

Spring 4-17-2024

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Recommended Citation

Vo, M., Madalon, D., & Greer, M. J. (2024, April 17). Exploring Healthy Occupations for Adolescents at Risk for the Juvenile Justice System. Poster presented at the Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium, University of St Augustine for Health Sciences. Retrieved from <https://soar.usa.edu/otdcapstonesspring2024/58>

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Exploring Healthy Occupations for Adolescents at Risk for the Juvenile Justice System

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BACKGROUND

There are multiple risk factors for the contribution of an adolescent's likelihood of being involved with the juvenile justice system (JJS) and can impact the transition into adulthood including adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and mental health diagnosis. This population is more likely to have difficulties with substance abuse, offending, and have an increased risk of homelessness (Vidal et al., 2016; Yao et al., 2022; Shook et al., 2011; Chun et al., 2020; Campbell-Heider et al., 2010).

PROBLEM

There are at-risk youth who have previously reported maltreatment and/or have at least one interaction with the child welfare system that lack necessary life skills to promote a successful transition into adulthood (Campbell-Heider et al., 2010).

PURPOSE

This project focused on preparing adolescents for the demands of living independently by addressing life skills and/or social skills to combat risk of homelessness and entering the juvenile justice system.

Project-based Objectives:

- A needs assessment will be completed, which would involve interviewing and screening to see what life skills participants want to learn.
- Creation of 6-8 modules of activities/education to help participants develop life skills.
- The modules will be accompanied by deliverables to be given to SAYS.
- The project will be evaluated to inspect the effectiveness of the program to see what changes need to be made to make the program more successful.

METHODS

Setting:

- St. Augustine Youth Services (SAYS)- therapeutic group home
- Pre-Independent Living (PIL) House

Participants:

- Seven adolescent males at risk for JJS & have had previous charges
- Age range from 14 – 17 years old
- History of childhood maltreatment and mental health diagnosis

Implementation:

- Group therapy sessions
- 1x/ week for 45 minutes - 1 hour
- 6-week implementation period

Needs Assessment & Data Collection

Creation of the program modules was guided by needs assessment, which included a variety of informal interviews and natural observation of residents in PIL House and staff.

Data collected to inspect program effectiveness and to manage program sustainability was done via informal interviews and natural observation.

PROGRAM

General Program Goals:

1. Increase residents' understanding of the demands of living independently
2. Advocate for the role of OT in the setting of foster care and independent living
3. Promote occupational participation in activities that are meaningful to the residents and to independent living
4. Educate and collaborate with other disciplines, such as social workers and psychologists, to optimize the care for the residents at SAYS

Program Outcomes:

- There was a consensus for the positive response of the hands-on activities that fostered learning life skills; however, the participants still recognized the value of social skills/talk therapy.

Program Modules

- Life skills training
 1. Building a Support System
 2. Cooking & Grocery Shopping
 3. Leisure & Hobby Exploration
 4. Money Management
 5. Career Exploration
 6. Car Maintenance
- Advocacy for OT in therapeutic group homes

Theoretical Frameworks:

- Person- Environment- Occupation Performance Model

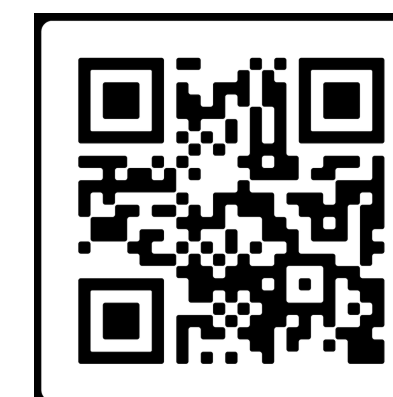
Strengths: generalizability of program modules, support of staff and mentor, availability of materials/resources

Limitations: duration of program, scheduling of events for participants, varying levels of age/cognition of participants

Conclusions / Future Directions

The likelihood of homelessness, addiction, and offending are greatly increased when an adolescent has a history of ACEs, mental health diagnosis, and a lack of life skills training. To combat these adverse possibilities, this project fulfilled the needs of at-risk youth by educating and training certain life skills necessary for independent living. Future direction for sustainability of the project purpose is an integration of individualized OT programming/interventions, education and training to foster care staff on OT-related interventions, and continued research on the long-term viability of independent living services for foster care youth.

Modules/Deliverables



References

