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Early Intervention Occupational Therapy Program Development Abroad

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BACKGROUND

Early intervention (EI) occupational therapy (OT) services support families of young children with developmental delays and/or disabilities which impact their ability to perform and participate in daily activities. Despite evidence which supports that access to OT services is associated with a higher quality of life and that earlier interventions “achieve more and cost less” these services are not available in all communities outside of the U.S. (Ledgerd, 2020; WHO, 2018). Belize is one such community as OT is not a recognized profession. Communities without access, such as Belize, rely on international programming to receive OT services.

PROBLEM

There exists a disparity in access to early intervention (EI) occupational therapy services in certain communities abroad resulting in occupational injustice. A secondary problem is that there is a need for sustainable international EI OT programming which utilize universal standards for practice including family-centered and culturally responsive care (Putt, 2022).

PURPOSE

To develop an EI OT program in an underserved community abroad with an emphasis on cultural responsiveness and caregiver coaching.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT



- Observations: OT Sessions delivered abroad via telehealth in partnership with Helping Hands American Samoa and The Inspiration Center (TIC) Belize
- Literature review: to determine approaches in EI, program development, and international service delivery
- Cultural training: Reviewed existing TIC training
- Interviews: with Helping Hands staff, providers with experience in international service delivery, and TIC staff



- Belize has no known licensure, education, or professional organization for OT
- Families in Belize experience limited access to OT services
- Current approaches most commonly used in international service delivery (biomedical model) have limited sustainability and limited opportunity for relationship building
- Identified opportunities for TIC staff education on role of OT in pediatrics and EI
- Collaborated with TIC director to streamline intake process through transdisciplinary evaluations
- Coaching is an effective method for program sustainability and cultural responsiveness



- Culturally immersive service and advocacy trip to Belize
- Advocacy for TIC and the role of OT in Belize
- Community education on role of OT in pediatrics
- Education for TIC staff and local caregivers
- Training on transdisciplinary intake process
- Advocacy/education on approaches to coaching
- Development of OT resource library
- Analysis of TIC programmatic data



Approaches to coaching

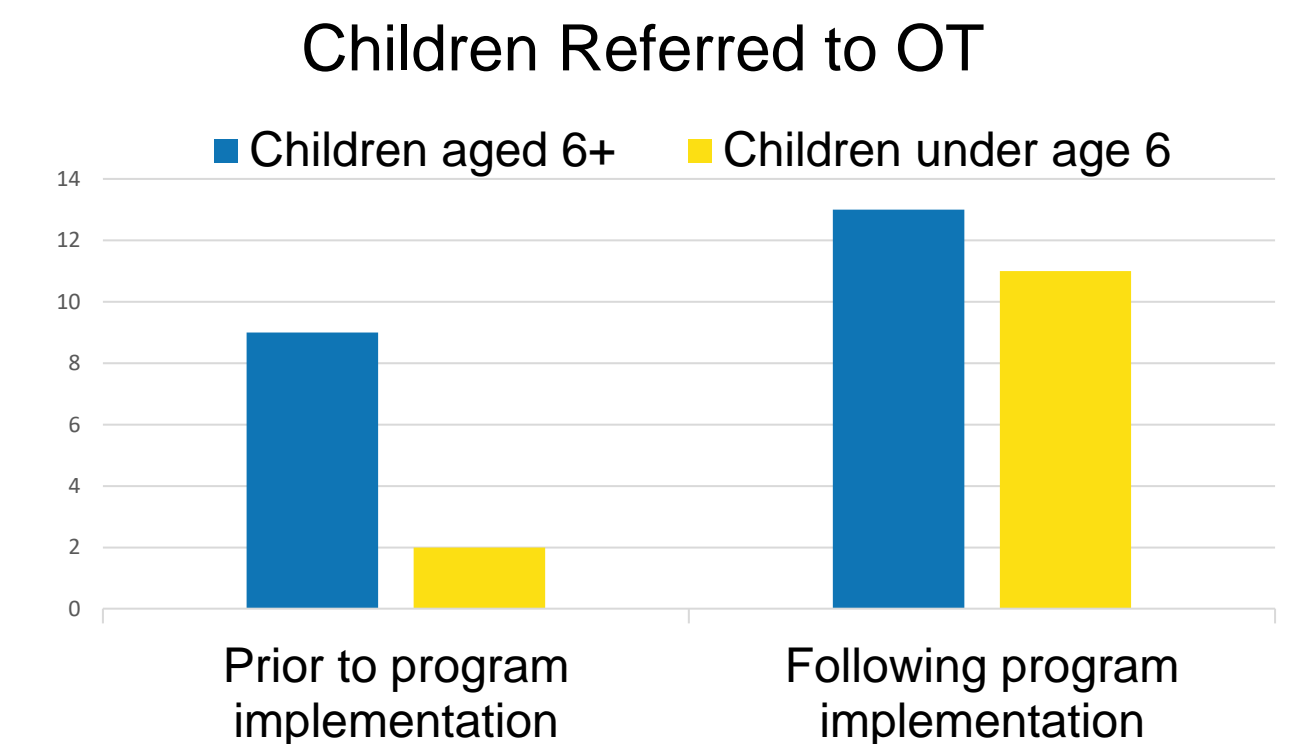
- ✦ Caregiver led
- ✦ Community-based
- ✦ Routines-based
- ✦ Strengths-based
- ✦ Detailed feedback
- ✦ Directed reflection
- ✦ Supportive problem solving
- ✦ Culturally responsive care

Approaches to cultural responsiveness

- ✦ Caregiver-provider partnership
- ✦ Community-based
- ✦ Relationship building
- ✦ Recognition of available resources
- ✦ Generalized, open-ended questions
- ✦ Cultural training
- ✦ Flexibility and responsiveness
- ✦ Caregiver coaching approach

RESULTS

- ★ Case study – CB is a 3 year old child, referred to OT by physical therapy. CB was evaluated using the SAFER, a routines-based interview via telehealth. His grandmother reported he experienced difficulty with sleep, bathing, play, self-care skills, and social engagement. OT provided strategies delivered via a coaching approach. Within 2 months, CB’s caregiver reported no further concerns in these areas.
- ★ Increased understanding of the role of OT among TIC staff
- ★ Improved access to OT for EI populations



FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Recommendations for future OT practice:

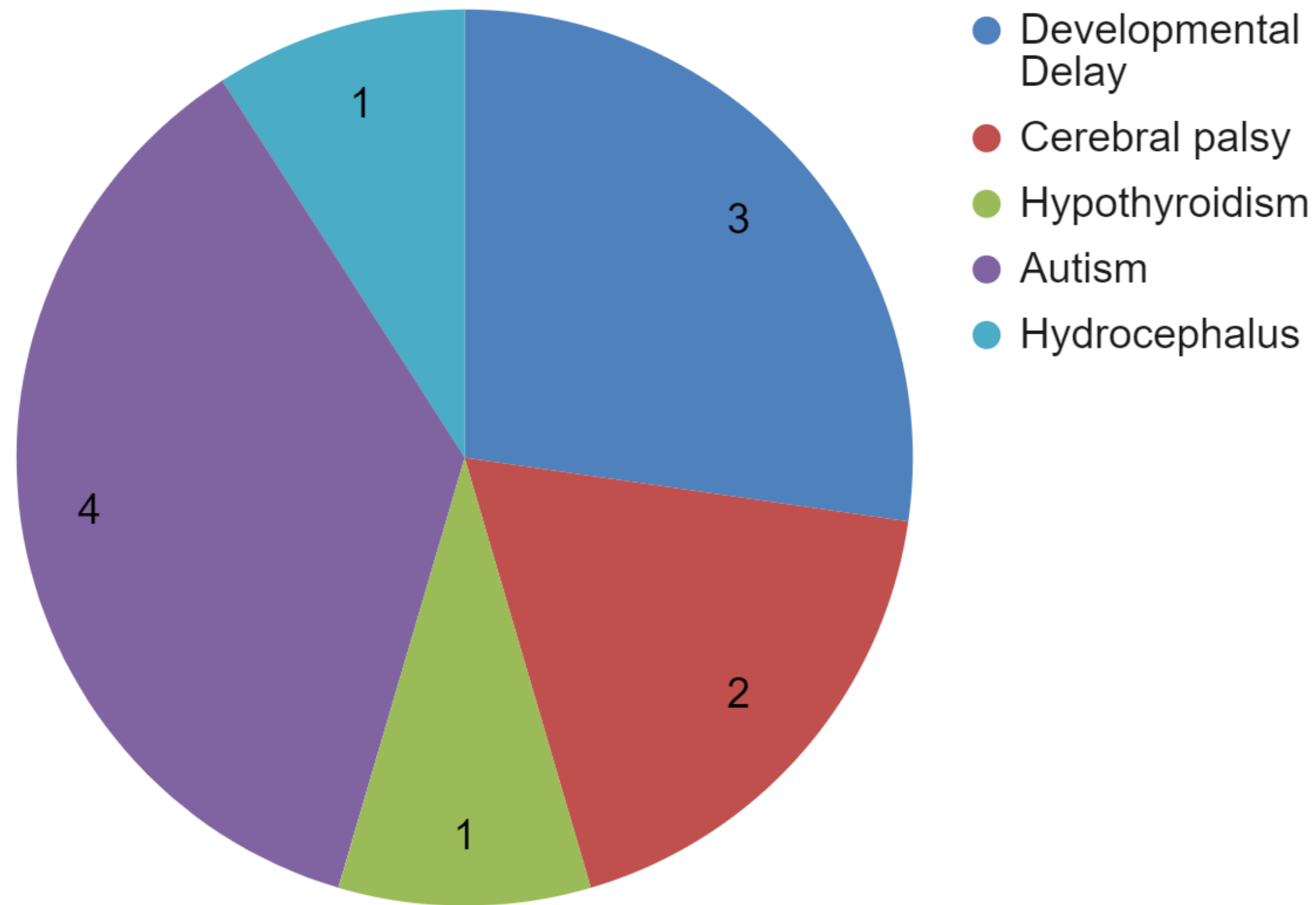
- ★ Development of a framework for international service delivery
- ★ Training in the application of culturally responsive care and coaching approaches during OT coursework
- ★ Continued advocacy for the OT profession is needed in Belize.

References:

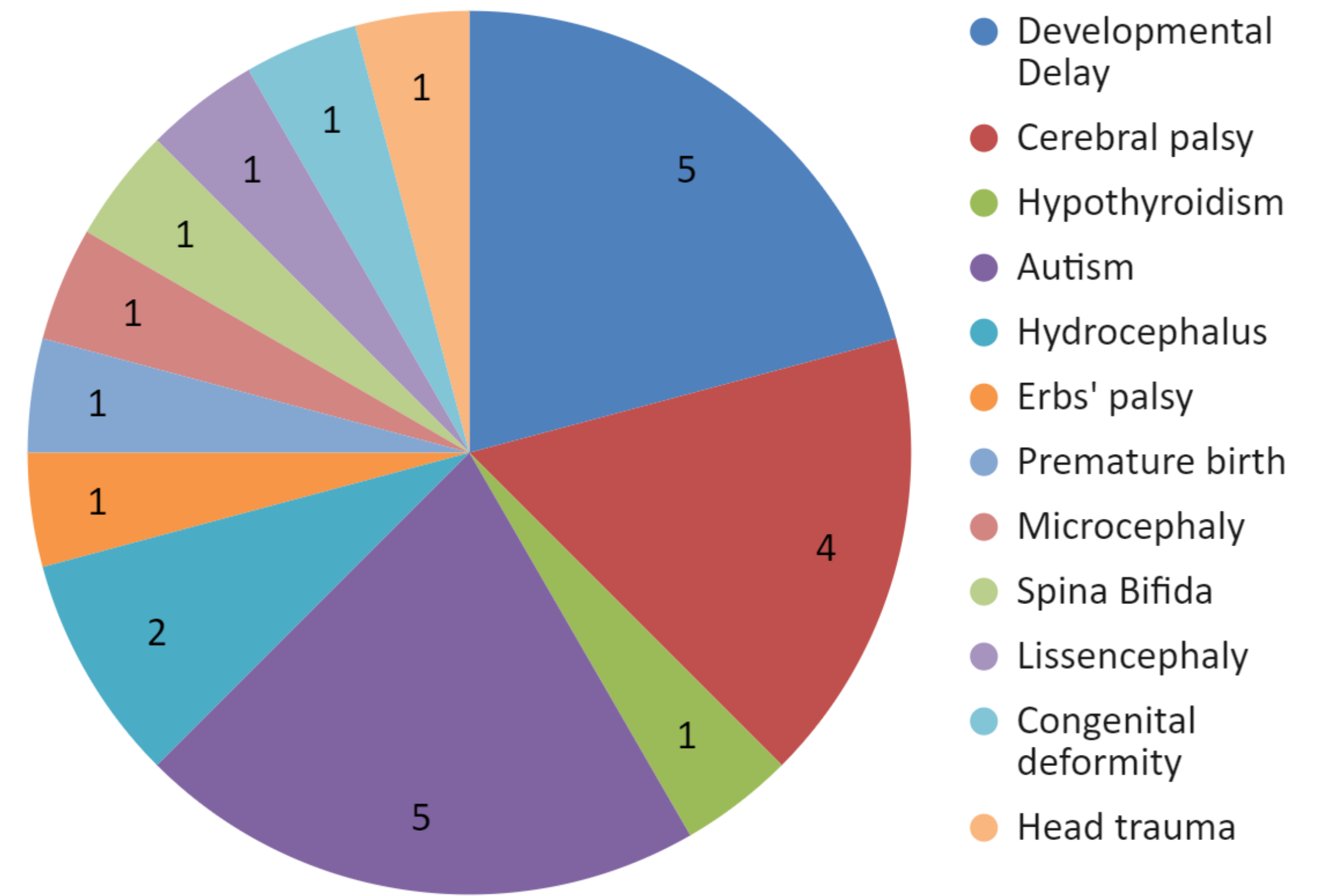
Acknowledgement: Special thank you to Dr. Becki Cohill, Sarah Putt, The Inspiration Center Belize, and Helping Hands American Samoa.



Diagnoses Referred to OT Prior to Program Implementation



Diagnoses Referred to OT Following Program Implementation



Children Referred to OT

