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Harvesting the idea of a rural after-school program enhancing the well-being of at-risk youth

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Research shows that limited access to resources and behavioral health problems are forces of economic disadvantage for rural youth. While socioeconomic status and stress challenge available social supports that can intervene against disadvantaged access to community resources, a rising body of evidence suggests that enhancing sense belongingness and self-efficacy can improve social, emotional and behavioral outcomes. For 3 years prior, a psychologist facilitated an after-school group that taught self-regulation skills to youth. The group received overwhelmingly positive qualitative feedback from participants and staff,

which prompted the current study. The current study extends prior work and will evaluate its impact. Theoretical and empirical origins formed the foundation for the program that consists of in-person and technology-based interventions. The study provides 8 to 15 year-olds an opportunity to strengthen their emotional regulation skills within an after-school setting. The study will test social-emotional learning interventions that aim to create a sense of belonging and acceptance among youth who are likely to feel misunderstood or excluded. The study will examine behavioral and psychosocial outcomes that align with CASEL's core competencies. Students receive the intervention during the fall, winter or spring of an academic year. Data is collected in pre- and post- surveys completed by students, caregivers, and staff across the school and community settings. Preliminary quantitative data has been encouraging. Participants,

caregivers, and staff reported improved psychosocial functioning across settings. The current study hopes to serve as a stepping-stone for vulnerable youth who are at risk of poor behavioral, academic and health outcomes.

Biography

Kelsie-Marie Offenwanger is a post-doctoral fellow at the Marshfield Clinic Health System. She was recently awarded the Early Career Psychologist Credentialing Scholarship by the National Register of Health Service Psychologists. Her training and expertise have focused on children, adolescents, and families across the community and school-based settings. She conducted her dissertation on the trajectory of non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI). She has presented nationally on NSSI to a wide array of audiences across the educational, medical, community, and clinical settings. She performs a variety of comprehensive psychological services in her day to day practice. She participates on multidisciplinary teams and conducts psychological evaluations. In addition, she provides individual and family psychotherapy to children and adolescents who exhibit a wide range of social, emotional and behavioral concerns. She is actively involved within the Center for Community Health Advancement and provides evidence-based interventions to enhance the functioning of at-risk youth and their families.

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