

Spring 4-29-2023

OT Employment Program Addressing Homelessness for Women Experiencing Homelessness

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Recommended Citation

Hoffman, A., & MacDermott, S. (2023, April 29). OT Employment Program Addressing Homelessness for Women Experiencing Homelessness. Poster presented at the Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium, University of St Augustine for Health Sciences. Retrieved from <https://soar.usa.edu/otdcapstonesspring2023/29>

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OT Employment Program for Women Experiencing Homelessness

Amber Hoffman, OTS and Susan MacDermott, OTD, OTR/L

BACKGROUND

Women experiencing homelessness face many barriers to employment participation. Barriers may include lack of work experience, education, childcare, transportation, mental health issues, poor physical health, and history of abuse and domestic violence (Groton & Radey, 2021). Occupational therapy can address the many barriers to employment and promote employment participation.

PROBLEM

There is a lack of occupational therapy programs that address the unique barriers to employment obtainment and maintenance for women experiencing homelessness.

PURPOSE

To develop an employment program addressing employment obtainment and employment maintenance for women experiencing homelessness.

Outcome Objectives

- Explore lived experiences of women experiencing homelessness
- Identify supports and barriers to employment obtainment and maintenance
- Develop an employment program based off needs assessment findings and current literature
- Develop an employment program manual for Switchpoint Community Resource Center

Special thank you to Kelcey Parker, OTD, OTR/L

METHODS

Needs Assessment

- Informal interviews and surveys
- 14 staff members responded to a survey via Google Forms
- 10 staff members participated in an informal interview
- Seven women participated in an informal interview

Participants

- Four women total
- Two women regularly participated in groups
- Two women attended individual meetings focused on resume building, goal setting, and job applications

NEEDS ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Impact of current situation on occupational engagement

Current employment status and/or job satisfaction

Barriers to employment obtainment

Confidence in ability to work

Goals related to employment

Based off the findings from the needs assessment and literature review, the employment program was created.

PROGRAM

An employment program outline and manual was developed and distributed to the staff at Switchpoint Community Resource Center. A pre-survey and post-survey were used to determine the participants' perceptions of their ability to work and worker role competence. The findings of the program were included in a presentation to the staff.



[Employment Program Outline](#)



[Employment Program Manual](#)

PROJECT OUTCOMES

General Program Goals

1. Promote employment participation
2. Provide health promotion strategies
3. Develop or enhance work readiness skills
4. Promote the individual's worker role competence

Environmental Focus of Program

Consideration to the physical and social environments in which the individual resides in and their desired work environments

Theoretical Framework

1. Model of Occupational Empowerment
2. Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) Model

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

OTs are well-suited to better address employment participation for women experiencing homelessness. OT interventions may include employer education regarding the impact of mental health conditions, cognitive disabilities, and physical impairments on employment participation in addition to work readiness skill development. OTs may also advocate for supportive employment training in real-life work environments.

Educational Materials

1. Work Readiness Skills Training
2. Computer & Phone Skills Handout
3. Workplace Professionalism Presentation
4. Resume Guidelines & Job Interview Handouts
5. Transition into Worker Role Presentation
6. Health Promotion Presentation & Handouts including Pain Management, Stress Management, and Mental Health Promotion Strategies
7. Job Training in Real-Life Work Environment
8. Additional Employment Support Handout

Future Recommendations

1. Program expansion to include men and individuals transitioning out of homelessness
2. Use of referral form through shelter case managers
3. Inclusion of real-life work experience in desired work environments
4. Utilization of formal OT assessment such as the Occupational Performance History Interview (OPHI) for future program evaluation

Reference

Groton, D., & Radey, M. (2021). "I've been through it": Assessing employment barriers among unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness. *Social Work Research*, 45, 88-100. <https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/svab003>