2020 Central Region Mental Health Programming Summary

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**Relevance**

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, nearly one in five U.S. adults lives with a mental illness and mental disorders often start in adolescence or early adulthood. Anxiety disorders, depression, and substance use are the most common mental disorders and they can be more disabling than many physical illnesses or ailments. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the challenges that families were facing in 2020. With this in mind, this team of Central Region FCH agents, with the help of their respective FCH Committees, saw the need to address the issue of stress due to COVID-19 and developed a series of virtual programs to provide families with the information and tools they needed to help them cope successfully, while social distancing and being at home.

**Response**

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension identified the following educational program to educate citizens on the topic of mental health and wellness. Programs were marketed through all available means including radio, newspaper and social media and fliers.

* Organized Central Region FCH planning group made of 5 agents, with specialist support, to plan and implement an online series addressing mental health, met 4/1, 4/9, 4/15, 4/16, 4/22, 5/4, 5/13, 5/15, 5/20, 6/15, 9/1, 9/4, 10/2
* Conducted “Stress Less: Mind Matters COVID-19 Edition in May. This program provided a general overview of stress and its effects on the body, with emphasis on how COVID-19 played a role. 48 participated virtually
* Developed and distributed video via social media regarding healthy activities to relieve stress in May. The video discussed simple activities that could be done at home when a person feels overwhelmed. viewed 2,100 times
* Developed and distributed video via social media regarding healthy stretches to relieve stress in May. The video emphasized breathing, along with simple, low-impact moves that can be beneficial in relieving muscle tension. viewed 763 times
* Conducted “A Good Night’s Rest is Best” in June. This program discussed the importance of sleep and provided tools to help develop and maintain good sleep habits. 33 participated virtually
* Conducted “Carrot, Cake or Casserole: How to Manage Stress Eating” in June. This program discussed how to recognize hunger cues. 40 participated virtually
* Conducted Eating with Purpose and Without Guilt” in July. This program focused on being mindful about what and how you eat, while recognizing that the stress of the current pandemic can have an effect on eating patterns. 23 participated virtually
* Conducted “Your Work, Your Life: Keeping a Healthy Balance” in October. This program focused on recognizing the roles work and family play in managing stress. 15 participated virtually
* Promoted and released the links to the recorded sessions to local Headstart parents, October 34 viewed the series
* Conducted “Managing Stress During the Holidays” in December. This program focused on how to recognize and reduce holiday stressors.
* The recordings of each of the programs were made available for families to view virtually after each session, 367 people viewed the recordings from May to December.

**Results**

Of the 87 people who filled out the evaluations from the 6 classes,

93% (81) reported increasing their knowledge about stress and how to manage it more effectively.

85% (74) planned to adopt and use at least one strategy discussed to help manage their stress more effectively as a result of attending the program.

74% (65) planned to adopt and use five or more of the suggested strategies to help manage their stress more effectively as a result of attending the program.

Clientele testimony:

*“Helpful information to use in a living situation of a two-generation family with a very busy farming business.”*

*“Even though it'll take longer, instead of stopping by a fast food restaurant on my way home from work, I’ll cook what is at the house.”*

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**Future Plans:**

Due to the success of this effort and feedback received from clientele, the team is planning to offer a series in 2021 regarding mindfulness. The series will again be offered virtually.