Occupational Therapy Program for Transitioning Foster Youth

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Description of DCE Site & Summary of Needs

Qualified was created by two occupational therapists back in 2015. Both founders saw how prominent human trafficking was in Los Angeles, and created a non-profit organization to assist survivors to reintegrate back into the community. The doctoral capstone student identified three needs for Qualified: 1) having participants willing to join the program, 2) acquire sufficient funding, and 3) secure a setting for implementation of the program.

BACKGROUND & LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth experience several challenges and barriers when they enter foster care. Some of those challenges include limited access to healthcare, housing instability, lack of education, developmental delays, and being severely vulnerable [4]. One of the main consequences of vulnerability in foster youth is that they can be easily coerced and groomed, which creates a gateway to trafficking [3]. Sex traffickers use force, fraud, or coercion to obtain control over their victims, depriving them of their freedom [2]. By having control over their victims, this strategy deprives the youth of communicating with anyone else from the outside world, limits decision-making, and results in underdeveloped life skills [1].

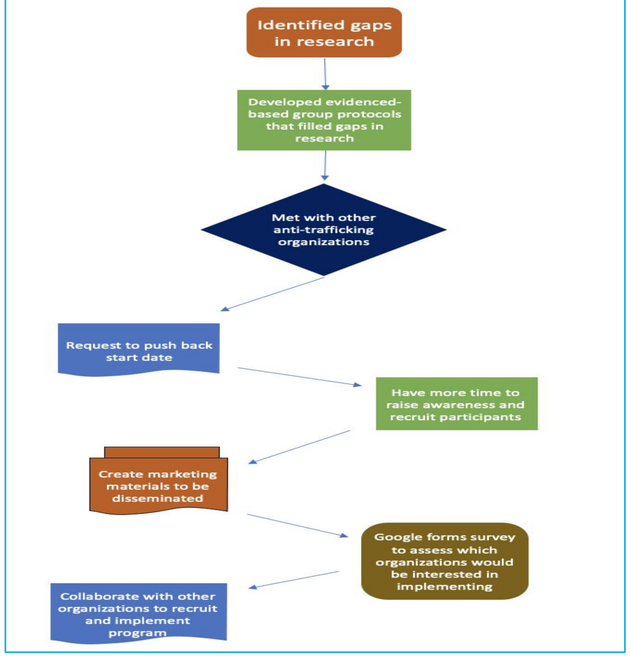
Common Themes

- Limited social support
- Education instability
- Limited long-term follow-up
- Racial trauma
- Inhibited executive functioning skills

Purpose of DCE

The purpose of this doctoral capstone student's project was to develop a trauma-informed occupational therapy program, called Devoted Forces, which focuses on increasing job retention for foster youth who are survivors of sex trafficking. The inclusion criteria includes: 1) youth in the process of transitioning out of foster care, 2) survivors of sex trafficking, 3) eighteen years or older, 4) in the process of obtaining employment or be employed, and 5) female participants only, at this time.

Project Description



Learning Objectives

- **The doctoral capstone student developed a six-week occupational therapy program focused on increasing job retention for foster youth.**
- The doctoral capstone student launched a social media campaign to raise awareness for trafficked foster youth and advertise new program.
- The doctoral capstone student advocated for occupational therapists role in working with survivors of sex trafficking and foster youth.

Evaluation & Outcomes

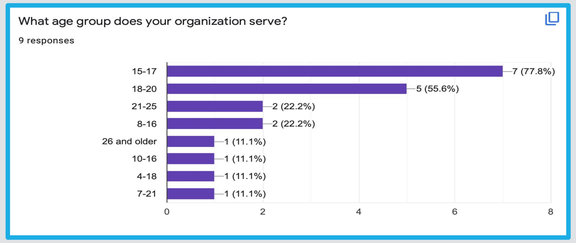


Figure 1. Displays the age groups of foster youth who receive services from various foster organizations

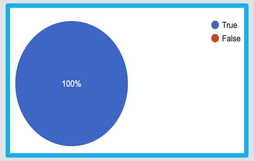


Figure 2. "There is a need for a program that serves this population"

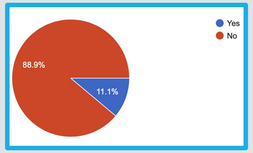


Figure 3. "Does your organization have similar program such as Devoted Forces?"

Deliverables

Throughout the doctoral capstone experience (DCE), the doctoral student completed three scholarly deliverables: 1) a program manual with a detailed description of all six-group interventions, 2) guest lectured for doctorate students on current DCE and what a capstone project entails, and 3) submitted an article to the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) highlighting the key role an OT practitioner has in working with foster youth and survivors of trafficking.

DISCUSSION

Foster youth organizations are likely to encounter youth who have a history of being trafficked, due to the high prevalence of the population being vulnerable and an easy target. According to research and data collected, foster youth typically get trafficked at a young age and miss out on learning basic life skills. Devoted Forces was developed to provide a safe space where survivors can receive endless support, resources, and get hands-on training to live independently, and improve their overall quality of life.

Future Direction

This DCE identified several directions that can be used in the near future. First, the primary focus should be on recruiting participants from other anti-trafficking organizations and having an OT practitioner implement Devoted Forces. Secondly, if this program were to expand to other locations, the inclusion criteria will be open to all genders, rather than only females.

Please use this QR code for a full list of deliverables references:

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