

La Mirada Students Adapt to Covid-19 in Silver Award/Mental Health Campaign Effort

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La Mirada~Eighth graders Sofia Orozco and Alexa Martinez co-created the “Mental Health Tackle Team” to earn their Girl Scout Silver Award and ended up developing a timely resource for students when school moved outside of the classroom due to COVID-19.

This project has taken away the stigma around mental health and helped students understand, cope and learn to live in an uncertain world.

The girls began planning in September of last year to find a community-centric topic both were passionate about. After much research, it was clear that Mental Health was a much-needed forum in an already troubled world.

The girls met with local counseling centers to explore and develop their plan. They wanted to create a safe forum for open dialogue and education to remove the stigma and help students understand, cope and function during these unprecedented times.

The originally planned four-week campaign was to be launched during Mental Health Awareness month this past May and Sofia and Alexa began with the mission statement, “To promote positive mental health through awareness and open discussion and to encourage students with tools and resources to successfully TACKLE their mental health.”

Their plan was to highlight one topic per week that included coping skills. The sessions were to focus on definitions and discussions around anxiety, depression, and stress. Each week a coping mechanism was presented through video calls, which included; belly breathing, creative outlets and open discussions around social distancing and COVID-19 at Safer-at-Home guidelines.

Research and discussion topics were gathered from nationally recognized mental health resources such as The American Psychological Association. The original strategy was to host

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in-person activities during lunch every week.

However, once COVID-19 arrived and schools closed they thought their project had come to an end. Within a few weeks both girls were able to quickly modify their campaign and move it to a one-hundred percent virtual forum relying on social media to communicate their messaging. The key was the creation of the Instagram page @MHTACKLETEAM.

With the guidance of their middle school counselor, Ms. Min, the program was expanded to include the takeover of "Wellness Wednesdays". A weekly zoom call for all grades was implemented and included multiple sessions. It was highlighted in Parent Newsletters which included sign-up forms distributed to interested students via their school communication portal.

Ms. Min provided vital encouragement and support. She firmly believed this program was impactful because it was student led and it was their voices which were front and center. They created a safe space for their peers to share real dialogue between one another and learn from each other.

The girls recruited three additional students using an interview and application process they created. Each student played a pivotal role and their team expanded to include Hannah Cantrell, Isaac An and Diana Menjivar.

Both girls shared their own personal experiences in making their mental health a priority on these calls and openly shared their thoughts, opinions and feelings with the group while encouraging others to do the same. "Sharing my thoughts and struggles openly on a call was not easy at first, but I wanted to open the door to a safe environment for others to share", said Orozco. "At the end of this project, I felt a sense of accomplishment and by creating this, I felt like I helped to break the stigma around mental health, along with the fact I had my own troubles

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and I didn't know how to deal with them. With MH Tackle Team I was able to help others and that alone makes me happy. I would never change this experience for anything in the world" said Martinez.

Alexa and Sofia are part of Girl Scout Troop 15424, in the Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles Council and will submit the MH Tackle Team as their Silver Award Project in the coming weeks and will have put in more than 50 hours of work.

The Girl Scout Silver Award is the highest award a Girl Scout Cadette can earn. It recognizes leadership, organization, determination, and dedication to improving their community. There were so many facets to this project. Not only was it a resource for students struggling with the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency but, it was also a resource for students who may have a parent in the home struggling with the stress. Education could be passed from child to parent and create dialogue in the home.

Sofia and Alexa are closing out their last year at Hutchinson Middle School. They will be attending La Mirada High School in the fall. Ms. Min has confirmed that the MH Tackle Team program will be implemented in the fall and will be a permanent resource for incoming students. Sofia and Alexa will be part of the selection committee and are delighted the program they created will live on after they move onto High School.

A good news story in a time of great uncertainty. Together, Sofia and Alexa have shown a pioneering spirit and resilience in an uncertain time when togetherness and support for their peers is needed most.