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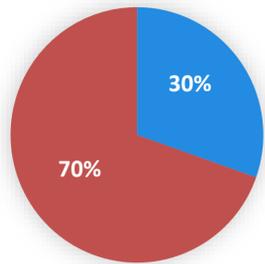
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Occupational Therapy's Role in the Transition to Employment

Jeanne Ventura, OTS and Kayla Collins, MOT, EdD, OTR/L

Background

Persons with Disabilities



■ Employed ■ Unemployed

Percentage of unemployment among people with disabilities (United States Department of Labor, 2019)

- A lack of preparation (Gauthier-Boudreault, Gallagher, Couture, 2017).
- Occupational therapy (OT) services are underutilized during transition (Eismann et al., 2017).
- Lack of soft skills (Riesen, Morgan, Schultz, & Kupferman, 2014).

Problem

This map depicts where transition programs exist near Warsaw, IN.

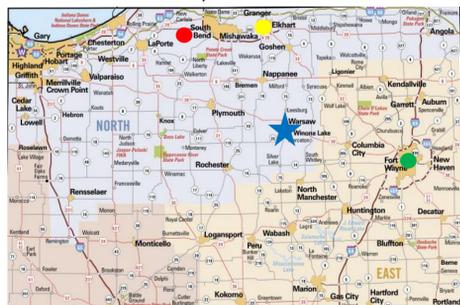


Image Modified from <https://visitindiana.com/about-indiana/maps>

Purpose

The purpose of this occupational therapy doctoral (OTD) project was to create a pre-employment course that introduces an OT-based curriculum for improving the confidence, soft skills, life skills, and communication skills of participants, thus making them more employable.

Methods, Program Description, and Results

Methods

This project developed a pre-employment program for youth and young adults with disabilities to fill a need within the community of Warsaw, IN. To do so, the following methods were used:

- **Needs Assessment:** Meetings held with local organizations and informal interviews with potential participants and staff of the YMCA uncovered a group of individuals within the community without access to pre-employment programs supporting the creation of a pre-employment course
- **Curriculum development:** Research on best practice, review and adaptation of existing lesson plans and addition of occupational therapy influences.
- **Recruitment** involved community gate keepers and using connections already in place. Using this method yielded 9 participants.
- **Implementation:** The course ran for 7 weeks meeting twice per week for 90 minutes. Inclement weather caused class to be cancelled twice changing the total of 14 class meetings to 12.
- **Evaluation:** A pre- and post-test document was given to students at the beginning and ending of the class cycle. Results were compared and meetings held with Inclusive Program staff to discuss program effectiveness and revisions.

Program Description

This course consisted of 12 class meetings. Three class meetings consisted of a transportation system field trip, mock

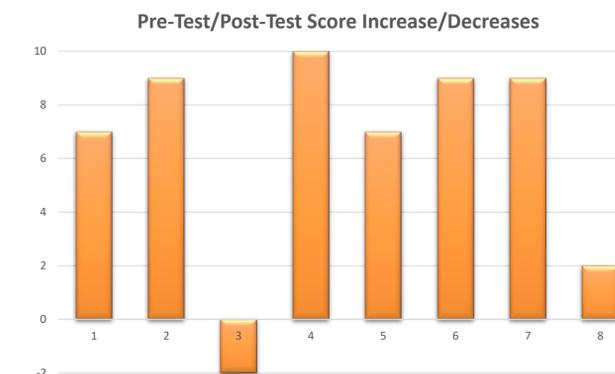
interviewing event, and job fair event. Topics covered in the lessons were:

- Self-advocacy and communication styles
- Self-determination and goal setting
- Problem solving and critical thinking
- Teamwork
- Budgeting and money management
- Transportation
- Resume building and professionalism
- Interviewing skills

A pre- and post-test were administered at the beginning and ending of the course and parent surveys were distributed halfway through the course and at the end of the course.

Results

Eight out of nine participants were present for both the pre- and post-tests. The highest score increase was ten points, the lowest was a decrease of two points. There was a mean increase of six points. While revisions are needed to improve effectiveness, this programs was effective at increasing the knowledge of the students overall.



Implications for OT

This project highlights the need for OT involvement in transition program development and provides evidence that OT involvement is a valuable contribution to any transition program. The positive differences in multiple areas shown in the pre- and post-tests show the value of OT in transition programs. The results also support the findings of Lindsey et al. (2019) that simply having a program that focuses on the transition from school to the workforce improves at least one area of the transition process.

Further programs and research need to be done to continue to support the involvement in OT and change how the transition from childhood to adulthood is handled for youth and young adults with disabilities. Hopefully, a positive shift in the employment rates and quality of life within the community with disabilities will be the result.

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