EMPOWERING THE SOUTH BRONX COMMUNITY THROUGH OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SERVICES AND RESOURCE APPLICATION

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LITERATURE SUMMARY

Research indicates children under the age of three with developmental delays or disabilities who live in low-income neighborhoods of color are less likely to receive critical services that could help them (APC, 2019). Only 61% of children found eligible for services in the Bronx received them in the 30-day legal deadline—less than in any other borough.

Immersion is crucial to success in community practice and allows therapists to face their own biases head on (Volz-Doll, 2008). In order to understand community needs, one must spend time exploring the impact of occupations on communities and building relationships. Application of OT principles can provide advocacy opportunities, skill building, education, and client-centered approaches (Smalls, Smith, Yu, & Lewis, 2019).

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Phase I: Completed virtual needs assessment with capstone key informants in June, 2020. Emphasized the mass inequality occurring in the South Bronx, and how the pandemic had only magnified those effects.

Phase II: Completed on-site classroom observations, caregiver questionnaires, and informal staff interviews by week 2 to determine how occupational therapy could support the various needs of children in the community.

Qualitative Tools:
1. Informal interviews
2. Observations
3. Caregiver questionnaire

Identified Needs:
1. Caregiver & staff support
2. Education
3. Advocacy

PROJECT GOALS / OBJECTIVES

- Actively collaborate and communicate with staff and caregivers to better understand community needs and identify areas for improvement at AHOB.
- Apply evidence-based OT principles and intervention methods to the preschool, babies-to-three, and after-school programs at AHOB. Enhance understanding of the role of occupational therapy in vulnerable communities and youth programs through full-immersion in AHOB setting.
- Design and implement in-service presentation on the unique role of occupational therapy and the capstone purpose and project.
- Implement relevant evidence-based practice through in-service evidence-based practice regarding trauma-informed care, social-emotional learning, and increase overall knowledge on systemic oppression and how it correlates to childhood development.
- Develop educational OT Toolkit manual for staff and caregivers with occupational therapy-based strategies and resources that can use to improve seamless series programming and positive youth development.
- Construct interactive resources and classroom supports that enhance participation and support developmental/sensory needs of children.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

The purpose of the capstone project will focus on the provision of occupation-focused care, essential resources, and staff/caregiver education to better support the mission of A House on Beekman and address the needs and barriers commonly faced by the South Bronx community. OT strategies will be implemented through the creation of an OT Toolkit that supports the seamless series and empowers community development and well-being.

Visual Support Board: If your child is overwhelmed by too many choices OR some of the schedule pieces are not options in your home, you can cut out a smaller number of choices and stick them on this board for your child to choose from. This can also be used as a reward choice board.

Emotion Thermometer: Implemented to help children develop coping skills and a deepening understanding of emotion. Recognize their emotions/feelings. This tool allows children to recognize and put a name to those feelings and rate how intensely they feel each emotion.

Sensory Exploration Bin: Visual and physical tool for calming and self-regulation. Allows for decompression, sensory exploration, and can be a great addition to classroom calm down corner or sensory area.

Interactive Busy Booklet: Targets fine motor skills, self-care tasks, and executive functioning. Enhances child engagement by providing various activities that promote child participation and focuses attention.

PROJECT EVALUATION

Conducted informal interviews with caregivers and teachers. Themes from interviews included the following:
- Teachers can implement sensory breaks and calm down corners into the classroom.
- Students benefit from mindfulness and coping strategy practice through different activities such as yoga, meditation, coloring, deep breathing, and practicing gratitude.
- Caregivers and staff reported improvements in the following areas: sensory, behavior, fine motor skills, self-care tasks, socialization, and visual perception.

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