

Spring 5-14-2023

Expanding Accessibility for Guests with Autism-Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Who Visit the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens in Jacksonville, FL

Lauren Schermerhorn

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, lschermerhorn@usa.edu

Thais Petrocelli

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, tpetrocelli@usa.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://soar.usa.edu/otdcapstonesspring2023>



Part of the [Animal-Assisted Therapy Commons](#), and the [Occupational Therapy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Schermerhorn, L., & Petrocelli, T. (2023, May 14). Expanding Accessibility for Guests with Autism-Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Who Visit the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens in Jacksonville, FL. Poster presented at the Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium, University of St Augustine for Health Sciences. Retrieved from <https://soar.usa.edu/otdcapstonesspring2023/24>

This Poster/presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the OTD Capstone Symposia at SOAR @ USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spring 2023 Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium by an authorized administrator of SOAR @ USA. For more information, please contact soar@usa.edu, erobinson@usa.edu.

Expanding Accessibility for Guests with Autism-Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Who Visit the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens in Jacksonville, FL

Lauren Schermerhorn, OTD; Dr. Thais Petrocelli, OTD, MHA, OTR/L

Background

- Between 5% and 16.5% of the general population identifies as having atypical sensory responses to stimuli (Bodison & Parham, 2018).
- Sensory sensitivity is correlated with deficits in social play, increased withdrawal, and negative temperament (Thye et al., 2018).
- Oversensitivity is due to a more excitable nervous system and decreased ability to process noxious stimuli (Zetler et al., 2022).
- There are limited opportunities for fun, leisure activities that are accessible to those with ASD in the community, across the country (Schwartzman & Knowles, 2022).



Problem

Due to public events being commonly characterized by crowded spaces, loud volumes, and unpredictable changes, attractions such as the Jacksonville Zoo can be challenging for those with ASD without proper accommodations (Kimura et al., 2020).

Purpose

The purpose of this capstone project was to advocate for updated evidence-based sensory accommodations at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens for those with an ASD diagnosis with the intention of creating a more inclusive zoo experience.

Methods

- Conducted a needs assessment to identify what areas within the zoo would benefit from sensory accommodations.
- Created five versions of a Jacksonville Zoo field-trip specific social story.
- Distributed an IRB approved questionnaire to Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens Education Department staff and Duval County Public School System teachers (OTD-1130-571).
- Delivered a presentation to members of the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens staff titled "Sensory Sensitivity, explained".
- Created two versions of a sensory map and a communication board, in collaboration with the Jacksonville Zoo Graphic Design team.

Educational Outcomes

- Created five versions of a field-trip specific social story document with the intention of eliminating the unpredictability associated with visiting an unknown public attraction.
- Delivered a presentation to Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens staff members with the purpose of providing education on ASD and how to effectively help guests who become overstimulated on property.
- Created two versions of a sensory map of the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens to illustrate levels of environmental stimuli throughout the park.
 - Version I: Color-Coded Map
 - Version II: Black and White Patterned Map (color-blind accessible)
- Created a communication board complete with basic requests such as "I am too hot" and "I am lost" on the first side and popular animals on exhibit on the second side, for guests who are non-verbal.
- Distributed an IRB-approved questionnaire regarding current zoo accessibility and accommodation recommendations (OTD-1130-571). Compiled results into a thematic analysis to organize feedback.

Suggestions for Improved Accessibility at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens

