



PROJECT RISE AND SHINE

Project Rise and Shine (PRS) is a community-based collaborative focused on assessing and improving access to mental health support for Asian American youth and their families across the Greater Houston area. Through resource sharing, community events, and leadership opportunities, PRS is working to shift the ways Asian communities talk about and seek care for mental health. Through their work, the collaborative hopes to influence healthcare organizations and faith-based institutions to promote a holistic view of wellness that centers relationship building and trust among youth and their families.



THE ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN THE GREATER HOUSTON AREA

is broad and diverse in language, culture, and identity. Historically, immigrants from East and Southeast Asian countries have come to the United States—particularly to Houston—to pursue education, earn degrees, build careers, and start families. Today, Asian communities have expanded and deepened their roots in Houston with dedicated cultural centers in neighborhoods like Chinatown and Sugar Land, preserving rich spaces for community connection. Community engagement efforts are focused on understanding the opportunities and challenges for Asian American communities, including insight into their specific health and social needs, multi-racial coalition building, and advocacy for systems change efforts that impact the wellbeing of Asian communities.

The PRS collaborative was formed in 2019 by [Light & Salt Association](#), a nonprofit that coordinates healthcare resources and services for vulnerable communities including youth, older adults, and people with special needs. In their work serving youth and families, Light & Salt Association saw an opportunity to provide resources that went beyond healthcare to provide deeper support for resident mental health and wellbeing.

Early collaborative partners included the Pearland Chapter of Alliance for Youth Leaders of the United States (AYLUS), which is a student-led organization that helps youth develop leadership skills and confidence, and Art to Hearts Association, which provides skill-building and a safe environment for children with special needs to engage in arts and creative pursuits. The collaborative also partners with local Chinese and Vietnamese churches, faith-based institutions, and Chinese schools to meet youth and families where they work and play outside of a healthcare setting.

THE INTERSECTION OF IDENTITY, CULTURE, & MENTAL HEALTH

In partnership with Sam Houston State University, PRS worked to recruit a representative sample of Asian American youth and adults from across the Greater Houston area to assess their unique priorities, concerns, and opportunities for their community. Through surveys and interviews, youth identified pressure from parents and school as a significant stressor, while parents wanted to prioritize gaming and social media as having major impacts on mental health.



THE MODEL MINORITY MYTH. In immigrant communities, parents commonly guide youth to pursue activities and classes that can set them up for as much success as possible to establish stability, but this often results in increased pressure on youth to succeed. This can be attributed to the Model Minority Myth, in which Asian American youth are pressured to excel and achieve a higher level of success than their parents and other racial groups, often out of fear of poverty or inadequacy. This creates a culture where youth often keep problems to themselves in order to avoid appearing unsuccessful, perpetuating mental health concerns that can impact their long-term wellbeing. With the pressure of having to succeed in school and at home, along with the stigma against seeking care in minority communities, Asian American youth face increasing rates of depression, conflicts with family members, and psychological distress.



From the assessment process, the collaborative was able to see how the Model Minority Myth impacted youth in school and at home. In identifying the different ways youth and their parents talk about mental health and stress, PRS saw an opportunity to work with youth and families to address these differences and work to build communication and trust that allowed them to work together on improving youth mental health.

As a result of the in-depth assessment process, four community priorities were selected based on the **THRIVE framework: participation & willingness to act for the common good, social networks and trust, norms and culture, and education.** The collaborative worked with partner organizations and youth to provide training and internship opportunities, community events, and resources based on their community-identified priorities, hoping to use their strategies to continue breaking down the stigma against seeking care for mental health.

SKILL BUILDING TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH IN COMMUNITIES

At the start of the collaborative, PRS formed their youth engagement strategy around service activities that offered incentives like food or community volunteer hours, and an internship program which proved to be an effective way to recruit youth into the collaborative. Throughout their events and recruitment efforts, they worked to embed messaging and lessons around mental health and the importance of connection and trust for community wellbeing.

PRS also organized a series of Mental Health First Aid trainings for youth and families to gain skills in recognizing when community members were experiencing mental health distress or needed additional support. Through these trainings, PRS introduces the idea of mental health care and prepares community members to feel more comfortable talking about the subject with their families and peers.

PRS coordinators have observed a change in the way young participants engage in the community. Collaborative coordinator Sharon Cheng noted, "Their service methods have expanded beyond traditional tasks such as street cleaning and fundraising. Now, they engage directly with community members face-to-face, such as conducting mental health screenings, providing one-on-one health education, and even forming their own nonprofits to address specific community needs."

PRS continues to identify and provide service-learning opportunities where students not only gain experience volunteering in a variety of settings, but they also practice using a lens for mental health and wellbeing when approaching conversations with residents, helping to further break down the stigma against seeking care for mental health issues in Asian communities.



BUILDING YOUTH LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS: YOUTH INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The PRS Youth Internship Program is a five-month program held twice a year that develops youth leadership through hands-on experience in health education and community advocacy. The program helps students acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and confidence to make meaningful contributions to their communities.

Under the guidance of experienced partners and community leaders, interns participate in a structured training to lay the foundation for effective advocacy and service. The focus areas of the training include:

- Understand the definition and importance of mental health and practical strategies to support your mental health and that of others.
- Explore the social welfare system and learn about various social service organizations and their role in supporting multiple community needs.
- Develop students' tools and confidence to speak up for vulnerable groups and encourage them to participate actively in change in their schools and communities.

After completing their training, youth interns will choose a health topic that has the greatest impact on their community, such as e-cigarette use in

youth or cancer prevention, and organize events, develop advocacy strategies, and deliver messaging to spread awareness of how to reduce the harmful effects of their chosen issue.



HELEN SUN, COORDINATOR OF PROJECT RISE AND SHINE, SHARES

the impact made on students from their youth internship program: "through this project a couple of the youth formed nonprofit organizations, and they organized other youth... They talk to the school district and the local government and the churches, so they are doing advocacy."

Inspired by their experience in the internship, youth interns have gone on to establish their own nonprofits and have continued developing strategies for Asian American youth to find relief for stress, connect with other youth, and advocate for more accessible mental health resources. Through empowering youth to recognize their passions and take action to advocate for their communities, PRS is creating pathways for a healthier idea of leadership and connection that honors mental health and community wellbeing.

BUILDING BRIDGES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL WELLBEING

One core focus of the Rise and Shine Program (PRS) is supporting the holistic well-being of families, mental and physical. While much of PRS's work revolves around youth, the program has also created a dedicated space for parents and family members to explore similar topics related to community health and well-being.

Through online and offline events, PRS works with parents to reduce the stigma around mental health and have meaningful, open conversations with their children about the issues that matter most. By engaging directly with parents, PRS gains valuable insights into their challenges and better equips them with the tools they need to navigate educational and social systems with their children.

In addition to providing separate learning spaces for parents and youth, PRS connects families through joint events and workshops designed to strengthen relationships and promote mutual understanding. A highlight of the 2022 launch is the Bridging the Gap workshop series, which promotes healthy communication between youth and parents. Through interactive games, skills training, and in-depth conversations, youth and parents reported a greater understanding of each other and more comfort discussing challenges and stressors related to mental health.

PRS hopes their work can serve as a model of training youth leaders and building bridges between youth and their families that can be replicated in other communities, helping to reshape norms in Asian American communities that promote open communication and break down the stigma around mental health and seeking care.



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