



Occupational Therapy, Mental Health Group Therapy Program

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Description of The Site

The occupational therapy doctoral capstone experience (DCE) was held at **Pawsitive Friendships**. This is a nonprofit organization that provides animal-assisted therapy (AAT) to individuals with developmental, physical, sensory, and social needs. The organization works with schools, adult day centers, and pediatric therapy clinics around central Arizona.



Objective 1

In the 14-weeks of DCE, the capstone student developed and implemented a mental health program that focused on students decreasing anxiety symptoms, building tools for emotional regulation, and providing opportunities for social participation with the use of wellness-based occupational therapy strategies and animal-assisted therapy.

Student Learning Objectives

Objective 2

By the end of 14 weeks, the capstone student developed educational videos for staff, volunteers, and occupational therapy fieldwork students on how to incorporate assistive animals into therapy sessions to target motor and behavioral skills.

Objective 3

By the end of 14 weeks, the capstone student evaluated the mental health program to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in decreasing anxiety symptoms, providing tools for emotional regulation, and increasing peer support through opportunities for social participation.

Outcomes

Program results demonstrate that incorporating OT wellness-based interventions in addition to AAT can decrease anxiety symptoms and help students manage stress during their school day.

- Interventions that got the highest participation rate and engagement from students were: **animal yoga and vagus nerve stimulation exercises, practicing self-love, practicing gratitude, and engaging in mindful movement exercises that met proprioceptive and vestibular needs.**
- Students enjoyed activities where they had opportunities to move their bodies and stretch in mindful ways.

Summary of Needs Assessment

Primary Need: Development of a mental health program.

- Services to support the mental health needs of children and adolescents this organization serves (trauma, anxiety, and stress-related symptoms).

Secondary Need: Development of educational materials for staff, volunteers, and students.

- Education on how to target performance skills & incorporate animals into therapy OT interventions..

Third Need: Additional clinical services.

- One-on-one therapeutic intervention

Project Description and Implementation

- Development and implementation of an 8-week mental health program to support the mental health of students in grades 1st -12th at Empower Academy.
- Occupational therapy, wellness-based strategies, and animal-assisted interventions to decrease anxiety and promote emotional regulation skills for students.
- Program targeted decreasing stress-related symptoms and improving mental health outcomes by providing interventions following the trauma-informed care in occupational therapy (TIC-OT) approach.



Scholarly Deliverables



1. Educational Videos

- Created for staff, volunteers, and OT fieldwork students placed at Milestone Pediatrics.
- OT strategies on how to incorporate therapy animals into a session to target performance skills using common dog toys and equipment.

2. Educational games and corresponding game cards

- Interactive tools to target performance skills while playing with the therapy animals.

3. Evaluation report and pre-post survey data outcomes.

- Data on which interventions were most effective in supporting students mental health and preferred by teachers.

OT Implications

- Including small breaks throughout the day where students can stretch or move their body may be beneficial for student engagement in the classroom and help decrease built up tension or stress throughout the day.
- Students benefitted from self-reflection activities: these activities helped students identify their own personal support systems and tools for emotional regulation.

Literature Review

Themes:

1. **The effects & limitations of using AAT with the pediatric population.**

2. **Wellness-based programs:**

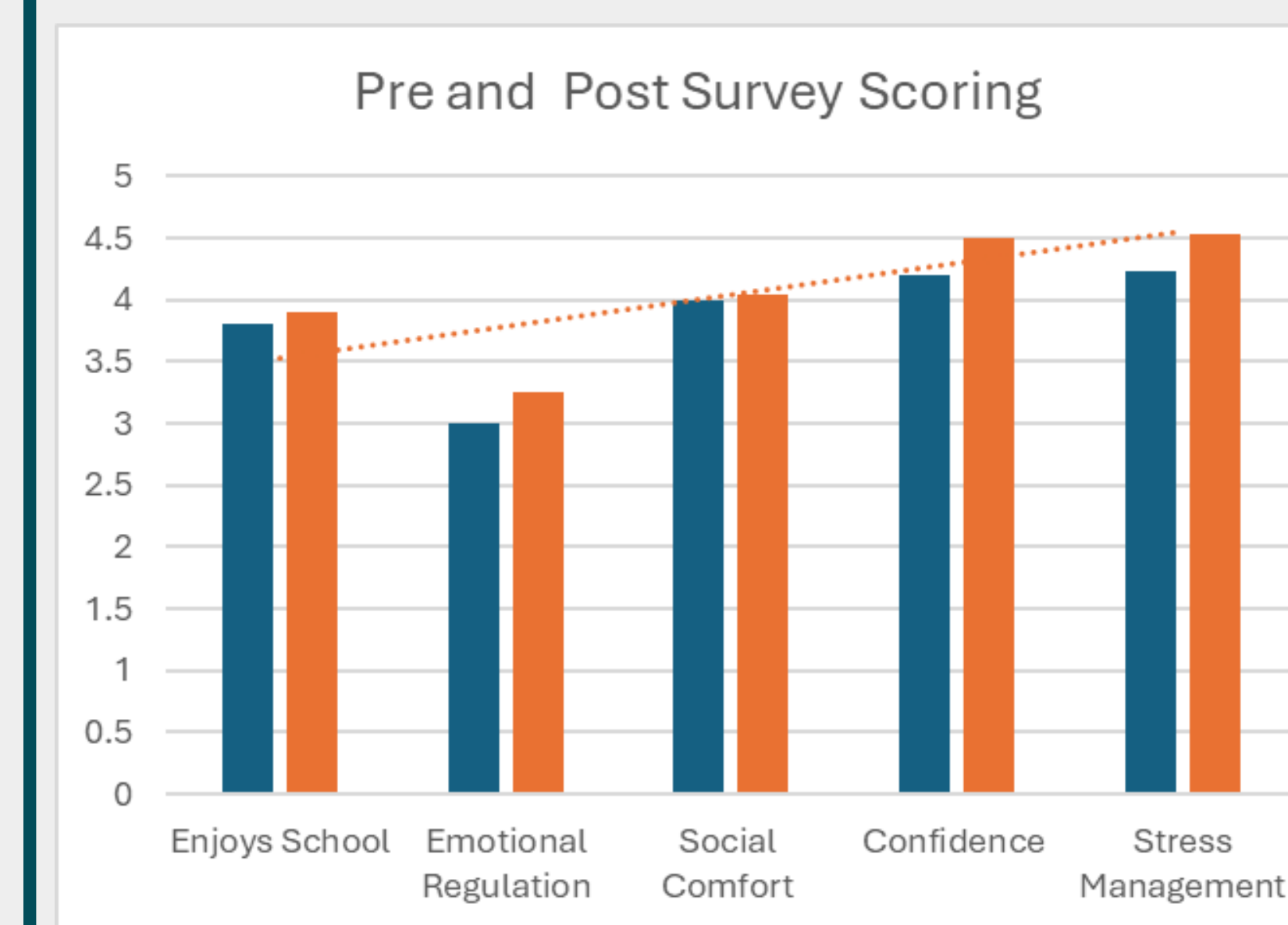
- Yoga, breathing, and meditation were shown to effectively reduce anxiety, nervousness, worry, fatigue, and sleep disturbance for children and adolescents (Weaver, L., et al., 2015)

3. **The need for innovative pediatric mental health programs.**

- Study emphasized the importance of targeting social participation in mental health programs for children with self-isolation and withdrawal tendencies (Hilton, 2018)

Results

Table 1: Double Bar Graph- Mean score comparison of student pre-post survey. Showing a general increase in trend.



Legend
 Blue - Pre-Survey
 Orange - Post-Survey

Table 2: Question 3 Staff Satisfaction Survey Results.



Student Participation Log Results:
 Animal Yoga- 100%
 Practicing Self Love- 96%
 Practicing Gratitude-92%
 Mindful Movement Dice Game-82%

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References

