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A Case Study on Peer Mutual-Aid Associations in Enhancing Positive Psychological Qualities among Higher Vocational College Students

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Abstract: This article discusses how peer mutual aid associations can improve the positive psychological qualities of vocational college students. Drawing on the practical work of a peer psychological mutual-aid association at a higher vocational college, this paper summarizes the association's positive role within the school's mental health education system and illustrates how its achievements contribute to new pathways for improving mental health education. This indicates that positive psychological qualities are an important component of a healthy personality among college students.

Keywords: Higher Vocational Colleges; Peer Psychological Mutual Aid; Student Associations; Positive Psychological Qualities.

1. Implementation Background

Positive psychological qualities constitute an essential component of a healthy personality among college students. They enrich students' cognition, positively shape their behavior, enhance their sense of gain and well-being, and help prevent the onset of psychological disorders. Data from the college's freshman psychological screening and mental health service survey reveal that 61% of students prefer to confide in friends or classmates when encountering psychological difficulties, while 39% turn first to the internet for self-help. Reporting issues to psychological counselors, instructors, or parents is their least preferred option. This trend presents new challenges for the school's mental health education and crisis management efforts.[1]

In response, the college officially launched its Peer Psychological Mutual-Aid Association in 2016. The association has since grown into a vital component of the institution's psychological education workforce.

2. Implementation Methods and Process

2.1. Consolidating the Foundation of the Group: The "Three-Core Support" Mechanism Ensuring Effective Operation of the Association

2.1.1. Professional Guidance as the Core to Build Forward Momentum

A well-structured organization is essential for establishing a new pattern of peer psychological mutual aid. A three-tier structure, "Mental Health Education Center + Secondary Workstations + Peer Psychological Mutual-Aid Association", was established. Strategic partnerships were formed with the Yiban Student Development Center, the Youth League Committee, the Student Union, the Dormitory Management Center, and the Student Self-Governance Committee, creating a collaborative model characterized by coordinated cooperation and synergistic linkage.[2]

2.1.2. Team Development as the Focus to Shape a Service-Oriented Framework

Organizational responsibilities were clearly defined to strengthen team building. Professional instructors and administrative advisors jointly guided the association in performing its respective functions and facilitating cooperation. Student leaders and outstanding members spearheaded self-education and self-management within the association. Interests combined with professional knowledge allowed members to enrich themselves and promote personal growth.

2.1.3. "Helping Others and Helping Oneself" as the Original Intention to Activate Work Effectiveness

The association adhered to principles of "helping others, helping oneself, and mutual assistance," integrating various online and offline resources inside and outside the campus. A three-year, multi-stage training model was maintained: first-year students focused on improving their own psychological qualities; second-year students emphasized the application of psychological knowledge and skills; third-year students focused on developing innovation and practical competence.[3]

2.2. Strengthening Competence as the Foundation: A "Four-Dimensional Training Model" to Enhance Team Capacity

Adhering to the "four-dimensional" training concept, the association fully leveraged its role in discovering and preventing psychological crises as well as promoting students' positive psychological development and education.

2.2.1. Self-Growth as the Foundation

By bringing mental health professionals "into the campus", including renowned university psychology experts, psychiatrists, and clinical psychologists, the association launched the "Sunshine Classroom." These experts offered scientific guidance on interpersonal communication, emotional regulation, stress management, and related issues. Growth-oriented peer support groups were developed to encourage students to form small teams and engage in

structured peer-help activities, thereby stimulating their internal motivation for action.[4]

2.2.2. Positive Experience as the Guiding Principle

Through group counseling activities grounded in positive psychology, students were guided to experience cooperation, interpret challenges positively, develop a growth mindset, and cultivate optimistic qualities. Continuous training programs focused on enhancing positive psychological qualities, such as "100 Small Things That Boost Energy" and "Happiness Scratch-Off Cards", helped strengthen students' sense of gain and well-being in peer psychological work.

2.2.3. Practice as the Key Training Approach

A "Growth Training Camp" was developed, through which selected student leaders were rigorously trained to form a team of psychological assistants. A structured, practice-oriented, and progressive curriculum, combining group counseling with individual psychological consultation, was carefully designed. All members completed training and certification through the National College Psychological Committee Work Platform. With a 100% "certified participation rate," they engaged in essential responsibilities such as appointment scheduling, registration, and reception in counseling services. The program adopted a framework of "comprehensive selection, prioritized development, and exemplary leadership," and regularly selected "Outstanding Psychological Committee Members" to enhance role-model influence.

2.2.4. Prevention as the Core Task

A meticulous "Green Psychological Safety Network" was constructed. Monthly "Class Psychological Feedback Forms" were submitted to assess the overall psychological status of each class, ensuring early detection and early intervention of psychological problems. Peer navigators played a vital role by organizing themed class meetings on mental health, knowledge competitions, team-building activities, and other educational events to foster a positive campus atmosphere. Students were encouraged to participate actively, thereby cultivating a positive mindset.

2.3. Upholding Innovation as the Driving Force: Building Signature Association Activities through the "Five-Dimensional Education Progression"

Adhering to the guiding principle of "integrating the five dimensions of education with implicit convergence," the association deeply explores the psychological education elements embedded in the Five-Education Model, promoting a holistic concept of mental health education across the campus.

2.3.1. Vertically Connecting Key Nodes of Mental Health Activities

Emphasizing implicit cultivation, the association integrates mental health education with traditional culture, aesthetic education, arts, sports, and labor education. A series of themed programs, such as Aesthetics for a Nurturing Mind, Reading for Clarity, Music for Joy, Sports for Strength, and Horticulture for Peace, have been launched as signature mental health projects. These initiatives connect the four levels of "school–college–class–dormitory" and align with key time points throughout the academic year, ensuring continuous and coherent implementation of mental health activities. By closely monitoring students' psychological rhythms across different periods, the association ensures that mental health education spans all seasons, reaches all levels, and is embedded throughout the entire student development process, thereby fostering positive emotions and a healthy mindset.

2.3.2. Horizontally Expanding New Platforms for "Professional + Psychological" Integrated Services

The association collaborated closely with students from the college's animation program to design and regularly conduct a range of artistic activities that "appear on walls, fall upon manhole covers, and come alive on screens." Through volunteer service platforms, a series of themed programs were organized, including "Blooming Hearts on Manhole Covers" (manhole-cover painting), the "Voices in Comics" 5.25 Comic Exhibition, the "Bluebird Art" mural project, and the "Flowing Sand Stories" sand-art showcase. These activities encouraged students to step outside the confines of classroom learning, engage with the broader society, and explore the depths of their inner world, transforming creative expression into a "sweet remedy" that soothes the mind and supports personal growth.

In partnership with the Yiban Student Development Center, the association also established an immersive animation-themed psychological experience room titled "Chuanxin Year." The space offers services such as companion chats with "Cute Bears" and multisensory experiences with "Little Bears," and hosts activities like the "Warm Big White" spontaneous hug event and the "Energetic Frog" team-building workshop. Using plush mascots beloved by students, these activities help foster corrective emotional experiences, nurturing a sense of achievement, strength, and control.

This innovative "psychology + professional skills" model not only enhances students' technical abilities and cultivates craftsmanship but also develops positive psychological qualities such as appreciation for life and mindful engagement with the present, ultimately supporting students' self-growth.

3. Insights and Implications from the Project

3.1. Peer Psychological Mutual-Aid Associations Cultivate Empathy and a Sense of Belonging

When facing psychological difficulties, higher vocational students often avoid professional counseling due to concerns about being labeled. As a non-professional yet highly relatable support system, peer psychological mutual-aid associations are composed of students who can deeply understand the common challenges their peers face in academics, daily life, and emotional experiences. Through diverse formats appealing to students, the association provides a non-judgmental and pressure-free space for expression.

In the processes of mutual listening and responding, students experience emotional resonance, feeling "understood and accepted", which gradually enhances their capacity for empathy. Meanwhile, collective interaction helps students break free from feelings of isolation, establish stable peer connections, and strengthen their sense of belonging. Such belonging is a fundamental basis for interpersonal harmony and self-identity—key components of positive psychological qualities.

3.2. Peer Psychological Mutual-Aid Associations Strengthen Self-Awareness and Self-Efficacy

Through varied activities, peer psychological mutual-aid associations translate abstract psychological concepts into practical, life-oriented experiences. Compared with formal classroom-based instruction, association activities are more engaging and participatory. Students not only learn the principles of positive psychology systematically but also apply them in real-life contexts to address their own problems. When students successfully manage stress or improve interpersonal relationships using strategies shared by their peers, they gradually develop a sense of self-efficacy: "I am capable of handling difficulties." Self-efficacy is a key driving force behind the development of positive psychological qualities.

3.3. Peer Psychological Mutual-Aid Associations Enhance Resilience and Problem-Solving Skills

The cultivation of positive psychological qualities requires not just knowledge transmission but also practical experience. Peer psychological mutual-aid associations provide students with a range of practice-based roles, such as event planning, organizational coordination, peer listening, and mental health promotion. During the association's operations, students must cope with real challenges, including planning obstacles, communication conflicts, and coordination of external resources. Through teamwork, they gradually strengthen their stress management ability, emotional regulation skills, and problem-solving competence, all of which are central to psychological resilience. Additionally, students serving as peer listeners must analyze problems rationally and respond patiently to others' needs. This process not only deepens their understanding of positive psychological qualities but also enables self-growth through the principle of "helping others while helping oneself."

3.4. Peer Psychological Mutual-Aid Associations Build a Comprehensive Psychological Support Network

University counseling centers often face limitations such as insufficient staffing and students' reluctance to seek help, making it challenging to address all mental health needs. Peer psychological mutual-aid associations serve as an important supplementary force, enabling the "extension" and "popularization" of psychological support services. With members distributed across various grades and majors, the association can promptly identify peers' psychological concerns and provide initial support through informal communication, helping to alleviate mild psychological stress and prevent further deterioration. For students requiring professional intervention, the association serves as a "bridge," guiding them toward campus counseling services. Together, this creates a multidimensional psychological support system consisting of "professional counseling + peer support + self-adjustment," providing comprehensive protection for developing positive psychological qualities.

Peer psychological mutual-aid associations are an indispensable component of mental health education in higher education institutions. They not only offer a safe and accessible platform for psychological support but also facilitate the development of positive psychological qualities such as self-awareness, empathy, and resilience through experiential learning. To address existing issues, such as limited professional skills, homogeneous activity formats, and irregular organizational management, continuous improvement is needed through establishing a tiered training system, innovating activity content and formats, strengthening organizational mechanisms, and enhancing multi-party collaboration. Looking ahead, as mental health education continues to advance, peer psychological mutual-aid associations must further enhance their professionalism, innovation, and effectiveness, fully embody the core value of "helping others while helping oneself," and support students in cultivating positive psychological qualities to achieve holistic well-being and overall development.

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