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Support Groups, Wise Advice

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Author Note

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Abstract

The need for parents to attend programs such as the Parent Project and understand the effectiveness of parent education classes is important, especially for those raising troubled or out of control youth. At Partners For Peace they provide just that, parent education through the Parent Project program. It has been stated that support groups help parents alleviate stress (Armenta and Huerta, 2015) therefore, the project consisted of bringing former Parent Project graduates together to continue supporting each other by reconnecting them in a barbeque, providing free food and games for them and their families, and hosting an enrichment workshop facilitated by a bilingual Salinas Police Officer due to the population being served were Spanish speaking parents. The purpose of the project was for parents to give each other wise advice and increase their peer to peer support. It also encouraged the parents to use the tools they received while they attended the Parent Project courses. By getting all parents from different graduating classes together, the agency learned more about their needs and the changes that they can make to better the program. After also providing a quick questionnaire it was found that many parents informed that the program is helpful because by educating themselves they can help their youth. The majority mentioned that the program would be so much more helpful to other families as prevention rather than intervention and that is the most important recommendation to the agency because by educating the parents at an early stage they can avoid problems down the road.

Keywords: Parent Project, Parent Education, Youth, Parents, Prevention, Intervention

Agency

Partners for Peace is a public nonprofit organization that focuses on building strong families for a peaceful community. Partners for Peace currently offers three programs which are, The Parent Project, Step Up Mentoring, and Strengthening Families. Each program focuses on different age groups. The Parent Project is designed for parents that have difficult or out of control adolescents. Step Up Mentoring is for at risk youth between the ages of eleven and fourteen years old, and Strengthening Families Program is for parents and youth together between the ages of ten and sixteen years old (Partners for Peace, n.d.). Partners for Peace has been serving Monterey County for over twenty years and their focus is family and parent education courses. Since 1995, Partners for Peace was incorporated as a nonprofit and Anna Caballero was the first executive director of the agency. She is a former mayor of Salinas, City Council member, and current State Assembly Member. In 1999, The David and Lucille Packard Foundation gave the agency a million-dollar grant for infrastructure and program implementation (Partners for Peace, n.d.).

The Parent Project wants to teach effective parenting skills, especially now for parents dealing with 21st century adolescents. The mission for the Parent Project is to develop parent-training programs for parents raising difficult or out of control children (K. Bauer, personal communication, March 1, 2017). They are committed to providing highly effective programs that are affordable for every parent. The agency is effective by offering the program in English and in Spanish as well as offering the material in Spanish and having facilitators that are bilingual because a lot of parents can relate. The Parent Project is an intervention program for parents only that are dealing with adolescents that are using drugs or alcohol, missing school (truancy),

runaways, are in gangs, are witnessing violence at home, or have witnessed violence elsewhere (K. Bauer, personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Although the program is locally offered by Partners for Peace, the Parent Project is a nationwide program that has served over 500,000 families. This program is the largest court mandated juvenile diversion program in the United States and the least expensive intervention program (Partners for Peace, power point slides, n.d.). The only charge they have is for the book which is \$45.00 and can be paid in payments during the twelve-week course that meets once a week for three hours (K. Bauer, personal communication, March 1, 2017). In some circumstances, the fee can be waived based on financial status. The program is designed for ten to twenty parents and two facilitators lead the class (Partners for peace, power point slides, n.d.).

The purpose of the agency and the program is to improve communication skills and problem solving between parents and youth. They want to teach parents how to set clear rules and learn love and limits. They teach goal setting for both parents and youth and peer resistant skills for youth. When parents take their classes, it does not mean that they are bad parents, maybe they just do not have the right tools for a teenager facing bullying, sexting, and so forth. For these reasons, many teenagers begin missing school, using drugs and joining gangs and that is why the parents need the tools (K. Bauer, personal communication, November 2016).

An important factor for parent education for youth in the 21st century is that many people that come from different backgrounds like to pass on family traditions and cultures to their children and although it is always nice to carry on with traditions it is also important to make the parents aware that their children are growing up in a different time where there are a lot of different things going on such as technology and the presence of social media and its pressures. Parents do not take the time needed with their kids and they do not listen. They get into yelling battles that

do not work well and instead push their children away. (K. Bauer, personal communication, November 2016).

Communities Served

The Parent Project is open to anyone. Any parent is welcome to sign up for classes but most of the people that are signed up have been referred by the courts. Parents of youth that are on probation or in custody are ordered by the courts to take the class because the classes give parents useful tools to deal with their youth. The program has served parents from all over Monterey County and 85% of the parents that they have served have been Hispanic (K. Bauer, personal communication, November 2016). The Project directly serves parents of youth ten to seventeen years old. Of those families served 83% of them are in the extremely low income family level, 8% are very low, 7% are low income, and 2% are medium or moderate. Most families served have been from the 93905-area code which is considered a high crime area in Salinas. (K. Bauer, personal communication, November 2016).

Problem

As adults one of the toughest jobs anyone can ever take on is being a parent, and even more being a parent to a teenager. Adults have great impact in their children's life which is critical to their success. The need for parents to attend programs such as the Parent Project and understand the effectiveness of parent education classes is important, especially in a city like Salinas because the city has been named the youth homicide capital of California more than once (VPC, 2015). The behaviors that some teenagers are taking have landed them in juvenile hall, trouble in school, drug use, and even death, and all this often happens because of lack of supervision or understanding from their parents.

Youth between the ages of ten and twenty-four years old are being affected by violence and other pressures that they are facing from their peers. In July of 2016, there had been sixteen shooting homicides being investigated and twelve of them involved young men twenty-four years old or younger (VPC, 2015). In 2015, Salinas had the highest number of homicides in history, 103 shootings in which thirty-one of whom were killed and almost half of those killed, were twenty-four years old or younger (VPC, 2015). These are large numbers for a city of 157,000 people. The Violence Policy Center (VPC) ranked Monterey County (Salinas is the county seat) as the youth homicide capital of California for four out of the past five years and defined youth as anyone between the ages of ten and twenty-four years old (VPC, 2015). The county has also taken the top spot in annual gang-related youth homicides every year since 2011. In 2015, Salinas had a total gun homicide rate of 19.7 shooting deaths per 100,000 people, which is more than seven times higher than the national rate and right below Oakland's, which is the third most violent big city in America. (Magdaleno, 2016). Community-based parent education like the Parent Project and support systems enhance parents' knowledge of ways that they can support the development of their children. Through family management, problem-solving skills, and referrals to other needed services, families whose children are at risk can help those youths avoid future problems with delinquency (NCPC, 2017).

Causes

Poverty is one of the main contributors of youth acting out. The increase in the City's population is fueled by the intensification of agriculture and the economic growth of Silicon Valley which is sixty miles north (Cohen and Erlenborn, n.d.). People moving from Silicon Valley have an income base far exceeding that of many of Salinas's current residents. The movement has driven housing costs up (Cohen and Erlenborn, n.d.). Insufficient affordable

housing combined with high unemployment and low-paying jobs has led to high population density in some areas of Salinas, forcing families to share small homes or apartments (Cohen and Erlenborn, n.d.). Some youth have even shared that they much rather be in the streets because they do not like being at home where there are only one or two rooms for a family of seven. They get irritated when they have no privacy and would rather be hanging out with friends.

Another contributing factor for teenagers to act out and not want to be home is to be out with gangs. According to local law enforcement, Monterey County has an estimated 5,000 certified and affiliated gang members, with approximately 3,000 of these living in the City of Salinas (Youth, n.d.). There are approximately seventy-one gangs countywide, with sixteen youth gangs and two prison gangs in Salinas. The county has Salinas Valley State Prison and the Correctional Training Facility (Youth, n.d.). Both are approximately thirty miles south of Salinas, which contributes significantly to local gang problems (Youth, n.d.).

Alcohol and Drugs are also a factor. Alcohol is the drug most associated with incidents such as homicides, suicides, and domestic violence (Cohen and Erlenborn, n.d.). The use of alcohol and drugs results in higher levels of aggression and crime and wherever there is a high number of liquor stores there is neighborhoods suffering from social problems that are alcohol related (Cohen and Erlenborn, n.d.). Youth that have been interviewed mentioned that they have seen drugs being sold in classrooms and one student shared that dealers make a lot of money from selling drugs and students think it is better than being in school (Cohen and Erlenborn, n.d.). Youth in Monterey County are at risk for substance abuse and statistics show that admittance to outpatient or recovery services by youth fifteen years of age and younger are the largest group admitted and the group between the ages of fifteen to seventeen are admitted for heroin use (Cohen and Erlenborn, n.d.).

Family dynamics is one of the most common factors at the Parent Project. Unsupportive homes that include psychological and physical abuse can start cycles of violence that are difficult to break (Cohen and Erlenborn, n.d.). Relationships between families are difficult and some families lack structure, communication, and discipline, which are key determinants of healthy families and healthy youth (Cohen and Erlenborn, n.d.). Family dynamics rank as the number one risk factor. Youth need positive role models and it is a concern that not many have them. Some homes are single parent homes in which the father is absent and youth struggle with the lack of positive male role models (Cohen and Erlenborn, n.d.). Therefore, there is a link between the absence of supportive and caring relationships and youth getting involved in violence.

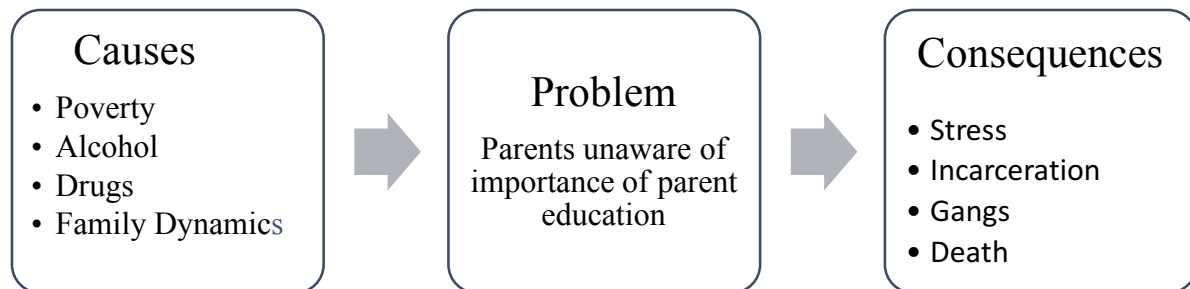
Consequences

When parents do not address some of the issues they are facing with their youth, they often have high stress levels (Armenta and Huerta, 2015). There are very few studies regarding the psychological well-being of parents but there are studies that suggest that when there is lack of effective parenting skills there is a likelihood of negative behaviors of children (Armenta and Huerta, 2015). Sometimes the effects of too much stress are demonstrated through incidents of family violence. In a study conducted in 2002 by Feldman and Werner, there were twenty-five families randomly selected (Armenta and Huerta, 2015). These were families that had completed parent education classes and who had children with behavioral disorders. The purpose of the study was to measure the parents stress in dealing with their children and whether their classes were effective in coping with the stress (Armenta and Huerta, 2015). The conclusion of the study was that parenting a child with behavioral problems is highly stressful and produces a sense of imbalance in the family system and their way of coping with such stress and alleviating it was

the social support from other parents and their parent education classes (Armenta and Huerta, 2015).

The City of Salinas has been dealing with increasing gang violence for over 50 years and has reached a critical level. It impacts 100% of the community and people are forced to deal with negative perceptions associated with the city (Youth, n.d.). Violence is a public health issue that not only affects the individual, but the community. It is a contributor to the deterioration of families and communities, it contributes to increases in health care costs, and decreases in academic achievement, and it prevents economic development in stressed communities (Youth, n.d.). See figure 1 for Problem model.

Figure 1: Problem Model



Support Groups, Wise Advice

Support groups wise advice was implemented by the intern with the idea that parents would re-connect with other parents and hopefully exchange information so that participants could continue supporting each other. The intern attended Parent Project classes in English and Spanish for three semesters and observed how well parents interacted and how well they felt about not being the only ones dealing with similar issues. Aside from that the intern also attended Monterey County Collaborate meetings, Community Alliance for Safety and Peace meetings,

and Mental Health training to better understand agencies coming together and figuring out ways to help parents and youth. During the BBQ parents had the opportunity to network with other parents whom they had not met with before but had taken the classes at different dates. The parents had the opportunity to share with each other the reason why they were there to begin with, which was not much different than other parents. By finding out that other parents had similar experiences they could give each other advice since they all know what it is like to deal with youth that have strong attitudes. The project consisted of bringing former parent project graduates together to continue supporting each other and educate each other. At Partners For Peace the agency provides just that, parent education thru the Parent Project program. Since it has been stated before that support groups help parents alleviate stress (Armenta and Huerta, 2015), the project connected the parents in a barbeque that provided free food and games for them and their families and hosted an enrichment workshop that was facilitated by a bilingual Salinas Police Officer since the parents attending were all Spanish speakers. The purpose of the project was for parents to give each other wise advice and increase their peer to peer support. It also encouraged the parents to use the tools they received while they attended the Parent Project courses. By bringing different graduating classes together, the agency learned more about their needs and the changes that the agency can make to better the program which is the reason why this project was implemented.

Planning

This project was made possible with extensive planning. The intern made many phone calls to former graduates from July 2017 to two years back. The parents were made aware of the barbeque via phone calls and addresses were verified to send a flyer with time, location, and other information pertaining to the barbeque (See Appendix A for flyer). Address labels were

created by the intern for each household. An agenda was also provided to parents as they arrived at the park where the barbeque was hosted (See Appendix C for Agenda) and an emergency plan was given to all volunteers in case of any emergencies during the event. (See Appendix D for emergency plan). There was also a budget (See Appendix E for budget) and a timeline (See Appendix F for timeline) created for the mentors to keep track of the progress and a sign in sheet for those that attended (See Appendix G for sign in sheet). The intern reached out for donations, which were used as incentives for participants to attend, and a raffle of a gift card for a massage to relief stress. A musician (harp player) was also hired by the intern to play live relaxing music while parents enjoyed their meals. There were no consent requirements signed for pictures taken due to the agency using the initial registration forms as forms of consent.

Project Outcome

Parents had the opportunity to share their needs with the program and share their input on how the program can better serve them. The program wished to have better delivery of services and find out why many parents are not able to make it to classes. In some instances, classes get full but when they begin, parents do not show up. Some parents show up for the first session and then stop going to the rest. The workshop was offered to enrich and refresh the parents on what they learned while they were attending the program and parents also had the opportunity to ask questions to officer Rosales regarding circumstances in which they should call the police department regarding their youth. Some parents shared their concerns regarding calling police while being undocumented because youth use that to threaten them and keep them from calling law enforcement when youth act out. Officer Rosales was able to help parents and inform them of all circumstances in which they should contact law enforcement and they should never be afraid to call regardless of their legal status. One measure that was used to assess the needs of the

parents was a questionnaire (See Appendix B for questionnaire) that consisted of eleven questions in which the parents were asked about reasons why they could not make it to class and their thoughts on parent education. After that, all answers were collected and consolidated into one paper. The agency then received a copy that may be used for future grant applications.

Findings

After reviewing the questionnaire, many parents informed that the program is helpful because by educating themselves they can help their youth. Most parents admitted that they were unable to continue to attend support groups after graduating because parents who volunteered to lead the groups did not follow thru or they just did not have time due to work. Many also mentioned that the program would be so much more helpful to other families as prevention rather than intervention, and that is the most important recommendation to the agency, because by educating the parents at an early stage they can avoid problems in the future. Most participants mentioned that their preferred method of receiving information was through mail. The mentors were pleased with the number of parents that attended the barbeque and the way everything was organized. The expected outcome was achieved due to many parents attending and sharing their opinion thru the questionnaire. Figure 2 will show the amount of families (parents) contacted.

Figure 2: Families Contacted (Spanish Classes)

Total # of Parents on rosters	# of Parents able to contact	# of Parents that participated in questionnaire	# of Parents that assisted BBQ	Total # of people that assisted the BBQ	# of volunteers
64	35	20	14	38	9

Activities

Some activities that contributed to the outcomes were providing child care and games for children and parents. Children were cared for by volunteers while parents attended the enrichment workshop for one hour, which took place in the Silver Star Building located at just walking distance from the park. Parents were motivated by the stress-free massage incentives because many expressed how stressed they felt during the phone call process. Figure 3 demonstrates the timeline and activities.

Figure 3: Activities

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline
Contact guest speaker	Guest speaker was not available and did not return messages. Plan was changed and contacted a different potential speaker.	8/7/17
Translate all paperwork into Spanish for Spanish speaking participants	Parents had a Spanish agenda and a Spanish speaking guest speaker was contacted.	8/7/17
Shop for raffle basket, develop budget, finished flyers to send out, recruited volunteers.	Shopped for basket and collected incentives, sent out Spanish flyers, gathered all volunteers needed	8/8/17-8/9/17
Emergency plan	Emergency plan was given to all volunteers, volunteers received gift cards for their help	8/14/17
Shop for all utensils and miscellaneous needed.	All games, drinks, and food were collected two days before BBQ	8/18/17-8/19/17
BBQ, games, music, food	Families enjoyed a day at the park while listening to live music, enjoying food, talking to officers, playing games, & attending workshop while kids continued to play.	8/20/17

Challenges

Many challenges were faced during the process such as, disconnected phone numbers and parents not answering the phone. There were a few parents that work at different times during the day and night therefore a strategy had to be used to adjust calling times during the morning and evening time. A few phone numbers were disconnected and some parents could not be reached for the event and to participate in the questionnaire. Another challenge was that food was running low but volunteers were prepared and made a quick trip to a grocery store before the food was completely out. Dates were a challenge because July is a month booked with family activities within the community and dates to implement had to be switched a few times. The park signs for reservation that were put up early in the morning were taken down, which meant that anyone could have taken over the spot before anyone arrived but luckily no one did. The spot was not reserved because the city did not allow any reservations as there is a first come first served rule. Another challenge was that the first guest speaker in mind never responded to any messages therefore the idea of the facilitator came later.

Successes/ Final Thoughts

After experiencing the successful turn out and observing the positive interactions that took place involving the parents and facilitator it is recommended that this project continues for future parent project graduates. The conversations that took place allowed for parents to vent and relieve stress from current and past situations that they were dealing with. As studies have shown, parenting a child with behavioral problems is highly stressful and produces a sense of imbalance in the family system and their way of coping with such stress and alleviating it, is the social support from other parents (Armenta and Huerta, 2015). The barbeque allowed for the

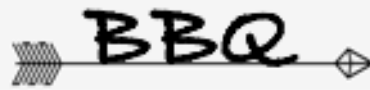
parents to spend a few hours not only with other parents but also with their children and youth. Families enjoyed bonding time, food, and games and it was strategically planned on a day that most parents do not work and all children and youth do not attend school. Gathering information that can better the program was important not only because it can help with future grants but also because the opinions are coming from the population that is being served and only they know what is working for them and what is not. The agency is pleased with the outcome and decided to sustain the project for future graduates. A second support group was hosted on Sunday November 5th, 2017 and the English Parent Project classes were part of a lunch and video sessions for marketing the Monterey County Mc Gives campaign in which nonprofits raise money through their website sponsored by the Monterey County weekly and the Community Foundation for Monterey County (V. Law, personal communication, November 30, 2017).

Personal/Professional Growth

As a parent, myself the experience of the parent project helped be become a better parent to my kids and step kids. It taught me how to balance love and limits and how to have positive approaches towards negative situations. I learned that a lot of parents do not spend much time with their children and the impact that it has towards their growth. I play a lot more games with my kids now and when possible have dinner as a family as many times as we can. Through the questionnaire, I learned that many parents were unable to attend the classes because of work. This information is useful to the agency because they can begin strategic planning on other possible times and dates to offer the classes. Another common answer was transportation. As mentioned before, many of the parents attending are of extremely low income rate and because of it do not own a vehicle or cannot afford to purchase one. This is all information that can help the agency in maybe adding transportation to their program in the future.

The increase in violence because of lack of supervision is critical because it impacts the community and innocent bystanders have lost their life's due to the violence that lost youth are creating. Violence is a public health issue that not only affects the individual, but the community. By offering this program the agency is building strong families because it is helping parents understand their teenagers and the reason behind many of their behaviors. Many of the parents come in feeling guilty, overwhelmed, and tired of trying to control their children not knowing that sometimes some behaviors that teenagers express are normal and they just need skills on how to approach them. The services provided help parents gain control of their homes and build better communication with their youth (Partners for peace, power point slides, n.d.). The project addressed this by giving the parents a workshop on everything they learned and giving them the opportunity to ask questions to local law enforcement. By doing so the parents are well informed of more laws and ways to keep their youth from getting in trouble. They also shared their own advice to each other and the types of things that have worked for them in particular situations. To better address the problem, more guest speakers should be brought to the classes to answer questions for parents and cover specific topics. This would also make classes more interesting and shift away from the same person talking for three hours. Each class can be switched up a little because we have different types of learners. Showing more visuals or listening to more testimonies can have parents more engaged. I would like for future capstone students to continue bringing parents together and let them know that the support is still there even after they have completed their classes. It would be good for interns to target the areas to improve that have already been identified by parents and build something positive on that to help them.

Appendix A: BBQ Flyer



¡Te invitamos a formar parte de una comida GRATIS! Para todos los graduados del Proyecto de Padres

Organizado por Partners For Peace y Nathaly (estudiante de la Universidad Estatal De Monterey)

**Domingo 20 de Agosto, 2017
De 12PM a 3PM**

- ❖ En el Veterans Park ubicado en Veterans Way, por 855 East Laurel Drive, cerca del edificio de Partners For Peace en Salinas
- ❖ ¡También tendremos juegos para la familia como Uno gigante, Jenga, pequeñas redes de fútbol, y un paracaídas!
- ❖ Los padres participarán en una rifa para ganar una canasta de accesorios para Spa y una tarjeta para un masaje gratis para aliviar el estrés
- ❖ Invitados Especiales: William Faulkner, Músico que estará tocando el arpa



Si tiene alguna pregunta puede llamar a Nathaly a el numero 831-794-1404

Appendix B: Questionnaire

PARENT PROJECT GRADUATES QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Have you attended a parent support group meeting?
2. If yes, what is the value or usefulness of the support group for you?
3. What type of information or classes would you like to see offered to parents?
4. Do you prefer to receive information about future classes via email, text, phone?
5. What is the value of parent education?
6. What tools can we use to get you to attend a support group?
7. If applicable what kept you from coming to support group? Transportation? Child care?
8. Where do you go when you need parenting help?
9. How did you find out about the Parent Project?
10. What can we improve upon?
11. How was the Parent Project helpful to you?

Appendix C: Agenda



12:00 p.m. Welcome, Introductions, Volunteers, Sign in

12:05 p.m. Hand out tickets for raffle

**12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. Guest Musician William Faulkner playing Harp
(attendees may request songs to be played)**

12:00 p.m.- 1:00 p.m. Play games, enjoy some food

**1:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m. Enrichment work shop for Parents with SPD
Officer Raul Rosales at Partners for Peace Building.**

1:00-3:00pm Volunteers remain with children at park

2:00 p.m. - 2:15 p.m. Parents fill out Questionnaire

2:15 p.m.- 3:00 p.m. Parents may return to Park enjoy evening.

**2:45 p.m. Raffle for care basket and massage gift cards donated by
Speed Boy Painting Inc.**

3:00 p.m. Thank you!

Appendix D: Emergency Plan

PARENT PROJECT BBQ EMERGENCY PLAN

VIOLENT ACT

In the case of a violent act including display of weapon or threatening harm contact law enforcement and coordinators Vicki Law or Nathaly Martinez. Give details about the person and their location or the direction they left towards.

MISSING CHILD

If a visitor reports a child missing, a member of the staff will assist the parent/family member/guardian to report the missing child to law enforcement. Be prepared with physical features and clothing. The message should also be spread to the event staff via word of mouth and entrances and exits must be monitored.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL ASSISTANT

In any type of medical assistance please contact emergency services. If it safe to do so remain on the scene until help for the person arrives. Do not move an injured person unless there is danger of further harm.

EVACUATION

In case of evacuation we will have two assembly points. Those at the park should walk up hill and meet at the flag pole. Those inside the Partners for Peace Building Silver Star Resource Center – Building H, should exit the building and walk towards the back-parking area towards the ROP building.



Appendix E:

PARENT PROJECT BBQ BUDGET

Total

\$424.72

Item	Cost					
Rice, Beans	\$54.60	Stress Massage	Giftcards	\$120.00	Donated	SpeedBoy Painting
Salsas	\$2.56					
Potato Salad	\$20.00					
Hot Dogs	\$15.00					
Waters	\$4.00					
Sodas	\$8.00					
Utensils	\$20.00					
Guest Musician	\$200.00					
Basket for raffle	\$4.99					
Labels for mail out	\$4.44					
Items for care basket	\$19.98					
Misc unexpected	\$71.15					

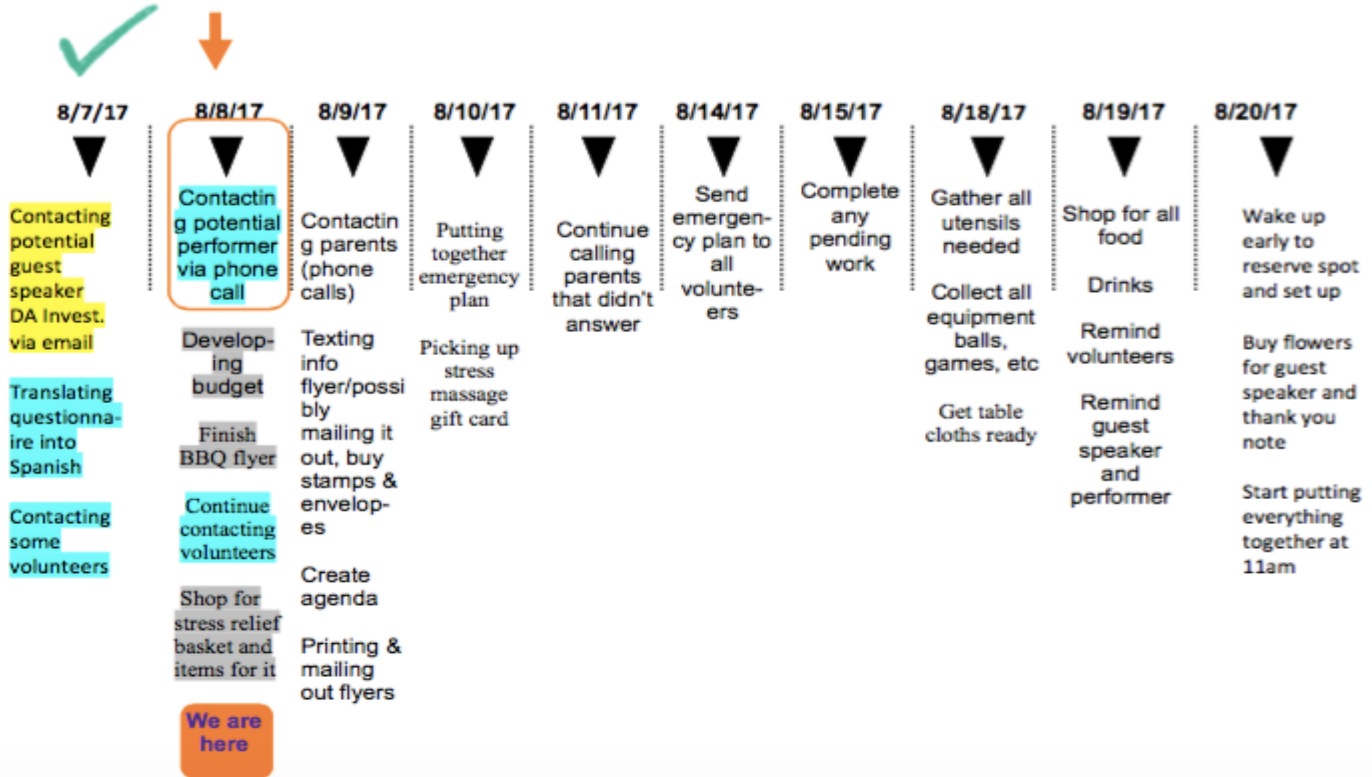
Appendix F: Timeline

Parent Project BBQ Support Group Timeline

Waiting for response

Completed

Pending



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