

DiscoverU: Augmenting middle school afterschool programs to improve adolescent mental health

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RATIONALE

Afterschool programs provide a safe space for students to socialize, be physically active, and increase belonging which can reduce mental health risk. Mentorship can help improve self-worth, academic achievement, and social-emotional health.

40%

In 2023, 40% of adolescents reported feeling persistently sad

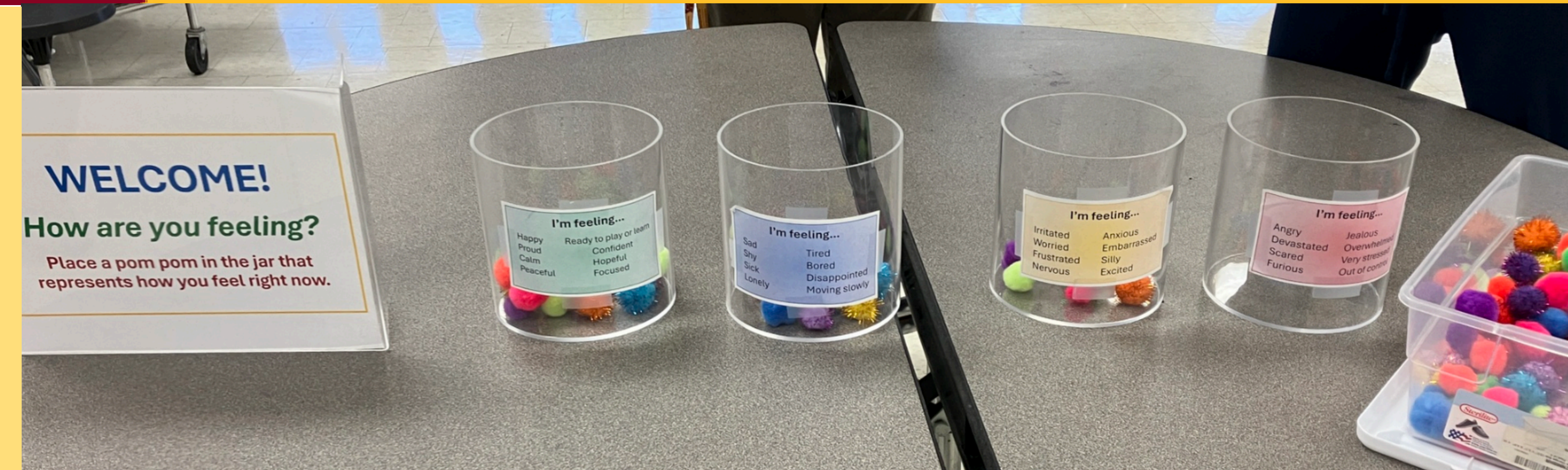
20%

In 2023, 20% of adolescents reported seriously considering attempting suicide

OBJECTIVES

Improve adolescent depression symptoms by augmenting afterschool programming with social emotional skill building, physical activity, and mentorship.

Examine the impact of the augmented program on adolescent mental health and wellbeing (i.e., depression symptoms, school connectedness, peer relationships).



EVALUATION

The DiscoverU pilot trial was conducted over one year in two middle schools (n=170) using a crossover design. Each school alternated between standard afterschool programming and programming enhanced with DiscoverU at the semester mark. The study evaluated feasibility, acceptability, mental health, and physical activity, with input from students, mentors, and staff.

Evaluation methods included:

- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Accelerometry data
- In class observations



PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

DiscoverU consisted of training college students to mentor adolescents and promote strategies to improve mental health during their afterschool programming. Mentors practiced role modeling, making connections with students, and leading three short structured activities:

• Emotion Check-in

- Discussed students' feelings after the school day and explored ways to improve mood during class.

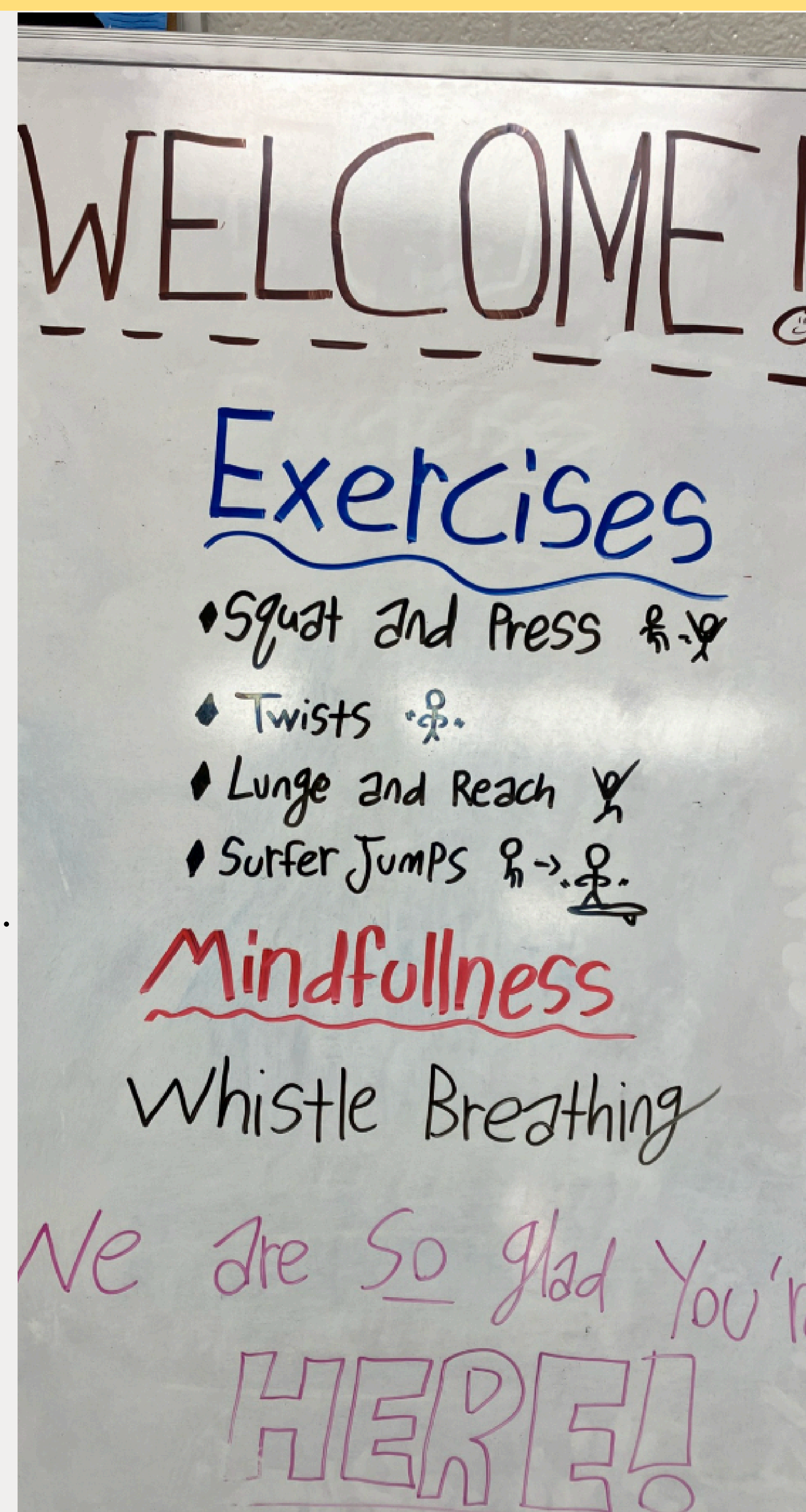
• Move Your Mood

- 5 minute set of exercises to boost heart rate and demonstrate how physical activity can improve mood.

• Mindfulness Moment

- Explored emotional and physical calming strategies, including breathing, grounding exercises, and techniques for focus and mindfulness.

Mentors also promoted consistent attendance by writing notes to students who were absent.



NEXT STEPS

We just completed data collection in May and are currently working on analysis.

Future efforts will focus on:

- Refining the program based on evaluation findings
- Expanding to other schools

