

Turning Challenges into Creative Solutions

Engaging Youth in Mental Health at SBHCs

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Continuing Education Credits

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The Challenge

- Started role in April 2022
- OHA grant nearing expiration
- Significant funds remaining
- Two months to use funds meaningfully



Working with the OHA

- Original grant focused on staffing
- Timeline to use funds in this way - unrealistic
- Requested flexibility in fund usage
- Ongoing and communication



Brainstorming

We wanted:

- Youth voice
- Honesty
- Resilience
- Emotional connection
- Something different from traditional education





The Reality

- Teens are struggling
- Many are not talking about it
- Stigma shapes what gets shared
- Traditional approaches don't always reach youth





The Opportunity

We had:

- Funding
- Flexibility
- Access to students
- Existing relationships
- A chance to try something new





The Shift

- Less adult-driven messaging
- More youth voice
- More authentic storytelling
- More creativity and collaboration



What we did

Two youth-centered creative projects:

1. "Be Real. Be Well."
2. Spotlight on Integrated Behavioral Health

Focus: engagement & stigma reduction

- Engagement
- Stigma reduction
- Real student experiences

Project 1 - “Be Real. Be Well.”

- Student-led storytelling project
- Partnership with Merlo Station Campus students
- Interview-style filming
- Students share personal mental health experiences
- Focus on authenticity and resilience



Why masks?

- We all hide parts of ourselves
- Masks created emotional safety
- Allowed students to share honestly
- Helped viewers see themselves in the stories
- Reflected the stigma surrounding mental health



Behind the scenes

- Students were extremely nervous
- Trust-building mattered
- Every student engaged differently
- Staff support was essential
- We learned as we went



Ideas that didn't work

- DIY mask workshop
- Ted Lasso-style skit concept
- Student self-filming
- Multi-district participation
- Planned “mask reveal” ending





Be Real, Be Well



Results

- Students share experiences they had never said out loud before
- Increased peer connection and empathy
- Created hope and visibility around mental health
- Demonstrated the power of simple, authentic storytelling
- Student feedback =felt seen and heard through these stories



Project 2 – Spotlight on Integrated Behavioral Health at SBHCs

Why this mattered:

- SBHCs are trusted spaces for students
- Integrated care makes mental health more visible and accessible
- We wanted to highlight the real impact of this work
- The videos helped connect youth stories to clinical support
- Also increased awareness internally and externally





Project Development

- Interview-style storytelling
- Real SBHC staff
- Natural, unrehearsed conversations
- Same production team as “Be Real, Be Well.” video series
- Connected youth stories with clinical care

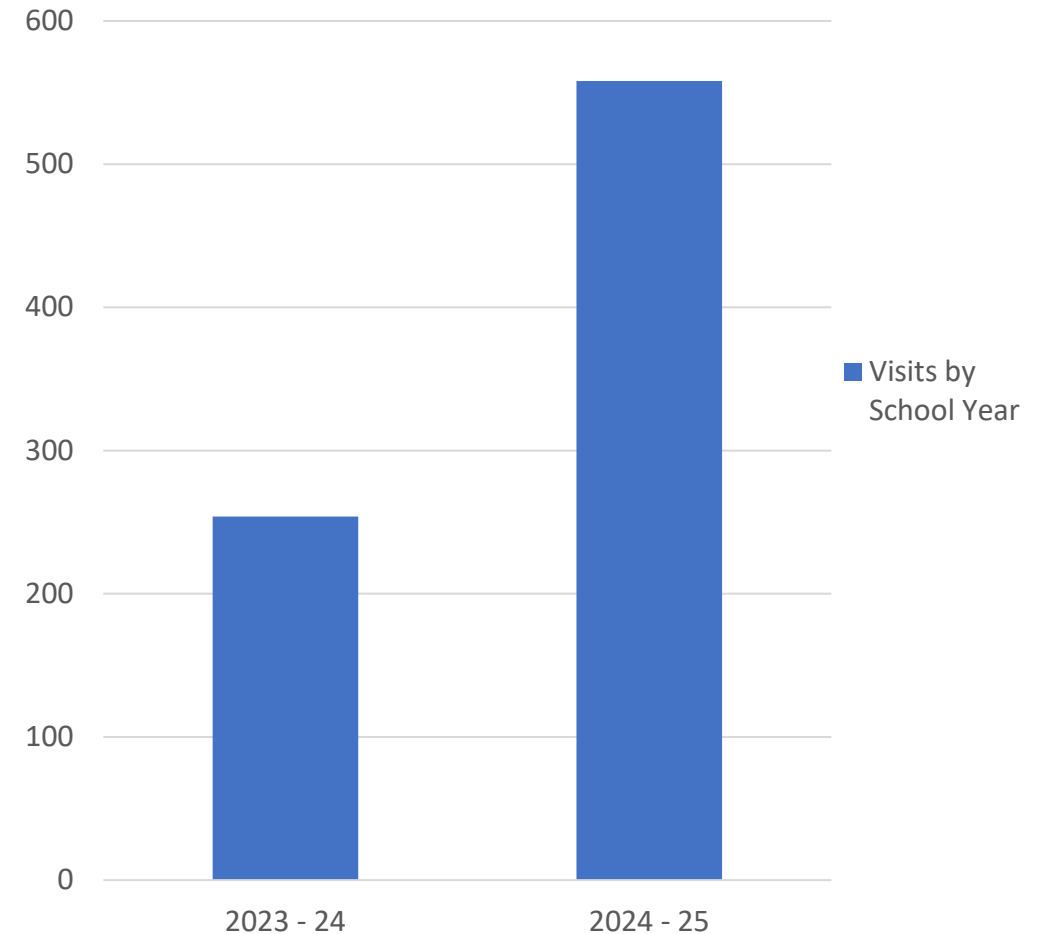


How School - based Health Centers are Changing Student's Lives



Impact

- Increased awareness of SBHC behavioral health services
- Greater internal and external support
- More focus on future grant opportunities
- Reinforced value of integrated care





If you want to try this

- Start small
- Make it youth-led
- Focus on authentic stories
- Build strong partnerships
- Expect some ideas to fail
- Keep it simple



Group Discussion



Stigma

- Where do you see stigma showing up in your work?
- What helps students feel emotionally safe enough to open up?
- How can we normalize mental health conversations for youth?





Grant management

- How can grant structures better support creativity and innovation?
- What kinds of flexibility help programs respond to real community needs?
- How do we balance accountability with adaptability?



Imagine

- What challenge in your setting needs a different approach?
- What could become possible with more flexibility and creativity?



Closing

When we make space for youth voices,
we make space for honesty, connection, and healing

Thank you!
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