

2019-2020 CSI & CACREP Leadership Essay Contest

Hannah Coyt

Doctoral Students/Professional Counselors/Counselor Educators

Second Place Award Recipient

Alpha Chi Omega Chapter

Lindsey Wilson College

Wellness Promotion Through Servant Leadership



How can you promote wellness for clients as a servant leader?

According to Greenleaf (Greenleaf, 1973), a servant leader possesses a genuine desire to serve others first. As a servant leader, our passion to see clients succeed should be paramount. Part of client success is to achieve a state of wellness. Myers, Sweeney and Witmer (2000) defined wellness as a holistic approach in which mind, body, and spirit are integrated. Assisting clients in navigating their lives in search of wellness is a primary task of counselors.

I have worked with a variety of populations throughout my counseling career and wellness has always been part of that journey. I currently work with the geriatric population, which is underserved in the counseling field. Working with geriatrics, we focus on wellness throughout the entire process to promote continuity of care.

For this population, wellness includes collaborating with their primary care physicians, medical specialists and psychiatrists in order to ensure that all areas of their holistic wellness is being addressed. Additionally, I encourage my clients to pursue other avenues of wellness such as social opportunities, embracing their spirituality, and exercise. Myers, Sweeney and Witmer (2000) promote the importance of these aspects in their creation of the Wheel of Wellness.

My work with clients includes group therapy, which promotes social connectedness and creates a cohesive connection among clients. I utilize group counseling to model the importance of caring for one another, which creates purpose for clients. Purpose is something that the geriatric population often feels disconnected from, which can increase symptoms of anxiety and depression. When clients feel like others depend on them to be part of the group, or know that others care when they miss sessions, this often encourages active participation and promotes wellness at a higher level. The positive changes I have witnessed within my geriatric clients, heavily influenced by wellness and social connectedness, is inspirational.

How is being a servant leader reflected in meeting the significant wellness needs of your local community?

Servant leadership is demonstrated through empowering and developing others with humility and authenticity (van Dierendonck, 2011). I come from a small town in rural Appalachia where poverty is rampant and wellness is often viewed as insignificant. In fact, when I went into the field of counseling, many of my family members questioned why. Stigma often comes attached to counseling, which prevents many people in my community from pursuing the services that would richly benefit them.

As a servant leader, I have spent a great deal of time working with various agencies to assist in educating people in my community about the crucial benefits of counseling and wellness. I have taught at a small local college for several years where I mentor students in their field experiences. These field experiences include working with various community agencies that provide vital services to our area and promote optimum health and wellness. It is important for students to understand the importance of wellness in their training, as well as their field experiences within agencies. Part of students' work in the classroom is to become more aware of the importance of self-care, as well as how they can promote wellness with their own clients.

Although I make contact with site supervisors during the students' field experiences to ensure that the agencies and students are working together to engage our community in wellness promotion, it is the students whose work makes the most significant changes. They become excited and engaged, which creates a ripple effect for wellness in our community. It only takes one student to change a life. When students give back to the community, many lives are changed. Wellness becomes a focal point and positive initiatives are created. In order to promote that ripple effect, servant leadership must be implemented, with others' needs being priority. I have watched this happen in my small Appalachian town and it has been truly inspirational.

What is the role of CSI chapters and CACREP-accredited counselor education programs in promoting wellness through servant leadership?

CSI chapters have a crucial role in promoting the importance of wellness for students, as well as the clients they serve. According to Herr (2010), one of the primary functions of CSI is to promote leadership at both the chapter and national levels. Part of that task is to develop leaders who are effective and mindful of the importance of wellness. Leaders are tasked with being examples to others around them. If leaders are not taking care of themselves, that is reflected in the followers. This in turn is reflected in the clients that they serve. The impact of this causal sequence is extensive.

CSI chapters are significant in ensuring that leaders are aware of their own wellness, as well as the wellness of their followers. The importance of that accountability makes CSI paramount within the process of developing servant leaders among colleges and universities. When CSI chapters work collaboratively with their respective colleges or universities, wellness promotion becomes a primary component of fostering successful

servant leaders.

CACREP-accredited counselor education programs share similar values and missions with CSI. The CACREP standards include the importance of students adhering to the ACA code of ethics. The ACA code of ethics (“ACA Code of Ethics,” 2014) states that wellness of counselors and counselor educators is a primary responsibility. Counselor education programs are tasked with assisting students in understanding the importance of wellness as an ethical responsibility.

CSI chapters and counselor education programs are designed to work together to show students that wellness is not only an ethical obligation, but a service to others they will work with. This embodies the spirit of servant leadership, as students understand and embrace that their dedication to wellness shows their servitude to others, whose lives they will impact.

How do servant leaders model and promote wellness?

Servant leaders, by nature, always think of others’ needs before their own. By the very definition of servant leadership put forth by Greenleaf (1973), those who practice servant leadership work in a collective manner with others to promote the well being of those they serve. With this in mind, servant leaders would model positive wellness strategies, in order to show others the importance of those practices. Modeling behavior is an important component of effective leadership.

By servant leaders demonstrating positive wellness strategies, as well as promoting the importance of practicing them to those they serve, they create positive change that can have ongoing impact. As servant leaders, we cannot expect others to practice positive wellness, if we are not willing to do it ourselves. Leading by example is a primary component of what differentiates servant leadership from other leadership styles.

References

- ACA Code of Ethics. (2014). *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 84(2), 235–254.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1973). *The servant as leader*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-70818-6_6
- Myers, J. E., Sweeney, T. J., & Witmer, J. M. (2000). The Wheel of Wellness counseling for wellness: A holistic model for treatment planning. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 78, 251-266. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.2000.tb01906.x
- van Dierendonck, D. (2011). Servant Leadership: A Review and Synthesis. *Journal of Management*, 37(4), 1228–1261.