

Occupational Therapy's Role in the Transition to Employment for Youth and Young Adults with

Disabilities

by

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A Capstone Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences

April, 2020

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April, 2020

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Introduction

The transition to adulthood happens for all youth. For typically developing youth, this transition usually ends in college, employment, and ultimately independence. What about the youth in the special education program? Many graduate high school or age out of high school without the tools or skills necessary to successfully make the transition into adulthood (Riesen, Morgan, Schultz, & Kupferman, 2014). The results of an unsuccessful transition can be homelessness, unemployment, or indefinitely living with aging parents or family members. Evidence has shown given the right training, support, and education, these youth can gain and retain employment and, ultimately, independence (Bates-Harris, 2012). Occupational therapy (OT) is a perfect match to fill the need for improved transition programs due to its holistic, occupation-based, client-centered profession dedicated to assisting clients in achieving their highest potential (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2014). The purpose of this paper is to outline the goals and process of this capstone project, and show how OT was incorporated in the curriculum of the pre-employment class at the local YMCA in Warsaw, IN. This paper will discuss background information, a statement of the problem, a purpose statement, the rationale of the project, the significance of the project, a literature review, the methods used, the results and analysis, and future implications for the field of OT.

Background

Employment statistics for the community with disabilities are significantly lower than typically developing young adults. As of 2018, the percentage of individuals employed in the population of persons with disabilities aged 16-64 is 30.4% compared with those without a

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disability at 74.0% employed (United States Department of Labor, 2019a). Of that percentage, 31% are employed part-time compared to 17% of their counterparts without a disability; this shows that persons with a disability are also more likely to work part-time (United States Department of Labor, 2019a). Bear in mind that these statistics are for all types of disabilities, including purely physical disabilities. Those with physical disabilities, according to Hernandez (2000), are met with a more positive attitude from employers than those with intellectual or psychological disabilities. While there are supports in place attempting to remedy these disparities in employment statistics, it is more than merely changing the attitudes of employers and training these individuals with marketable skills.

The community individuals live in also has an impact on access to resources and availability of job opportunities that match their skill set. In more impoverished southern areas and rural areas, there are fewer opportunities and, therefore, poorer health outcomes and higher unemployment (Muth, 2015). Employment is essential for the health of these individuals as unemployment is one of the significant factors in health status (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2018). Unemployed individuals are 54% more likely to have poor or fair health and 83% more likely to develop heart disease due to the added stress of unemployment (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2018).

Seventy-one percent of adults with disabilities participate in non-work day programs and sheltered workshops where they receive below minimum wage and have little to no exposure to individuals without disabilities (Braddock, Rizzolo, & Hemp, 2010). This practice is often not meaningful for them, does them a disservice, and is not an acceptable employment outcome for the community with disabilities (Bates-Harris, 2012). According to a statement by the United States Senate (2013), most individuals with disabilities should be employed and have the same

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wages as those without disabilities and have other options besides day programs, clubhouses, and sheltered workshops.

During early intervention programs, elementary school, middle school, and high school, youth with disabilities have many resources at their disposal under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under IDEA, they have an individualized education program (IEP), OT sessions at school, and access to special education classes (The United States Department of Education, n.d.-b). The IEP team and their parents advocate for their care and meet their needs in school. The IEP plan requires a plan for the transition to college or the workplace (The United States Department of Education, n.d.-b). Planning for that transition is not started early enough to make a significant impact (Riesen et al., 2014). Surprisingly, very few school-based occupational therapists are involved in this transition process despite the valuable role they could play (Mankey, 2011). Also, resources are limited after they age out of IDEA at the age of 21 (United States Department of Education, n.d.-a). When youth with disabilities age out of IDEA, they are under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), where they must advocate for themselves and have access to fewer resources (the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2005). Not enough is done during their high school years to prepare these youth for that monumental shift. A study by Nguyen, Stewart, and Gorter (2017) identified close collaboration between disciplines, focus on experiences and opportunities, inclusive education for stakeholders, increased peer mentorship opportunities, and a broader approach to teaching employment skills as suggestions to improve the transition process. All of these are opportunity areas for youth transition programs.

The holistic nature of OT creates a focus on activity analysis and what is most meaningful to the client (AOTA, 2014). OT expands the view of transitions to include how the

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person, environment, and desired occupations all interact with one another (Stewart, 2013). OT's role in transitions can include promoting student self-advocacy, magnifying functional skills, developing life skills curriculum, collaboration with community entities, supplying and recommending assistive technology for success, performing assessments in support of transitioning to the next stage of life, and assistance with developing social skills and peer relationships (AOTA, 2008). All these factors make OT involvement a distinct addition to any transitional program, employment, or otherwise.

Statement of Problem

The transition from adolescence to adulthood, and the workforce is rife with changes and challenges for typically developing youth (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan & Ruth, 2007). When you add disabilities, it creates a significant problem for parents and young adults (Osgood et al., 2007). Limited options are available to youth with disabilities to enter the workforce besides vocational rehabilitation. Vocational rehabilitation is a viable and federally funded option; however, it is not available in every community (Family and Social Services Association, 2019). The closest vocational rehabilitation location to Warsaw is in Elkhart, IN, 45 minutes away (Family and Social Services Association, 2019). There is a representative from Vocational Rehabilitation who comes once a month to Cardinal Services in Warsaw, IN to meet with individuals; however, the wait is long with interested parties waiting anywhere from six to eight months to meet with them.

Organizations like Project SEARCH, and Gigi's Playhouse strive to assist high school students with disabilities by providing internship experiences with real-life job opportunities, job coaching, continuous feedback, and education (Gigi's Playhouse, 2019a; Project SEARCH, 2018a). In smaller, more rural communities such as Warsaw, IN, the options are minimal. The

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nearest Project SEARCH location is in South Bend, IN, a 60-minute drive away (Indiana University, Bloomington, 2019). Gigi's Playhouse is available in Fort Wayne, IN, a 50-minute drive away but only serves youth with Down syndrome (Gigi's Playhouse, 2019b).

There are private program options available; however, most charge participants to take part in making them less accessible to lower-income families. Also, many private programs, such as programs through the YMCA, sports, or dance teams, are more activity-based rather than life-skills based (Parkview Warsaw YMCA, 2019a). This is a vast hole in supports for youth with disabilities, especially as they begin the transition toward adult life and independence.

Soft skills and interviewing skills are vital when attempting to secure employment (Lazarus, 2013). According to Kaye, Jans, and Jones (2011), many employers do not know how to interact with persons with disabilities. Employers are also often unsure if these individuals can perform the job for which they are applying (Kaye et al., 2011). Improving the soft skills that contribute to interviewing skills can ease this interaction and thus may lead to increased employment. This area is also where OT can make a valuable contribution to their education and the transition process.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this OT doctoral (OTD) project is to expand a pre-employment program at the Parkview Warsaw YMCA to include a pre-employment course emphasizing soft skills, life skills, and interviewing skills. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the program and YMCA employee training is also part of the purpose of ensuring sustainability in the future. The main goal for this project is to introduce OT-based curriculum into a pre-employment class that improves the self-efficacy and confidence of both participants and future employers in their abilities.

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Rationale for Project

Barriers common in all youth, no matter the disability, transitioning from school to the workforce, according to Stewart (2013), are a lack of support, preparation, and information. Other barriers include a lack of opportunities to develop the skills necessary to fill adult roles and disjointed services that do not meet their needs (Stewart, 2013). Another barrier is perceptions about the abilities of individuals with disabilities. Overwhelming evidence suggests that with the right preparation, support, training, and resources, these workers with disabilities can secure and perform the responsibilities of employment with an equal wage to their conventional counterparts (Bates-Harris, 2012). This project sought to eliminate some of those barriers through providing support, preparation, information, and an opportunity to practice and develop the skills necessary to aid them in transitioning into employment.

Life skills such as budgeting, transportation education, and directing one's care have been found to make a significant impact on the success of individuals with disabilities to live independently (Kingsnorth, King, McPherson, & Jones-Galley, 2015). Many adolescents desire to live independently. According to Scott, Foley, Bourke, Leonard, and Girdler (2014), youth with Down syndrome, specifically, have strong desires to live independently. With these desires to live independently comes the need for life skills training and employment. Best practice for transition programs should include teaching independent living skills and self-determination (Orentlicher, 2015). Developing self-determination increases abilities in problem-solving, attaining goals, self-regulation, and advocating for oneself (Carter, Swedeen, Walter, Moss, & Hsin, 2011).

Soft skills are essential for securing and retaining meaningful employment. Many business research articles stress the need for soft skills in employment acquisition and retention.

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In one such article aimed toward health care professionals, the five specific soft skills most employers are looking for are leadership, communication, professionalism, appearance, and etiquette (Lazarus, 2013). These skills are needed for any occupation and can apply to the population with disabilities as skills that will help them attain and retain employment. In a study done by Riesen et al. (2014), a consistent report from special education teachers, rehabilitation counselors, and community providers was that students in special education leaving high school did not have the skills necessary for securing employment. The skills needed that graduating students in special education lacked were life skills, social skills, and soft skills (Riesen et al., 2014). These skills are positively associated with employment after school (Cameto, 2005). When approaching teaching new skills to this population, a strength-based approach is beneficial. These youth have always been identified for what they cannot do, rather than their strengths. Focusing on their strengths will make them more confident and able to advocate for themselves (Carter et al., 2015).

OT can play an influential role in the transition process due to its client-centered approach (AOTA, 2014). The holistic view and unique ability of an occupational therapist to perform an activity analysis (the breaking down of a complex task into smaller components considering all client factors [AOTA, 2014]), allows them insight into the abilities, interests, and values of any population and makes them valuable tools in the process of transition. The activity analysis skill can also be applied to the needs assessment portion of program development, making occupational therapists valuable members to any program development team.

Occupational therapists focus on occupations, i.e., meaningful activities in the lives of clients (AOTA, 2014). Occupational therapists ask what matters to the client, not merely what their problems are (AOTA, 2014). Occupational therapists are also experts at adaptation and are

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creative in their problem-solving. Including OT influences into the curriculum of this project provided client-centered, occupation-based solutions to the barriers these youth face and a valuable lens through which to look at their needs (Stewart, 2013).

Significance of Project

This project has the potential to make a massive difference in the lives of adolescents with disabilities transitioning from high school to college or the workforce and aid in their becoming self-sufficient. Similar programs have led to greater independence and self-efficacy in the lives of participants (Daston, Riehle, & Rutkowski, 2012; Kingsnorth et al., 2015). This population has untapped potential in the workforce. Soft skills and life skills can only help them in their transition to adulthood by giving them the tools to succeed. This project has the potential to expand the role of OT in the transition to adulthood and the workforce for individuals with disabilities. This project is an opportunity to broaden the understanding of the community of Warsaw, IN, to what OT has to offer and may lead to more value placed on the role of OT in transition programs.

Preliminary Project Objectives

The goal of this program was to improve self-efficacy for independent living and increase soft skills and interviewing skills for youth with disabilities.

Learning Objectives:

1. Become familiar with the needs assessment process to assist in future program development endeavors.
2. Assess the needs of the current employment program (Support Champion) at the YMCA and identify three to four topics for a new pre-employment course curriculum between the second and third weeks of the capstone experience.

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3. Incorporate current literature on transitions to adulthood for youth with disabilities into the curriculum and future practice.
4. Understand and define the role of OT in the transition programs for youth with disabilities.
5. Become familiar with the program development process and apply knowledge to current and future program development.
6. Explore other programs and services available to youth with disabilities in Warsaw, IN, and become familiar with the process of building partnerships within the community.

Outcome Objectives:

1. Assess the needs of the current employment program (Support Champion) at the YMCA and identify three to four topics for a new pre-employment course curriculum between the second and third weeks of the capstone experience.
2. Develop and refine pre-employment course curriculum and effectiveness assessment for a new six week, twice a week program based on OT principles to include soft skills, interviewing skills, and life skills by week five or six of the capstone experience.
3. Recruit eight to ten participants through community outreach, internal advertisement, and community partnerships and implement a 6-week pre-employment course at the Parkview Warsaw YMCA by week six or seven of the capstone experience.
4. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the pre-employment course and complete revisions by week thirteen of the capstone experience.
5. Train a member of the YMCA staff to continue the course between week thirteen and fourteen of the capstone experience.

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6. Improve the self-efficacy and confidence of program participants in the area of securing and retaining meaningful employment.

Definitions of Terms

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A formal document developed by the IEP team consisting of teachers, therapists, and administrators in the school outlining supports and programs needed to allow the student with disabilities to participate in educational activities and learn (Bazyk & Cahill, 2015; United States Department of Education, n. d.b). The IEP is regularly reviewed, updated, and evaluated to ensure best practice (United States Department of Education, n.d-b)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A law passed in 2004 allowing children with disabilities to receive special education and related services free in the “least restrictive environment,” meaning every effort is to be made to allow these children access to the same resources and environment as their typically developing peers (United States Department of Education, n.d.a, para. 3).

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): A law passed in 1990, making it illegal for employers to discriminate against workers with disabilities and requiring employers to provide reasonable accommodations to workers with disabilities (the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2005). This law also requires individuals to advocate for themselves and disclose any disabilities to their potential employers as employers are not authorized to inquire about disabilities (the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2005).

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Soft Skills: personality traits, behaviors, and habits that individuals use when interacting with others (Indeed Career Guide, 2019). These skills can include work ethic, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, etiquette, self-control, confidence, and teamwork (Lazarus, 2013).

Life Skills: Skills that allow one to adapt to and handle the challenges of everyday life (United Nations Children's Fund, 2019). Some of these skills include, but are not limited to, critical thinking, problem-solving, goal setting, self-control, self-determination, assertiveness, budgeting, and time management (Hanbury, 2009).

Activity Analysis: Addressing the demands of specific activities on the person while also considering the physical, cognitive, and performance skills of the individual, thus allowing the occupational therapist to discern what skills are lacking, preventing the person from performing a specific task (Crepeau, 2003). In other words, the breaking down of a task to understand the skills needed to complete it while focusing on the personal skills and experiences of the person being treated (AOTA, 2014).

Vocational Rehabilitation: A federally funded program available to all persons with disabilities providing support, counseling, and training for gaining and retaining employment and independence (Family and Social Services Administration, 2019).

YMCA-Acronym for Young Men's Christian Association. The YMCA is a community nonprofit organization focused on improving communities through healthy living, youth development, and

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social responsibility (Parkview Warsaw YMCA, 2019b). Included in many YMCA's are a gym, fitness classes, community programs, and sports leagues.

Assumptions

It was assumed that there would be an interest in attending the course, and the YMCA staff would be supportive and helpful during the process. It was also assumed that each of the participants would improve in their life skills, soft skills, and interviewing skills, improving their chances of securing employment and, ultimately, independence. After this project, it was assumed that the course would continue under the direction of the YMCA staff and be improved for the benefit of future participants.

Conclusion

Clearly, there is a disconnect during the transition to work and adulthood for the community with disabilities. There are holes in services that need to be filled to assist these individuals in this pivotal period in their lives. OT is a multidimensional profession with the skills to assess where the needs are and work to fill those needs in the most efficient way possible. Due to this disconnect and the positive effect OT can have on youth in transition, the obvious next step is to create a program that fills the needs of these youth through incorporating OT themes into the curriculum. To further support this assumption, the next step is to review the literature on the topic. The following chapter will discuss current and relevant research to support the purposes of this project.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Introduction

Youth with disabilities face many challenges throughout their lives, particularly in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The process of transitioning to adulthood comes with its own set of difficulties for all youth regardless of abilities. The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature available on post-secondary outcomes, the challenges these youth face, current support programs, methods that have been proven to be successful, OT's role in this transition, and the theory chosen to guide the process of this project.

Post-Secondary Outcomes

Unemployment is an issue many Americans face (United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019b). Youth often face being unemployed or underemployed while they struggle with the transition from being an adolescent to an adult (Kalleberg, 2012). With outsourcing and technological advances, many jobs available to previous generations no longer exist, pushing unemployment into the realm of reality for many youths in the transition to adulthood (Kalleberg, 2012). Unemployment can be particularly damaging to youth in transition as they are still discovering who they are and which direction they are progressing toward (Mortimer, Kim, Staff, & Vuolo, 2016). Failure to secure employment during this time can severely undermine their confidence and outlook on the future (Mortimer et al., 2016). Considering all the added challenges that youth with disabilities face, it is unsurprising that unemployment is much higher in this population at 69.6%, with 31% of the 30.4% employed part-time. (United States Department of Labor, 2019a).

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It is essential to consider the transition process and examine the ease and success of these transitions in this population to remedy the unemployment rate. When compared to their typically developing peers without an Individualized Education Program (IEP), 74% of students with an IEP expected to enroll in college or post-secondary training compared to 94% without an IEP. The difference in work experience was similar, with 40% of students with an IEP reporting work experience compared with 50% of youth without an IEP preparing to exit high school (Lipscomb et al., 2017a). Parental attitudes also seem to be less hopeful in students with an IEP, with only 78% of parents with children in special education having expectations of their children entering the workforce or living independently compared to 96% of parents with typically developing teens (Lipscomb et al., 2017a).

According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study of 2012, students with autism, intellectual disability, or multiple disabilities are least likely to pursue or prepare for college or employment (Lipscomb et al., 2017b). Youth with intellectual disabilities or various disabilities are at the highest risk for unsuccessful transition and face the most challenges through that transition (Lipscomb et al., 2017b). According to Oertle, Chesley, and Sax, (2017), how prepared students with disabilities are for transition is strongly associated with the quality of collaboration across disciplines on their behalf. Given the disparities in these statistics, disseminating what the challenges are for these youth is vital in determining how to remedy these challenges and improving their transition experience.

Challenges Faced

There are various barriers unique to youth with disabilities that they face during their transition to adulthood. These barriers make the transition to adulthood an extremely stressful time for these individuals and their parents (Gauthier-Boudreault, Gallagher, & Couture, 2017).

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Each youth experiencing the transition to adulthood requires supports in the cognitive, emotional, and physical realms of their lives to be successful (Gauthier-Boudreault et al., 2017). These needs are not always met, and preparation is often lacking for the ending of their high school experience and the transfer of health services from pediatric to adult (Gauthier-Boudreault et al., 2017). Other barriers identified by Awsumb, Balcazar, and Alvarado (2016) include a lack of education of programs available, lack of knowledge and practice of soft skills, lack of funding for transitional services within their school district, gaps between best practice and actual practice, and socioeconomic statuses of students and their families. Zipcodes often determine what resources are available to these youth and can be indicators of future success due to the lack or abundance of resources available to them (Muth, 2015).

Employers that are willing to hire these youth cited three components that made them more willing to hire specific individuals with disabilities: interview preparation, job capabilities, and professionalism (Simonsen, Luecking, & Fabian, 2015). Given these components and the lack of education and soft skills common in students with disabilities exiting high school (Riesen et al., 2014), this can be a challenge for youth seeking to obtain employment from willing employers. This point is further apparent given that employers are often unsure of and uncomfortable in interactions with potential employees with disabilities (Kaye et al., 2011), making it safe to assume that without soft skills or proper interview preparation, these youth will be unable to secure employment despite efforts.

Other risk factors include the disabilities they face as we have seen specific diagnoses within this population are more successful than others in their transitions. To review, the diagnoses of autism, intellectual disability, and multiple disabilities are at the highest risk for unsuccessful transition (Lipscomb et al., 2017b). It has been shown that youth with mental or

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emotional illnesses are more likely to participate in risk-taking behaviors, also making their transition difficult (Altshuler, Mackelprang, & Baker, 2008).

Current Support Programs

Employment-based programs for the population of youth and young adults in the transitional phase to adulthood have been shown to make a positive impact on the lives of students involved in them. The number of programs available for this population is sadly lacking and cannot keep up with the number of individuals with disabilities in need of their services. Programs such as Project SEARCH, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Gigi's Playhouse are programs available in most states and many communities (Family and Social Services, 2019; Project SEARCH, 2018b). Another support in place is the Plan to Achieve Self-Support program of the Social Security Administration, a work incentive program where individuals with disabilities who secure employment do not lose their benefits through the Social Security Administration (Orentlicher, 2015). The monetary benefits these individuals receive, such as their Social Security Income, can be set aside for future education or entrepreneurial endeavors (Orentlicher, 2015).

Before discussing the number of pre-employment programs available in the state of Indiana, it is necessary to explore how many individuals in Indiana need their services. The population of Indiana is approximately 6.732 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2019). As of 2017, approximately 13.1-14% of the state's population was reported to have a disability (Kraus, Lauer, Coleman, & Houtenville, 2018). That means that there are at least 881,892 individuals with disabilities in the state of Indiana. Keep this number in mind as the programs available are discussed.

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Each state controls vocational rehabilitation; vocational rehabilitation provides counseling, training, supported employment, and assistance with advocacy and education on their rights (Orentlicher, 2015). In the state of Indiana, there are 19 vocational rehabilitation locations, and while that may seem like a substantial number, there are 92 counties in the state (Family and Social Services Association, 2019). There are vocational rehabilitation programs all over the state, but they are not always accessible for every resident in need of their services.

Project SEARCH is a fantastic organization that assists youth with disabilities through supported internships, giving them real-world experience and education on self-advocacy, marketable skills, and interviewing skills (Project SEARCH, 2018a). They partner with local businesses and hospitals and train interns to perform jobs within those facilities (Project SEARCH, 2018a). There are seven Project SEARCH locations in the state of Indiana (Indiana University, Bloomington, 2019), even fewer locations than Vocational Rehabilitation locations; however, it increases the number of transition programs available from 19 to 26, increasing access to transition services.

Gigi's Playhouse is a wonderful organization that serves children and youth with Down syndrome. The services offered at Gigi's playhouse include tutoring, therapy services, career development, and global outreach (Gigi's Playhouse, 2019a). Each location has a section where participants can learn marketable skills and gain employment experience (Gigi's Playhouse, 2019a). There are only two Gigi's Playhouse locations in the state of Indiana (Gigi's Playhouse, 2019b), bringing the number of transition programs in Indiana up to 28; however, Gigi's Playhouse is only available to individuals with Downs syndrome. Recall the number of individuals with disabilities in the state of Indiana-approximately 881,892. Twenty-eight programs are woefully inadequate to serve that amount of people.

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In a systematic review of post-secondary transition programs by Lindsay et al., (2019b), it was highlighted that programs that focused on increasing self-determination are essential for successful transitions. Other findings from their review caused them to conclude that merely having a transition program, no matter the format, was shown to improve at least one aspect of the transition process for youth with disabilities (Lindsay et al., 2019b). This finding is fascinating and encouraging because if programs are focused on increasing the self-determination of participants, the format of the curriculum is not as important. There is no one size fits all recipe for programs that will improve the transition process for these youth. Still, components from other successful programs can be used while also considering the needs of the specific area or population with disabilities we are working with (Lindsay et al., 2019b). The addition of OT could enhance the success of these programs. The next section will outline the role of OT in the transition process to provide insight into what OT has to offer transition programs.

The Role of Occupational Therapy in Transitions

OT can have a powerful positive influence on the transition to adulthood for youth with disabilities; however, little is known even among occupational therapists as to what role they play in transitions to adulthood. In a study by Mankey (2011), occupational therapists were surveyed about their knowledge of their role in transition programs. Twenty-eight percent reported feeling secure in their understanding of their role in secondary transitions. With this low number, it is unsurprising that fewer than 10% were recommending OT services be included in the secondary transition plan (Mankey, 2011). These numbers are alarming to occupational therapists that understand the value of including OT services into the transition process for these at-risk students.

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As of 2015, the AOTA has identified secondary transition as an emerging practice and, in doing so, has made it necessary for occupational therapists to fully understand what their role is in the transition process (Abbott & Provident, 2016). It has been shown that education about their role in transition can positively influence occupational therapists' attitudes and knowledge (Abbott & Provident, 2016). However, most occupational therapists have to research on their own to increase their understanding of their role in secondary transitions. Some of the issues stem from the fact that most pediatric OT services are provided to children 13 years and under (Wei, Wagner, Christiano, Shattuck, & Yu, 2014). Exceptionally few high school students with an IEP in their transitional years receive OT services, with only 7.5% reported in a study by Eismann et al. (2017). With these alarming statistics, it is safe to assume that many high school students in need of transition planning and OT services are not receiving them, and it is partially because of a lack of knowledge across the board.

Due to this lack of knowledge, it should not be shocking that OT does not have a more prominent role in current transition programs (Mankey, 2011). Few can confidently advocate for that role within the profession, and OT is not generally on the radar of other occupations (Mankey, 2011; Wei et al., 2014). In a scoping review of school-to-work transitions performed by occupational therapists and OT students, it was found that research is being done on the occupational value of improving transition programs for youth with intellectual disabilities from school to work, but occupational therapists were not involved in those studies (Rosner et al., 2020). OT interventions are being provided, but not by OT professionals. The interventions also lacked evidence to support their efficacy, which exacerbates matters (Rosner et al., 2020). Rosner et al. (2020) contest that occupational therapists have a responsibility to add to the body

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of evidence and stake a claim in programs that support the transition process for youth and young adults with disabilities.

The role of OT in transition services is broad, and there are many areas where OT can help students. The AOTA identified areas where OT can assist in the transition process. These areas include education of families, community leaders, and school staff of the needs of these students; evaluation of employment and independent living supports; knowledge of skills needed to secure employment and independence to students with disabilities; promote self-advocacy skills with the help of the transition team (AOTA, 2018). Other areas include curriculum development, activity analyses, and interest checklists for employment and school-based programs, and as a resource for assistive technology (AT) that could support student performance (AOTA, 2008). Occupational therapists can also provide evidence-based treatments and interventions that improve function, adaptation, social skills, and involvement within the community (Eismann et al., 2017). Research has shown that participation in community programs is an indicator of a successful transition into adulthood and health status (Eismann et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2011). Other predictors of postsecondary success include the ability to care for oneself, appropriate social skills, the ability to use public or private transportation independently, and well-developed communication skills. These predictors highlight the need for OT involvement, as these are common areas of expertise in the profession (Wehman et al., 2015).

Occupational therapists are experts in performing activity analyses (AOTA, 2014). They understand the skills necessary to accomplish tasks and the interventions needed to support these individuals making them perfect additions to any transition team (Cleary, Persch, & Spencer, 2015). In a case study done by Coakley and Bryze (2018), it was found that the combination of

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the occupational therapist's observation skills, critical thinking, and focused interventions was the most significant contribution to success in participants. Occupational therapists can critically look at each student and recognize their abilities and areas of improvement that, when improved, will allow them to be successful at desired occupations (AOTA, 2014). Occupational therapists are also experts in the field of AT. They can be an essential resource for students with disabilities in connecting them with AT that can allow them to be more successful in their transition and skills development (Smith, 2017).

Not only do occupational therapists have a lot to offer these programs, but work is also a relevant and critical occupation that gives meaning and identity to most adults in our culture (Berkman, 2014). Rather than asking why OT should be included in transition to work programs, a better question is: why hasn't OT had more of an impact and role in the transition to work programs for individuals with disabilities? With the role of OT in transitions in mind, the next step is identifying the underlying theory of the proposed project.

Person-Environment-Occupation Model

In working with youth in transition, there is a standard methodology; we must first evaluate and understand the current skills and needs of each student. Then we consider their environment and what supports are available and what supports are needed, and finally, what the desired occupations of our students are and how we can put all the pieces together to help them achieve their goals. This process should sound like a familiar and commonly used occupational model, the Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) Model. These components of the model are vital to the transition process of youth with disabilities, and this model is a natural choice to guide the implementation of the curriculum of this project. In a study done by Peloquin and Ciro (2013), teaching life skills to groups with alcohol and drug abuse, they found the groups that

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employed the PEO model to their approach yielded more client satisfaction with their results. Their findings further support the use of this model in this project as it included sections on life skills using the PEO model as a guide. This section will discuss each component of the model and how it relates to the transition process.

The first element of the PEO model is the person. Many personal factors support a successful transition, such as healthy coping strategies, goal orientation, adaptive behavior, self-control, social skills, and belief in oneself (Stewart, 2013). Self-determination has also been identified as an essential personal factor as it magnifies and refines the abilities of problem-solving, self-advocating, achieving goals, and self-control (Carter et al., 2011). Self-determination has also been positively associated with better outcomes for employment and living independently (Martorell, Gutierrez-Rechacha, Pereda, & Ayuso-Mateos, 2008). One may ask what self-determination is, and the answer is directing oneself and one's actions rather than being a victim of circumstance (Carter et al., 2011). Self-determination requires autonomy and self-realization. Self-determined people act intentionally on their own will (Williams-Diehm, Weheymer, Palmer, Soukup, & Garner, 2008). With the positive personal factors that facilitate successful transitions come the negative, which must also be considered.

Negative personal factors can have a lasting and profound negative impact on youth in transition and even cause them to fail to transition into adult life successfully (Stewart, 2013). One of these personal factors is the disability the individual has. Recall that individuals with Autism, intellectual disability, and multiple disabilities are the most at-risk for unsuccessful transitions (Lipscomb et al., 2017b). Other personal factors to consider are gender, race, motivation, and substance abuse (Stewart, 2013). Lindsay, Cagliostro, Albarico, Mortaji, and Srikanthan (2019a), found that personal factors that limited successful transition were the

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unwillingness to disclose their disability and ask for accommodations, lack of awareness of how their condition affected themselves and others, and a lack of self-advocacy. They further revealed in their study that many clinicians in the study did not tailor their approach to each client depending on gender but did acknowledge that each population had differing needs (Lindsay et al., 2019a). When working with youth with disabilities in transition, it is critical to consider and use personal factors to direct approaches to treatments and education.

The second component of the PEO model is the environment. When considering the environmental factors of students in transition, it is vital to consider their physical, social, cultural, institutional, temporal, and virtual environments (AOTA, 2014). Supports in the physical environment can include access to programs, transportation, and services through adaptations to workplaces and schools. At the same time, some barriers could be a lack of access to these things without adaptations or specialized equipment (Stewart, 2013). The social environment includes friends, family, and other adults and youth with whom the person is in contact. Factors that support a successful transition in the social environment are supportive teachers and staff, positive relationships with peers, adult mentors, positive parental expectations, and access to social events. Barriers include bullying relationships with peers, lack of support from teachers and staff, negative parental expectations, and poverty (Stewart, 2013). Culture can also affect their environment in positive as well as negative ways. If the culture of an individual is accepting and understanding of disabilities and includes those individuals, it is positive. If the culture stigmatizes or alienates individuals with disabilities, it can be challenging for these students to overcome that and transition to adulthood (Stewart, 2013). At the institutional level, some legislation in place can be both a help and a hindrance to this population.

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Considering the funding and programs available is essential in working to assist this population in their journey (Stewart, 2013). The government controls the funding of all vocational rehabilitation programs, and some states are better than others at spreading the funding and providing programs for youth in transition (The United States Department of Education, 2017). The temporal environment, as described by the AOTA, is “the experience of time shaped by engagement in occupations...” (2014, p. S28). In other words, it is the sum of their experiences and can include their stage in life and previous history (AOTA, 2014). If students have had positive experiences in their lives with others that encourage them and motivate them to move forward and validate their worth, they are more likely to be successful than if they had negative experiences in their lives and been discouraged (Stewart, 2013). The virtual environment is the place where communication takes place without physical contact (AOTA, 2013). Positive factors in this environment include assistive technologies that enable better communication and increase participation in occupations. Barriers include out of date technology or lack of access to needed assistive technology (Stewart, 2013).

For this project, it is essential to draw attention back to the lack of local programs available for youth with disabilities transitioning from high school to the workforce. In the city of Warsaw, IN, there is not a Project SEARCH location (Indiana University, Bloomington, 2019) or an official Vocational Rehabilitation site (Family and Social Services, 2019). There are supports in the local high school for youth transitioning to the workforce, but not all are catered to assist youth with disabilities (Warsaw Community High School, 2019). These factors were considered in this project, which aided in the success of the students.

The last component of this model is occupation. The AOTA defines occupations as “daily life activities in which people engage” (2014, p. S6); they can also be described as meaningful

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activities in which clients participate. From a transition to the workforce standpoint, occupations are the activities or aspirations in which these youth wish to participate. These occupations can include employment and taking care of oneself (Stewart, 2013). If activities chosen for these youth are not meaningful to them, they will not have the personal factor of motivation, and it can undermine their self-determination, which is vital to the success of transitions (AOTA, 2014). This project sought to keep the desired occupations of participants in mind and use this model as a guide in curriculum development and implementation.

Conclusion

The evidence in the literature indicates an imminent need for more transition programs to assist these youth in their transition to adult life and to improve their success rate in doing so. These youth face many challenges on their way to becoming adults, and occupational therapists have a unique skill set that is underutilized in the transition process. Including OT in these programs has the potential to improve them and provide a new perspective. That new perspective has the potential to enhance the success of these individuals. During the implementation of this project, OT influences were included in the curriculum, and the PEO model was utilized. Doing so resulted in a positive impact on the lives of participants. The positive influence of this project on the participants has the potential to benefit the community of Warsaw, IN, ultimately. The next step is to explore how this project attempted to fill this need in Warsaw, IN.

Chapter 3. Methods

Introduction

The next logical step given the evidence provided in the literature review was to create a program that filled this identified need in the community. The purpose of this section is to describe the methods used to carry out this project with supporting literature to justify the means used. Outlining the methods of this project provides a clear picture of the flow and insight into the efforts and materials needed to complete this project (Muller-Staub, 2012). The methods section is most important as it outlines the details of the project and provides a structure for future projects to build upon (Muller-Staub, 2012).

Background

To review, unemployment in the community with disabilities is extremely high, at almost 70% unemployed (United States Department of Labor, 2019a). This high rate of unemployment is complex, with many different contributing factors. However, in a study done by Oertle et al., (2017), the quality of collaboration between parties involved in the transition process had a strong correlation to future employment success or failure. A review of the literature revealed gaps in services for youth with disabilities transitioning to the workforce and a lack of programs available in more rural communities (Muth, 2015). Encouraging findings from a systematic review by Lindsay et al., (2019b) show the mere presence of a transition program, no matter the format, improved at least one area of transition for youth with disabilities. Research has also shown that involvement in community programs is also an indicator of a successful transition into adulthood (Eismann et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2011). Taking these factors into consideration, it appears that the creation of a pre-employment course within a community

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program would be beneficial. Thus, a program was created for pre-employment at the local YMCA in Warsaw, IN, where one did not exist.

The involvement of OT in transitional programs has been shown to increase the success of the transition due to the unique ability to conduct activity analyses, focus on the functionality of the individuals they treat, and connect the dots to improve the skills needed to accomplish functional tasks (AOTA, 2014; Cleary et al., 2015; Coakley & Bryze, 2018; Wehman et al., 2015). OT focuses on what is most meaningful to the individual (AOTA, 2014), and in many cases with this population, that is independence (Scott et al., 2014). These factors make it clear that OT can have a powerful impact on the success of participants and, therefore, it was a driving force in this pre-employment course. This course has the potential to make a significant impact on the lives of the participants and their families as it focuses on improving the participants' employability and independence.

When developing a program, it is essential to include theory and models to give direction and validity to the finished product (Snelling, 2014). The theory used to guide this project was the Theory of Change, as this theory assists in planning for and working through the volatile and compound problems that arise (Van Es, Guijt, & Vogel, 2015). The program planning model chosen to direct this program development was the Multilevel Approach to Community Health (MATCH) as the time needed to follow the PRECEDE-PROCEED model was not available. This process must ensure the project is fulfilling the planned objectives outlined in this proposal. As a result, the objectives will be reviewed in the following section.

Outcome Objectives

It is necessary to review some of the main objectives of the program to ensure cohesion and understanding. The outcome objectives of this program are as follows. Assess the needs of

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the community of Warsaw, IN, and possible program participants. Develop and refine a pre-employment course with a curriculum and an assessment tool. Recruit approximately eight to ten participants. Evaluate the effectiveness of the pre-employment course at its completion. Train staff to perpetuate the pre-employment program. The ultimate objective was to improve the self-efficacy and confidence of program participants in securing and retaining meaningful employment. The way these objectives were carried out is outlined in the following sections.

Process of Program Development

This project focused on creating and implementing a pre-employment course set to run twice a week for seven weeks. Due to the limited time available and the time needed for curriculum development and evaluation of the program, running the course for seven weeks was the most feasible. Meeting twice a week provided flexibility and allowed a shorter duration of each class meeting (Diette & Raghav, 2016). Each class meeting ran for 90 minutes with a 10-minute break halfway through. A 30-minute free gym time after class was added to allow students to decompress after the academic portion of the course. The 90-minute time frame provided time for the practice of skills using role-playing, student teaching opportunities, group activities, one-on-one interactions, and field trips (Keenan, King, Curran, & McPherson, 2013). Participants of the course were youth and young adults with disabilities transitioning into the workforce living in Warsaw, IN and the surrounding area. Student ages ranged from 17-29 years of age. The setting was the local YMCA, and the staff involved in the inclusive programs were the supporting staff for this course. The site supervisor was the Inclusive Programs Coordinator, Anne, Petre, who supervised and mentored the OTD student throughout the process.

The first step in program development is to identify the needs of the population (Snelling, 2014). According to the Public Health Accreditation Board (2011), the primary purpose of a

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health needs assessment is to form strategies to meet the needs identified. Assessing the needs of a population is multi-dimensional, and required the consideration of social, environmental, educational, and administrative needs of both the youth with disabilities and the staff of the YMCA (Snelling, 2014). Thus, a comprehensive literature review was performed focused on the post-secondary outcomes, challenges, and current programs in place for these youth. The role of OT in transitions was also studied to increase understanding of its value in transition programs.

To supplement and provide a more personal and focused view of the needs of this specific population, informal interviews of YMCA staff and participants involved in the inclusive programs were done (Crandall, 2005). How programs and procedures occur are not always as they seem on paper as Catchpole et al., (2017) found in a review of studies of the healthcare system. They contest immersive observation is a vital part of analysis and aids in the development of a hypothesis (Catchpole et al., 2017). As this was related to program development, it was surmised that immersive observation of the current inclusive programs would be a vital component to analyze the needs of these youth. Thus, immersive observations of all the inclusive programs were done. During the needs assessment, logistics, and plans for the location of classroom space and days and times of meetings were discussed.

After assessing needs within the programs at the YMCA, it was necessary to evaluate the needs of Warsaw, IN, to prevent duplication of services. This needs assessment was done through a review of current programs within the community outside of the YMCA for this population and meeting with Cardinal Services, Good Will Employment Services, and Brenda Linky, the Special Education Director at Warsaw Community High School in Warsaw, IN.

Cardinal Services provides employment opportunities for the population with disabilities and partners with both vocational rehabilitation and high schools in the surrounding area to offer

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pre-employment classes (Pre-ETS) for students in special education programs within the high schools (Cardinal Services, 2020). While Cardinal Services is an excellent resource for the population with disabilities, they cannot do everything. In meeting with Cardinal Services, it was discovered that a vocational rehabilitation representative works with them and is on-site once a month; however, the waiting list to meet with them is anywhere from six to eight months long. What do those individuals do in the interim? The pre-employment courses Cardinal Services offers are only available to high school students, but not all high school students in the special education departments, namely those students on the diploma-bound track. Cardinal Services also does not provide educational classes for those individuals with disabilities who have aged out of high school or who are homeschooled. In meeting with Cardinal Services, these issues were brought to light, and they whole-heartedly supported the creation of a class that would fill some of these gaps in services and offered the curriculum used in their Pre-ETS program for review.

Good Will Employment Services in Warsaw, IN, provides services for everyone to assist with resume building, interview preparation, employment connections, and technology training (Good Will, n.d.). In meeting with Good Will, it was found that their main clientele is older adults, retirees, and those needing assistance in learning new technology or computer programs. They do not provide classes and work at a more individualized pace. Each client coming in meets with the employment specialist and makes plans based on their need. Good Will was in full support of this program, interested in a partnership, and excited by the possible benefits it could yield.

The Special Education Department at Warsaw Community High School has internal employment training programs and partners with Cardinal Services to provide pre-employment

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classes for some of their students in special education (Warsaw Community High School, 2019). It was brought to light, through meeting with Brenda Linky, that there is a population of students who have mild disabilities and are diploma-bound but slip through the cracks because they do not qualify for the Pre-ETS program, but also need extra assistance. She was also in full support of the creation of a pre-employment class and offered to assist in the recruitment process and transportation for students.

Meeting with these institutions provided a clear picture of the needs of the community and what programs were currently available for the population with disabilities. These meetings completed the needs assessment of the city and supported the perceived need for the creation of a pre-employment course within a community program setting.

Curriculum Development

After the needs assessment, the next logical step was to plan the intervention (Snelling, 2014). Planning included research on the appropriate curriculum for courses designed for individuals with disabilities to improve their confidence and self-determination necessary to secure employment. Afterward, curriculum development and creation took place in the third phase of the MATCH model, program development (Snelling, 2014). In a study by Keenan et al., (2013), it was discovered that one-on-one and group experiences were equally valuable in life skills coaching for youth with disabilities. They also found that much more important than the format was goal-oriented activities and opportunities for practicing skills in a real-world setting (Keenan et al., 2013). Other successful programs such as Project SEARCH and Vocational Rehabilitation also include one-on-one counseling and hands-on experience (Family and Social Services Association, 2019; Project SEARCH, 2018a). As these programs have been successful

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in their methods, much of the curriculum and class time was dedicated to practicing skills in real-world settings and goal-oriented one-on-one and group experiences.

A study by King et al. (2015), evaluating residential immersive life skills programs, found that the most effective programs provided a high expectation and opportunity environment, used peer teaching and learning, and allowed students to problem-solve together. In keeping with this finding, the curriculum for this course included opportunities for students to problem-solve together and teach each other what they learned. Bush and Tasse (2017), found that there was a strong correlation to simple choice-making and employment in youth aged 21-30. Following this pattern, the students were given opportunities to make simple choices in a safe environment during this class. Doing so boosted their confidence and increased their ability to make more difficult decisions. Hopefully, it increased their ability to secure employment.

Further support for this approach is found in a study by Sheppard and Unsworth (2011). They found that a residential program for youth with disabilities focused on providing opportunities to make choices and develop skills yielded a significant increase in self-determination (Sheppard & Unsworth, 2011). Clearly, opportunities to make choices and practice skills should be an essential part of any transition to work program. The purpose of this course was to improve the confidence of the participants. Giving participants opportunities to make choices, problem-solve, teach one another, and practice those skills aided in developing self-determination, which in turn, increased their confidence (Bush & Tasse, 2017; King et al., 2015; Sheppard & Unsworth, 2011). Each class meeting had a lesson plan, and all lesson plans were compiled into a lesson manual and given to the YMCA staff after the course ended.

Before the class began, a pre- and post-test document needed to be created to measure student success and understanding. Another purpose of the pre- and post-test was to evaluate the

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effectiveness of the course (The National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth who are Neglected, Delinquent, and At-Risk, 2006). The factors correlated positively to employment attainment identified in the literature are self-determination (Martorell et al., 2008), adequate life skills (Kingsnorth et al., 2015), and soft skills (Cameto, 2005). It follows that a pre- and post-test focused on assessing the self-determination, soft skills, and life skills of the students in the course is a valuable tool. The assessment tool was designed by Andrea Bottomly of Cardinal Services and adapted by the OTD student. Administration to students happened at the beginning and end of the class, and results were synthesized. The document was also included in the lesson manual given to the YMCA staff after the project.

Recruitment

During the development stage of the project, strategies were formed for outreach to other community programs, and recruitment began. Recruitment for programs can be challenging, and it is crucial to go through the correct channels to ensure positive community involvement and exposure to the maximum number of possible participants (Joseph, Keller, & Ainsworth, 2016). Joseph et al. (2016), cited five strategies for participant recruitment for studies. This information can be used for recruiting participants for a program with minor revisions. One of the approaches mentioned was to take advantage of personal contacts and existing social relationships (Joseph et al., 2016). Recruiting participants already attending current inclusive programs at the YMCA is how this was done. Five of the nine students who participated in the program were recruited using this strategy.

The next strategy was to discern who the “community gatekeepers” are and work with them (Joseph et al., 2016). Using community gatekeepers was done through collaboration with

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the site supervisor and Director of Child Care and Inclusive Programming, Rachel Hardy, and Brenda Linky, Director of Special Education at Warsaw Community High School, due to their connections within the community. Both were able to provide valuable information on which students would benefit from the programs and even reached out to the parents of those students to help recruit participants. Four of the participants were recruited using this strategy.

Another strategy was to list possible outlets where recruitment can take place and provide materials that describe the purpose and methods of the program for interested participants (Joseph et al., 2016). An informational flyer in keeping with this strategy was created to e-mail to interested parents and possible participants. Contact information to sign up was also included in the flyer. A combination of these strategies yielded nine participants for the pilot pre-employment course and generated interest within the community for future course cycles. A cap of ten students was put in place as smaller class sizes have been shown to grant better student outcomes (Salgado, Mundy, Kupczynski, Chaloo, 2018), especially with this population.

To eliminate the risk of over-recruitment, interested parents had to contact either Anne Petre or the OTD student who were in constant contact before a set deadline. The deadline was set for the week before class began. Despite not reaching the cap of ten students, there were still parents who were turned away for this class session as they missed the deadline. The goal was to give those who signed up the best experience possible through a smaller class size, but a deadline needed to be imposed for proper planning before the start of class meetings. Consent forms were provided to parents and legal guardians to fill out before their student was allowed into class to eliminate any liability risks to the YMCA or OTD student. Included in this form were questions about contact information, diagnosis, allergies, learning styles, sensitivities, and a space for further details for the instructor.

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Implementation

Finally, implementation. The first meeting of the course was dedicated to introducing the flow of the class to the students and assessing their current abilities and understanding through a pre-test to establish a baseline (Lazarowitz & Lieb, 2006). As of 2017, approximately 18% of individuals with a disability 25 and over had less than a high school education (The National Institute on Disability, 2018). Literacy rates among this population in the United States are not well known. However, it is estimated that 60% of adults who are illiterate have some form of a learning disability, and 75 to 80% with learning disabilities possess deficits in language and reading (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2019). Taking these statistics into consideration, it was unsurprising that two of the nine students had at or below a second-grade reading level, thus questions and possible answers in the pre- and post-tests needed to be read to them.

Using hands-on experience and practicing the skills learned allows students to put what they have learned into action and aids in carry-over into real life (Mansker, Fulks, Peters, Curtner, & Ogbeide, 2010). One of the most pressing issues for unemployed persons with disabilities seeking employment and potential employers is transportation (United States Department of Labor, 2013). Thus, this course included opportunities for role-playing activities to practice skills learned and hands-on experience with real-life situations. An example of this was in the transportation section, where students were able to call the Kosciusko Area Bus Service to set up their rides during the Tuesday class for the following Thursday. Students took their trips, paid the bus driver, and rode back. A member of staff was stationed at the YMCA and the destination. The students went in groups of three on the bus. A significant hiccup happened, and the bus driver forgot to come back and get the groups. This situation was a valuable teaching

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moment, as similar situations occur in real life. Students were allowed to problem-solve how they would remedy the problem in a safe environment with low risk. The miscommunication was solved, and they were able to ride the bus back to the YMCA. This experience is an example of how life skills were one of the significant areas where hands-on learning was the most beneficial (Keenan et al., 2013).

An additional example of hands-on experience in a real-life setting was the inclusion of a mock interviewing event. Professionals from the community who are regularly involved in the hiring process came in and interviewed one to two of the students and provided feedback. After the mock interviews, students asked the interviewers questions through a panel discussion. These real-life practical learning experiences were vital in increasing the confidence of the participants in themselves and allowed them to receive feedback and problem solve. Experiencing this event took some of the apprehension away from those experiences, and in turn, allowed them to learn more about themselves and their abilities, which is a vital piece in self-determination (Williams-Diehm et al., 2014).

Evaluation

During the second to last class meeting, the post-test was administered to participants. Afterward, a course evaluation took place through a panel of individuals, including the OTD student, site supervisor, and the member of staff who assisted in the running of the program. Surveys were sent out to the parents of the participants to glean feedback and find out if carry-over was happening at home. The purpose of these measures was to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the program and discuss results. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a cyclical framework for program evaluation designed to put the information gathered to use, which was considered during this process of evaluation (CDC, 2012). The components in

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the cycle are to articulate the program, focus on relevant aspects, gather valid and related information, provide justification for conclusions, share findings, and involve relevant stakeholders (CDC, 2012). Through creating a panel of these individuals and sending out parent surveys, many of these components were fulfilled, especially involving relevant stakeholders.

Gathering information was accomplished by comparing the pre- and post-test scores and interpreting the results. These results also allowed the panel to discern where problem areas still exist and provided an opportunity to discuss how the program can be adjusted to meet those needs better. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the course is the final step in the MATCH model and is essential for sustainability, improvement, and continuation of the course (Snelling, 2014). With the process in mind, the next step is to review the objectives to ensure the process aligns with them.

Alignment with Objectives

Performing a literature review, interviewing YMCA staff and inclusive program participants, observation of the current programs, and meeting with local organizations offering similar services completed the objective of assessing the needs of the target population and community. Curriculum development and refinement were achieved through collaboration with the YMCA staff and OTD mentor and a review of current research of best practices. It was necessary to include opportunities for problem-solving in real-life experiences where skills were practiced within the curriculum (Family and Social Services Association, 2019; Keenan et al., 2013; Mansker et al., 2010; Project SEARCH, 2018a) which helped to fulfill the main objective of building confidence in participants.

Recruiting nine participants for the course was methodical. It included the proven strategies of taking advantage of personal connections in place, identifying and collaborating

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with community “gatekeepers,” and providing information to potential participants through flyers distributed to interested parties through e-mail (Joseph et al., 2016). Vital individuals to this process were Anne Petre, the Coordinator of Inclusive Programs coordinator, Rachel Hardy, the Director of Child Care and Inclusive Programming at the YMCA, and Brenda Linky, Director of Special Education at Warsaw Community High School due to their connections within the community.

The most critical objective, evaluation of the course, was completed through pre-and post-tests that provided a way to track how much the participants have improved and learned during the course (The National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth who are Neglected, Delinquent, and At-Risk, 2006). Discussions with staff, volunteers, and participants and surveys sent out to parents were also part of the evaluation as it included relevant “stakeholders” in the process (CDC, 2012). The objective of training a YMCA employee to continue the course was completed through including staff during the course itself. Finally, the main aim of improving the self-efficacy and confidence of participants was accomplished through the focus on enhancing self-determination, soft skills, interviewing skills, and life skills and providing a space where participants could practice real-life events in a safe environment (Carter et al., 2011; Kingsnorth et al., 2015).

Conceptual Framework

Theory must be involved in any program plan and development as it provides a framework from which we can build projects that will be successful and make a positive impact (Stevenson, 2014). The theory chosen to provide the framework for this project was the Theory of Change. The Theory of Change is cyclical and has six steps allowing developers to move through and deal with issues that may arise in the planning and implementation process (Van Es

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et al., 2015). These six steps are to identify the purpose of the change, create a vision of and define the change needed, pinpoint where the change is needed, prioritize, create pathways for change through activities that logically lead to change, and finally, review and adapt (Van Es et al., 2015).

The main objective of this project is to increase the self-efficacy and confidence of program participants, so they are more likely to become employed. All three of the first steps were completed by suggesting increasing employment in the population of youth with disabilities in Warsaw, IN. The change proposed was to increase employment within this specific population. The vision of the change was an increase in employment in youth and young adults with disabilities in Warsaw, IN. The need was pinpointed within the population of youth and young adults with disabilities in Warsaw, IN. The employment rates across the country for persons with disabilities being deficient at just over 30% (United States Department of Labor, 2019a), and research showing the lack of transition services available in more rural communities similar to Warsaw, IN (Muth, 2015), support this.

The last three steps of this process work together as the priority became assisting these youth in developing soft skills, interviewing skills, and life skills, thus improving their self-determination (Bush & Tasse, 2017; King et al., 2015; Sheppard & Unsworth, 2011). The logical next step was to create a course that teaches them these skills and provides a space where they can practice fulfilling the fifth step of creating pathways to change (King et al., 2015). The final stage of reviewing and adapting in this project came in the form of an evaluation completed through pre- and post-assessments of the students, discussions with a panel of staff and volunteers involved in the program, surveys sent to parents, and the development of plans to

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improve. After a review of the process, objectives, and theory, the next step is outlining the timeline of these events.

Timeline

A common component of any project is a timeline outlining when each element of the project took place (Bunner, 2016; Stepanov, 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to describe the timeline of this project. In the first week of the project, informal interviews with current participants and staff in the inclusive programs were performed to gain a more personal understanding of their main concerns (Crandall, 2005). Interviews with family members and parents of participants also occurred during this time as positive parental perspectives are a predictor of successful employment, according to a study by Wehman et al. (2014). Immersive observation and volunteering with all other inclusive programs took place throughout the project to gain a more realistic view of how programs are run in this setting and build rapport with participants and their families (Catchpole et al., 2017).

During the second and third weeks of the project, reviewing and synthesizing emerging themes from the responses of interviewees occurred to solidify the focus of the course. In the process, meetings with organizations in town who offered similar services began to be scheduled to ensure duplication of services did not occur and build connections within the community. These findings were discussed with the site supervisor after she accompanied the OTD student to each meeting to ensure accuracy and clarity. During weeks four and five, meetings with other community organizations, and the local high school occurred to recruit participants and discuss services. Curriculum development also occurred during weeks four through six. Recruitment continued through January 21, 2020, a week before the class started. The start date of the class was Tuesday, January 28, 2020, with the last class meeting occurring on Thursday, March 12,

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2020. The last week of the class consisted of a mock interviewing event, post-testing, and a job fair. The simulated interviewing event and post-testing occurred in the same class meeting. The final class meeting was dedicated to a job fair where the students had the opportunity to speak to eight diverse local businesses who were hiring, increasing their likelihood of obtaining employment.

The last two weeks were some of the most important as they were devoted to the evaluation of the course. This evaluation consisted of comparing the pre-tests with the post-tests, evaluating the effectiveness of the course, reviewing parent surveys and feedback, discussing sustainability, and making revisions on curriculum and class structure to improve future student success. Evaluation is a vital component of any project or course as it is an opportunity to see the impact, or lack of effects, the course made and works to improve weaknesses (Snelling, 2014). One of the goals was to create a sustainable and valuable addition to the current inclusion programs in Warsaw, IN. Without evaluation and discussions about plans for sustainability, this goal would not be fulfilled.

Conclusion and Envisioned Next Steps

In conclusion, there was a need in the community of Warsaw, IN, for more support programs for youth with disabilities transitioning into the workforce. OT can have a positive impact on these youth (AOTA, 2014; Cleary et al., 2015; Coakley & Bryze, 2018; Wehman et al., 2015) and needed to be included in the creation of a new program due to its positive effects on youth in the transition to adulthood. Due to this need, an OT-based pre-employment pilot course was added to the inclusive programs at the local YMCA in Warsaw, IN. The creation of said course was the logical next step in filling the needs of the community and promoting change

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in the right direction according to the MATCH program development model and the Theory of Change (Snelling, 2014; Van Es et al., 2015).

The methods of developing and implementing this program were in line with the MATCH program development model, the Theory of Change, and the outcome objectives of this project. Development, implementation, and evaluation of the pre-employment course occurred throughout the project, and revisions were made after the evaluation was complete. The materials for the course, i.e., curriculum manual, learning materials, and pre- and post-tests, were given to the staff at the YMCA who will take charge of future course cycles. The OTD student will continue to be on-call for YMCA staff should any questions arise, or support is needed. Frequent additions to the course and additions of OT within the remaining inclusive programs at the YMCA could be a meaningful OTD project for future OTD students.

Chapter 4. Results and Analysis

Introduction

A good practice when developing a program is to have a measure of effectiveness and report on the success or failure of the said program so that revisions can be made, and effectiveness measured (McGuire, 2016). Without a measurement of success, programs struggle to find funding and thus become unsustainable (McGuire, 2016). In keeping with best practice, the purpose of this chapter is to outline the development and inner workings of the pre-employment class, how effectiveness was measured, report results, and discuss the implications of the results.

Project Description

In conducting a needs assessment before creating this course, the organizations of Cardinal Services, Good Will, and Warsaw Public High School were contacted, and meetings set with each. During the meetings, discussions about the services they offer, and the population served occurred. Through these meetings, holes in services for diploma-bound students with mild disabilities, students who are home-schooled with disabilities, and young and older adults with disabilities out of school were uncovered. These individuals do not have access to the services provided by Cardinal services with their transitional program. Cardinal Services has a representative of Vocational Rehabilitation who is in their offices once or twice a month. However, individuals wishing to participate in Vocational Rehabilitation often wait months before seeing a specialist and getting set up with a job coach. This finding supported the idea to create a pre-employment class for individuals to attend while they waited for Vocational Rehabilitation to contact them. It also could lead to a job and free up their place in Vocational

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Rehabilitation for someone else. After meeting with these organizations, the need for more programs that reach this passed-over population became apparent. The purpose of meeting with each of these businesses and organizations was to ensure services would not be duplicated, and it would be filling a need within the community.

In addition to meeting with local organizations that serve the population with disabilities in Warsaw, the Inclusive Programs hosted at the YMCA were observed and discussed with Anne Petre, Inclusive Programs Coordinator, and Rachel Hardy, Director of Child Care. Through observation and discussions about each of their programs, a foundation for the pre-employment class began to form. Plans were also made for which employees would be available to help during the course, and the addition of a job fair and mock interviewing event were discussed and plans made for implementation of both. These additions added two class periods to the original 12 planned. The needs assessment fulfilled the objectives of becoming familiar with the needs assessment process, assessing the needs of the current employment program (Support Champion) at the YMCA, and identify three to four topics for a new pre-employment course curriculum.

The pre-employment course consisted of 12 class periods lasting an hour-and-a-half rather than the scheduled 14. Adjustments were made for the two class cancellations due to weather through the transportation section being condensed to one rather than two weeks. There was a total of nine students enrolled in the class. Four students were recruited through the high school special education director, Brenda Linky. The remaining five students were recruited through the inclusive programs at the YMCA with the assistance of Anne Petre and Rachel Hardy.

Each parent was required to fill out consent forms designed by Anne Petre and the OTD student outlining the diagnosis, allergies, learning style, and needs of their student. These forms were due the Friday before the class was to begin and reviewed before starting the course. The

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forms also included spaces for parent contact information and any pertinent information about their student the instructor might need to ensure success. If these forms were not filled out in time, the student would not be able to participate as their parent did not give consent to participate in the class. Turning in forms on time was not an issue in this class cycle.

There were ten lesson plans, one for each topic or a combination of topics, for the class. Lesson plans were not created for the transportation practice session, mock interviewing event, and job fair. With the school cancellations, only nine lesson plans were utilized. The two transportation lessons were combined into one, and there was only one class period set aside for practice riding the Kosciusko Area Bus Service (KABS) rather than the planned two. Each of the students still had the experience of calling and setting up their rides. Three students were absent the day of the rides due to another inclement weather school cancellation and did not get to take their trips. One student was absent from the mock interviewing event, but all students were present for the job fair.

A variety of diagnoses were present in the same class, including Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, psychological diagnoses, autism, developmental delay, and Williams syndrome. Two of the nine students had a second grade or lower literacy level with limited comprehension. All students were able to communicate verbally. However, one student was challenging to understand and struggled to understand the material presented. Three students required one-on-one attention for success, an impossibility with the amount of staff provided for the course. The OTD student was the instructor for the class supervised by Anne Petre. There was always staff available should the need arise and for student safety; however, only one member of staff was provided for exclusive classroom help halfway through the seven-week class.

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Measurement of Effectiveness

A pre-test and post-test were administered to the students on the first and last class meetings. The purpose of the pre-test was to establish a baseline for student's understanding of the material covered in class. At the end of the class, the same document was used as a post-test to measure their knowledge again. This document asked a series of questions with four possible responses. Points from one to four were awarded depending on the answers. The higher the points scored, the more understanding of the material was assumed. Options to choose from included "I have no idea," "I know what that is, but not how to use it," "I'm starting to understand and use that skill," and "Yes! I know what that is and how to use it". Topics covered included time management, budgeting, transportation, keeping oneself and clothing clean, community resources, teamwork, problem-solving, communication of needs, strengths, resumes, the application process for employment, and answering questions in a job interview.

Surveys were sent out to all parents to receive feedback on how they perceived the class was affecting their students. The survey was sent halfway through the class cycle at week three and again at week seven. Three out of the nine surveys were returned from week three, and four were returned after week seven. The parent survey asked a series of questions using a Likert scale from zero to ten with zero being no change, and ten being a vast improvement. Topics for questions asked were decision making, problem-solving, teamwork, transportation knowledge and practice, self-advocacy, and social skills. There was also space to write feedback for the course and suggestions for improvement.

Results

When comparing the pre and post-test results, shown in figures 4.1-4.2, seven out of the eight students saw an increase in scores. One student's data was unusable as they were absent for

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the post-test. The student who saw a decrease was never confident in their abilities and may not have understood everything taught. There was a mean increase of approximately six points when all scores were taken into consideration. The highest growth was ten points, and the lowest was a decrease of two points, shown in figure 4.3.

The confidence of the parents in their student's ability to obtain and secure employment mirrored the confidence of the students in themselves. The higher the student scored on their post-test, the more likely it was that their parent expressed confidence in them and their abilities. The students that scored lower on the post-test were the students whose parents had less positive feedback in their parent surveys. It is important to note after the first survey was sent out, critical concerns were brought up by specific parents about their student's benefit in taking the class. These concerns sparked discussion about having support staff in the room. After the addition of another staff member, there was a marked decrease in distracting behaviors and parent surveys showed an increase in the change in their student. It is also worthy of note that four surveys were returned the second time compared to the three that were returned the first time.

Overall, this course increased the knowledge and confidence of most students. Even with some students falling behind others, there was a mean increase in scores of six points. This increase shows an increase in knowledge and confidence overall despite one student's decrease in their score. The parent surveys back this up as their confidence level in their student reflected the confidence and knowledge of each student, shown through the post-test.

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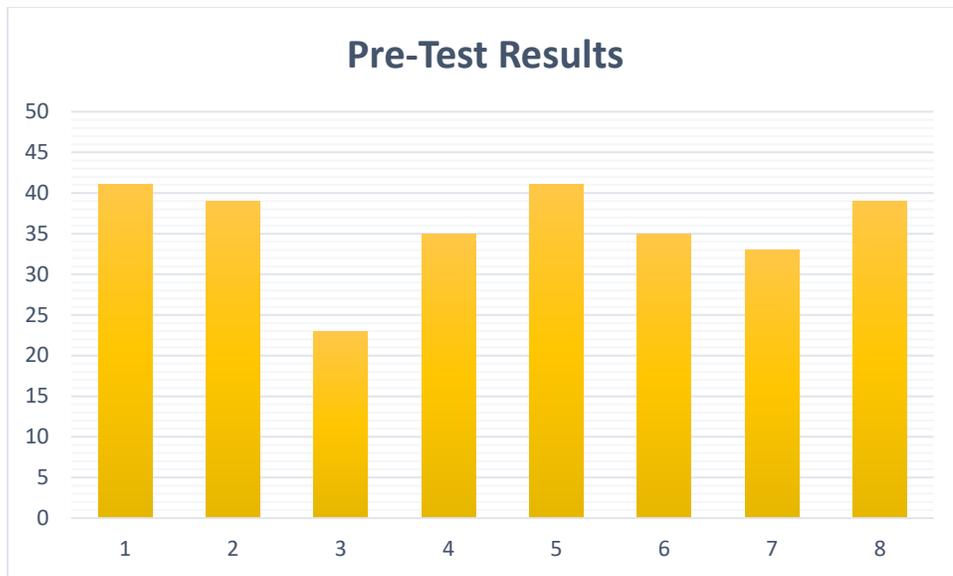


Figure 4.1

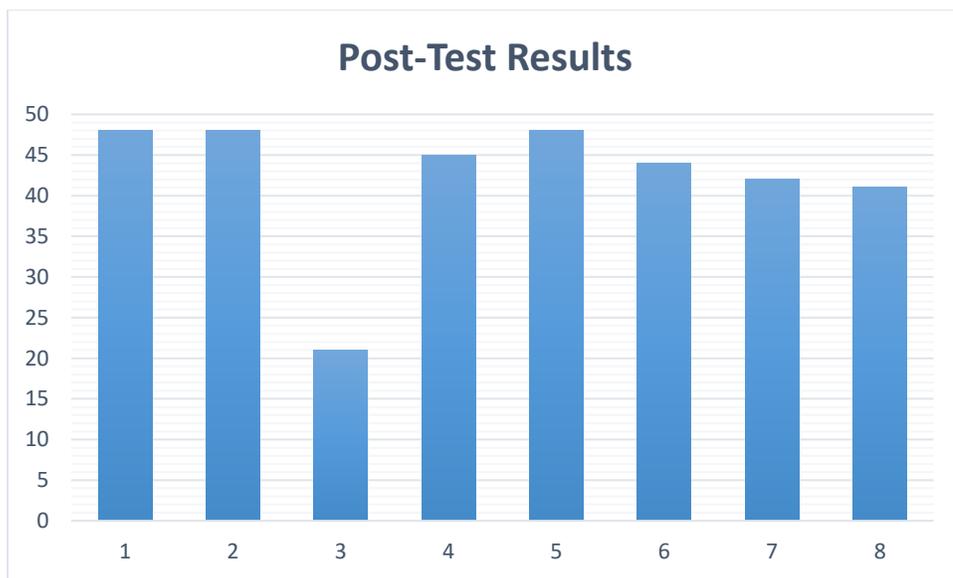


Figure 4.2

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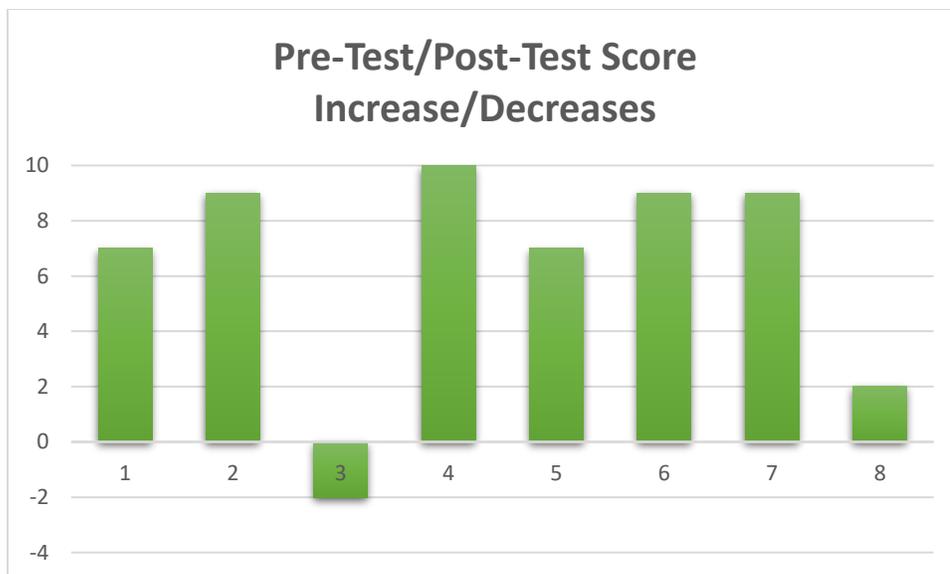


Figure 4.3

Discussion

Many things came to light as the course continued that need to be addressed in future programs and classes. These items consisted of the need to separate students by levels of ability, the possibility of splitting up the material to create two classes, more staff availability, and different class sizes.

First, the ability levels of the students must be addressed. Out of nine students, there were approximately three students who needed much more attention and focus due to ability levels. That level of instruction was not possible with one instructor. Toward the end of the class, an additional staff member was provided for classroom support, which was helpful. However, this was still not enough to allow the lower level students to keep up with the higher-level students. If the lesson was slowed to accommodate the lower level students, the higher-level students became restless, bored, and behaviors began emerging. If the lesson was at the appropriate speed for the higher-level students, the lower-level students became lost and confused. For the good of all, it is proposed that screenings for future classes are conducted

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before the beginning of a class and that two separate class options are available that fit higher and lower-level students. This separation will alleviate stress on instructors and students alike as the class will be tailored to their ability level. In the profession of OT, there is a term used, the “just right challenge” (Ayres, 1979); this term refers to the balance between the boredom of things being too easy and the frustration of things being too difficult. That space is where learning is most effective and efficient. With the diversity of the students and ability levels in this pilot class, achieving the “just right challenge” was almost an impossibility.

Second, breaking up the material into two separate classes. During the program, many lessons needed more in-depth discussions, leading to an inability for each student to practice the skill being discussed. This problem goes back to the issue of differing ability levels. Some of the students did not need as much time spent on the social aspects of the course, and the skills they needed to understand were eclipsed by a review of material they were already familiar with because other students needed that material. Separating the class into two five-week classes where one focuses on the social skills of having a job and the other focuses on the practical aspects of obtaining and retaining employment will allow more time on each section if needed. Separating the material will also ensure that students in the pre-employment course are ready for it and will increase their chances of success. It is also proposed that any student wishing to take the pre-employment class to be required to take the social skills course first as a pre-requisite. Doing so will allow more time to screen students and hone their social skills needed to secure employment. The social skills class should also be separated by ability level to ensure that “just right challenge.”

Staff availability to teach and assist with the class was a serious concern and issue during this pilot class. The first half of the course had only one instructor with no classroom support

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staff. Staff was on hand should any problems arise, but there was not a designated member of the team to assist in the classroom. This situation was challenging considering the ability levels and diversity of diagnoses. One on one attention was virtually impossible with nine students and one instructor without behaviors cropping up and loss of control of the classroom. The result was three of the nine students falling behind. Concerns about the three lower-level student's performance in the class were brought up by both parents and the instructor. During the remaining weeks of the course, a staff member was assigned to classroom support and was an immense help to alleviate some of the stress and control of the classroom while also ensuring that students received one on one attention when they needed it. As a suggestion moving forward, it is proposed that at least two individuals, staff, or volunteers, are present in each classroom. Grouping students by ability level will significantly assist in needing less staff as all students in the class will be working at a similar pace. However, having a second individual in the classroom will make the class run smoother and more efficiently. Suggestions for securing volunteers include partnering with the local college to set up possible internships or ways for students to fulfill their volunteer hours and pulling from the pool of individuals already volunteering their time with the YMCA.

Finally, the class sizes should depend on staff availability and ability level. With one instructor, it is recommended that a maximum of six students in the lower level class be implemented. With the higher-level students and one instructor, it is recommended that a maximum of ten to twelve students be applied. The key is the ability levels staying separate so that each student can learn at their own pace. As shown in this class, when the correct pace is implemented, students learn quickly, and teaching is more efficient and effective.

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The main issue faced with this pilot program was the diverse abilities of the students. In the future, screening processes need to be more robust to ensure that each class has students with similar abilities for the benefit of all involved. To do so, more in-depth questionnaires when signing up for the class, a pre-test or evaluation with observation, and more face time with participants before class begins are recommended. These measures should alleviate some of the issues seen in this pilot class. Again, that “just right challenge” is critical when developing such programs.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to this project. One limitation was the short 14-week time frame to develop curriculum, recruit participants, implement the course, evaluate the course, and train YMCA employees for sustainability. Another limitation was the reliability of participants to attend the course regularly. Participants coming from the high school were bussed over to the YMCA. When school was canceled due to inclement weather, the pre-employment class was canceled because many students could not attend. The cancellations caused the transportation section to be condensed from two weeks into one. Only four participants had perfect attendance in class. Those participants unable to attend every course missed important information and learning opportunities to practice skills, thus decreasing carry-over of skills into daily life. An additional limitation was the diverse ability levels of the students making reaching the “just right challenge” extremely difficult for all the students together.

Delimitations

There were a few delimitations of the proposed project that helped to mitigate the limitations of this project. One was the space and staff support provided by the YMCA for the class to carry out the project and assist with classes. Another delimitation is the number of

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participants; nine students were recruited to keep the class size small. The small class size allowed more attention to each student. There was not an even number of students, so groups of three were used, or the instructor partnered with students. These small groups allowed students to practice and give each other feedback. Modeling was also used; students were happy to participate in a role-play scenario in front of the class so everyone could understand. A job fair was added to the end of the course to give the students real-world experience in speaking with hiring managers and an event to prepare to attend. These delimitations assisted in carry-over, allowed a space for the class to occur and increased the ability of the instructor to control behaviors in class.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

Introduction

A common theme throughout this project has been the lack of services for the often passed-over population of youth and young adults with disabilities currently passing through the transition to adulthood and the workforce. While there are programs and resources available, they cannot keep up with the demand for pre-employment and social skills training. An example of this is the six to the eight-month waiting list to get in to see an employment specialist with vocational rehabilitation in Warsaw, IN, that was brought to light through meeting with Cardinal Services. Recall that there are only 28 pre-employment programs specifically for individuals with disabilities available in the state of Indiana. Nineteen Vocational Rehabilitation locations, seven Project SEARCH locations, and two Gigi's Playhouse locations (Family and Social Services Association, 2019; Gigi's Playhouse, 2019b; Indiana University, Bloomington, 2019). With at least 881,892 individuals in the state of Indiana who have a disability (Kraus et al., 2018; United States Census Bureau, 2019), 28 pre-employment programs specific to their population is woefully inadequate. Adding another option for people to utilize alleviates some of that stress, and allows individuals to bypass long waits and secure employment at a more rapid rate.

Occupational therapists focus on occupations, which are meaningful activities that people perform daily. Employment is one of those meaningful activities that affect multiple aspects of adult life. Unemployment in the population with disabilities is extremely high at 69.6% (United States Department of Labor, 2019a), much of this is due to a lack of preparation during the transitional period of youth to adulthood for individuals with disabilities (Awsumb et al., 2016; Gauthier-Boudreault et al., 2017). Another problem is the lack of OT involvement in transition

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teams (Eismann et al., 2017). Occupational therapists have a place at the table in transition teams because employment is an occupation that brings meaning and purpose to the lives of adults (Berkman, 2014; Rosman et al., 2020). Work affects almost every other occupation in a person's life. Some occupations affected by employment status are the ability to care for oneself, live independently, and income often dictates what leisure activities in which individuals can participate (Berkman, 2014). Employment also gives individuals a sense of purpose and self (Berkman, 2014). Many individuals with disabilities want to be more independent and make decisions for themselves (Scott et al., 2014). The purpose of this chapter is to discuss future considerations and how this project impacted the field of OT.

Future Considerations

People with disabilities, even severe disabilities, deserve a fighting chance to be taken seriously, treated like an adult, and become employed. This pre-employment class allowed these nine students to learn critical social and practical skills and taught them about self-determination and how to apply it in their lives. Some of the best class meetings where students retained information were those with practical application pieces such as the teamwork, transportation, resume building sections, and the mock interviewing event. These results highlight the findings by Keenan et al. (2013), that hands-on experience and real-life experiences were most beneficial in increasing the self-efficacy of students. It follows that future programs should follow suite and be sure to include practical applications to programs wherever possible. As shown by the increase in most scores from pre-test to post-test of the students in this course, the student's understanding and confidence in themselves increased, thus making them more likely to secure employment. More programs like the program described need to exist to keep up with the

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amount of youth and young adults, and even some older adults with disabilities, who need assistance in preparing to obtain and retain employment.

The time is now to implement more programs to serve this vulnerable population. When creating programs such as the one described in this paper, care needs to be taken to include social skills training, self-determination, communication styles, and teamwork (Orentlicher, 2015; Carter et al., 2011). These pieces are essential for any program preparing individuals for employment as businesses are looking for employees who can communicate well and work within a team harmoniously (Doyle, 2020).

This class had many different elements and a large amount of material to cover. It is possible to put all of this material into one program; however, a better idea may be to separate the social skills and the practical applications of the pre-employment process to allow the pre-employment section to be open to more individuals. The social skills piece is where many individuals with disabilities need the most help as they often do not have the soft skills required to secure employment (Riesen et al., 2014). These individuals still need the pre-employment piece of creating a resume, preparing for and practicing interview skills, figuring out the transportation system, and working on networking skills; they simply need the social skills piece first. Separating the programs from one another will help to create a more defined focus and allow more time to perfect the necessary skills. Rather than running a six-week comprehensive pre-employment course, it is recommended that one five-week social skills course run and then a five-week pre-employment course.

Conclusion

OT themes were the undercurrent of this program. The focus of OT is on function and the occupations that allow individuals to find purpose and complete the activities of daily living they

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both want and need to accomplish in their lives (AOTA, 2014). This course focused on preparing youth and young adults with disabilities to enter the workforce and zeroed in on the skills needed to increase the possibility of employment.

This project showcased how influential OT can be in the community program setting. It also displays how much OT involvement has to offer in filling the need for more effective programs that will prepare youth and young adults with disabilities to enter the workforce. Recall the vital skill occupational therapists have of activity analysis; this skill can be applied to program development. Pinpointing exactly where the gaps in service are in a needs assessment and working to fill those needs is an integral piece of program development (Snelling, 2014). Essentially, the needs assessment piece is an activity analysis applied to program development. Without this essential piece, creating new programs becomes inefficient.

Adaptation is another unique skill occupational therapists have in their repertoire (AOTA, 2014) that was explicitly used within the curriculum development portion of this project. Many of the lesson plans were adapted from existing lesson plans with the needs and comprehension levels of the population served in mind. Also, the “just right challenge” was a goal in the class meetings when presenting the material. This goal was not achieved due to the variations in the ability levels; however, the unique OT perspective magnified the need to separate the ability levels to meet that “just right challenge.” Occupational therapists can put all the pieces together and adapt existing programs to be more efficient and effective for participants.

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 the pre- and post-tests supported the findings of Lindsey et al., (2019b) that merely having a program that focuses on the transition from school to the workforce

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improves at least one area of the transition process for these youth. There was more than one area of the transition process that was enhanced by this program, which shows that including OT in the transition to work programs is a valuable addition for effectiveness and efficiency. Further programs and research need to be done to continue to support the involvement of 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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