



THE S.M.I.L.E. CLUB



**UK Center of Excellence
in Rural Health**

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Background/Abstract

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among people age 15-24 in the United States. Nearly 20% of high school students report serious thoughts of suicide and 9% have made an attempt to take their lives. Teenagers and young adults have had rising rates of suicide compared to 10 or 15 years ago. These statistics became even more personal to us when two teenagers affiliated with our school committed suicide.

With the social isolation that occurred during the COVID pandemic, young people are experiencing an increased incidence of mental illness and social emotional issues. Within our school there are currently six students on homebound due to social/emotional issues.

With the reality of our current situation, the S.M.I.L.E. Club hopes to bring awareness to mental health and suicide prevention by creating a more inclusive culture within our school and community. Our project activities have been designed to not only bring a smile to someone's face but to target students that may feel isolated or disconnected from their peers.

Project Setting/Target Population



- Martin County, Kentucky located in the heart of Appalachia
- Population – 11,140
- Median Household Income - \$40,826
- 15.4% of Martin County families live in poverty
- Martin County High School
- Enrollment 508 students, 65 faculty and staff
- Target population will be pre-teens, teens, and young adults

Project Goals

The overall goals of our project were as follows: Improve the social, emotional, and mental health of students and staff within our school; create a more welcoming, safe, and positive school climate; and improve our Kentucky Summative Assessment School Safety and Climate Survey scores from 60% in May 2022 to 65% in May 2023.



RAE of Sunshine speaker with Kennedy & Chelsea



S.M.I.L.E. Club Officers

Project Activities

- Posted positive, educational and inspirational quotes throughout the school
- Featured SMILE of the Week Students on bulletin board and school Facebook page
- Conducted a school-wide assembly with a speaker that shared mental health issues experienced as a result of her daughter's suicide
- S.M.I.L.E. Club members interviewed on the WSAZ TV news regarding the club and FCCLA.
- S.M.I.L.E. Club walk around the school to bring awareness to mental illness and teen suicide
- Created and distributed care baskets for children hospitalized during the Christmas season
- Created Tie Blankets for staff or students going through difficult situations. Also donated to local nursing home.
- Stocked a basket in the girls' restrooms containing feminine hygiene products, lotion, shampoo, conditioner, soap, deodorant, and other personal items.



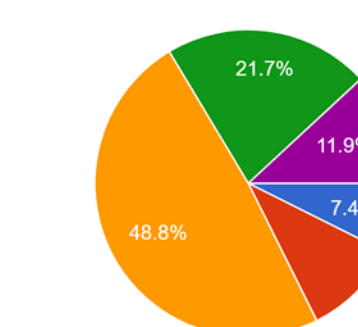
QR Code for WSAZ segment



S.M.I.L.E. Club Members with tie blankets

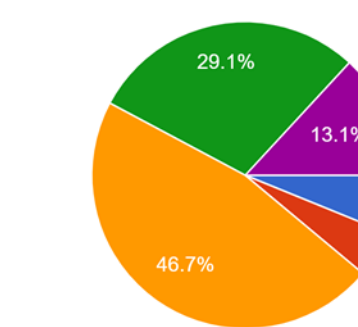
Evaluation

I am familiar with the S.M.I.L.E. Club and the activities they are doing to make our school a more positive place to grow and learn.
244 responses



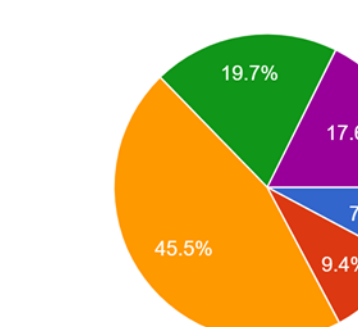
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree
Neutral

The schoolwide assembly with the RAE of Sunshine speaker was very effective in increasing my awareness of teen suicide and mental health.
244 responses



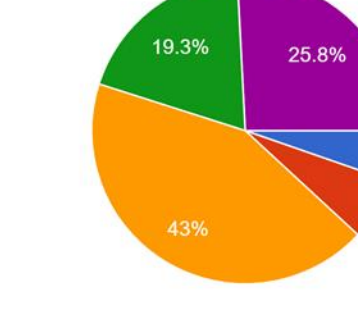
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree
Neutral

The S.M.I.L.E. Club has made a difference in our school by promoting encouraging, positive activities?
244 responses



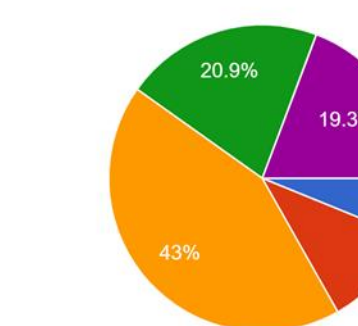
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree
Neutral

I have enjoyed seeing the S.M.I.L.E. of the Week on FB and displayed on the bulletin board.
244 responses

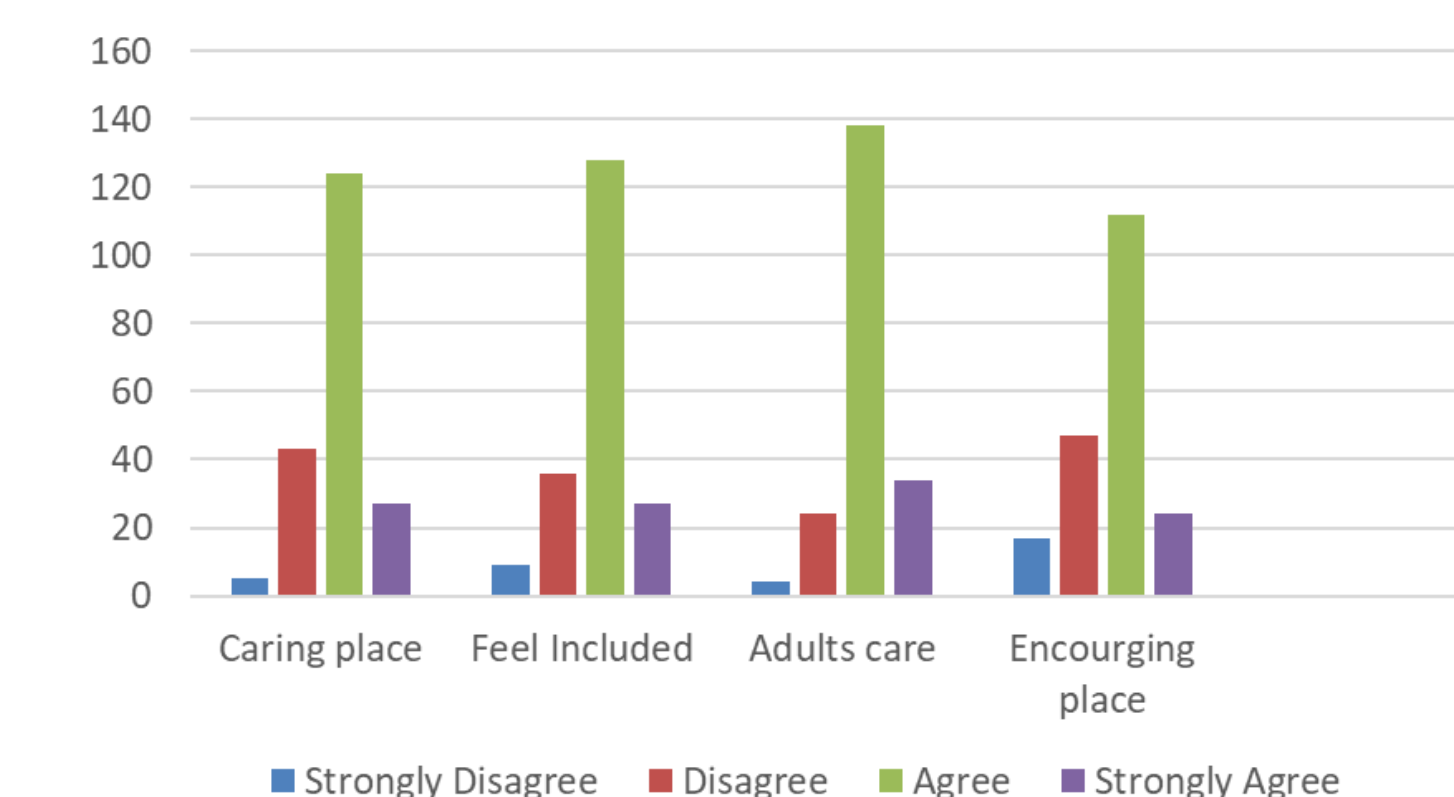


Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree
Neutral

S.M.I.L.E. of the Week has made a positive impact on the students in our school.
244 responses



Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree
Neutral



Outcomes

- The Google survey conducted had 75.8% students reacting positively to the Rae of Sunshine assembly which was attended by our entire student population. In that survey, we asked for suggestions for future activities. The overwhelming majority listed conducting more assemblies such as the RAE of Sunshine.
- The survey also suggested having more walks for mental health awareness, expanding membership, and recognizing more Smiles of the Week. 70.5% of our survey participants stated they were familiar with the activities.
- The FB post on the tie blankets produced 96 likes or loves and multiple comments.
- The main evaluation of the project will be when results of our 2023 School Safety and Climate Survey scores are released this fall. We set the same goal for improvement that is listed in our school improvement plan.

Acknowledgements

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The project described is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the UK Center of Excellence in Rural Health.