



The Impact of an Occupational Therapy-Based Program on Refugee Youth Wellness



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Refugee Children Center

- The **Refugee Children Center (RCC)** is a non-profit organization located in North Hills, California
- First founded by Pastor Fred Morris in 2015 in response to the immense amount of unaccompanied minors crossing the United States (U.S.)-Mexico border
- Functions under two main departments:
 - Children and Families' Department
 - Offers social services, educational programs for both parents and children, basic needs, and food relief program
 - Immigration Legal Resources Department
 - Offers referrals to Immigration Legal Service Providers, delivers orientations on 'Know Your Rights', 'Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) Process', and 'Asylum Process'
- Mission Statement:** "To provide a healing embrace and a dignified welcome to refugee children and their families who have made the perilous journey to the U.S.-Mexico border" (RCC, 2025)

Summary of Needs Assessment

Three key area of needs were identified at the Refugee Children Center:

- Youth participation and wellness
- Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) training and education amongst staff and incoming interns
- Cultural acceptance amongst various cultures and deepened sense of community

Literature Review

Main Themes:

- Art therapy is a client-centered, strengths-based approach for engaging youth (Cahill et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2021; Shukla et al., 2022; Waalks et al., 2019)
- Refugees face barriers to services, including mistrust, stigma, and cultural and language challenges (Ellis et al., 2011; Qu et al., 2021)
- Group activities, such as sports, promote identity development and mutual benefit among youth (Hermens et al., 2017; Makhoul et al., 2012)
- Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) improves youth self-regulation and self-awareness (Anderson et al., 2021)

Gap(s):

- Limited/outdated research on Occupational Therapy (OT) and/or evidence-based interventions for Latino refugee youth in the U.S. (Herati & Meyer, 2023)
- Language barriers and cultural misunderstandings are frequent obstacles (Forrest-Bank et al., 2019)

Individualized Learning Objectives

- By the end of seven weeks, the capstone student will design a wellness program consisting of group-based and trauma-informed interventions for refugee youth who are experiencing difficulty integrating in their local communities
- By the end of 14 weeks, the capstone student will implement and evaluate a wellness program consisting of group-based and trauma-informed interventions for refugee youth that are experiencing difficulty integrating in their local communities
- By the end of 14 weeks, the capstone student will provide an in-service training presentation to all staff and interns to introduce TIC and educate on how to further support refugee families

Project Description and Implementation

Areas of Focus: Program Development and Education

Program Development: Youth Flow (YF), a six-week wellness program for refugee youth (ages eight to 19) at the RCC, focused on enhancing social participation and mental health through OT-based interventions

Education: RCC staff and interns received a one-hour training on TIC to boost knowledge, confidence, and comfort in applying TIC principles and practices

→ Program and training efficacy were assessed through feedback from parents, RCC staff, and interns, yielding both quantitative and qualitative data

Qualifications to Participate

Program Development Evaluation

- Parent of an RCC youth participating in the program, or an RCC staff member
- At least 18 years old
- English and/or Spanish speaking
- Able to read and write in English and/or Spanish

TIC Training Presentation Evaluation

- RCC staff member or student intern participating and receiving TIC training presentation
- At least 18 years old
- English and/or Spanish speaking
- Able to read and write in English and/or Spanish

Week One to Three

- Needs assessment
- YF pre-test distribution

Week One to Three

- All consent forms signed
- Research for YF program

Week Four to Seven

- Research for YF program
- Created all YF materials

Week Eight to 13

- Delivered YF weekly
- Distributed surveys for in-service

Week 13 to 14

- Deliver in-service presentation
- Collect all surveys

Evaluation and Project Outcomes

Quantitative Data: Program Development

→ Youth Flow Pre/Post-Surveys

- Sample size:** Two parents, Two staff members
- Eight Dimensions of Wellness *Parent* Perception Ratings
 - Positive change observed between pre and post
- General Participation and Overall Mental Health *Staff* Perception Ratings
 - Positive change observed between pre and post

Qualitative Data: Program Development



Figure 1. Three key themes emerged from the thematic analysis and coding process (open, axial, and selective), as shown to the left
N = 4
(2 parents/2 staff)

Quantitative Data: Education

Item	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Change	P-Value	Effect Size (r)
Confidence	3.6	4	0.4	0.346	0.424
Comfort	3.4	3.8	0.4	0.346	0.424

Table 1. Nonparametric test: Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Findings

The RCC staff and interns (N = 10) were asked to rate their confidence and comfort in providing TIC

Key Findings

- Positive outcomes in both survey items
- $p > 0.05$ due to small sample size
- Moderate ($r = 0.424$) effect size suggests clinically meaningful

Discussion, Implications, and Future Directions

Discussion

- Improvements in social participation, wellness, and mental health were observed among YF youth members, but the small sample size prevented these changes from achieving statistical significance
- Quantitative data reveals a positive trend across all wellness dimensions, indicating the YF program's beneficial impact

OT Implications

- Expand OT services in community organizations supporting refugees, advocate for OT in specialized settings, and develop targeted interventions to improve the well-being, mental health, and confidence of refugee youth

Future Directions

- Increase YF program sample size, explore online workshops and transportation integration, and focus on youth-driven, interest-based interventions

Scholarly Deliverables

Scholarly deliverables consist of:

- English and Spanish digital pre- and post-surveys for parents and staff
- Youth Flow group program curriculum manual
 - Workshop overviews
 - Workshop materials
 - Workshop references
 - Workshop presentations (digital only)
 - Workshop flyers (digital only)
- Digital copy of Trauma-Informed Care in-service presentation



The Refugee Children Center takes co-ownership of all scholarly deliverables and oversees program implementation. The RCC may expand on the existing program and use current research to enhance results

References



Scan the QR code to view the Scholarly Deliverables and References!

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