



Self-Determination Life Skills Program for Youth with Developmental Disabilities



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SITE DESCRIPTION

Professional Child Development Associates (PCDA) is a nonprofit outpatient clinic in Pasadena, CA, dedicated to supporting individuals with developmental disabilities, and their families, from birth to 21 years of age, through skilled individual services and group programs.

- Provides multidisciplinary services for comprehensive, individualized care
- Utilizes the Developmental, Individual Differences, Relationship-Based (DIR) model to support overall development through relationships

Mission: “To create a community that builds on strengths and relationships to prepare young people with Autism and developmental disabilities for a future in which they are empowered fulfilled, and feel the security of belonging” (PCDA, 2024).

IDENTIFIED NEEDS

- Develop curriculum content for the Young Adults (YA) program
- Develop screening and assessment tools for YA program eligibility and outcomes
- Enhance clinical support through occupational therapy student involvement and team collaboration

LITERATURE REVIEW

Differences in Daily Life Skills

- Many YA with developmental disabilities struggle to acquire and maintain daily life skills, especially after secondary education services decrease (Howlin & Magiati, 2017).

Effective Interventions in Life Skills Programs

- Successful interventions incorporate technology, real-world practice, group activities, and task adaptations (Duncan et al., 2022).
- Weekly structured sessions improve skill acquisition and reduce anxiety in YAs with Autism (Oswald et al., 2018).

Need for Young Adult Perspectives

- Including YA perspectives in life skills research helps bridge the gap between caregiver reports and actual experiences, leading to better program outcomes (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2020).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)-Based Interventions

- High levels of self-determination are positively correlated with improved outcomes in employment, independence, and financial stability for YAs with developmental disabilities (Lindsey & Varahra, 2022).
- Interventions incorporating SDT principles are correlated with improved life skills acquisition and overall life outcomes (Teixeira et al., 2020).

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. By end of seven weeks, the capstone student developed 8 topics of curriculum for the young adults’ program.
2. By end of DCE, the capstone student implemented and evaluated six weeks of the young adults’ program to determine its effectiveness.
3. By end of DCE, the capstone student increased their clinical practice skills in outpatient pediatrics.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION & IMPLEMENTATION

Primary Focus Area: Program Development

Purpose: To create 8 topics of curriculum content for the YA program using an SDT-based approach, and evaluate 6 weeks of its implementation to improve occupational performance in life skills

Participants: Nine young adults (18-21) with developmental disabilities enrolled in PCDA’s YA program

Program Structure: Participants completed a life skills interest survey, a pre/post-survey, and engaged in six weeks of the YA program (1x/week for 90 minutes), focusing on topics chosen by the group, including Budgeting, Friendships, Job Applications, and Public Transportation, followed by a post-intervention focus group.

PROCESS EVALUATION

A Mixed Methods Approach

- Likert surveys measured YA’s self-reported life skills:
 - Occupational performance (*Not Good at All* to *Extremely Good*)
 - Importance (*Not Important* to *Extremely Important*)
 - Post-survey assessed YA’s experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, aligning with SDT
- Focus group questions gathered qualitative data to further explore YA’s experiences in the program, specifically related to:
 - Autonomy
 - Competence
 - Relatedness
- Raw data analyzed via Google Sheets and thematic coding

OUTCOMES

QUANTITATIVE DATA

Figure 1
Pre- and Post-Program Occupational Performance Averages

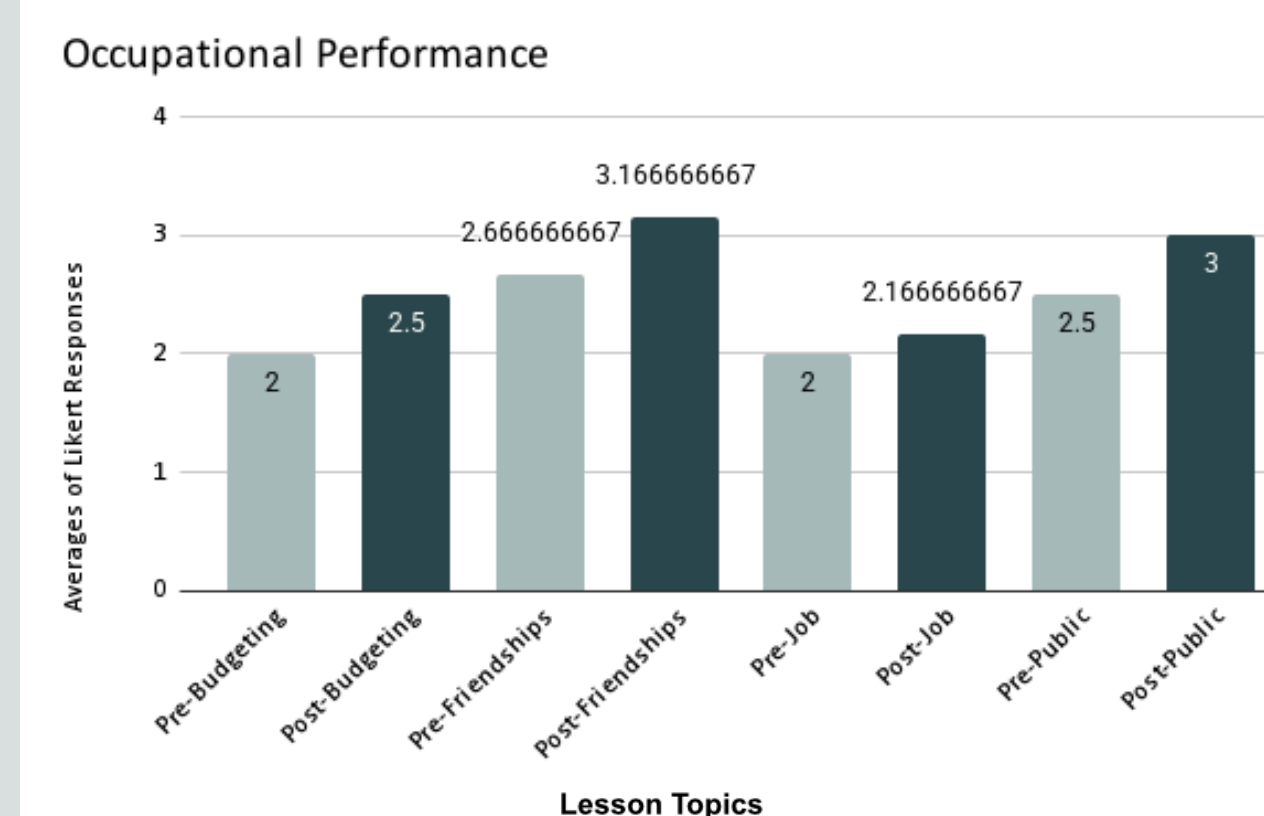
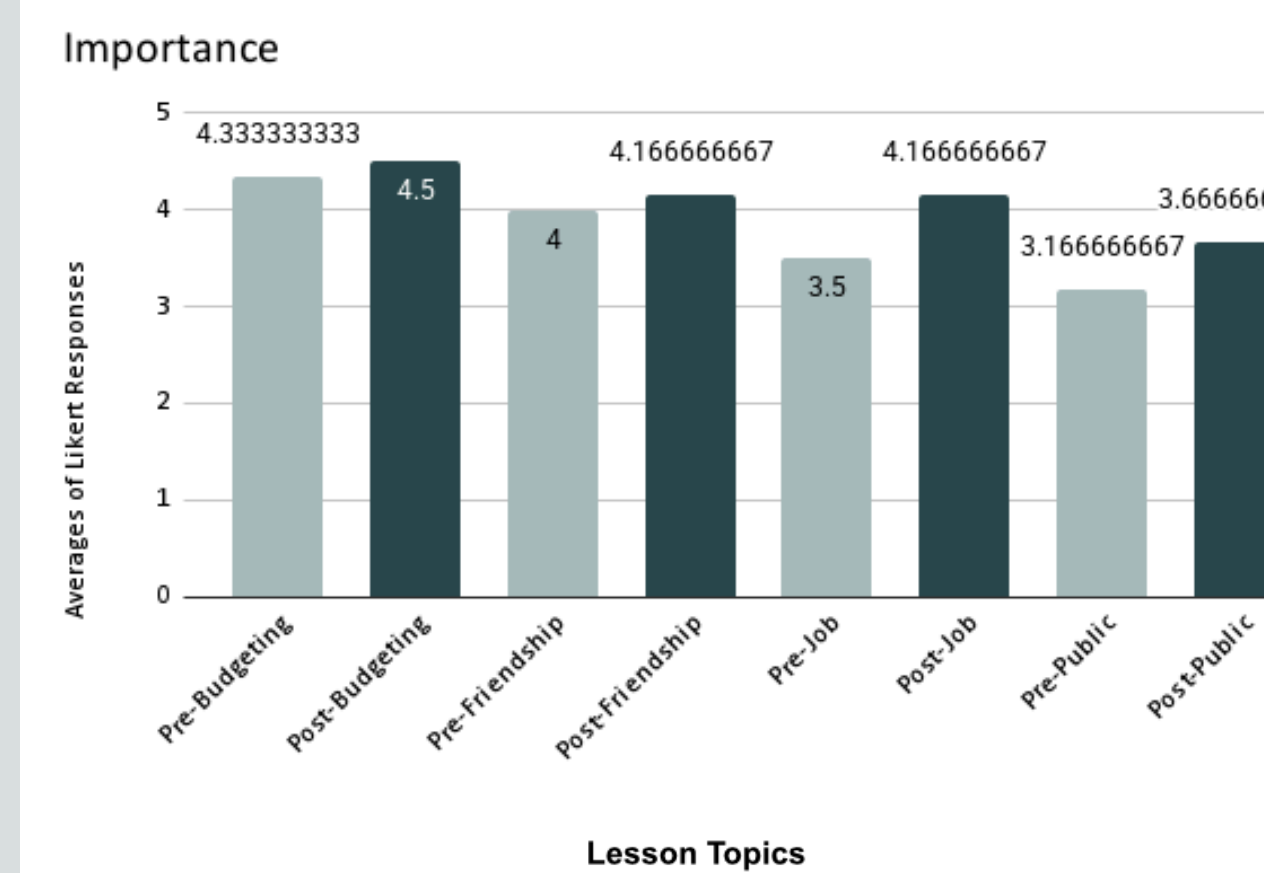


Figure 2
Pre- and Post-Program Importance Averages



QUALITATIVE DATA

- **Experiences with Choice and Voice in Learning**
 - High levels of opportunities for choosing what is learned
 - All YA had positive feelings associated with choice
- **Building Social Connections**
 - Comfort and trust developed in a group setting
 - Advice for new members

Practical Skill Development

- Noted difficulty in recalling specific instances of using learned skills outside of the group
 - Suggestions for repetition and progressive skill-building lessons
 - Overall agreement in needing more practice in life skills

SCHOLARLY DELIVERABLES



Curriculum Content



Facilitation Guide

IMPLICATIONS

- **Overall increase in perceived importance and occupational performance in targeted topics**
- **Mismatch between competence and importance**
 - Budgeting and job applications were rated the most important but had lowest self-rated occupational performance
- **Group format supported relatedness**
 - Members showed willingness to engage even when content wasn’t their top priority, highlighting the key role of peer connection
- **Agreement with SDT principles**
 - Members expressed value in advocating for their learning goals , feeling motivated by meaningful activities, and suggesting self-acceptance in a supportive group environment
- **Emerging self-awareness in skills**
 - While members reported measurable improvement, they expressed difficulty recalling specific examples

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REFERENCES

