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MCH Innovations Database Practice Summary & Implementation Guidance

Urban Lotus Project: Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth

Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth is an innovative practice which provides a unique opportunity for adolescents, especially for youth who are disproportionately affected and those with special health care needs, to participate in physical activity utilizing a trauma-informed approach.



Location

Nevada



Topic Area

Nutrition/Physical Activity



Setting

Community



Population Focus

Adolescent Health



NPM

NPM 8.1: Physical Activity –
Ages 6 to 11, NPM 8.2:
Physical Activity – Ages 12 to
17



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Section 1: Practice Summary

PRACTICE DESCRIPTION

Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth promotes physical activity and provides stress reduction tools to young people, often exposed to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). This specialized yoga instruction and mindful awareness is brought to agencies serving adolescents, inclusive of young people attending public or charter schools, those who are homeless, in foster care, as well as those residing in juvenile justice centers, transitional living homes, and inpatient mental health and substance use treatment facilities.

Nevada's Title V Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Five-Year Needs Assessment emphasized the need to address obesity through increased physical activity for adolescents. The 2017 Nevada Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) reported 14.0% of middle school and 14.8% of high school students engaged in physical activity at least 60 minutes daily, indicating the need for more movement programs for young people. Furthermore, Nevada lacks specialized physical activity programs for youth who are disproportionately affected and living with special health care needs. A 2017 Nevada YRBS ACEs report revealed 51.1% of middle school and 62.2% of high school students were affected by a lifetime prevalence of ACEs which can contribute to negative health outcomes. This indicates the need for prevention and intervention strategies targeting early adverse experiences to reduce mental health consequences into adulthood.

Therefore, the Nevada Title V MCH Program pursued physical activity programs serving young people and those with special health care needs to address these gaps. Urban Lotus Project provided a seamless fit since the organization offers Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth to young people impacted by a high lifetime prevalence of ACEs. This specialized yoga practice was designed to increase physical activity, provide resilience, support mindfulness to combat obesity and chronic disease, enhance wellness, and help mitigate other harmful public health outcomes.

CORE COMPONENTS & PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

The Social Cognitive Theory informed the focus of Urban Lotus Project's yoga program on learning through interaction, observation, and imitation of the actions modeled by others and the resulting actions. Learners can gain new behaviors and knowledge by observing a model such as an instructor demonstrating the calming yoga breath. When youth slow down their breathing, they experience the calming of their heart rate and mind. Learning by itself may or may not lead to immediate change. Attendance in weekly classes provides young people the opportunity to eventually engage in



breathing techniques, or yoga poses not previously attempted. This theory allows students to self-regulate since they continually observe the instructor’s yoga poses, allowing them to perfect their postures, increase their confidence by mastering the techniques, and notice the benefits of mindfulness, resilience, and the ability to better cope with life’s daily stressors.

The Life Course Theory informed the practice since Urban Lotus Project’s yoga program is designed to help young people build resilience at a critical period in hopes of improving their future outcomes. The principles taught may serve as a protective factor to mitigate the outcomes of ACEs by fulfilling young people’s potential amidst changing conditions or challenges and maintaining their quality of life and healthy lifespan growth. Although the life course perspective asserts development is lifelong, the period of adolescence can exacerbate or buffer against early disadvantages or other childhood experiences in manners affecting adulthood. Problem behaviors associated with adolescence can be deflected since yoga poses and mindful meditation offer ways to discharge acute stress responses to help decrease violent outbursts, self-harm, addiction, and other risky health behaviors.

The goal of the program is to improve adolescent health and wellness through yoga poses and mindful meditation. Urban Lotus Project has accomplished this outcome by implementing the following core components in Reno, Nevada and surrounding areas: (1) providing Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth at locations serving adolescents, (2) increasing the number of agencies offering yoga classes, (3) growing the number of students attending public classes, (4) ongoing training to yoga teachers, (5) continuous quality improvement to enhance agency performance, quality of yoga instruction, and impact of yoga on well-being, as well as (6) development of a sustainability plan.

Core Components & Practice Activities

Core Component	Activities	Operational Details
Conduct Yoga Classes	Offer Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth at agencies serving adolescents	Conducted classes where youth present with behavioral/emotional health challenges, drop-in centers, substance and mental health treatment centers, human services entities, and schools.
Expand Program Reach	Contact new agencies to grow the number of locations yoga is taught	Performed outreach to youth-serving agencies and established new agreements with multiple agencies to teach yoga classes. Secured space to teach classes open to the public.



Grow Public Classes	Conduct marketing to increase awareness of public yoga classes	Distributed public class materials to youth-serving agencies and used social media to increase awareness of the no-cost public yoga classes. Youth provided input to increase attendance.
Yoga Instructor Training	Offer training to yoga instructors	Provided trauma-informed principles and techniques to yoga instructors. New standardized training provided videos and quizzes following the teachings. Ongoing trainings were conducted with existing yoga instructors.
Evaluate Program	Conduct quantitative and qualitative evaluations	Performed ongoing quality improvement plans including Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles, teacher evaluations, key informant interviews, and student response surveys.
Sustainability Plan	Expand fiscal stability by diversifying funding stream	Successfully sought resources to augment Nevada Title V MCH Program funding through monthly donation programs, foundations/organizations, and fundraising events.

HEALTH EQUITY

Health equity is inherent in Urban Lotus Project’s core values and mission providing opportunities for young people of various socioeconomic statuses, racial/ethnic backgrounds, sexual and gender identities, and physical abilities to explore their capability mentally, emotionally, and physically to live life to their fullest potential. Thus, Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth makes physical activity available at no-cost in safe inclusive environments, regardless of social and cultural factors. It provides access to physical activity for 60 minutes, often only available at a significant financial cost and in restrictive contexts for other physical activity alternatives. To ensure health equity, all site expansion is offered at no cost to diverse populations. Additionally, cultural humility is built into staff training, allowing teachers to nurture individual student strengths, interests, and talents honoring each person’s beliefs, customs, and values.



EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

Since February 2017, 984 yoga classes have been taught to adolescents ages 12-17 years old (y.o.). Four evaluation methods were used to learn about program outcomes.

Pre- and post-test surveys were conducted to assess the program's impact on perceived stress. When a pre- and post-test was designated as an evaluation tool, the transitory nature of the student population was not considered. The lack of reliability of a pre- and post-test model was not fully accounted for since the largely transient, residential, and or incarcerated participants would not be available for the four-week post-test. A shorter pre- and post-test interval did not fit well into any comparable research model.

Teacher evaluations were used to learn about the instructor's ability to help students understand yoga, their responsiveness to youth needs, and how safe the instructor made the students feel. Responses revealed the yoga classes felt safe and the instructors were responsive to student needs and showed interest in teaching classes.

Key informant interviews were conducted to evaluate the program's impact on student well-being, influence of positive outcomes on student behaviors at host facilities, and suggestions for program improvements, as well as instructor training. The interviews revealed positive outcomes in participant well-being, student safety, host facility needs being met by yoga classes, and sufficient instructor training.

Qualitative student response surveys were used to learn how yoga supports participants thinking differently about themselves, in what way yoga helped them learn their capabilities, and what they did differently since being exposed to yoga classes. A high number of students reported being able to cope with life's daily stressors in a healthy way.

Section 2: Implementation Guidance

STAKEHOLDER EMPOWERMENT & COLLABORATION

Urban Lotus Project partners with local agencies serving young people to complement each organization's empowerment programs and curricula. Prior to placing Trauma-Informed Yoga into agencies, staff assess how well the classes align with the host facility's mission to assist young people to better cope with life's daily stressors. Initially the yoga instructors were not compensated; however, once the agencies started noticing positive outcomes in participant well-being and student safety,



reimbursement was provided allowing for program legitimacy and expansion in the number of locations offering yoga classes.

Urban Lotus Project staff work in partnership with the Board of Directors to ensure all yoga programs align with the organization's mission. The program's two full-time staff are responsible for the day-to-day operations, whereas the Board safeguards the agency's long-term vision.

Urban Lotus Project involves young people's ideas and opinions in program planning and operations. The title of the public yoga class (Teen Chill Lounge) was named by young people and class attendance increased after suggesting changing the location, time, and day of the week. High school and college students shared the public classes through social media resulting in improved turnouts. Additionally, adolescents were asked how to best word the student response survey questions to ensure reliability for quality improvement.

REPLICATION

Urban Lotus Project primarily serves youth since adolescence is an important time to intervene/mitigate ACEs and Trauma-Informed Yoga is an excellent means to accomplish this goal. The agency has successfully replicated the practice to serve young children (ages 5-11 y.o.) and young adults (ages 18-25 y.o.). Elementary school-aged children received yoga classes through Title 1 schools (mostly low-income students), foster care, and inpatient mental health facilities. Young adults engaged in yoga while residing in transitional living homes and inpatient mental health and substance use treatment facilities, as well as those in outpatient treatment programs. Quality improvement measures were conducted with young adults via student and instructor evaluations.

Urban Lotus Project is planning to expand into neighboring counties this year. Meetings have been held and contracts signed with agencies serving youth residing in juvenile detention centers, as well as behavioral health and substance use treatment centers. Continued discussions are planned with other organizations about contributing space for a no-cost public class for adolescents. Expansion into neighboring counties entails using yoga instructors living nearby to avoid unnecessary travel time while also having an increased connection with those communities. Utilizing the standardized training videos and quizzes will decrease the amount of travel time for teacher trainings, as well as allow for continued education and fidelity to the methodology.

INTERNAL CAPACITY

Within the first year of Urban Lotus Project becoming a 501c(3) organization, it was staffed full-time by the Founder/Executive Director and 12 volunteer yoga teachers holding a minimum of 200+ hours of yoga instructor certifications. The Executive Director, an accomplished yoga instructor, learned the principles and techniques of Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth through prior trainings, allowing for successful teacher training. Year two growth required one half-time Bookkeeper/Office Manager,



additional Yoga Instructors (reimbursed by host facilities), and improvements in teacher training methods. By year three the Bookkeeper/Office Manager became full-time, an outreach coordinator was hired to work 20 hours per month, and 31 Yoga Instructors were being compensated for teaching. Each year the Executive Director attended Trauma-Informed Yoga courses to enhance her teaching skills and knowledge of trauma-informed principles. Training improvements were made to ensure consistency as more yoga instructors were added.

Nevada Title V MCH staff held monthly meetings with Urban Lotus Project staff to discuss project activities, progress, and outcomes. MCH staff provided program development guidance, suggested implementation sites and potential funding sources for expansion, and assisted with PDSA cycles for quality improvement. This guidance increased the project’s value to the adolescents served.

PRACTICE TIMELINE

Phase: Planning/Pre-Implementation		
Activity Description	Time Needed	Responsible Party
Expand program outreach by researching locations serving youth	Continuous need to expand 40 hours per month	Executive Director, Office Manager and Outreach Coordinator
Design of evaluation tools	6 months (ongoing Board involvement) 30 hours to create	Executive Director, Office Manager, and Board of Directors
Design training materials (handbook and videos)	2-3 months 100 hours to create	Executive Director

Phase: Implementation



Activity Description	Time Needed	Responsible Party
Conduct yoga classes	Continuous 24 hours per month using 31 teachers	Yoga Instructor
Yoga Instructor training	For each new instructor 5 hours (current), 2 hours (when videos implemented)	Executive Director
Community outreach to grow public classes	Continuous 10 hours per month	Executive Director and Office Manager
Enter evaluations into computer	Continuous 5 hours per month	Office Manager

Phase: Sustainability

Activity Description	Time Needed	Responsible Party
Grant writing	Continuous 10 hours per month	Executive Director and Office Manager
Community fundraising	3 major events per year 240 hours per year	Executive Director, Office Manager and Board of Directors

PRACTICE COST

Start-up costs were minimal since the founder used her personal residence to conduct office work and trainings, yoga instructors volunteered their time, supplies were donated, and yoga mats were shared



by being transported to each location. Rapid demand for additional classes required more resources. Funds from the Nevada Title V MCH Program, community donations, and awards from foundations/organizations facilitated Urban Lotus Project's capacity to operate from a commercial office space, increase workplace staffing, produce training materials, print brochures, and advertise public classes.



Budget

Activity/Item	Brief Description	Quantity	Total
Personnel Salary + Fringe Benefits	Executive Director and Office Manager (80% FTE for ages 12-17)	2 FTE @ .80%	\$79,000
Independent Contractors	Outreach Coordinator (1) and Yoga Instructors (31)	32 people	\$34,000
Operating Expenses	Internet, rent, supplies, phone, and software programs	Continual	\$11,800
Public Awareness	Educational supplies and advertisement	Continual	\$1,000
Total Amount:			\$125,800

LESSONS LEARNED

Key informant interviews allowed agencies hosting yoga classes to learn about the rigorous evaluations being performed to determine program impact which further increased Urban Lotus Project’s credibility. Additionally, input from the interviews helped propel the creation of a female-only yoga class and decreased class sizes allowing for more personal attention to nurture the individual strengths, interests, and talents of each student.

The pre- and post-test data analysis identified discordance between survey responses and students self-reported experiences at the end of each class when participants were asked to provide one word stating how they felt. The positive words spoken, such as calm, good, peaceful, safe, and content, combined with the yoga instructors’ observations of perceived student increase in self-esteem and relaxation on their faces, highlighted the need for discontinuing the quantitative survey.

PDSA cycles became valuable components of quality improvement efforts. Several cycles conducted on the pre- and post-test surveys improved the numbers collected and completed. The student response survey underwent a PDSA cycle allowing youth to provide valuable input to the draft questions.



Urban Lotus Project began as, and continues to be, a place where teachers can serve their community. Site expansion required additional class time from instructors, resulting in loss of accountability to show up and teach class as a volunteer. Once host facilities started paying fees, the teachers felt valued, schedule accountability improved, and student attendance increased.

As the agency grew and added more yoga instructors, it was evident teacher training improvements were needed for consistency ensuring every student had a similar experience with each teacher and location. Training videos provided information on how trauma impacts people physiologically and psychologically, as well as location-specific teaching tips for populations, such as those who are pregnant, hospitalized, incarcerated, or homeless.

Urban Lotus Project developed a sustainability action plan for growth and expansion to diversify its funding streams. The agency successfully sought resources to augment Nevada Title V MCH Program funding, including monthly corporate and individual donation programs, foundation/organization funding from several agencies, as well as hosting multiple successful community fundraisers.

NEXT STEPS

The Nevada Title V MCH Program proudly continues to fund the Urban Lotus Project since the agency has fiscally matured, leveraged funds for sustainability, expanded numbers served, and created evaluation models to enhance public health interest in trauma-informed principles. The Teacher Evaluation Survey and Student Response Questionnaire will continue to be used by Urban Lotus Project as part of their quality improvement plans.

During 2020, in partnership with Urban Lotus Project, MCH staff will conduct the no-cost *Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health's Partnership Self-Assessment Tool* to evaluate agency and staff collaborative processes, as well as identify specific focus areas to make said processes more efficient.

Urban Lotus Project plans to expand into neighboring northern Nevada counties in 2020. Replication in the eastern and southern portions of the state requires additional funding to set up local offices and hire support staff. It would please Urban Lotus staff to teach other agencies how to duplicate their services allowing for expanded reach.

RESOURCES PROVIDED

- [Urban Lotus Project Website](#)
- ["What Is Trauma-Informed Yoga?" Understanding Trauma-Informed Yoga.](#)



- [“What are ACEs.” ACEs Science 101. ACEs Too High News.](#)
- [“10 ACEs, as identified by the CDC-Kaiser study.” Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\). Joining Forces for Children.](#)

APPENDIX

- N/A.

