



Empowering the Unhoused: An Occupational Therapy Approach to Independent Living

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Description of DCE Site

Mission: “Lifting people out of homelessness, one person, one family at a time” (Ascencia, 2024)

- Ascencia is a 45-bed temporary housing facility located in Glendale, California
- 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization founded in 1996
- Provides housing support and services to approximately 1.200 unhoused individuals annually
- Services include case management, permanent housing acquisition, street outreach, trauma therapy, occupational therapy, mental health services, telepsychiatry, and medical services.
- 97% housing retention rate

Needs Identified

- **Family Activities**
 - Needed to keep families connected and engaged after school hours
- **Health Management Programs**
 - To educate and train clients on how to maintain their overall well-being
- **Transportation Services**
 - To enable residents to attend their appointments and reach their goals more efficiently

Literature Review

- There is a positive correlation between shared enjoyment, positive affect, and resilient thinking (Arewasikporn et al., 2019)
- Economic, social, health, and personal factors contribute to homelessness and delay the process of acquiring permanent housing (Aubry et al., 2021)
- Social isolation is a significant problem among individuals living in vulnerable housing because they live with others, lack personal space, have decreased safety and security, and may have difficulty maintaining their sobriety (Ecker & Aubry, 2017)
- Financial skills training for persons experiencing homelessness(PEH) helps to reduce financial stress and contribute to greater life satisfaction (Fieldhouse & Greatorex, 2020)
- Hoarding disorder is more prevalent among persons experiencing homelessness. This is a concern for this population because it affects their health and ability to maintain permanent housing (Greig et al., 2020)
- Homelessness is associated with higher rates of depression and other mental health conditions, which negatively impact task initiation and motivation (Renger & Macaskill, 2021)
- Measures the housing trajectory, personal recovery, functional level, and quality of life of clients experiencing homelessness and mental illness at discharge and one year after completing the program (Soufi et al., 2023)

Learning Objectives

- By the end of 9 weeks, the capstone student will develop a housing transition program that provides a smooth transition from living in a temporary housing facility to living independently and enables residents to use available resources to maintain their occupations
- By the end of 14 weeks, the capstone student will implement a housing transition program and provide in-service training to the staff
- By the end of 14 weeks, the capstone student will evaluate the effectiveness of the housing transition program to determine if the program is beneficial and can be replicated

Program Description

Purpose:

- Provide education and training on several skills required for independent living
- Increase motivation and self-determination in Ascencia residents
- Create sustainable and accessible resources for case managers and students

Program Structure:

- Three-week housing transition program held twice a week for 60-75 minutes
- Two hours were reserved after group sessions for training participants who could not make it to group sessions and one-on-one follow-up sessions to address participants' individual needs

Participants:

- Residents who are 18 to 75 years old and have the cognitive ability to process information and follow simple instructions

Methods

Design:

- Mixed methods study consisting of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods

Sample:

- 12 participants were recruited through rapport building and case manager referrals

Instrument:

- Non-standardized pre/post survey

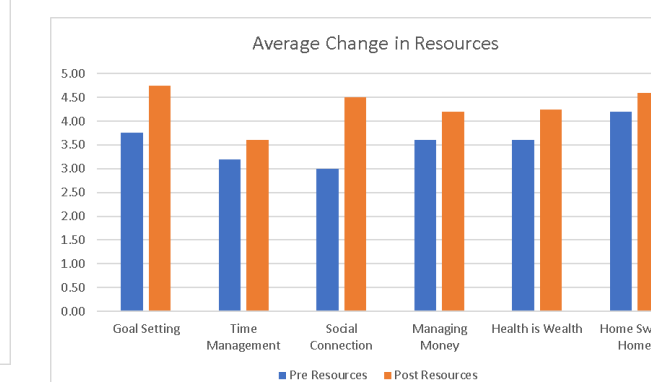
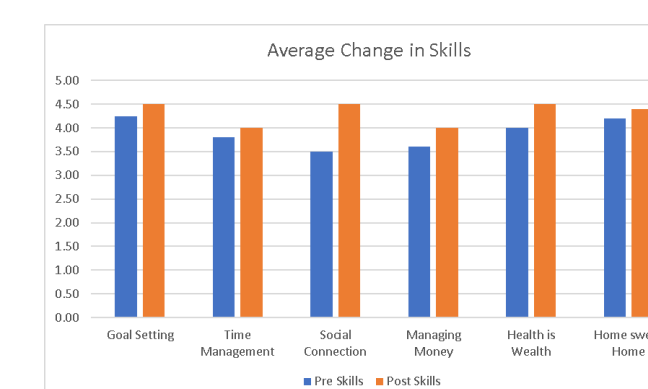
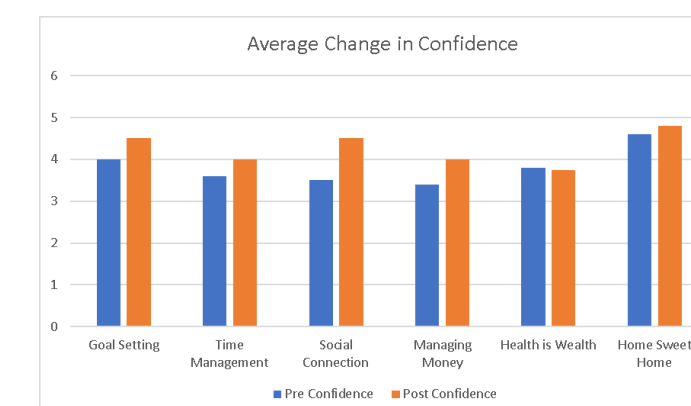
Data Collection

- Quantitative data was collected using Likert Scale survey questions
- Qualitative data was collected via open-ended survey questions

Data Analysis:

- Google Sheets was used to analyze quantitative data
- Thematic analysis to analyze qualitative data and find common themes between participants' open-ended responses

Project Outcomes



Results:

- Although participants reported that they feel confident about living independently, the change in confidence was not statistically significant ($p=0.09$)
- The change in skills and change in resources were statistically significant ($p=0.03$ and $p=0.01$), respectively
- Overall, the results of all outcome measures were statistically significant ($p=0.02$)

Qualitative Themes:

Increased Self-determination and Motivation
Satisfaction with Occupational Performance
Enjoyment of Shared Experiences with Peers

Discussion and Implications



- Group sessions in community-based settings increase morale and improve social participation
- Skills training and education are effective means of improving motivation in persons experiencing homelessness
- Emotional regulation strategies enable persons experiencing homelessness to cope with the challenges that come with their predicament

Implications for Future Direction:

- Future research should explore other areas of need that promote long-term independence, such as employment seeking and acquisition
- Residents in temporary living facilities would benefit from mock job interviews and work etiquette training

Conclusion

This project highlights the role of occupational therapy in increasing independence and occupational performance among PEH. It contributes to the existing body of knowledge by showing the impact of skills training and education on occupational performance. Evidence from existing research shows that decreased motivation and a decline in mental health are significant challenges among this population. This program targeted those challenges and provided training, education, and resources to increase motivation, promote self-determination, and empower participants to advocate for themselves. The quantitative and qualitative results suggest that occupational therapy services are beneficial in community-based settings.

Scholarly Deliverables



Deliverables Include:

- Pre and Post-Surveys
- Six Group Protocols
- Facilitator Guidelines
- PowerPoint Slides
- Handouts
- Certificates of Completion

References



Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my faculty mentor, Dr. Windham, and site mentor, Lauren Diaz, for their unwavering support and insightful guidance throughout my capstone experience. I am also thankful to the case managers and staff at Ascencia for their collaboration and for providing a welcoming and stimulating learning environment. I appreciate my family and friends supporting me and providing emotional support during difficult times. Most importantly, I am thankful to God Almighty, who enabled me to overcome many obstacles and achieve this remarkable milestone. To God be the glory!