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.

 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.

 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.

 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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communities/County</th>
<th>Local Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akron/Hale County</td>
<td>Akron Senior Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boligee/Greene County</td>
<td>Boligee Town Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eutaw/Greene County</td>
<td>Eutaw City Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funsdale/Marengo County</td>
<td>Funsdale Post Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greensboro/Hale County</td>
<td>First Presbyterian Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newbern/Hale County</td>
<td>Volunteer Fire Department</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 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.

 Acknowledgements

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