

CASE STUDIES: REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES OF HOW LIBRARIES ARE RE-ENVISIONING TEEN SERVICES

HackHealth

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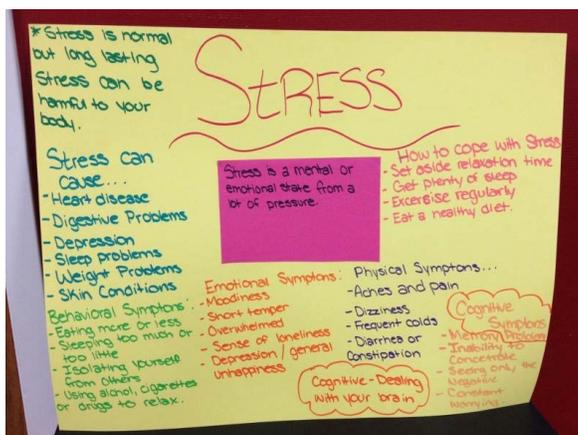
What Did You Want to Achieve?

The central focus of the program is to help young adults investigate their own health interests, whether it is information they personally need, information for a family member, or information they want simply out of curiosity. At the end of the program, young adults (and their parents) attend a closing party at the University of Maryland and demonstrate what they have learned through a presentation in the media of their choice.

“It gives [my daughter] the push more. She’s always told me that she wants to be a pediatrician. . . . Being enlightened, being exposed to the experience has given her the courage to pursue that.”

Overview of the Program/Project

At the beginning of the HackHealth program, young adults are asked to choose a health topic of personal relevance and interest. They spend time creating research questions that they want to explore and answer related to their topic of interest; learn about choosing good search terms to help them find useful, relevant, and credible information about their health topic online, as well as in their school’s available databases and print collections; and explore various modalities they may want to use to present what they learned about their chosen health topic to others.



To help young adults improve their information literacy skills, several lessons are taught that help them learn about the research process, how to navigate through a search engine results page, and how to read a URL/web address. In HackHealth, young adults get to think more critically about the websites they have visited and will visit for information on health topics. During each weekly session, young adults spend time putting what they learn immediately into practice by searching for information on their specific health topics, taking notes on what they find, and organizing that information in a clear way to be presented to others.

At the end of the HackHealth program, young adults bring together everything they learned about their health topic into a presentation.

These presentations have ranged from classic PowerPoint slides on sports injuries and brain cancer and Prezi presentations on asthma and breast cancer to more unique forms of presentation including an interpretive dance on Kawasaki disease, a play describing a girl with sickle cell anemia, and remixing the lyrics of a Taylor Swift song to talk about thyroid disease.

What Challenges Did You Face and How Did You Overcome Them?

Retention: Because HackHealth took place after school, it had to compete with other after-school activities and programs. In order to make sure we attracted as many students as possible and maintained their interest throughout the program, we made our activities highly interactive and did the more engaging and exciting activities early on in the program.

Continue to have fun: We learned which activities are more appealing to young adults as we offered the program at successive schools. For example, we learned that one particular method of taking notes (Cornell note-taking) was not favored by the young adults with whom we worked, so we had to change it to another method (VIP note-taking).

What Did You Learn?

We learned to be adaptive. Working with young adults in schools can pose some interesting challenges. Snow days, testing, and varying school schedules kept the HackHealth team (and the librarians and young adults) on our toes. It seemed like each week we were modifying some aspect of the week's activity to fit in with unexpected events.

We learned to take advantage of the fact that young adults are motivated by their personal interests. Enabling young adults to choose their own health topics, their own mode of presentation, and what resources (web and print) they wanted to use was a powerful motivator for teens to take ownership and responsibility for their own research and learning.

We learned that the skills the young adults learned in HackHealth have broader impacts on how they seek information in other contexts. After completing HackHealth, young adults felt like they were “experts” at searching online and felt confident they could find the relevant and credible information they need in and out of school. In her follow-up interview, Chocolate Rain (a pseudonym) affirmed that her skills used to find health-related information have improved. She stated, “Now when I research things, I actually stop and think about what sources (dot-org, dot-gov, dot-com) should I trust? [She now thinks], ‘Should I check to see what other sites have the same information?’ ”

We learned that the skills the young adults learned in HackHealth allowed them to be information intermediaries for their families. They felt confident that they could use these newfound skills to help their families and friends to find information. Star Wars, for example, said that she would not recommend to her family members that they look online for health information because, as she explained, “. . . my family is very . . . They don't know if it's reliable or not and they'll . . . You know how people just read something and they're like, ‘Oh my god, that's true!’ and I'm like ‘Oh my god, that's not true!’ and then they're stuck doing stupid rituals like ‘Oh my god, let me put something on my head!’ I was like ‘Mmm, is this what the world has come to?’ Yes, it has!”



How Does This Work Connect to YALSA's Futures Report and Vision?

As a way to support *media literacy skills*, for their final presentations, young adults are encouraged to try new and different ways to present on a topic. This unstructured and informal learning environment leads to their willingness to create something using a tool they have not used in the past (such as creating a digital comic with ToonDoo or a glog on Glogster). *Connected learning* is also called out in the Futures Report, and HackHealth taps into the things that young adults are already excited to learn about.

In many cases, young adults choose to research health conditions that they have (e.g., asthma, Kawasaki disease, sickle cell anemia, Type I diabetes) or that one of their family members has (e.g., foot pain, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, cancer).