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The Participation and Exploration of Play for Children in Foster Care

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The Participation and Exploration of Play for Children in Foster Care

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Background

In the United States, approximately 500,000 children are currently in foster care (Lynch et al., 2017). Children are placed into foster care due to extenuating circumstances that lead to a potential breach in their safety, such as their basic needs not being met, or factors of neglect or abuse (Lynch et al., 2017). Over 30% of children are in foster care for an average of 11 months, and almost 40% reside in foster care longer than that (Lynch et al., 2017).

Problem

The largest impact on play for youth in foster care is the environment, lack of opportunity, fear of falling behind, and impacted social participation (Lynch et al., 2017). The lack of understanding about child-led or strengths-based play impacts foster youth's participation, exploration of, and engagement in play.

Purpose

The purpose of this capstone is to provide education and advocacy to improve opportunities for foster youth to participate and engage in child-led or strengths-based play. Specifically, promoting engagement and opportunities for play to support children in foster care through raising public awareness, advocating and educating on the profession of occupational therapy, and program enhancement.

Methods

Needs Assessment

- Consulting and providing opportunity for reflection with team through informal interviews, opportunities for reflection, and unstructured conversation
- Establishing opportunity for colleagues to ask questions and provide insight

Deliverables

- 1. Foster Focus: Occupational Therapy Tuesdays & Thursday**
 - Distribution of articles and auditory media via site communication channels
- 2. OT-ification of Current Programs**
 - Evaluating programs with an OT perspective and providing recommendations
- 3. Resources on Play**
 - Readily accessible resources on various aspects of play
- 4. How To Play Info Cards**
 - Suggestions for play opportunities with little to no available materials
- 5. Guest Lectures**
 - USAHS Conditions and Pediatrics

Analysis - Impact and Dissemination

Occupational Therapy Tuesdays & Thursdays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly education and advocacy • Consistent participation • Reinforces values
OT-ification of Current Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupational therapy's role • Program enhancement • Accessibility and change
Resources on Play & How to Play Cards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creativity and adaptability • Stakeholder education and advocacy
Guest Lectures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissemination • Reflection • Education & advocacy wrap-up

Implications and Next Steps

- Occupational therapy's role can provide significant impact directly or indirectly - advocacy, education, and raising awareness.
- Organizations supporting youth in foster care are actively working to provide opportunities for participation and engagement in play.
- Providing easily accessible resources allows the potential for multiple stakeholders to benefit from the information described.
- Potential for raising public awareness extends beyond local engagements through existing programs.
- Discussions on further research and dissemination opportunities to be conducted at OTAC.

Acknowledgments and Deliverables

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Deliverables

