

Connect, Adapt, Respond: Parent Education Program for Families

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Site Description

- Volunteers of America Los Angeles (VOALA)** is the Los Angeles County branch of a national non-profit organization, Volunteers of America
 - Provides direct services to children, families, veterans, formerly incarcerated individuals, human trafficking survivors, and those struggling with substance use
- Mission Statement:** “To provide quality education and comprehensive services to children, families, and communities through support, guidance, resources, and advocacy” (VOALA, 2025)

Identified Needs

- Self-care techniques for parents and caregivers
- Further education on child development, sensory strategies, and emotional regulation for parents, caregivers, and educators
- Advocacy for occupational therapy (OT) within VOALA

Literature Review

Impact of Stress on Wellness and Family Functioning

- Parents of children with special needs face a myriad of challenges, leading to increased stress and isolation (Bellone et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2023)

Role of OT Education in Supporting Child Development

- Caregivers play a key role in child development, but a lack of knowledge can hinder growth (Alghamdi et al., 2019)
- Occupational therapists educate parents and teachers on sensory and behavioral strategies, empowering them to implement these techniques independently (Miller-Kuhaneck & Watling, 2018; Scott et al., 2023)

Importance of Group Sessions and Mutual Support

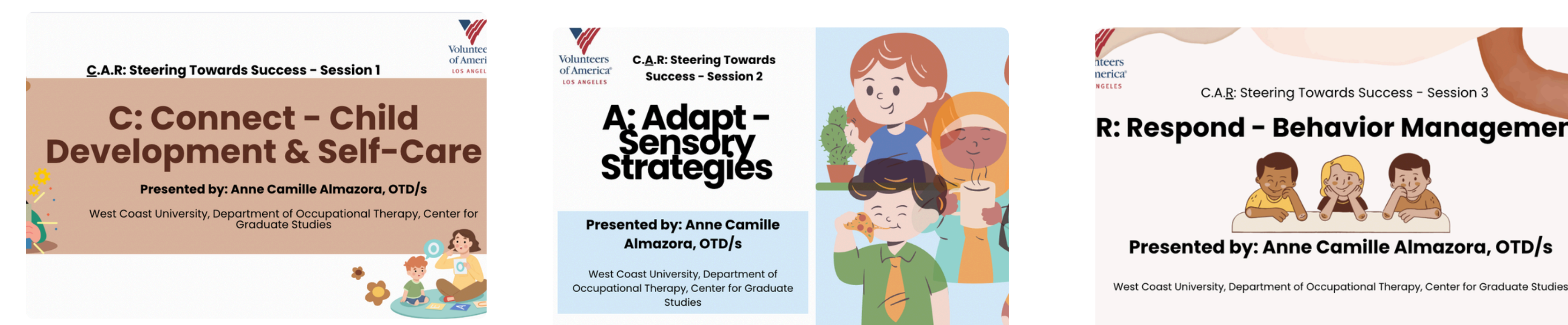
- Parents seek connections to share experiences, gain peer support, and receive practical advice in a non-judgemental environment (Bektas et al., 2021)

Project Objectives

- Develop a comprehensive parent education program focused on self-care, child development, sensory, and behavioral strategies
- Implement the program and evaluate its effectiveness
- Improve skills in advocating for OT and collaborating with interdisciplinary professionals

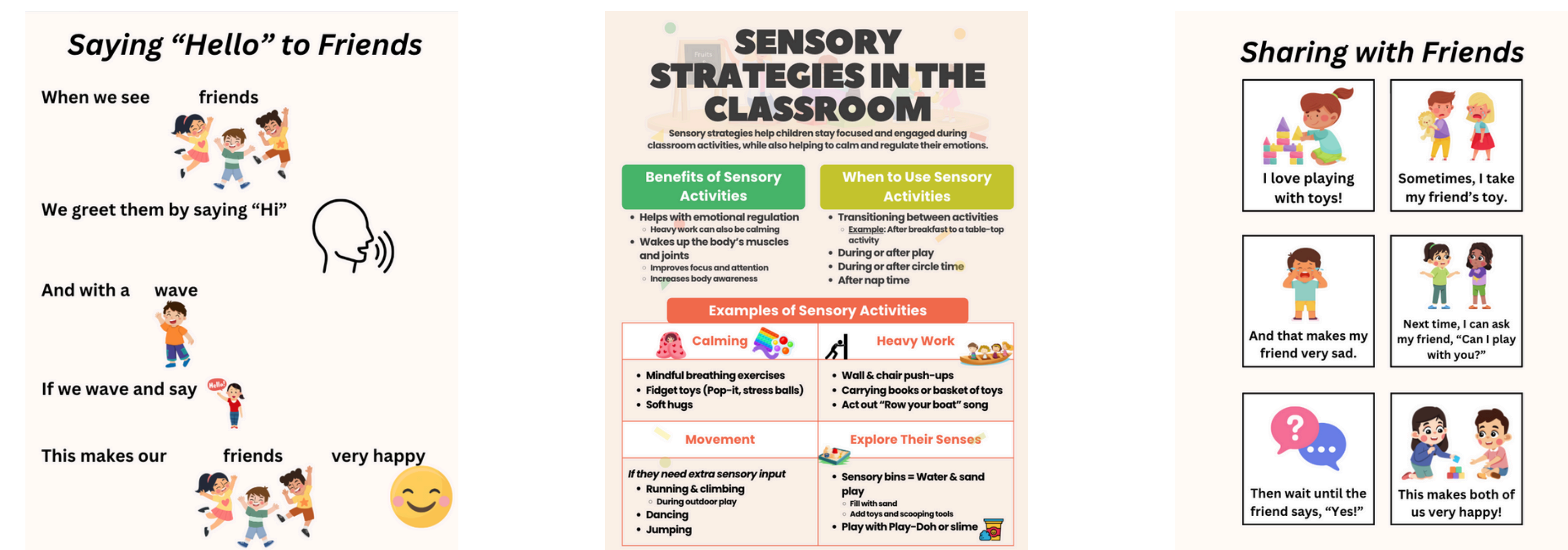
Program Description

Connect, Adapt, Respond (C.A.R): Steering Towards Success



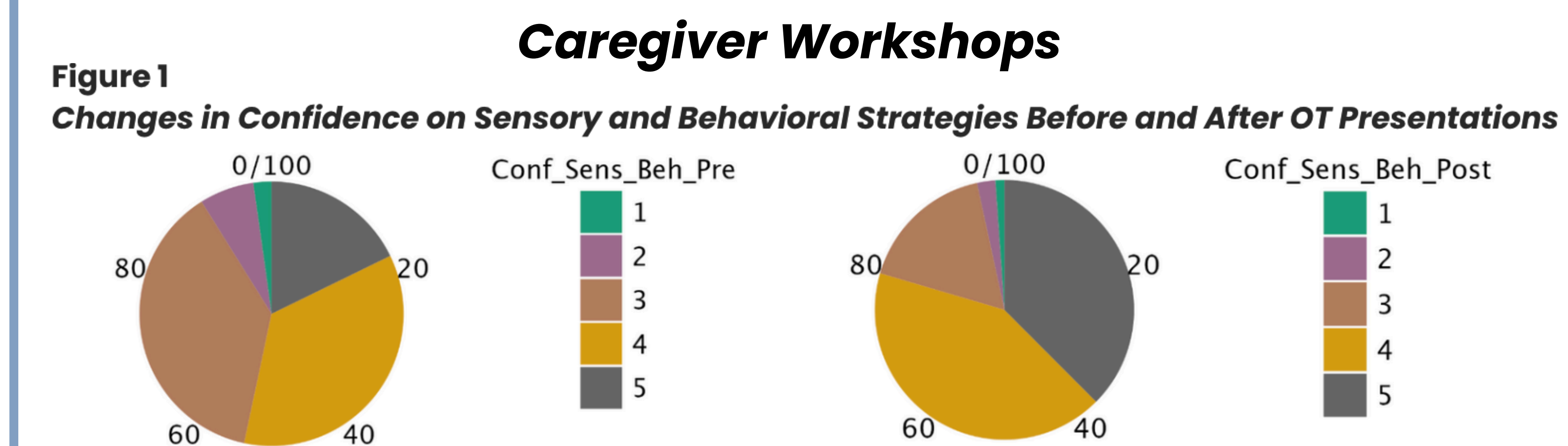
- Description:** An educational program for parents and caregivers of children (ages zero to five) with special needs in VOALA's Early Head Start and Head Start programs
 - Purpose:** To address educational disparities, reduce caregiver burnout, and provide strategies to support development
- Structure:** Three weekly one-hour sessions, separate English & Spanish groups
- Participants:** Average of 60–80 parents, recruited via Learning Genie
 - Completion:** Certificate for full participation in all three sessions

Empowering Educators with OT-Resources in Early Head Start and Head Start classrooms



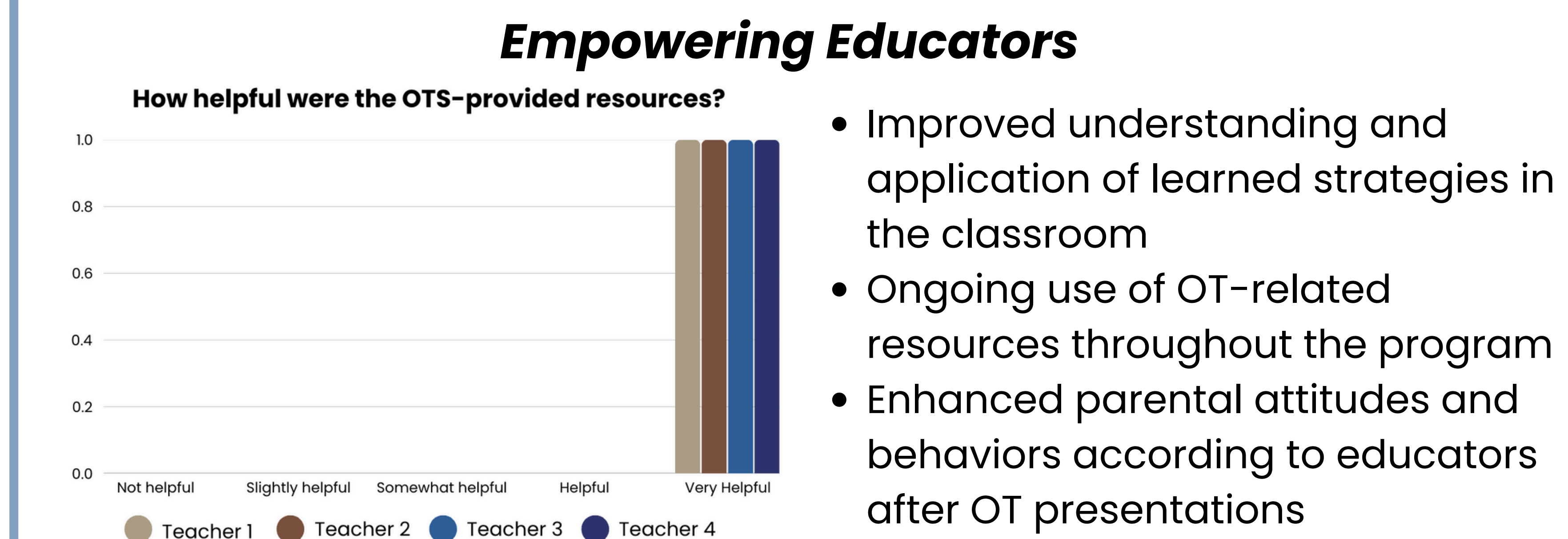
- Conduct observations and develop sensory and behavioral strategies to improve students' emotional regulation

Program Evaluation & Outcomes

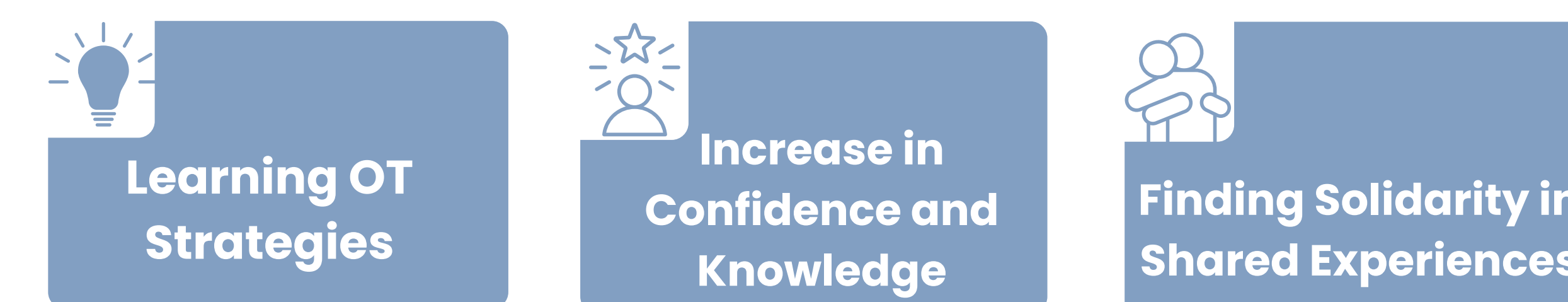


Note. Likert Scale-Key: 1 = Not confident, 2 = Slightly confident, 3 = Somewhat confident, 4 = Confident, 5 = Very confident

- Increase in confidence and familiarity with sensory and behavioral approaches ($p < 0.001$)
- Increase in the use of time management techniques ($p < 0.001$)
- Increase in the use of physical, mental, and emotional self-care strategies ($p < 0.001$)
- Increase in quality of life among caregivers ($p = 0.012$)



- Improved understanding and application of learned strategies in the classroom
- Ongoing use of OT-related resources throughout the program
- Enhanced parental attitudes and behaviors according to educators after OT presentations



OT Strategies: Supporting Parental Self-Care, Managing Children's Behaviors, and Applying Sensory Strategies

- "I now do what I like to do (self-care), which I may have forgotten."
- "I got several ideas (deep pressure fidget toys, listening to music, and patience) that I didn't know about, I'm glad I know them."
- "Visual supports and social stories were the most helpful."

Finding Solidarity: "Everyone's stories made me feel like I'm not the only one that feels the way I do - We're all just trying to do better."

Scholarly Deliverables

- Digital Resource Binder** (English and Spanish versions)
 - Presentation slides, handouts, and worksheets
- Milestones Handbook**
- Handouts for Educators**
- Certificates of Completion**
- Flyers**
- Survey Instruments**



Discussion & Implications

Program Evaluation Data:

- Significant increase in parents' and educators' knowledge and confidence in sensory and behavioral strategies
- No significant change in understanding of child development, benefits of self-care, and application of positive reinforcement due to prior knowledge and use
- Limitations due to unequal sample sizes of caregiver workshop attendees

Implications for Future Direction:

- Ongoing collaboration with OTD students to broaden OT knowledge for future families and staff members
- Introduction of in-person workshops

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References

