

# A Trauma-Informed, Occupation-Based Program for Formerly Unhoused Women



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## Description of DCE Site

### Downtown Women's Center

**Mission:** "To end homelessness for greater Los Angeles through housing, wellness, employment, and advocacy" (Downtown Women's Center [DWC], 2024).

- Non-profit organization located in the Skid Row neighborhood providing various supportive services for women who have experienced homelessness and domestic violence
- Two permanent supportive housing (PSH) locations (Los Angeles St. and San Pedro St.) allowing women to have access to safe and comfortable housing

## Identified Needs

1. Structured occupational therapy group workshops
2. Self-advocacy among PSH residents
3. Psychoeducational training to reduce substance abuse relapse

## Literature Review

### Themes:

- **A need for development of OT interventions in PSH** → Lack of independent living skills results into problems such as hoarding, safety issues inside their apartment unit and inability to apply important life skills (Grajo et al., 2020; Gutman et al., 2017).
- **Integrating trauma-informed care (TIC)** → Promoting TIC principles reduce barriers in occupational engagement and participation in individuals who have experienced gender-based violence and homelessness (Kahan et al., 2019).
- **Client-centeredness** → Facilitating life skill group sessions fosters transferable life skills which in turn, result in creation of health-promoting habits and routines (Gutman et al., 2019; Schultz et al., 2021).

### Identified Gaps:

- Insufficient research found regarding occupation-based interventions specifically in individuals who were previously homeless living in PSH

## Learning Objectives

By the end of DCE, the doctoral capstone student:

1. Developed an occupation-based IADL skills and wellness program for women who have a history of chronic homelessness, domestic violence, and substance abuse.
2. Increased her program implementation and advocacy skills by leading a six-week program and advocating for OT in PSH.
3. Administered an outcome and process evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the program.

## Program Description & Implementation

### Primary Focus Area: Program Development

**Project Empower** → a six-week program implemented in the two PSH locations which offered occupation-based and psychosocial group interventions for women who have experienced homelessness.

### Objectives:

- To support residents' community integration by improving their independent living skills and quality of life (QOL)
- To foster resilience, self-sufficiency, and self-empowerment among the DWC residents



### Full Session Outline



**Frequency:** thrice a week  
**Duration:** one-hour long sessions for six weeks

- Nine participants from the two PSH locations in DWC
- Total of 18 group sessions
- Certificates awarded to all participants after program completion

### Secondary Focus Area: Advocacy

- Delivered a staff presentation regarding the role of OT in PSH and significance of OT group interventions
- Presented a student journal advocacy presentation with Level I interns in DWC

## Evaluation and Outcomes

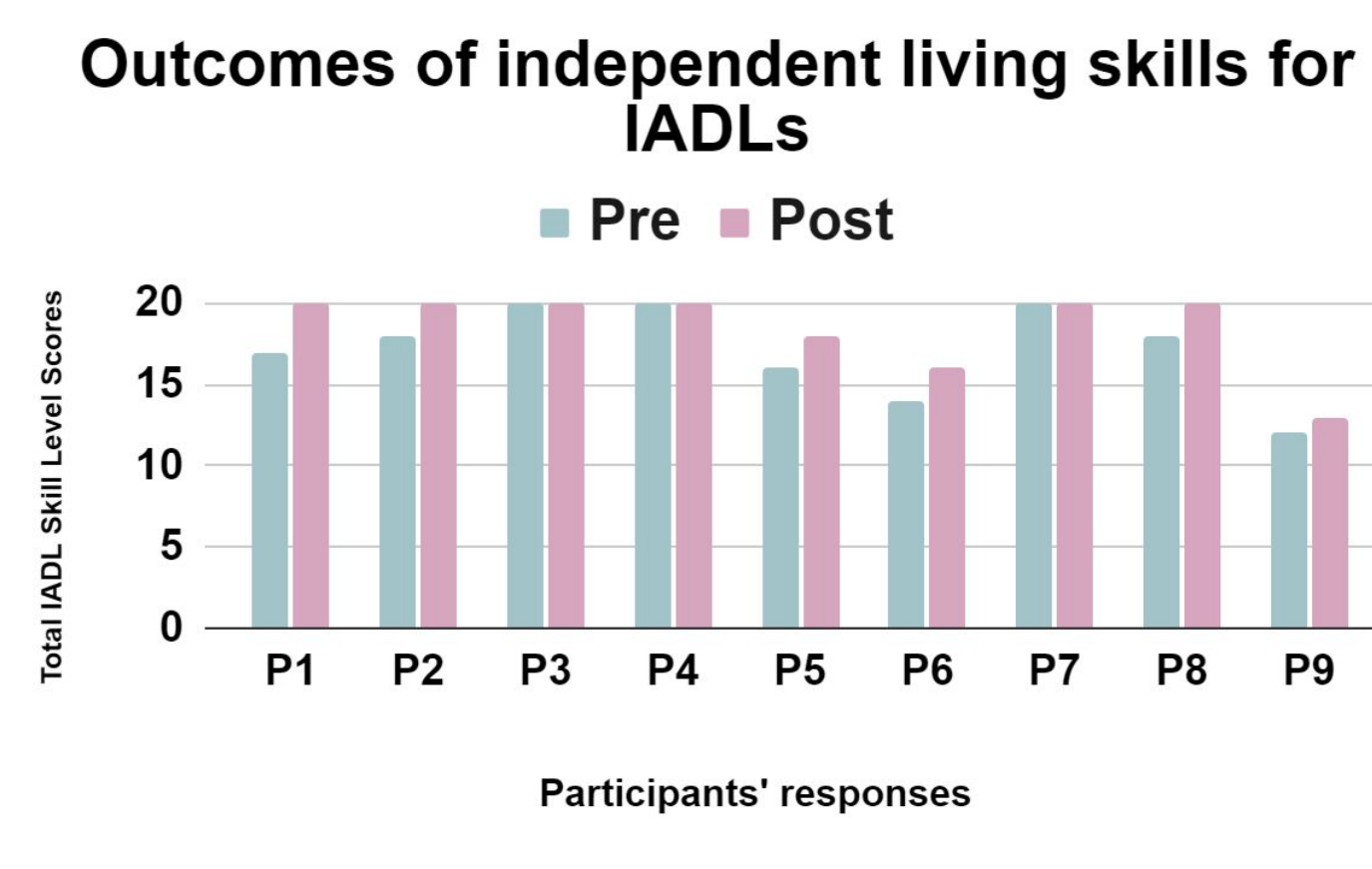


Figure 1. Independent Living Skills Outcomes

### Quantitative Results:

**Increase in residents' perceived independent living skills** (paired sample t-test indicated a statistically significant difference: p-value: 0.031).

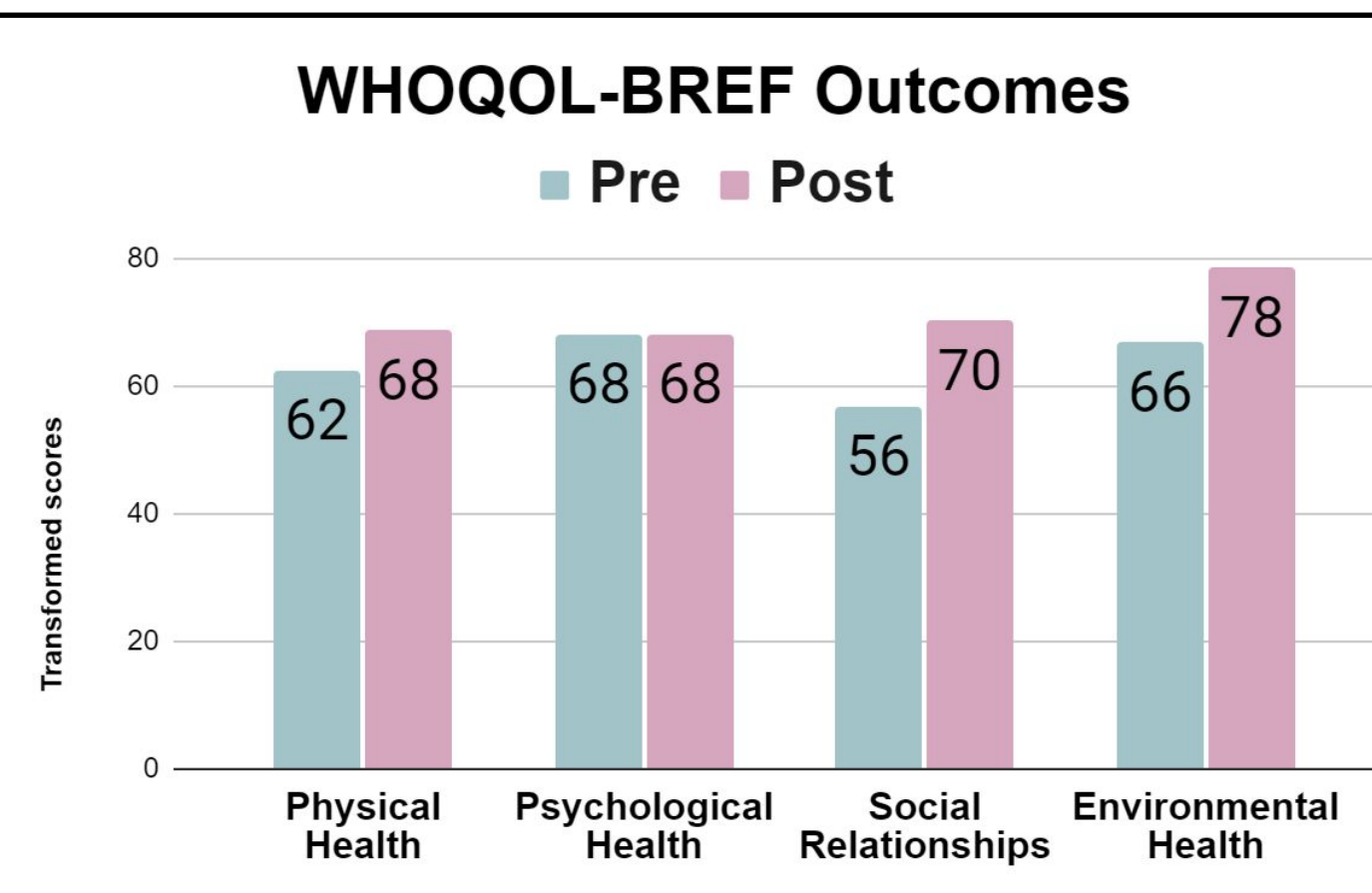


Figure 2. WHOQOL-BREF Outcomes

**Increase in residents' QOL** (paired sample t-test indicated a statistically significant difference: p-value: 0.04).

### Qualitative Results:

- Theme 1: Increased understanding of daily living skills
- Theme 2: Improved confidence
- Theme 3: Better balanced life

## Scholarly Deliverables

- Resource program consisting of 18 group protocols
- 18 Educational skill handouts
- Goal-setting worksheets
- PSH staff and student advocacy presentation



## Discussion & OT Implications

- Results showed significant increase in residents' perceived independent living skills and QOL post-intervention, supporting the effectiveness of the program..
- Participants described how the six-week life skills and wellness program also influenced their QOL positively.
- This study demonstrated the need for community-based occupational therapists in PSH to utilize their knowledge and expertise in developing occupation-based programs supporting residents in their community integration.
- Continued advocacy was essential in expanding the provision of OT group interventions for the DWC residents.

## Future Directions

- Larger sample size
- Expanding this program on how residents can safely age in place while living in PSH
- Extending program length and follow-up evaluation

## Acknowledgments

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## References

