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Improving Belonging Through Occupation in Individuals Within the Substance Use Disorder Population

Michelle Perkins, OTS; Susan MacDermott, OTD, OTR/L

Background

- Approximately 40.3 million people were classified as having a SUD in the past year (SAMHSA, 2021).
- SUD can impact all areas of occupation and has been associated with restricted engagement in occupations (Stoffel & Moyers, 2004; Wasmuth et al., 2021).
- Individuals within the SUD population often express feelings of isolation, loneliness, and decreased sense of belonging (Ingram et al., 2018; Lui et al., 2020; Wasmuth et al., 2014).
- These characteristics have been linked to diminished health and poor quality of life (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Ingram et al., 2018).
- Occupation-based interventions are particularly effective for addressing addiction. Social participation and building social connections and community elicit better short and long-term recovery outcomes (Wasmuth et al., 2016; Wasmuth & Pritchard, 2016).

Problem

Many individuals within the SUD population often experience loneliness and a lack of connection (Wasmuth et al., 2014; Ingram et al., 2020). As such, they may benefit from a program designed to improve belonging through occupations to increase well-being and quality of life.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to conduct a site-based needs assessment of individuals within the SUD population and design or enhance programming to improve belonging through occupations.

Program Development

Needs Assessment

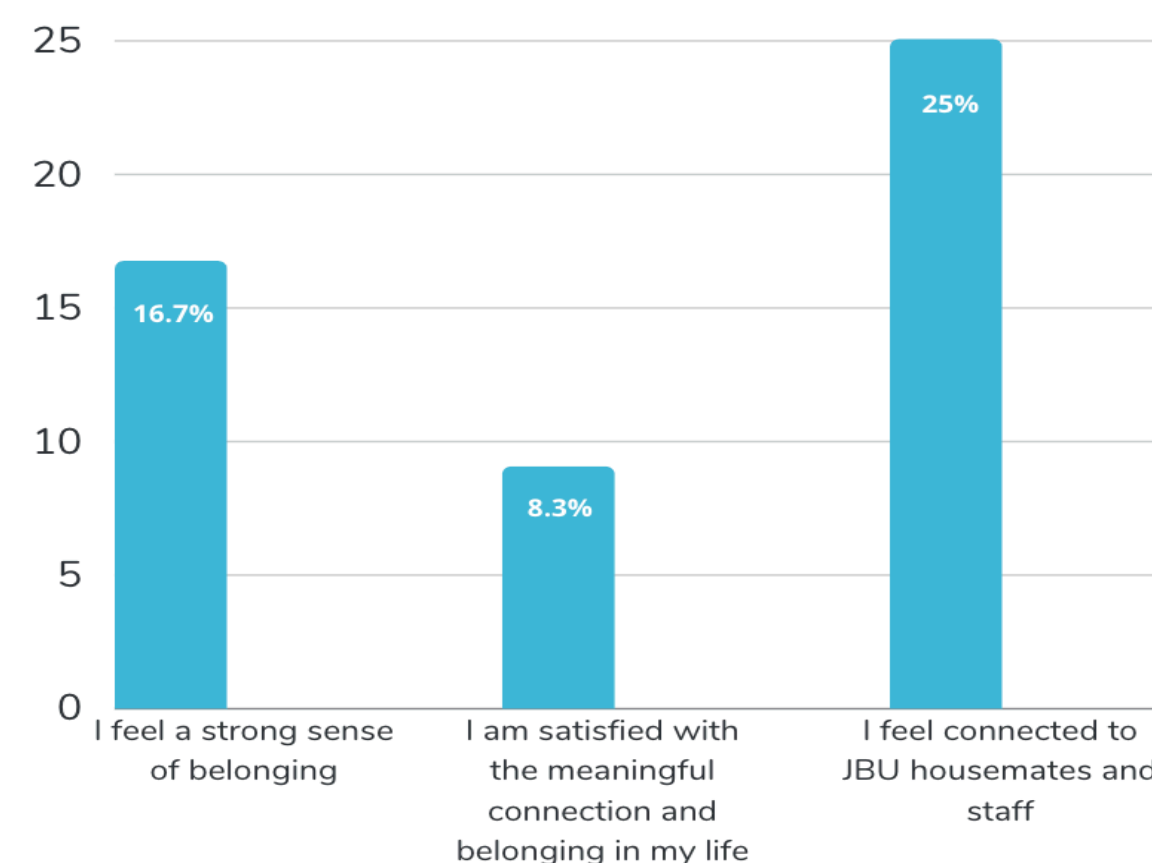
Setting



- Conducted at Urban Street Angels' Just Be You Program
- Participants completed interviews and pre-program questionnaires
- 5 female/female identifying and 7 male/male identifying adults aged 18-25
- Informal staff interviews
- Review of current OT programming

Identified Occupations

- Creative expression
- Listening to or creating music
- Spending time in nature or with animals
- Social participation



Barriers

- Limited access due to insufficient resources
- Significant period of transition
- Mental health concerns

Program Implementation

Elevate 4-Week Pilot Program

Informed by the Recovery Model and the Doing, Being, Becoming, Belonging framework

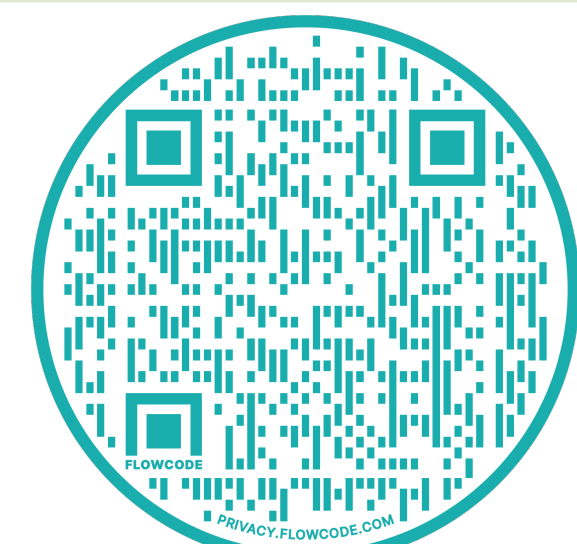
Week 1: Introduction to belonging through creative expression

Week 2: Team-based occupation

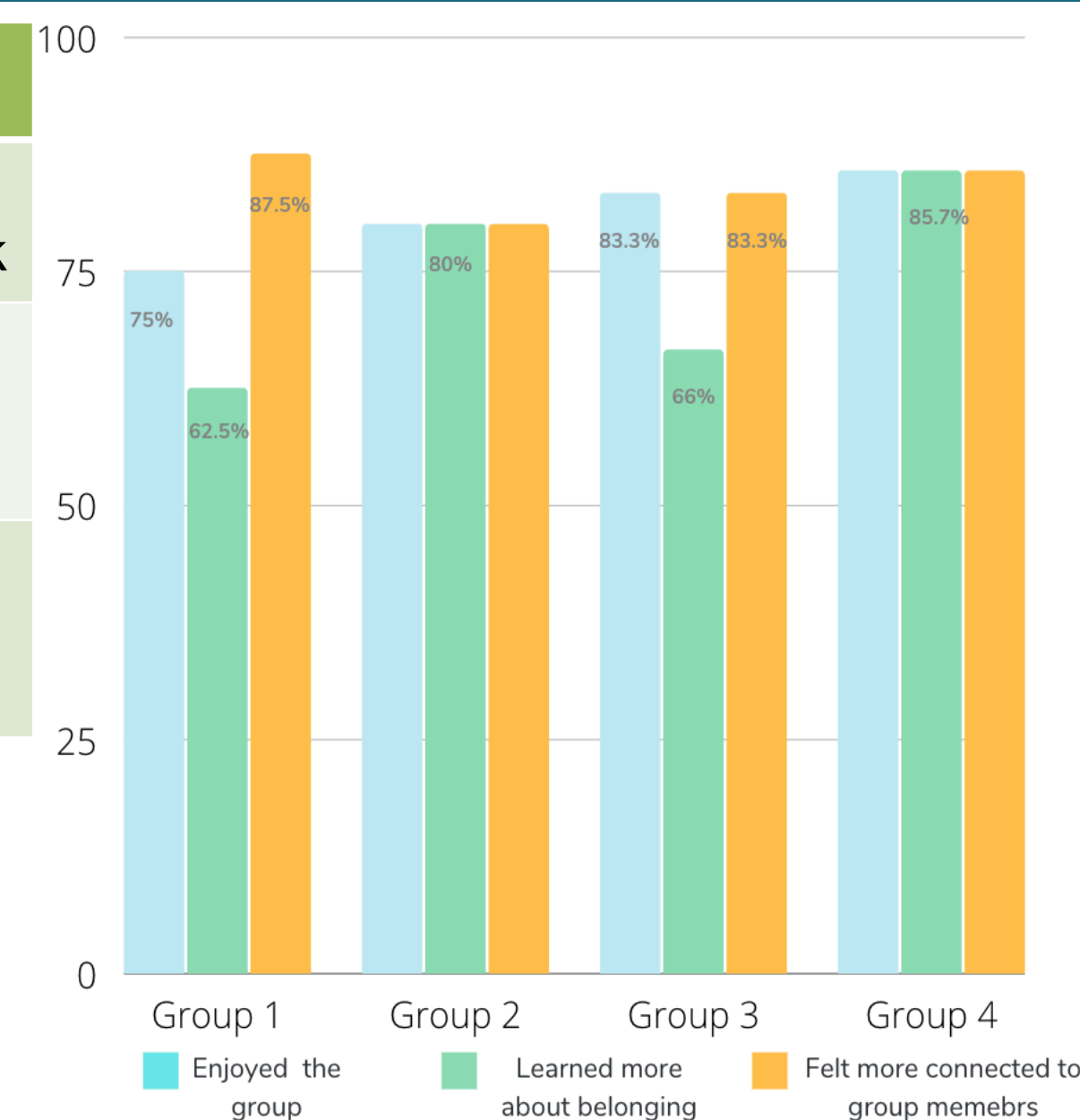
Week 3: Creative expression parallel occupation

Week 4: Shared-goal occupation

Acknowledgement: Special thanks to Monica Robinson, OTD, OT/L, BCMH, FAOTA for her mentorship

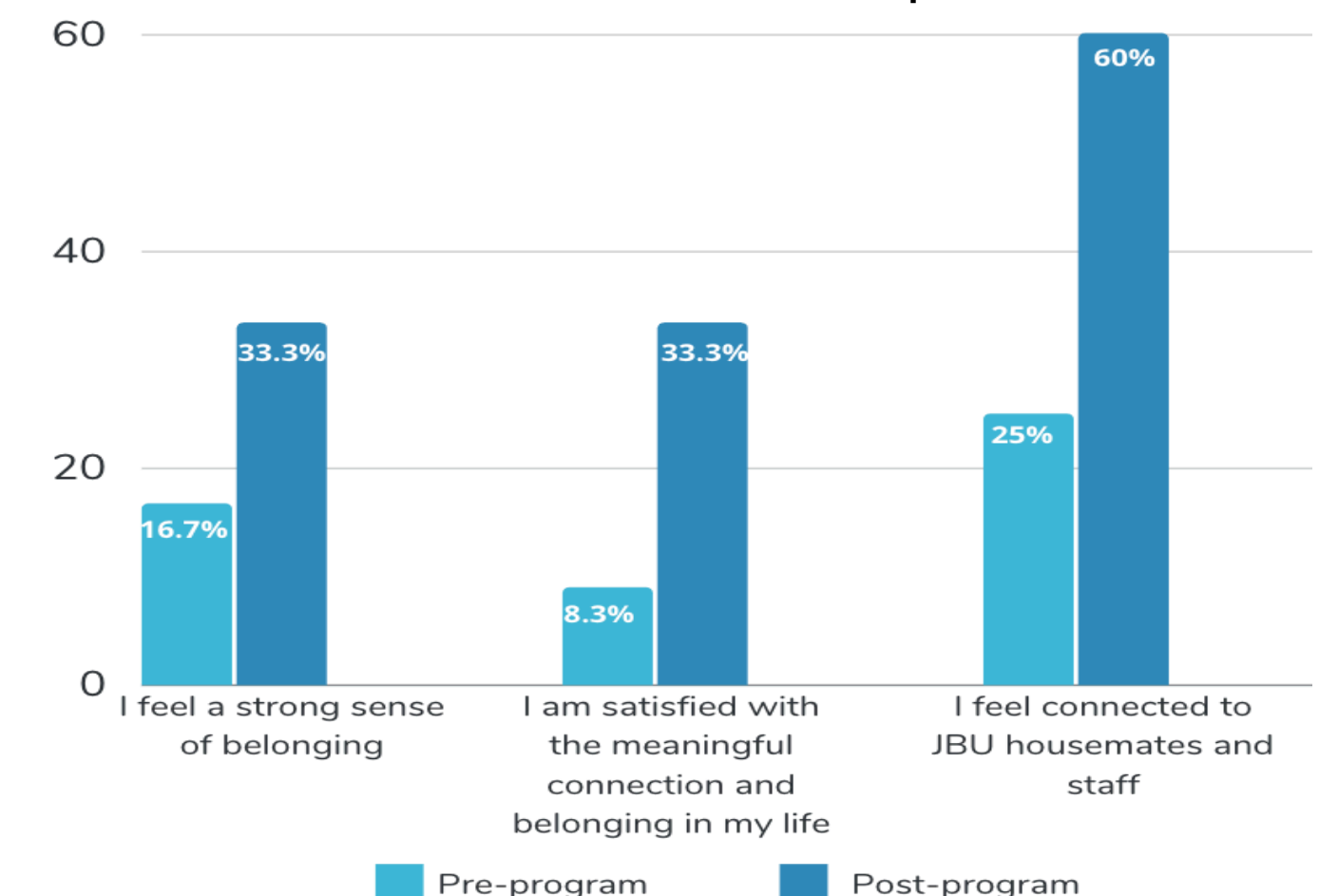


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Results

The Elevate program successfully demonstrated the feasibility of improving belonging through occupations, as evidenced by changes in pre and post-program client questionnaire scores. The client's self-report scores in sense of belonging, satisfaction of belonging, and connection to housemates and staff demonstrated noticeable improvement.



Conclusions

- Elevate was a pilot program. So, further research is needed.
- Open group format of group sessions made it challenging to ensure clients would attend multiple or all sessions in the Elevate program.
- Unexpected discharges of house members impacted the program evaluations as post-program responses could not be obtained.
- While these limitations existed in this program, there is still value in further research on improving belonging in individuals within the SUD population and the continued implementation of this program at JBU or other Urban Street Angels programs.