

# Service Learning at the University of Colorado School of Medicine: Highlighting Successful Service Learning with an Exemplar Community Based Organization



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## BACKGROUND

### Service-Learning Curriculum

- CUSOM Introduced a Service-Learning Curriculum (SLC) in August 2021 as part of the new TREK curriculum
- SLC aligns with CUSOM's values of leadership, commitment, and curiosity
- Students engaged in relevant didactics during 1<sup>st</sup> year before placement with community-based organizations (CBOs) for their Community Engagement Experiences (CEE) based upon rank ordering various topics
- Student responsibilities included assisting organizations with their core mission and supporting communities in improving healthcare outcomes
- SLC was suspended in July 2023 following student feedback, faculty feedback, and changes in SLC leadership
- Many students had very positive CEE and continue to work with their CBO after the suspension of SLC
- Common student grievances, discovered through individual and group conversations with students included:
  - Placement with CBOs they were not passionate about
  - Placement process was unclear
  - Scheduling conflicts between CBO and rigid and demanding medical school commitments
  - Unresponsive or seemingly misinformed CBOs (e.g. reports that a CBO thought that they were receiving physicians that would volunteer their clinical time for the CBO)
  - Roles some students had within CBO didn't offer meaningful community engagement

### Mental Health Community Engagement Program

- MHCEP was founded in August 2020 by medical student Jane Ewing with support from CUSOM faculty member Janet Meredith, MBA
- Jane was passionate about better understanding barriers to behavioral healthcare and experiences of the broader mental health community after caring for a family member with schizophrenia
- Medical students from the classes of 2024 and 2025 joined MHCEP prior to announcement of SLC

## APPROACH

- Passion project with interested, motivated students
- Mixture of community engagement, qualitative research, quantitative research
- Students free to participate according to their availability, ability, and interest
- Students encouraged to design projects, start initiatives, collaborate, and take leadership roles
- Integrated into SLC and adopted a recruitment and leadership model that will ensure student engagement and smooth transitions of leadership for years to come (education, community engagement, advocacy/leadership phases)
- Flexible, ambitious roadmap for the future

## RESULTS

### A. MHCEP Activities and Achievement

Activities	Achievements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Functioned as an SLC</li> <li>Formed and engaged with community advisory board</li> <li>Conducted one on one interview with mental health community members</li> <li>Qualitative community focused research</li> <li>Quantitative community focused research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7 Poster presentations                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2021 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Student Research Forum</li> <li>2022 NAPCRG Annual Meeting Conference</li> <li>2022 CU SOM Department of Family Medicine Poster Presentation</li> <li>2022 CCTSI Tenth Annual CU-CSU Summit</li> <li>3 poster presentations at this year's 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Student Research Forum</li> </ul> </li> <li>1 Manuscript Submission                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Barriers to Mental Healthcare for Vulnerable Populations: Lessons Learned from Online Public Testimonies and Implications for Medical Education. In Review. Submitted for publication October 2023 to Social Science &amp; Medicine.</li> </ul> </li> <li>1 Abstract                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through the Lens of the Community: Reviewing Public Testimonies of Colorado Mental Health Care to Improve Medical Education. Annals of Family Medicine. January 2023</li> </ul> </li> <li>1 Oral Presentation                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public Testimonies as a Form of Community-Based Participatory Research to Inform the State of the Mental Health Care System. 90-minute presentation at the 2023 American Psychiatric Association's conference</li> </ul> </li> <li>2021 Poster Winner at 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Student Research Forum</li> <li>3 Grants and Funding Awards                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2021 and 2022 Slay Community Scholars funding award</li> <li>2023 American Academy of Family Physicians Student Externship Grant Program funding award</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

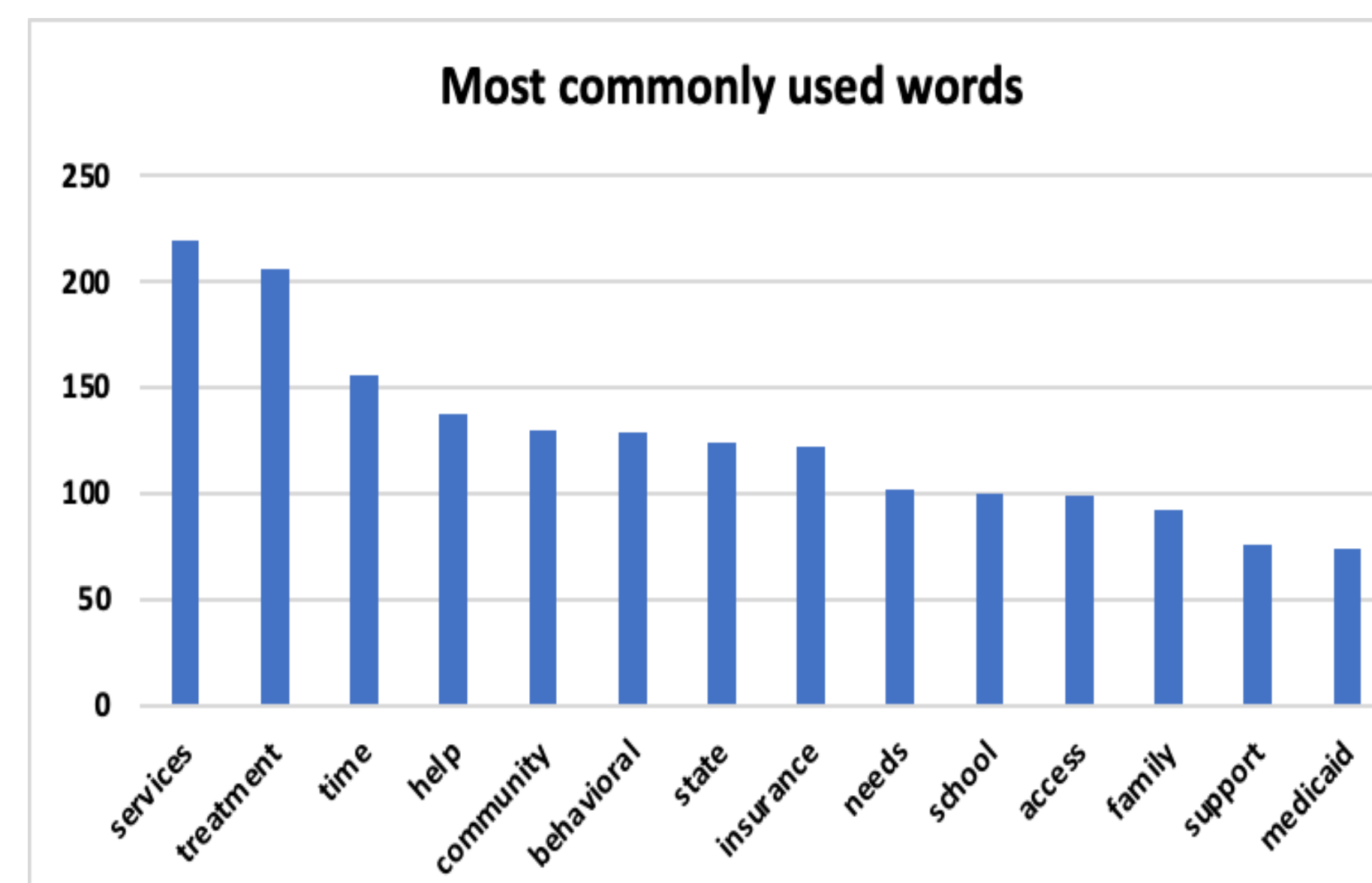
**Table 1. MHCEP Activities and Achievement.** MHCEP activities include community-oriented engagement and research while achievement includes poster presentations, manuscript submissions, abstracts, and oral presentations.

### B. MHCEP Community Feedback

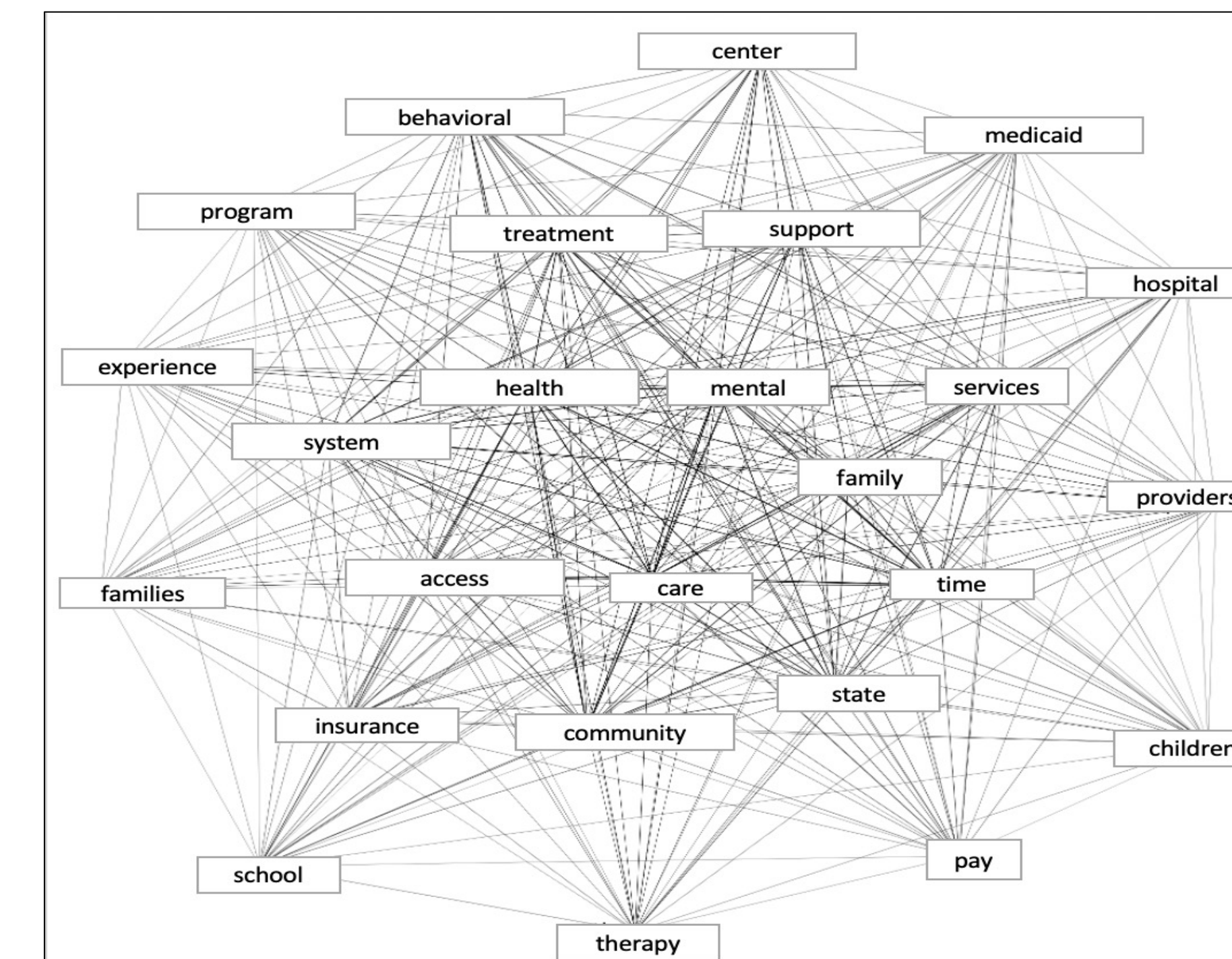
**"Thank you for this study. It is long overdue. Unless and until the community comes together to work on behalf of people with mental illnesses and family members who love them so much, we will not gain traction. This study is a welcome sign to those of us who have become strong, and mostly exhausted advocates for loved ones with mental illnesses who do not get the help, support, resources, understanding and respect that they deserve... This study gives me a glimmer of hope that doctors care."**

**Figure 1. MHCEP Community Feedback.** Community Feedback to MHCEP following qualitative analysis of mental health community testimonies

### C. Brief Overview Exemplifying MHCEP Scholarship



**Figure 2: Most Commonly Used Words:** Most commonly used words in the public health testimony transcriptions. This data was auto-generated by the natural language processing analysis.



**Figure 3: Natural Language Processing Word Web:** Highlight relationships and strength of association between words in the public testimony transcriptions. Words in the center of the web were mentioned the most frequently. Thicker lines indicate stronger relation.



**Figure 4: Summary of Themes in Mental Health Community Testimonies.** Cross-referenced with the qualitative framework approach, the NLP results identified 4 primary themes: (1) structural barriers, (2) equity of access, (3) population-specific needs, and (4) training and education gaps.

## CONCLUSIONS

### MHCEP Characteristics that Led to Success

- Student passion
- Student leadership
- Flexible participation according to availability, ability, interest
- Encouraged members to take ownership, create, collaborate, and lead
- Support from CUSOM faculty and funding organizations

### Suggestions for Improvement in Service-Learning Curriculum

- Generally, adapt SLC to be more similar to successful long-standing Mentored Scholarly Activity (MSA)
- Empower students to directly choose their CBO or design their CEE
- Offering Q&As and/or written summaries describing each CBO to inform student selection
- Replace inflexible hour requirements that clash with rigid and demanding medical school commitments
- Establish core activities and competencies that students must perform and display (confirmed by signature from representative of CBO)
- Establish outcomes that students must produce for project completion (project, manuscript, poster, presentation, etc.)

## NEXT STEPS

### MHCEP

- Function as CBO when SLC program returns
- Write planned 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> manuscript for which data has been collected
- Creation of "partner program" pairing students with community members

### Service-Learning Curriculum

- Planned restart on July 2024
- Reviewing and acting upon previously gathered student feedback
- Gathering, review, and acting upon CBO feedback

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

