

Partnering with Local Communities with Innovative Strategies to Enhance Rural Mental Health

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Scholarly Merit of the Mobile Unit Project

1. Rural mental health disparities is a growing public health concern (Hartley, 2004). However, very few mental health professionals and resources are available to address identified needs.
2. Rural residents are one of the greatest at-risk groups for depression, suicide, and substance abuse (Mulder et al, 2001).
3. The West Alabama Mobile Unit Project aims to provide engaged scholarship and a community/university partnership in Alabama's Black Belt region to deliver accessible, innovative, and quality mental health care for rural residents.



Figure 1. Collaborating Efforts between University and Community

Objective II : Partnering w/ Local Communities

1. Research indicates that multifaceted barriers make it difficult for rural residents to receive mental health care (Letvak, 2002).
2. It is crucial to collaborate with local community partners in an innovative manner to overcome barriers which include an anti-stigma campaign.
3. Over the past five years, we have developed partnerships with local governments, community agencies, churches, and businesses to increase the accessibility of the mobile unit project.

Traditional Counties of the Alabama Black Belt



WAMHC Mobile Unit

Table 1. List of Local Community Partners in Black Belt Counties

Communities/County	Local Partners
Akron/Hale County	Akron Senior Center
Boligee/Greene County	Boligee Town Council
Eutaw/Greene County	Eutaw City Park
Funsdale/ Marengo County	Funsdale Post Office
Greensboro/Hale County	First Presbyterian Church Greensboro CVS Pharmacy
Newbern/Hale County	Volunteer Fire Department



Summary of Project Outcome

1. The community partners contributed to the anti-stigma campaign by assisting with continuous recruitment and enhancing community participation.
2. With the partnerships from local community agencies, the interdisciplinary team has successfully conducted mental and physical health screens to 2056 residents via mobile unit services.



Figure 2. Innovative Strategies to Enhance Rural Mental Health

Objective I : Enhancing Engaged Scholarship

1. Faculty and students from departments of psychology, social work, nursing, rural medicine, and communication developed an interdisciplinary health care team and proactively cultivated a reciprocal partnership with the West Alabama rural communities.
2. Faculty and students routinely visit seven rural communities to deliver physical and mental health screens, flu shots, and brief psychotherapy on the mobile unit.



Conclusion

1. Engaged scholarship provides valuable training opportunities for faculty and students to serve rural communities.
2. Using innovative strategies such as collaborating with local community agencies in rural Alabama to provide mobile healthcare delivery is crucial to offering accessible healthcare to enhance rural mental health.

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