



An Interprofessional Approach to Meeting the Healthcare Needs of a Transient and Age-Diverse Population

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Introduction

- The New Orleans Women and Children's Shelter (NOWS), the largest shelter for women and children in New Orleans, transitions homeless families to sustainable and independent living.



- NOWS houses 65 women and 130 children, newborns to teenagers, for an average stay of 4 months.
- Two first-year Louisiana State University Health Sciences (LSUHSC) medical students founded NOWS Outreach in the spring of 2015.

Methods

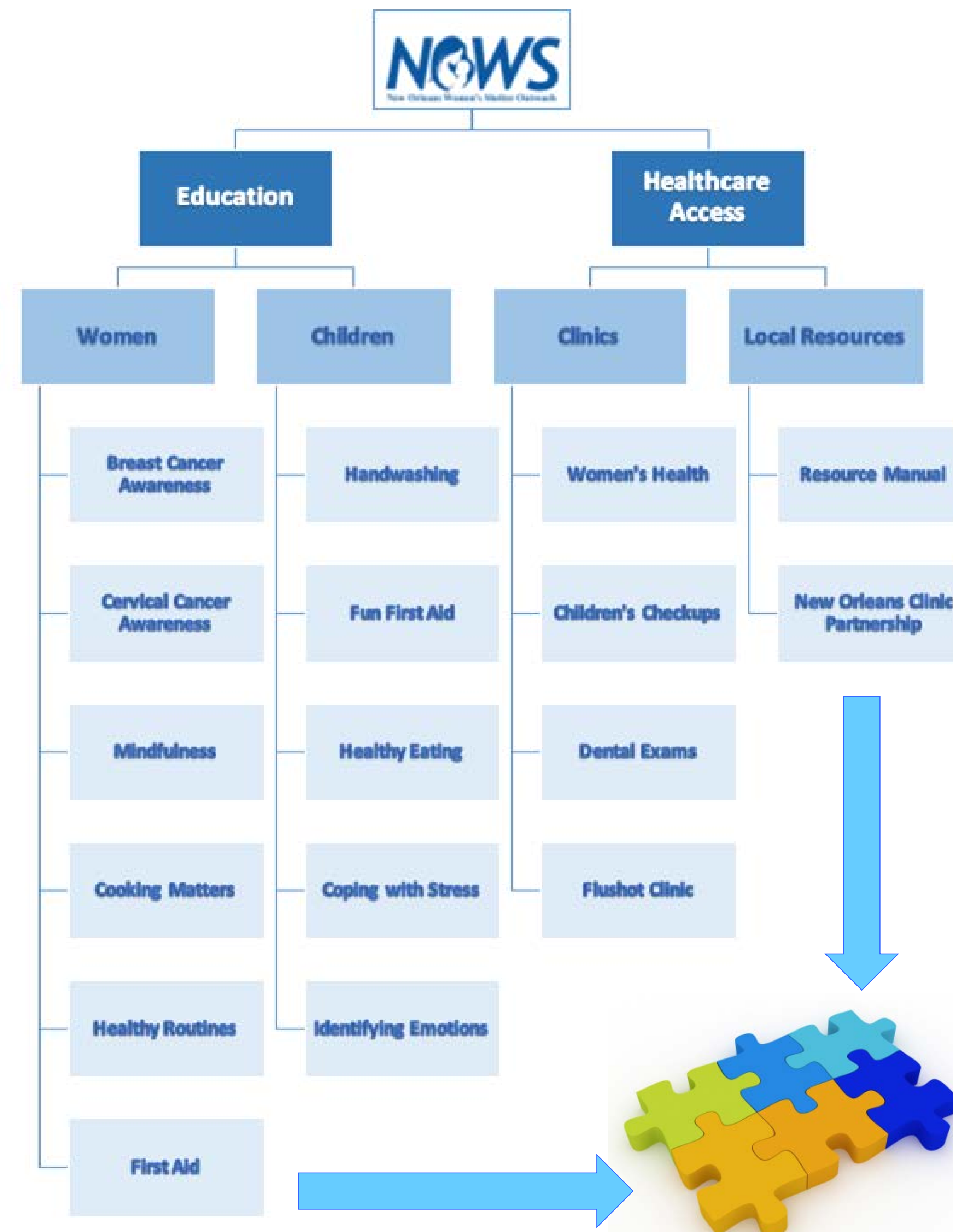
- 200+ student volunteers** – all from LSU Health Sciences Center (LSUHSC) – New Orleans
- Interprofessional teams** – the teams are composed of students from LSUHSC Schools of Allied Health, Dentistry, Graduate Studies, Medicine, Nursing, and Public Health.
- Focus groups** – these are held each year with the shelter residents to shape the NOWS Outreach curricula to meet health needs. Not only do these focus groups ensure that needs are being addressed, they also encourage shelter residents to participate in and take charge of their health care.
- Curriculum development** – the curricula were designed by students using their knowledge, their LSUHSC resources, and shelter resident input. Students from all six LSUHSC professional schools helped with this process and used their training background to come up with a diverse set of health-centered lesson plans.
- Biweekly health education sessions** – separate sessions were held for women and for children. The large age range of residents at the shelter added an extra logistical challenge, so children's education was further divided into activities by age and development level. This also meant that the program needed twice the number of curricula and volunteers.
- Monthly health clinics** – because locating local resources and facilitating transportation were barriers to health care for almost all shelter residents, clinics were held at the shelter in order to maximize access. Two women's health clinics were held at a local community health center to utilize additional resources, such as pap smears, and transportation was provided.
- Partnerships** – local and/or national partners include the Interprofessional Student Alliance (IPSA), Louisiana Office of Public Health, St. Thomas Community Health Center, and Vitamin Angels.

Limitations

- Longitudinal data** is challenging to obtain because of the shelter's transitory population (most reside at the shelter for an average of 4 months).
- Sustainability** requires dedicated volunteers and detailed transition plans from year to year, which can be difficult for full-time students.

NOWS Outreach Mission Statement:

To *empower* women and children at the New Orleans Women and Children's Shelter *to be proactive* with their *health* and *wellness* by providing *health education* and physician-student run *medical clinics*.



Results

May 2015 (program's inception) – December 2016:

- Events Held**
 - 24 women's health education sessions
 - 25 children's health-related activities
 - 1 children's summer camp
 - 10 shelter-based health clinics
 - 2 health fairs
 - Hearing and vision screening
 - Glucose checks
 - Healthy parenting skills (and more)
- Vitamins Distributed**
 - 189 bottles of vitamins for women
 - 112 bottles of vitamins for children



- NOWS Outreach, with the help of the LSUHSC Foundation, received a \$10,000 grant from La Societe des Dames Hospitalieres Donor Advised Fund.

- NOWS Outreach expanded its services to provide full family health education sessions at a new, NOWS second shelter location in January 2017.



Conclusion

A student-run interprofessional community service program *can* promote health literacy and increase access to health care in a transitory, age-diverse population.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are meant to serve as a guide for the implementation of similar student-run service projects aimed at serving an underserved population:

- Define an unmet need in the local community
- Create a service project to address that need
- Identify a target population that would benefit from intervention
- Involve the target population in curricula planning
- Develop partnerships with local community partners
- Encourage student volunteers from different healthcare professions
- Deliver developmentally-appropriate education that aligns with level of health literacy
- Hold interactive health clinics and activities