

Teacher Wellness Fridays at Volunteers of America Los Angeles (VOALA)

Andrea Dionisio, OTS; Kathryn Duke, OTD, OTR/L; Danielle Friberg, OTD, OTR/L; Alma Nunez, M.S., LMFT

West Coast University – Center for Graduate Studies



Volunteers of America Los Angeles (VOALA)

- A non-profit, human services organization that was founded in 1896 to serve individuals from under-served communities throughout the United States
- Populations they serve:**
 - Low-income families
 - Veterans
 - Victims of domestic violence
 - Individuals challenged by homelessness, substance use, and addiction
- First Early Head Start/Head Start (EHS/HS) Programs were developed in the 1990's throughout Los Angeles County and the San Fernando Valley
- Mission & Philosophy of EHS/HS Program**
Advocating for children and families from different backgrounds to support the children's school success and improve their quality of life (VOALA, 2014).

Identified Needs

- Implementation of a teacher wellness program for EHS/HS teachers
- Addressed the following challenges for VOALA early education teachers:**
 - Inconsistent work-set up (work from home due to COVID-19 pandemic)
 - Maintaining occupational balance
 - Accommodating to children with challenging behaviors

Literature Review

- Job-related stressors in teaching profession for early education teachers such as working past school hours and experiencing role ambiguity may lead into higher levels of burnout, stress, and compassion fatigue (Cassidy et al., 2019; Merida-Lopez et al., 2017).
- There is a growing teacher attrition rate across the nation due to the lack of work-life balance in teachers which may impact the quality of education for students (Johari et al., 2017; Cassidy et al., 2019; Merida-Lopez et al., 2017).
- Alternative stress reduction methods and weekly support groups have been effective in lowering stress levels and compassion fatigue in teachers to support their mental health (Sharp Donahoo et al., 2018).
- Occupational therapists have a distinct skill set in providing interventions in emerging practice areas such as mental health and workplace wellness (Kirsh et al., 2019; Jensen 2021).
- The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the methods on how teachers perform work tasks, especially with the abrupt change of working from home (Nigam et al., 2020; Purwanto et al., 2020).

Student Learning Objectives

- The doctorate student completed the following objectives by the end of 14 weeks:**
- Developed teacher wellness workshops based on the identified needs
 - Implemented a teacher wellness program and analyzed its effectiveness and outcomes
 - Delivered virtual ergonomic consultations for the VOALA mental health team

Program Description: Teacher Wellness Fridays

Purpose: Provided education on themes of health management and occupational wellness for EHS/HS teachers to support their well-being

Program Objectives:

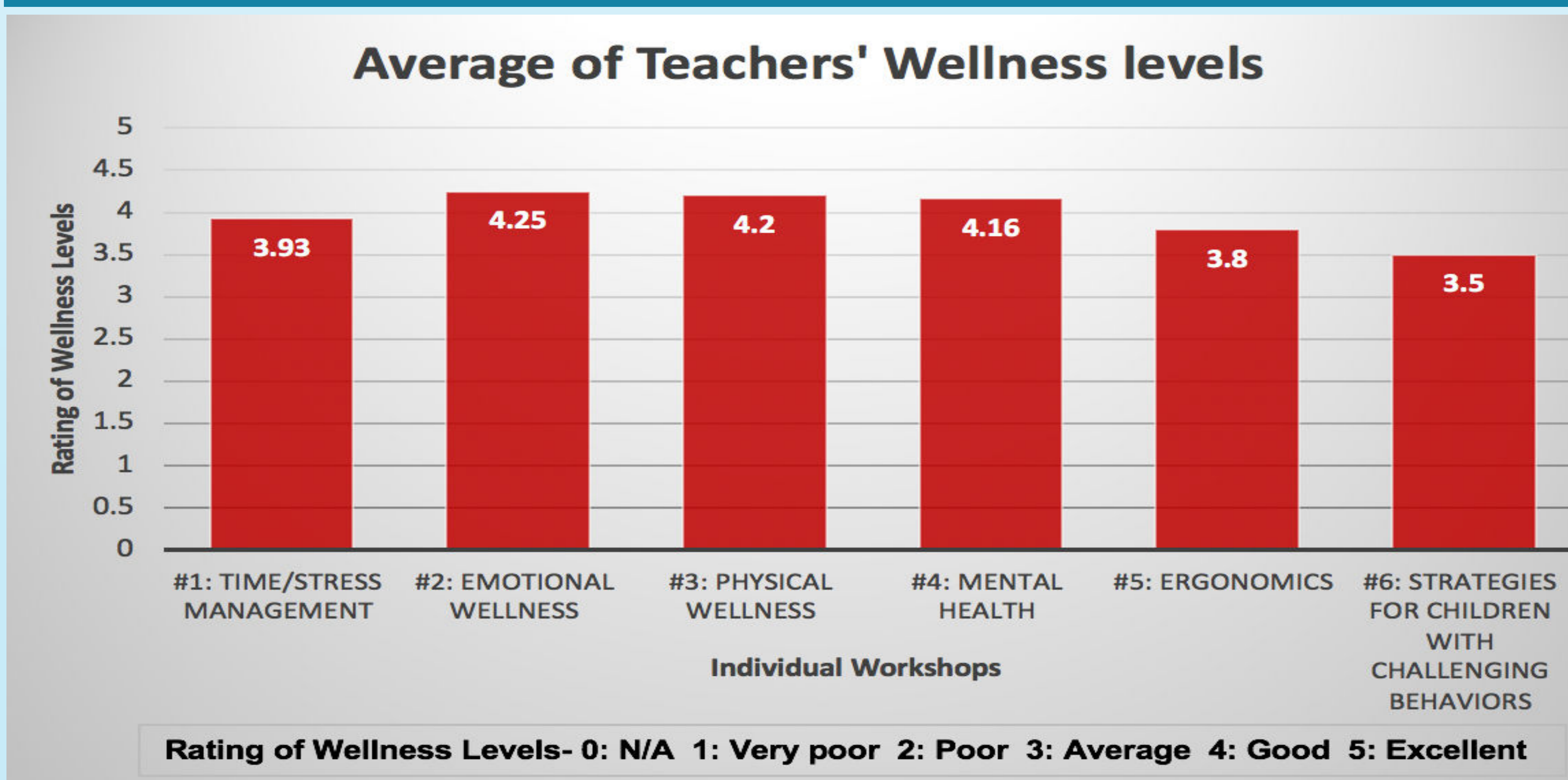
- Gain an understanding on the dimensions of wellness
- Identify a personalized approach in lifestyle balance
- Incorporate wellness strategies into their daily routines

Program Schedule: Wellness workshops hosted every Friday for six weeks for 30-45 minutes (three live workshops via Zoom and three pre-recorded workshops)

Total Participants: Closed group of 17 Child Care Partnership EHS/HS teachers

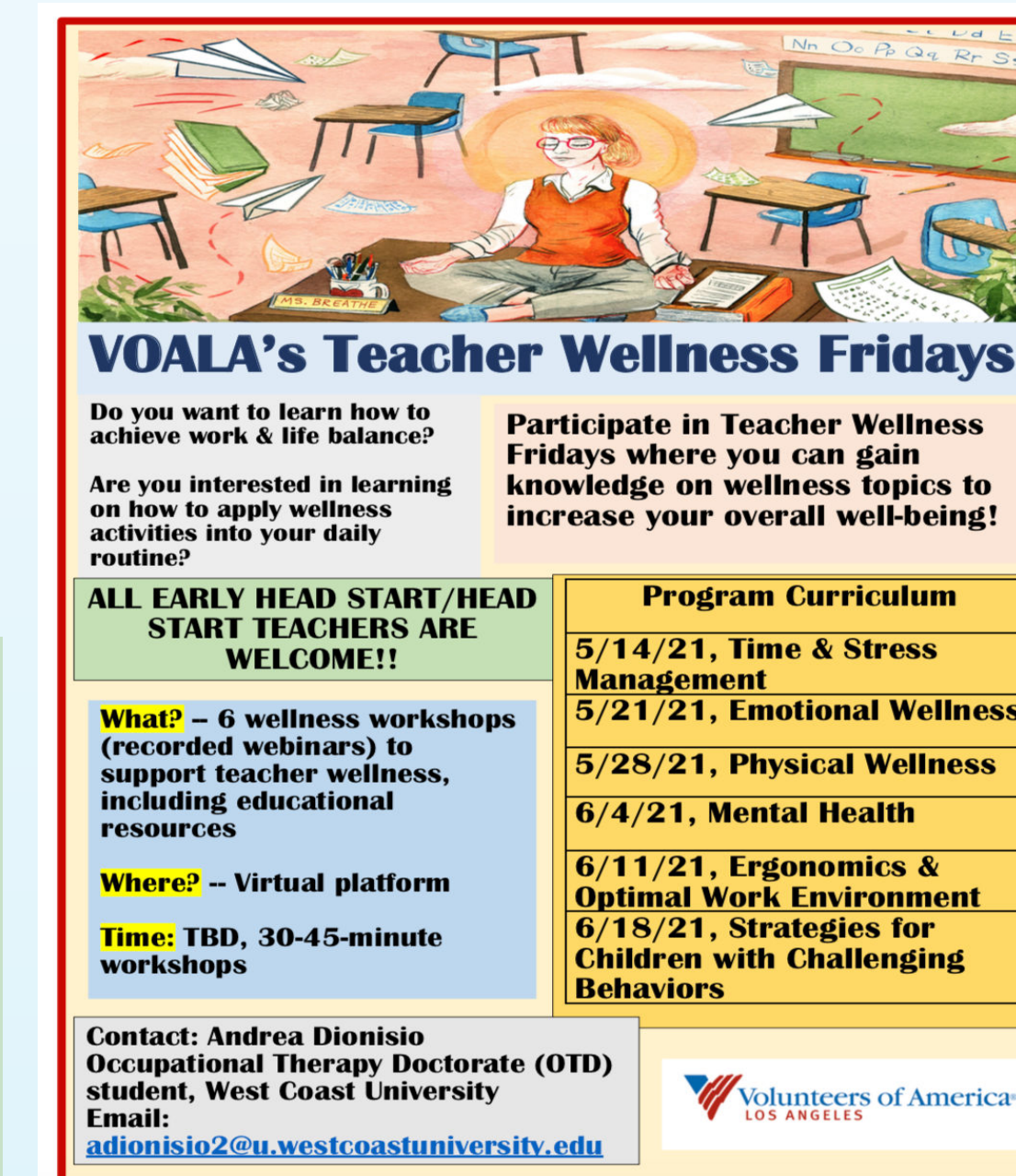
Program Evaluation: Utilizing post-workshop surveys to determine the effectiveness of supporting EHS/HS teachers by asking about their competency on the wellness topics, transfer of knowledge from workshops into daily routines, and their wellness levels for each workshop topic

Program Outcomes



- Demographics of Participants:** Hispanic women
- Attendance:** 16-17 participants in live workshops & 6-12 participants in pre-recorded workshops
- Average of Participant Engagement Levels:** Moderately in wellness topics (4/5) (1: Not at all – 5: Extremely)
- Average of Participants Using Wellness Strategies in Daily Routines:** To some extent (4/5) (1: No – 5: Yes)

Scholarly Deliverables



- Six Recorded webinars
- Six PowerPoint presentations
- Curriculum Outline
- Post-workshop survey forms
- Educational resources
- Student ergonomic consultation/follow-up templates
- VOALA staff wellness bulletins

Discussion & Implications

- Minimal impact on EHS/HS teachers' wellness levels as it was at a mean score of 4.16-4.25/5 (Good)
- Increased teachers' perceptions on how important wellness and mental health in correlation to achieving lifestyle balance
- Program can be expanded throughout other VOALA sites to support oncoming teachers' overall well-being and their work roles
- OT correlates with teacher wellness by therapists' having the skill set to provide education on occupational wellness and health management
- Future directions of OT providing teacher wellness interventions in other non-traditional settings

Limitations

- No pre-workshop surveys
- Inconsistent participant attendance
- Method of implementation of workshops due to COVID-19 safety guidelines
- Technological difficulties

Acknowledgements

Utmost gratitude to Dr. Duke, Dr. Friberg, and Alma Nunez for providing guidance and collaboration in developing Teacher Wellness Fridays. Also, special thanks to Dr. Attenni for supporting me in my process of delivering the virtual ergonomic consultations to the VOALA mental health team. I had a great experience working with everyone.

References (Available Upon Request)