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OT's Role in a Social Enterprise Jobs Training Program for Homeless Youth

Luke Drohan; Susan MacDermott, OTD, OTR/L

BACKGROUND

Homeless youth experience developmental lags in the realms of motor, cognitive, and psychosocial domains (Kannenberg et al., 1997). Because of these deficits, programming that provided job and life skills in the past via non-clinicians has been less impactful. According to Helfrich and Fogg (2006), both unemployment and inconsistent employment can result in people being unable to find housing and sufficient economic security (2006).

PROBLEM

Youth experiencing homelessness face difficulties finding and retaining employment due to the intersectionality of limited job skills and experience, stigma, mental illness, addiction, trauma, and lack of permanent address.

PURPOSE

To develop a sustainable employment program at Urban Street Angels focused on youth experiencing Serious Mental Illness (SMI) using Social Enterprise.

Outcome Objectives:

- (a) Incorporate OT services into a social enterprise program at Urban Street Angels, a transitional housing facility for TAY (18-24).
- (b) Conduct a needs assessment to understand the lived experience of homeless youth seeking employment
- (c) Develop a program resource at Urban Street Angels designed to facilitate employment opportunities for homeless youth

METHODS

- This pilot program utilized a needs assessment via semi structured interviews with youth recommended to the program by facility case managers. An occupational profile and employment history was taken at this time.
- A programming staff survey was also conducted to ascertain needs of youth through the lens of staff members.
- **9 youth** participated in semi-structured interviews

Needs Assessment Results:

- Youth reported barriers to employment including weak or absent employment history, transientness, mental illness, low motivation, lack of transportation, sensory differences, cognitive impairments, and residency status, and anxiety pertaining to interviewing and explaining personal histories.

8 staff members participated in survey

Staff Survey Results:

- Staff reported **barriers** including lack of documentation like SS cards, birth certificates, ID cards, general mental health status, limited job history, interviewing skills and adherence to societal norms such as personal hygiene, formal communication skills, respect for authority figures, substance use, and criminal records.
- Staff reported **strengths** of youth including resourcefulness, volition to stay off the streets, resiliency, life experience, ability to overcome adversity, persistence, and proximity to in-house employment resources.

Results: 8West Social Enterprise Program

Social Enterprise is a business that aims to turn a profit but reinvests the money to facilitate positive social change

General Program Goals:

1. Develop job skills through participation in artisanal soap making business
2. Adapt and modify tasks/jobs to the specific needs of individual clients to increase occupational performance
3. Identify specific job-related goals for individual clients to develop throughout program
4. Reduce “boomerang” clients by promoting financial independence s/p permanent housing placement
5. Create self-sustaining business model for ongoing viability of program/suggest grants for funding

Theoretical Frameworks:

1. The Model Of Human Occupation (MOHO)
2. Dunn’s Model of Sensory Processing

Assessment Tools:

1. AOTA Occupational Profile Template
2. Adolescent-Adult Sensory Profile (AASP)
3. Work Rehabilitation in Mental Health Programs Questionnaire

8 Week Pilot Program

Weeks 1-3:

- Evaluation and assessment of youth for participation in Cohort 1
- Environment/space creation with potential cohort members

Weeks 4-7:

- Product production with cohort 2x/weekly with parallel group interventions 1x/weekly including product knowledge, customer service, professional comportment, resume building, and interview skills
- Outreach to community partners for sales and marketing opportunities

Week 8:

- 4 tabling events to sell products, develop customer service skills, marketing, communication, and promote community outreach
- Youth feedback form to assess performance in program
- Program feedback from youth

Ongoing

- Individual interventions to address clients’ specific needs, i.e., documentation, cognitive training
- 8West “Council” meetings biweekly to discuss future of organization and ideas for improvement