

Social and Emotional Health Evaluation Best Practice Guide

SUPPORT FOR THIS CASE STUDY CAME FROM THE HUMANA FOUNDATION

ADVENTUROUS MINDS PRODUCE EXTRAORDINARY DREAMS (Amped)

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Amped Music Academy Social and Emotional Health Evaluation Best Practice Guide

Introduction

This best practice guide has been created for the purpose of expanding the outlook and offerings of social and emotional health assessment and interventions within youth serving organizations. Social and emotional well-being (SEWB) assessments can help with early identification of mental health or emotional challenges, such as anxiety, depression, or social isolation. Addressing these issues early can prevent more serious problems down the road and support healthier emotional development. The building of emotional intelligence can also help young people become more aware of their own emotions and those of others, fostering emotional intelligence, empathy, and strong interpersonal skills.

The pilot organization Adventurous Minds Produce Extraordinary Dreams (Amped) is a family-oriented ecosystem that builds generational wealth for marginalized communities through youth programming, in-demand workforce development and business incubation. The pilot program was implemented within the Music Academy program. The Amped Music Academy, a free music program for youth between the ages of 6-18, empowers young people to collaborate, express themselves creatively through writing, performing, and producing music, and grow into healthy, productive members of the community and the world.

Description of Community Served

The pilot program was implemented in a geographic area referred to as West Louisville. The West End is 80% Black, and its residents are burdened by ongoing poverty and various health disparities. This area has long struggled with systemic issues that have resulted in significant disparities and inequalities among its residents. For nearly six decades, West Louisville has faced a severe lack of black business ownership, further exacerbating the economic challenges faced by its residents. This absence of economic opportunities has perpetuated generational wealth gaps and hindered the community's ability to thrive.

What Problem Did You Address?

Combatting Mental Health Struggles: Many individuals, especially young people, may experience loneliness, disconnection, depression, or other mental health issues. We often think of loneliness as affecting mostly adults, especially older adults or adults who live alone. But loneliness can affect children as well, and may strongly impact their mental health, physical health, and even

their academic standing in school¹. A survey from Mental Health America found that two-thirds of 11–17-year-olds experienced stress related to loneliness. In fact, Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth and young adults in Kentucky. According to the Kentucky Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 15 percent of Kentucky high school students (1 in 7) reported having seriously considered suicide within a 12-month period. In addition, 17.4 percent of Kentucky middle school students (nearly 1 in 5) reported that they had seriously considered killing themselves at some point in their lives².

In the 2022 KIDS COUNT County Data Book, nearly 1 in 6 sixth graders in Kentucky said they deal with depression and anxiety. 21% of 8th graders and 25% of 10th and 12th graders have reported being under serious psychological stress. While kids can easily mask the stresses and struggles of depression and anxiety, youth mental health is a serious concern, and we must listen to what Kentucky’s kids are saying about it³. It should be noted that the 2022 KIDS COUNT Data Book did not include data from Jefferson County Public Schools, which makes our work that much more important.

As Amped works to strengthen its impact on our ecosystem of program participants it has become apparent that attention should be given to the mental health and wellbeing of our youth. This pilot initiative incorporates the assessment and evaluation of loneliness within the Amped Music Academy program.

This document outlines the processes and procedures our organization incorporated into the Amped Music Academy with a goal to prevent, reduce, or eliminate incidences of loneliness, disconnectedness, suicides, and depression among youth. It is our belief that music programs that integrate mental health assessments can offer early identification of struggles, allowing for intervention and support tailored to participants' needs.

What is Your Expertise?

Recommendations of Staff Positions for youth serving organizations implementing SEWB assessments:

Program Director holds the responsibility of creating implementation strategies, evaluating program preparedness, and determining

¹ Handspring Health, September 21, 2023, <https://www.handspringhealth.com/post/loneliness-how-to-deal-with-lonely>

² <https://www.education.ky.gov/school/>

³ <https://kyyouth.org/youth-voices-in-the-2022-kids-count>

additional resources identified to ensure a safe and successful assessment process. This director will communicate implementation plans with staff to determine the appropriate staff members and complimentary skills needed.

Program Staff are critical in the implementation of assessments and connecting to resources if the assessment determines an intervention is needed.

Data Evaluator is responsible for the collection of assessment responses, compiling collected data and working with the program director to assess the effectiveness and impact of the program in the areas of SEWB.

How Did You Address the Problem?

Step 1: Determine the desired Objectives and Outcomes for the project

Determined Objectives:

- Establish best practices to provide a safe and healthy space for youth participating in out of school time programs
 - How do we create a safe and healthy environment for youth to thrive?
- Establish best practices and procedure to identify youth that are experiencing loneliness, disconnectedness, depression, or thoughts of suicide
 - What are the indicators and triggers that tell us when a youth needs help?
- Establish best practices and procedures to connect youth to the proper organizations for the professional help that they need
 - Who and what are the best resources available that will best support youth in crisis?

Determined Outcomes:

- Youth participating in the Music Academy demonstrate improved social and emotional well-being at semester and year end with improvements in connection and sense of belonging.
- Youth participating in the Music Academy demonstrate improved grades, behavior progress and increased school attendance at semester and year end.
- Youth gain introductory Music Industry skills in playing instruments, voice, production, audio recording as well as gaining confidence by presenting/producing at least one project during the school year.

Step 2: Identify stakeholders for the project

Building effective relationships and systems to support youth requires a collaborative approach across various sectors. To start, it's essential to create a trusting relationship with both youth and their parents. This foundation of trust is key to fostering open communication and encouraging engagement from families, which enhances the overall support network for the young people involved.

In education, developing strong, trusting relationships between youth-serving organizations and education partners is critical. This collaboration ensures that both parties work together to meet the needs of students. Additionally, it is important to understand the legal requirements for accessing student data consistently and in compliance with privacy regulations. This ensures that the youth-serving organization can support the individual needs of students effectively and securely.

Engaging with out-of-school time programs is another crucial element in the support network. Identifying partners who already serve youth in the community is necessary to reach the participants who will benefit most from the case study. These programs offer additional resources and access to youth who might otherwise be harder to reach during regular school hours.

When it comes to addressing mental health, it's important to identify the proper mental health providers that align with the needs of the youth being served. Building a reliable, cohesive network of these providers ensures that young people receive consistent and comprehensive care. This network should be structured to support timely referrals and seamless transitions between services as necessary.

Finally, securing support from local, state, and federal government entities is vital. Financial and legislative backing is needed to ensure that sufficient resources are available to address issues such as loneliness, disconnectedness, suicides, and depression among youth. This support is essential for creating sustainable solutions and advancing policies that benefit youth mental health and overall wellbeing.

Stakeholders have played an essential role in the implementation of this case study. Specifically, the stakeholders within this project offered a comprehensive perspective on the youth's experiences, behaviors and needs within various settings. In the evaluation phase we were able to consider family dynamics, school environment, peer relationships, and community pressures. Each of these elements contributes to a system that supports youth in meaningful ways, ensuring their emotional, mental, and social needs are addressed through collaboration, trust, and comprehensive care.

Step 3: Determination of Assessment Tools and Intervention

The program leaders at the Music Academy decided to assess students' emotional and social well-being through a variety of methods, including casual check-ins, surveys, and conversations. At registration and at the end of each semester, students completed questionnaires designed to gauge feelings of loneliness and isolation. These surveys were supplemented by group discussions and one-on-one conversations to further understand their emotional states.

In addition to internal methods, data from external sources such as parent or guardian feedback and the Jefferson County Public Schools' CASCADE reporting system were also considered. Students were also encouraged to self-report, with an open invitation to contact a Music Academy representative if they felt alone, disconnected, depressed, or suicidal.

To specifically measure loneliness, the team selected four questions from the UCLA Loneliness Scale, a 20-item tool used to assess feelings of loneliness and social isolation. These questions were included in the registration process as part of a student self-report requirement and were re-administered at the end of the semester via a hard copy survey. The selected questions focused on how in-tune students felt with those around them, whether they felt part of a group of friends, if they shared common interests with others, and whether they had people they could confide in.

Step 4: Implementation Strategy

Before administering the social and emotional assessments, the Music Academy hosted an orientation session for students and their families. This session outlined the purpose of the assessments, explained the confidentiality measures in place, and clarified how the results would be used to support the students.

To regularly monitor students' emotional and social well-being, brief self-report surveys were administered on a consistent basis. Assessments were given at key points throughout the year: during registration, mid-semester, and at the end of the year.

In addition to formal assessments, informal, ongoing evaluations were integrated into daily activities. Staff observed and engaged with students during group activities, arts and crafts, and playtime to gauge their social-emotional development. Field trips to places like Dream Lake and the Louisville Science Center offered students opportunities to create lasting memories and build connections with peers.

However, the organization identified a gap in staffing when it came to collecting and reviewing the assessment data. While the initial plan was for program staff to manage this, it became clear that the Music Academy lacked the necessary expertise to translate survey results into actionable, trackable data.

Identification of partnership with Mental Health and Resource Intervention Professionals Amped Music Academy staff leaned on the existing relationship with Education Justice for a tutoring resource. We have yet to identify Mental Health partners who have the capacity to serve our program at no cost.

Step 5: Evaluation Plan and Measurement Criteria

Music Academy Evaluation Plan “See Appendix A for the full assessment tool”.

Outcomes and Notable Achievements

Youth participating in the Music Academy show significant improvements in their social and emotional well-being, as evidenced by data from the Social and Emotional Assessment and the JCPS Cascade System. However, a lack of expertise in data interpretation led to the decision to hire a Data Analyst with funding from The Humana Foundation. While quantitative data is still being refined, student testimonials reflect the program's success, with students expressing how Amped helps them feel supported, connected, and inspired.

The program also leads to improved academic outcomes, with 90% of instructors reporting positive behavior in class, despite some challenges in retention of previous material. Staff attribute this to students' limited practice at home, prompting the Music Academy to focus on instrument donations—recently receiving four pianos for student use. The impact is visible in a GPA increase from 2.7 in Spring 2022 to 3.0 in Fall 2023 and significant growth in student enrollment from 169 in 2022 to 293 in 2023.

JCPS staff have also praised the program's adaptability and its ability to reach and engage students, particularly those who are harder to reach, fostering community and encouraging creativity.

In terms of music skills, 85% of students set goals to master basic tasks like note identification and scales by December 2024. The academy also focuses on improving motor skills and coordination, especially for younger students. Despite attendance challenges, the program sees high motivation from students who show impressive progress in playing instruments and reading music.

Confidence, measured through participation in the Amped Music Academy Showcase, doubled over the grant period, with 46 attendees at the Mid-Semester Showcase and 90 at the End of Semester Showcase.

Conclusion

Amped Music Academy faced several challenges during its Social and Emotional Assessment pilot, learning valuable lessons along the way. One key challenge was developing a formal process to address emergent needs identified through self-report surveys. Staff had to ensure sensitive information was handled properly, reviewed by the right personnel, and used to provide appropriate interventions. The team also recognized the need for better data collection methods, including automated assessments to maintain anonymity and minimize disruption to instruction.

Another challenge was determining if the selected assessment tools were age-appropriate for younger participants, and identifying which staff members had the expertise to interpret the data. Additionally, while community partners can access suspension data through the Jefferson County Public School Cascade System, they don't have access to behavior-related information. The team is working to find a suitable assessment tool and plans to gather data from students and parents by the close of the 2024 school year.

Amped also focused on staff training in areas like suicide prevention, mental health awareness, and recognizing nonverbal cues of social-emotional changes. Several free online courses on mental health were identified as valuable resources. Parent involvement proved inconsistent, prompting the need to explore alternative engagement opportunities.

For students who may be on the autism spectrum or are too young to fully understand loneliness or depression, the program is exploring tailored intervention plans. The team also learned how to connect music education to mental health interventions, with feedback from instructors emphasizing the importance of applying survey data to program curriculum.

In response to an increasing number of students on the spectrum, Amped became a Certified Autism Friendly Learning Location in 2024, with all staff receiving autism-friendly certification. Amped's impact also expanded beyond after-school programs through the Level Up initiative, bringing music education to high-need schools within Jefferson County Public Schools. The program was well-received in four restorative pathways schools, with students producing and recording original pieces.

Ultimately, Amped's work goes beyond music education, fostering creativity, mental health improvement, academic growth, and strong community connections. The program emphasizes completion, inspiration, and a deep sense of belonging within the Amped family.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

Objectives	Measurement	Collection Method	Frequency	Who is responsible
Increase the Social and emotional well-being of students by providing a safe and productive environment for music instruction and exposure to positive role models.	Rating of students' emotional well being	Pre and Post program self-reported survey regarding feelings of loneliness and belonging. SYRB Tool	4x per year 2x per year	Music Academy Program Manager Music Academy Staff
Improve academic achievement and engagement of students by providing resources for positive engagement, collaboration, and academic support	Student GPA at beginning and end of semester Number of behavior incidents during semester Number of unexcused absences during the semester	JCPS Cascade student data	4x per year	Music Academy Program Director
Increase skills and confidence of students by providing quality technical instruction in the arts.	Number of students who participate in the semester showcase Percentage of students and parents who report increased musical or artistic skills	Winter and Spring Showcase sign-ups. Pre and post program self-reported surveys	2x per year 4x per year	Music Academy Administrative Assistant Music Academy Program Manager