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## PYD Youth Program Design: Safe House

### **Overview:**

Name of the site is Haidian Middle School. This is a boarding school located in Haidian District, Beijing. It accommodates students from grades seven to twelve, including International Students. The total number of students is approximately 1500, with a staff of around 200. The school has well-established infrastructure, including multiple teaching buildings, dormitories, two cafeterias, two playgrounds, and other facilities. The economic situation of the students' families is generally self-sufficient, with a relatively low percentage of students in financial need. The school implements a militarized management approach, enforcing a strict daily schedule. Students return to campus on Sunday evening and are dismissed on Friday afternoon, during which time the use of any electronic devices is prohibited.

Name of the PYD program is Safe House, with its mission statement of “Listen, Protect, Encourage”.

Target groups are students from any grade within the school, as well as the students' families.

### **Goals:**

The form of militarized management has its pros and cons. In terms of academic performance, Haidian Middle School's scores in the high school entrance examination and the

college entrance examination do rank among the top in major schools in Beijing. However, behind the outstanding results lies immense pressure on the students. Starting from waking up at 6:20 in the morning until the end of evening self-study at 9:50, except for meal times, breaks between classes, and outdoor activities, most of the time is occupied by teachers from various subjects. The high-intensity study routine brings huge stress to the students. In addition, teachers generally tend to be strict, placing more emphasis on students' academic performance than their mental well-being. When students experience emotional breakdowns, they can barely receive proper psychological counseling; instead, they rely on the care of their classmates. Since students spend almost six days a week without meeting their parents, there is a significant possibility of growing distant from them. Prolonged interaction with classmates may also lead to conflicts.

The establishment of the Safe House project is aimed at focusing on students' mental well-being. The objectives include:

- Providing Psychological Support: Creating a safe space for students to receive psychological counseling and support.
- Promoting Emotional Well-being: Assisting students in dealing with emotional issues, cultivating positive ways of expressing emotions, and fostering the development of emotional health.
- Alleviating Academic Pressure: Helping students better handle academic stress by providing study skills and methods to cope with pressure, thereby reducing their academic burdens.
- Establishing Social Support Systems: Encouraging students to build positive social relationships, offering support and friendship, and minimizing potential conflicts among classmates.

- Home-School Collaboration: Facilitating communication and collaboration between students, parents, and the school to jointly care for and support the holistic development of students.

Through the assistance of the "Safe House" project, we hope that students can confront challenges in academic, interpersonal relationships, self-doubt, and other aspects with a healthy mental state. Additionally, we aim to foster trust among student groups and between students and the teacher community.

**Project Description:**

The Safe House project encourages the participation of students within the school. Considering the academic pressure faced by students in Grade 9 and Grade 12 as they prepare for the High school/College Entrance Exams, the project will primarily select participants from the other four grades and international department students. International department students, with relatively flexible schedules, may constitute the majority of the project. This initiative is intended to be long-term. A student can participate spanning up to six years from Grade 7 to Grade 12. Over this time, regular volunteers are more likely to establish trust with the students, facilitating subsequent emotional counseling efforts.

Volunteers are not obliged to continue their involvement beyond a given semester; they can exit the project at the beginning of any term. However, they are required to pass on their work experience to newly joined volunteers. Each year, volunteers will be selected at the beginning of the semester and undergo training in the first month, which includes learning from experienced volunteers and acquiring relevant professional knowledge. These training sessions will occupy 40 minutes of time between the end of afternoon classes and the beginning of

evening self-study, occurring three times a week.

During the first month of training for new volunteers, experienced volunteers will take turns providing guidance and daily psychological counseling activities. After this initial month of learning, volunteers will begin their duties from the second month onward. There is no fixed workspace; the entire school is considered the working environment. Volunteers from different grades will be responsible for organizing psychological counseling sessions for their respective classes and grades. If a particular class does not have a volunteer available for this activity, students will need to seek assistance from the nearest available class or grade.

Volunteers from each grade need to meet every day to compile the number of registered participants (recommended during the ten-minute break during the evening self-study) to confirm the names and grades of students requiring psychological counseling. Volunteers must reasonably arrange counseling times based on the daily number of registrations, with each session not exceeding half an hour. The time and location will be mutually agreed upon by the registering students and the volunteers. Each counseling session will involve two volunteers for mutual supervision and evaluation. If a volunteer perceives that their mental state is not optimal, they can seek support from other volunteers or take a break to recover before continuing their involvement in the project.

At the end of each month, volunteers are required to summarize their work, identify sources of student stress, and document their problem-solving approaches. Meanwhile, they will submit reports to the project leader regarding the performance of other volunteers they have worked with. If a volunteer shows low participation or irresponsibility during counseling sessions, they will be automatically removed from the project the following month. Conversely, active participation may result in gaining more discretionary time. At the end of each semester,

they must compile a comprehensive report of all activities undertaken during that semester. This report can be presented either in writing or through a spoken presentation to the school's administrative staff.

**Resources Needed:**

Firstly, we need to select volunteers within the school. Secondly, we require experienced psychological counselors with professional expertise associated with the school to serve as mentors for guiding volunteers. Within one month, these mentors will help cultivate basic knowledge in psychological counseling, including an overview of the process. Additionally, as a reward for exemplary performance during activities, student volunteers will receive relatively more discretionary time within the school. We need to collaborate with the volunteers' class teachers, grade supervisors, and school administrators to discuss suitable options, allowing volunteers to choose the time periods they would prefer for rest.

The training sessions will take place in a conference room within the teaching building. Since the training occurs between the end of afternoon classes and the beginning of evening self-study, this location will not disturb other students during their break. After the formal training sessions, the actual counseling sessions will be conducted within any area on the school premises. The location will be determined through mutual agreement between the registered students and volunteers. However, volunteers should be mindful of selecting a venue that ensures the safety of both parties, avoiding places that are too distant from public areas whenever possible.

The only expense involved in the entire activity is the hiring of professional psychological counselors as mentors. Since this is a long-term initiative, we encourage these

counselors to establish a lasting partnership with the school. The estimated cost is around \$1500 per month. Additionally, if they commit to an entire semester, they can receive an additional bonus. During their tenure at the school, counselors can have meals in the cafeteria and are not required to be on campus all day. An ideal working schedule would be from 12:00 PM to 20:00 PM each day.

**Effectiveness:**

By encouraging students to participate in this activity, we will convey a signal of "we care about students' mental health," letting students on campus, who may be plagued by various pressures, know that they have a reliable outlet for stress relief. Through psychological counseling, we hope to alleviate student stress to a certain extent. Meanwhile, asking students to take on central roles in this activity is a form of empowerment. By giving them the authority to make decisions and making them aware that their actions can truly benefit others, they can gain a profound understanding of their significance in the project (Tobey 129).

Some common risk factors on campus include students lacking motivation, poor interpersonal relationships between groups, resistance to closed management styles, and teachers using ineffective teaching methods. We hope that our project can use psychological counseling to help students recognize their dissatisfaction and encourage them to find suitable coping strategies.

Since volunteers are selected from the student body, providing psychological counseling is also a process of building bonds among classmates. For the entire school, this plays a significant role in improving the campus atmosphere, creating a safe and caring environment for students to learn and live. At the same time, implementing this project can serve as a model for

schools in the entire Haidian District and even in Beijing. It allows other schools to understand our campus culture and the positive impact of the "Safe House" project on students. On the contrary, schools and the broader community should also encourage students to engage in similar projects. Only through mutual support can the overall community make progress (Pittman 21).

Works Cited

- Pittman, K., Irby, M., Tolman, J., Yohalem, N., & Ferber, T. (2003). Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement: Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals?. Based upon Pittman, K. & Irby, M. (1996). Preventing Problems or Promoting Development? Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc. Available online at [www.forumfyi.org](http://www.forumfyi.org).
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