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Program Development at a Nonprofit Organization for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

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**Program Development at a Nonprofit Organization for Individuals with Intellectual
Disabilities**

Final Doctoral Capstone Project

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People Like Us, Inc.

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Abstract

There are over six million individuals in the United States alone with developmental, or intellectual disabilities (ID). ID is defined by the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (2021) as significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This type of disability originates before the age of 22. Historically, members of this population have fewer opportunities for engagement than their typically developing peers. This can be for a variety of reasons, including limited funding, the public's lack of education on ID, and even ableism. Ableism is defined as "discrimination or social prejudice against people with disabilities" (Eisenmenger, 2019). Lack of opportunity is especially true in the arts, as there are few opportunities for individuals with varying abilities to participate in the performing arts. The arts are widely known to provide individuals with an outlet for expression, creativity, and judgement free learning. In providing arts education for individuals with varying abilities, there is room for growth in many areas of occupation and overall quality of life.

For my capstone project that will be discussed in detail throughout this submission, I helped to create an easily accessible performing arts course for individuals with varying abilities. Included are lessons on music, vocals, choreography, visual art, character development, and more. Using my experience in occupational therapy (OT) schooling and fieldwork rotations, I was able to include strategies for self-regulation, coping, behavior management, stress relief, body awareness, social skills, etc that are proven through research to have a positive impact on social emotional learning (SEL) and quality of life in individuals within this population when employed regularly. This course includes 15 weeks' worth of videos lessons (See Appendix B) to be watched by the end user with ID, as well as a supplemental workbook for educators or

volunteers to use if teaching the class to a group of participants. This workbook is a step-by-step guide (see Appendix A) for instructors, complete with lists of needed materials, warm-ups, activities, reflections, and curtain call to do throughout the 40-minute class time. Additionally, at the top of each lesson is a QR code that can be scanned by instructors or parents in order to be taken to a link with all needed materials for that lesson, including audio tracks, video lessons, printable materials, scores, and sheet music. The course can be taken completely virtually either individually at home or through a class, and is also appropriate for in-person learning as well.

Lastly, I was able to create an evaluation for parents and guardians to fill out prior to and following participation in the 15-week course to measure skills such as communication, self-regulation, and social participation (See Appendix C). Open ended questions were included for further feedback from parents and guardians about the course to address any other improvements noticed or aspects of the content with room for improvement.

Keywords: occupational therapy, occupational therapy capstone, doctoral residency, intellectual disability, performing arts, program and policy development

Introduction to Residency Setting and Capstone Project

Residency Setting: Nonprofit Organization

People Like Us (PLU) is a nonprofit organization that consults other organizations around the US to implement sustainable performing arts programs for individuals with developmental differences. They provide all of the consulting, training, guides, and curriculum needed to start and sustain a musical theater program that is specifically tailored towards those with varying abilities. PLU has several locations throughout the US, and is now shifting to also

accommodate many more individuals and institutions by creating virtual content in addition to in-person consulting services. The array of populations served by the organization include the end user, or individuals with varying abilities, arts educators dedicated to starting an inclusive performing arts program, and PLU is now also serving school systems looking to provide PLU professional development courses on inclusion as continuing education (CEU) credits for their educators.

There is not a current occupational therapist (OT) onsite at PLU, which allowed room for research and brainstorming regarding how OT would fit best in this specific setting. It was determined that an onsite OT would be beneficial in this setting to edit content through a therapeutic and evidence-based practice lens. Furthermore, OT practice could be integrated into the activities and curriculum to address improving upon participant's social, communication, gross and fine motor, body awareness, visuospatial skills, and more. Research shows that the performing arts are an effective means for improving upon all of these skills, allowing for a dynamic collaboration of OT and the arts for improved quality of life and important life skills. Following my residency experience, the PLU board of directors concluded that it would be in the organization's best interest to hire a part-time occupational therapist to have on staff for these aforementioned reasons.

Residency Mentor

The mentor for my residency experience is the founder and executive director of People Like Us (PLU). PLU began as a thesis paper about inclusion that was completed at the end of my mentor's college career. She utilized her love and knowledge of film to turn her thesis paper into a compelling documentary about her younger sister with Down syndrome, as well as several other members of the local community with varied abilities. Over 1,200 people attended the

premiere of the documentary at a local theater, and she decided to turn PLU into a nonprofit organization after realizing PLU had the potential to be a much-needed solution to a gap in communities. She has grown the nonprofit for several years since into what it is today. My mentor always had a passion for the arts as well. Throughout primary and secondary school, she was extremely involved in musical theater. Due to health issues, she was unable to pursue this field as a career, but never lost interest in the arts. She was able to combine her two passions to create accessible and high-quality opportunities for individuals with varying abilities in the area of performing arts.

Capstone Project Focus

The goal of my culminating project was to help close the gap that has been created in arts education for individuals with disabilities, through research-based learning and a comprehensive guide. This residency experience and culminating capstone project were concentrated on the ACOTE focus areas of program policy development, as well as education. Program policy development, in relation to ACOTE, can be described as designing evidence-based programs to address unmet needs of the population, while education is described as the development of training modules, continuing education modules, and curriculum. The capstone project provided a way to improve upon existing curriculum, add research-based content to the curriculum, and create new content for PLU participants, partners, and instructors.

Due to current events, PLU recently decided that providing partners with a library of thorough and engaging *digital* resources, including video series and printable workbooks, will allow the organization to reach a larger volume of individuals than ever before. Throughout the 16-week residency, my mentor and I worked together to organize and create high quality video content (targeted towards the end user, or individuals with intellectual disabilities) and

corresponding downloadable lesson planning materials (targeted towards arts educators, instructors, and volunteers) that take groups of individuals with ID through each step of putting on a full musical theater production. These lessons serve as a guide for individuals with varying abilities from initial practices and theory all the way to a final performance, while learning important musical terms, theater knowledge, and engaging in research-based activities during each lesson. Students also learn specific songs, choreography, and the script for the performance.

As a part of my culminating project, I helped create and carry out this full 15-lesson course that individuals with varied abilities can independently take virtually or in a live class setting. One of my responsibilities was piloting the course through a live virtual class to gain feedback from participants and parents. I was able to teach three separate 45-minute classes per week to three different age groups: children, teens, and adults. Each class had from 5-10 participants. Classes were held through an organization called Gigi's Playhouse, a PLU affiliate and partner. Gigi's Playhouse reaches over 26,000 individuals with Down syndrome worldwide, with over 50 physical locations, and virtual programs available to 48 countries across the globe. After review of the pilot class, it was decided by the board of directors that this course will continue to be offered to all Gigi's Playhouse families, and the lessons are able to be applied solely online through a web-based approach, or through an in-person class when the appropriate time comes. Through research and extensive online searching, it was made clear that there is no program such as ours in the current market. If there happens to be a similar program, it is not easily accessed or found online.

At the end of the course, the cast members are able to show off all of their hard work in a final production, whether virtually or in person. Along the way during the lessons, the students will engage in research-based activities designed to help develop and improve social emotional

learning. I was able to use experience in occupational therapy (OT) practice to enhance the curriculum. The warm-ups and activities we included in the courses help participants practice skills such as nonverbal communication (ex: eye contact), emotional regulation (breathing techniques, visualization), balance and strength (physical warm-ups, yoga, proprioceptive work), and other social-emotional skills. I included in the courses additional “instructor tips” with occupational therapy-based interventions and information that is useful when engaging with individuals with intellectual disabilities or sensory processing disorders. A disclaimer was provided to make sure readers (arts educators, general educators, volunteers, etc.) understand that any therapy-based interventions should be left to licensed therapists, therefore advocating for the legitimacy and specialization of the field. However, the curriculum does include research-based activities to be implemented by instructors that research shows to improve social-emotional skills in those with ID. Fortunately, PLU will soon have a licensed occupational therapist as a part-time staff to continue editing and adding content, to answer any questions instructors may have about sensory processing differences or behavior as communication, and to provide information on best practice for the population.

Literature Review of the Capstone Topic

There is a gap in arts education targeted towards individuals with intellectual disabilities. This population remains underserved in many areas, including in school systems, the work force, and extracurricular activities. While there are renowned programs for individuals with varying abilities in the athletic arena (ex: Special Olympics, etc), there is yet to be a renowned program for individuals with varying abilities specifically relating to the arts. The arts are known to enhance social-emotional learning, self-regulation, and improve overall quality of life and

mental health. The aim of this research is to identify a need for comprehensive and targeted education for individuals with intellectual disabilities relating to the arts.

Intersection of arts and special education. The arts are defined as the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power; the various branches of creative activity, such as painting, music, literature, and dance (Oxford Dictionary, 2021). There is relatively little research available on the intersection of the arts and special education, or education for those with intellectual disabilities (ID). Some smaller research studies have been completed, with results showing that the arts are an appropriate and meaningful way for students to practice non-verbal communication skills, independence, self-confidence, and problem solving. Additionally, the arts offer an organic way to break down socially constructed barriers in order for individuals with ID to form relationships with their typical peers (Sjoqvist et al., 2020). Fostering of personal relationships between those with and without disabilities can lead to a higher sense of inclusion throughout our society.

Sjoqvist et al. (2020) go into depth about the importance of crafts for individuals with ID. Crafts help students become more aware of the relationship between part and whole, as well as encourage problem solving with daily tasks through the avenue of personal choice. Crafts are also beneficial for fine motor skill development, which is a major part of almost any daily occupation. Andrus et.al (2012) go on to expand the benefits of the arts, arguing that inclusion in the arts leads to “developing imagination, increasing and regaining cognitive and creative skills, strengthening problem solving, evolving, and contributing to critical thinking, empowering students, and making a difference in overall academic achievement.” While performing arts are often overlooked as an expendable extracurricular, it is worth considering the impactful benefits

they are able to have on individuals with and without ID. Major life skills can be gained and improved upon through the use of various arts activities, therefore over time having the power to improve quality of life and life satisfaction overall.

Andrus et.al (2012) identify a large problem contributing the gap in arts education as being the need for a dynamic information hub complete with a wide range of resources including research studies, curriculum examples, programs, descriptions of model arts education and disability partnerships, policies, information on issues such as Universal Design, advocacy resources, and more. While there is information on the intersection between the arts and special education, the information is scattered across an array of platforms, websites, conferences, etc. Providing a hub for arts- specific information relating to individuals with ID would be a big step in the right direction. For example, a well-known resource for individuals with physical and intellectual disabilities in the athletic department is the Special Olympics. The Special Olympics provides an outlet and an opportunity for individuals with varying abilities to engage in athletic training, team sports, and competitions. Currently, there is not an equally well-known organization providing resources for individuals with ID relating to the arts. The aforementioned article proposes that a well-known organization such as the Kennedy Center, or a large university, might have the resources needed in order to create and run this type of hub. Another similar recommendation mentioned in this article was the establishment of a consortium of arts education and disability organizations to advance the national agenda towards inclusion. One way the Kennedy Center has furthered this agenda is by hosting an annual conference, VSA Intersections: Arts and Special Education Conference. This conference is a place where organizations, schools, and groups send representatives to present their arts programs for individuals with varying abilities for thousands of conference participants. According to The

Kennedy Center (2020), the conference provides the opportunity to share current research, best practice, programs, and policy, as well as serve as a catalyst for change through innovative, through-provoking and interactive sessions. The goal of the conference is to help shape the best practices and educational experiences for students with disabilities through the use of the arts.

Social-emotional learning. Beyond schooling in the classroom setting and subject specific curriculum, social emotional learning is a key aspect of education and development for individuals with and without ID. According to CASEL (2021), social emotional learning (SEL) is defined as “the process through which people acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible caring decisions”. The arts can be used to improve on these skills in a more enriching way than in the traditional academic setting. Involvement in extracurricular activities relating to the arts is an effective way to improve social skills, work with others towards a collective goal, express feelings in a non-traditional setting, and build a more unique identity. As an arts educator, it is important to be aware and intentional in how social-emotional learning is incorporated into arts-based curriculum, including creating a safe space for students to challenge themselves and reach their creative potential (Farrington et al., 2020). Some effective ways to incorporate SEL into arts-based curriculum are through games that encourage eye contact, nonverbal communication such as gestures (ex: Charades), role playing, and more.

According to Wang (2021), the arts may offer a quantifiable strategy to develop skills and knowledge for students in special education. Arts engage multiple senses simultaneously, including visual, auditory, tactile, and proprioceptive stimuli, over time increasing the body’s organization of sensory stimuli. Many individuals with ID are also diagnosed with sensory

processing disorders, which can affect the person's natural ability to engage in social-emotional learning. Wang (2021) reports that there have been medical studies finding that participation in creative arts reduces stress, therefore enhancing the ability to learn. Furthermore, many aspects of sensory integration are naturally embedded into the creative and performing arts, not only improving the body's ability to organize sensory information, but resulting in greater social-emotional and self-regulation skills through an organic process. Improvements in these skills can have a positive impact on school-based academic performance, behavior, self-esteem, and stress levels.

Mason et al. (2008), in their study, found that the arts are an outlet for individuals with ID to communicate information about their world and their emotions in an appropriate way. They also found that arts allow for decision-making and problem solving, which are two characteristics that are vital for individuals to become active community members and independent citizens. Because there is no right or wrong, no one way to do things, when speaking about the arts, it allows students the opportunity to engage in activities with less pressure than in a traditional setting. Every person, regardless of ability or disability, has the ability to engage in the creative arts in some capacity. In their two-part study, Mason et al. (2008), conducted 34 focus groups over two years, with the focus groups including special education teachers, artists, and arts directors. Interviews were transcribed and coded for common themes. Second, the participants were provided with a curriculum as well as support to implement the curriculum into their classrooms and group settings. They were also all a part of a virtual community where they could share knowledge and expertise with the other participants. The researchers concluded that the arts are an important integration for students with disabilities,

and can be effectively implemented through well-designed tools specifically targeted towards the population.

Sulewski et al. (2012) studied the artwork and reflective words of 47 young artists with disabilities in order to find information on how their perceptions of how their identities as “individual with a disability” and “artist” interact and intersect. The researchers argue that at the heart of visual, creative, and performing arts, there is a celebration of differences, an applauding of those who break the norm. Sulewski et al. (2012) believe that engaging in the arts can help with the identity-forming process and self-realization, creating a positive sense of identity. One common theme found throughout the reflective words shared by the artists was that art helped give their lives meaning and purpose.

An important aspect of social emotional learning is self-regulation. Self-regulation is defined as the ability of an individual to manage behavior and control impulses so that the individual is able to meet certain standards, achieve desired goals, or reach personal ideals (Hendricks, 2016). This is one of the most important skills for success in school, social situations, the workforce, and community participation. Self-regulation is important for maintaining control over emotions, staying on task, exercising good executive functioning skills, and forming positive relationships (Hendricks, 2016). According to Hendricks (2016), research shows that engagement in the arts can change the achievement trajectory of students, and it is hypothesized that there is a positive correlation between fine arts engagement and improved self-regulation. Few results were found due to limitations in the study, but it is worth noting that self-regulation scores were the highest among students involved in visual arts. Further research would be beneficial in studying this hypothesis and looking to identify a correlation between involvement in the arts and level of self-regulation.

Occupational therapy, social emotional learning, and the arts. Occupational therapy (OT) has roots in the arts as well as science. OT was born out of the Arts and Crafts and Moral Treatment Movements, with the philosophy that “all people are entitled to consideration and compassion, and that participation in purposeful activity improves health” (Bathje, 2012). As the profession grew, so did the areas of life it addressed. OT grew, expanded, and diverged from focusing solely on arts to a unique blend of “art and science”. Today, the arts typically fall under the occupation “Leisure” in most cases, but the arts have been used as a modality of treatment for many years to address all areas of occupation, including activities of daily living (ADLs), education, play, social participation, etc. To this day, OT has maintained its identity as a health profession that utilizes creativity in practice (Bathje, 2012).

According to the American Occupational Therapy Association (2021), there are five SEL competencies; these include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. SEL is ingrained into every area of occupation. OT has an important role in promoting SEL at every level of intervention. Practitioners have the skill set to create opportunities to learn SEL during instructional or non-instructional scenarios.

The American Journal of Occupational Therapy (2020), published an article about a qualitative study analyzing the characteristics of an inclusive musical theater program called “Dream Catchers”. Results showed that the program had an overall positive effect on the behaviors and social wellbeing of the children, an improved perception of how the parents viewed their children’s abilities, as well as the community’s more positive perspective on disability. This study helps show that inclusive organizations can shift mindsets to create a more positive view of those with disabilities. Unfortunately, many people view those with disabilities as a burden to society, while oftentimes they merely do not have the same opportunities to be

involved in the community. Organizations such as Dream Catchers are creating accessible and inclusive environments for individuals with varying abilities to live up to their full potential through engagement in the arts.

There are many ways that occupational therapy practice can be implemented through the arts in an engaging, innovative way.

Needs Assessment

As evidenced by the literature review above, there is a gap between the *need* for high quality, engaging arts content for those with varied abilities and what is *actually* available in the market. Engaging in the performing arts (for individuals with and without ID) allows for an organic development of SEL skills, body and self-awareness, healthy coping mechanisms, abstract thinking, and more. These are all skills that many individuals with ID receive treatment for in a therapeutic setting. By combining arts-based learning with OT practice skills, an innovative curriculum was created to help close this gap through a new, nontraditional route. Baseline information was collected by the residency mentor prior to taking steps towards content creation to fulfil the aforementioned gap in the community. Arts educators, community theaters throughout the nation, school systems, parents of individuals with ID, as well as individuals with ID themselves were contacted in order to assess what type of content would be beneficial for the end user as well as instructors. Many of the points below are based on informal conversations with these individuals and organizations about the importance of minimizing this gap, as well as what content and format would be beneficial for working towards our goal.

Due to the current events in the world, social isolation and lack of community participation are two things that many are experiencing in their daily lives. Many have been turning to technology and different forms of virtual interaction to continue engaging with others,

but there are groups of individuals who do not have as many opportunities for virtual participation. Very little quality, online content exists for people with intellectual differences. This could be due to lack of awareness of how this population has been affected by today's events, or possibly due to others not knowing the best way to create content that is user friendly for individuals with varying abilities. My goal through my capstone project was to decrease this gap by providing high quality virtual content that can be used in-person as well when the appropriate time comes so that people with intellectual disabilities can get the social, emotional, and academic stimulation they need for improved quality of life and participation.

When inclusive theater programs across the nation were shut down due to COVID, many individuals with disabilities had their programming stripped from them. Therefore, PLU has determined to create high-quality video content (targeted towards persons with disabilities) and corresponding lesson plans (targeted towards arts educators) that take groups or individuals through each step of creating a full musical theater production. The lessons serve as a guide for individuals with varying abilities from initial practices all the way to a final performance, while learning important musical terms, theater knowledge, and engaging in research-based activities during each lesson. Once in-person programming resumes, this content can be paired with the corresponding workbooks for instructors to have a 15-week curriculum that emphasizes interdisciplinary development and research-based activities.

In February of 2021, PLU completed their first "Putting on a Production" series, featuring an original, musical script for an inclusive production of Red Riding Hood. This is one of twelve scripts PLU has created and copyrighted specifically for individuals with varying abilities. Essential to the scripts are roles for nonverbal individuals, as well, so every person that desires to showcase their abilities and develop their social-emotional learning can be involved.

The workbook and video series for “Putting on a Performance: Red Riding Hood” will serve as the template for additional courses that will be created. The curriculum highlights “instructor tips” throughout the lessons with tips specific to the Occupational Therapy practice, which teach the implementer how to address certain communication difficulties, sensory processing differences, and information about research-based activities they can engage in with their groups that are proven through research and therapeutic intervention to improve communication and social skills over time.

In each course, students learn foundational theater skills, as well as learn the script, vocal score, and choreography for each production. The goal of the courses is to create a space where individuals of all abilities feel welcome, engaged, and comfortable. Here, they can showcase their abilities and develop a wide range of useful life skills. PLU collaborated with Gigi’s Playhouse, where PLU hosted three weekly classes (three separate age groups), which implemented the 15-lesson series for the intended audience, individuals of varying ages with a diagnosis of Down Syndrome. Classes were held on a virtual video call platform. Before and after the program, parents or guardians were asked to fill out an evaluation form that will be used to measure any improvements in social, communication, and self-regulation skills as a result of the courses.

Following the pilot course for Gigi’s Playhouse, the organization has decided to continue offering this class for its participants. While the pilot class was only available to a small number of participants to test if the content was able to be graded up and down to match the individuals’ abilities, Gigi’s Playhouse has confirmed that this course will now be offered to all of their virtual participants on a sign-up basis. Instructors will watch the pilot series and go through training to ensure that they are fit to instruct a class. Additionally, the in-person Gigi’s Playhouse

locations will also have access to this course in order to teach the 15-week course to their live members. There has been very positive feedback from both participants and guardians throughout the process of putting on the pilot course, and this feedback has helped PLU to recognize the importance of filling this gap in society.

The implementation of the content in this course has the opportunity to improve performance in all areas of occupation for the population served. Areas of occupation include activities of daily living (ADLs), instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs), sleep and rest, work, education, play, leisure, and social participation. Described are a few examples of how the warm-ups, activities, and lessons included in the capstone project course are able to address areas of occupation for participants. For example, some activities and warm-ups throughout the lessons, including breathing techniques, guided imagery, and engagement in the visual arts such as coloring, are backed by research confirming stress-relieving or reducing effects. Stress relief can lead to lowered anxiety, having the ability to improve quality of sleep, education, social engagement, etc. Additionally, group games such as Charades and Mirror Mirror (participant mirrors the actions of another participant) are meant to give opportunity for increased social engagement, eye contact, body awareness, turn taking, and abstract thinking. All of these skills are important for improved social participation and relationship building.

Goals and Objectives

Goal One. For my capstone project, one goal I focused on was ensuring any program or content I created would be easily replicable and sustainable for future use within the organization. After creating the content (see Appendix A and B for reference) for my culminating capstone project in a replicable workbook and video series template, we are now able to duplicate and tweak the process to create other web-based programs for participants.

While this was a large amount of work on the front-end, it creates less work in the long run because programs, through efficient and replicable processes, ideally become self-sustaining. We are still working to perfect the systems, but we are well on the way to creating a sustainable program that can be easily altered and duplicated for a variety of programs, uses, and purposes.

Goal 1 objectives and results:

- Due to the creation of a replicable course template, upcoming large projects being undertaken at PLU include a similar “Putting on a Production” course with a different end performance, as well as a professional development course on inclusion for educators within the school system. Both of these projects will follow a similar layout as the capstone project, with a video series as well as a supplemental downloadable workbook.
- We were able to complete this goal within the timeframe of residency, but will continue to adjust and improve upon our system in the future. Achieving this goal helped to bridge the gap addressed in the needs assessment, creating a simple template for multiple programs, courses, and opportunities to be developed for people with varying abilities. One problem with many of the current opportunities available for this population is that they do not become sustainable enough to last more than a few years. There is a lot of work, preparation, and training involved with working with the population, and without a guide or framework to go off of, it can be overwhelming for many.
- Our guides, curriculum, and step-by-step processes provide a way for organizations and entities to provide these opportunities without all of the difficult and time-

consuming work on the front end. They are easily graded up or down based on the age and ability level of groups.

Goal Two. My second goal for the capstone project was to be able to pilot the program virtually with groups of individuals with varying abilities to improve my confidence in teaching workshops and courses.

Goal 2 objectives and results:

- I was able to teach the 15- week course to various age groups and ability levels. In these weekly classes, volunteers were present that were hoping to learn how to better work with individuals with varying abilities. Positive feedback was given, including that volunteers felt more confident after watching the lessons that they would also be able to lead a group of individuals with varying abilities.
- The lessons were recorded, and are going to be used to train volunteers for Gigi's Playhouse across the nation so that this course can be replicated to accommodate all interested participants.
- I am involved in an upcoming Gigi's Playhouse national meeting to advocate for future courses, and was asked to return as an instructor for future courses that Gigi's Playhouse will make available to their over 26,000 users with Down syndrome.

Goal Three. One of the most important goals was to include best practices and practical tips influenced by the OT practice throughout this course. I hoped to use my education and fieldwork experience and passion for OT to improve the curriculum and advocate for the profession.

Goal 3 objectives and results:

- Within the content I was able to include research-based information on ways to improve areas such as social participation, self- regulation, and communication skills.
- My mentor gave full access to the current curriculum, and as a resident with OT-based training, I was able to add best practices for working with individuals with varied abilities, such as instructor tips on how to manage behaviors related to sensory processing differences, interpreting behavior as communication, tips on how to create a sensory friendly environment, choice making, etc.
- I created an evaluation form for parents to fill out prior to and following their performer's participation in the program. This evaluation addressed social and communication skills such as nonverbal communication, turn taking, voice projection, and understanding of personal space. It also addressed self- regulation strategies such as ability to cope in a non-disruptive manner, ability to utilize strategies such as deep breathing, etc. when feeling overwhelmed. By using layman's terms and understandable diction, I hope that any volunteer or organization leader reading the information will feel more prepared and capable of working with individuals with varying abilities after reading the curriculum.

Goal Four. My main goal for my doctoral residency and capstone project was to provide individuals with varying abilities the opportunity to engage in the arts. I hoped to assist in the nationwide expansion of the program, and to effectively train new coaches with varying abilities in the skills needed to educate others and self- advocate. In the end, I wanted to leave PLU with a sustainable, replicable program that could be utilized in years to come.

Goal 4 objectives and results:

- Fortunately, we are now expanding our reach to school systems across the US. We are in the process of creating another professional development series, much like the series we created during my residency, but now geared towards educators in public schools. This curriculum will be considered a CEU that teachers can go through and get CEU credit for through the school system. Courses in this 120-part series will include: scaffolding content for varied abilities, identifying behavior as communication, inclusive performing arts practices, creating a sensory friendly environment, grading material up or down within a class, etc. The goal of this series is to provide educators (theater, special education, and general education teachers) with all of the resources and knowledge they need to foster an inclusive, equitable environment for students with ID.
- We are in the process of creating another “Putting on a Production” course with the same template as the capstone project completed. This will be available to Gigi’s Playhouse as well as individuals or organizations willing to pay for the virtual course materials.

Additional Learning Experiences

Throughout the 16-week residency experience, I was able to gain many unforeseen experiences through PLU. I had a wide variety of experiences and opportunities, such as grant writing, webinar planning/ organizing/ formatting/ writing, creating illustrations and graphics, instructing in a video series, creating evaluation forms, website design and online course creation, business planning research, and much more. The residency experience was very well-rounded and I was able to learn and sharpen many skills throughout the process.

Summary

All additions and edits made as a part of this capstone project have been permanently added to the main curriculum for continued use. Additionally, the courses created will continue to be used to educate and guide arts and general educators in hosting a 15-week performing arts course for individuals with varying abilities.

Recommendations for future work with site and mentor. PLU fosters an engaging learning environment, with ample opportunity for personal and professional growth. There are many ways in which a residency student could develop a sustainable and mutually beneficial capstone project, whether through program development, education, research, or advocacy. The residency mentor at PLU maintains an open mind, allowing for brainstorming and mutual learning, always eager to gain more understanding and knowledge of the OT field. Any residency student interested in working with individuals with varying abilities, and who enjoys frequent collaboration and working on a team would be a potential fit for this organization.

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Appendix A

Appendix A consists of a portion of one lesson pulled from the 15-part, 65-page workbook course created during my doctoral residency experience. The workbook is targeted towards arts educators and volunteers looking to teach an inclusive performing arts course. Due to copyright, the full 65-page workbook cannot be provided for public use. Attached is a link to the full Lesson 05 for reference.



PUTTING ON A PRODUCTION:

RED RIDING HOOD

**15 LESSONS TO GUIDE YOUR CAST
FROM PRACTICE TO PERFORMANCE**

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05

WILDFLOWER BALLET

Teach your troupe the full choreography for the "Wildflower Ballet." This content is structured for a 40-minute class, including a warm-up, activity, reflection, and curtain call.

MATERIALS

- Playlist of your troupe's favorite songs to play during your warm-up
- Flower with stem for each performer
- Speaker for music**
- Screen to show a performance of the "Wildflower Ballet"
- Scan the above QR code with your phone's camera app for the videoed choreography and musical track

INTRODUCTION

 2 minutes

Welcome your troupe members. Share the structure for today's class:

- Physical Warm-up
- Learn the choreography to the "Wildflower Ballet"
- Time to reflect on the dance
- Curtain Call to end class

Check in with your troupe members and share any expectations you may have for the day.

WARM-UP

 6 minutes

Lead a series of stretches to make sure everyone's body is warm before learning the choreography. Instruct the performers to mirror your movements. Use this opportunity to energize and engage your troupe members by playing music relevant to them during your warm-up.

Slowly and safely lead the following full body stretches*:

- Reach arms up
- Reach toward your toes
- Bend to one side
- Bend to the other side
- Neck roll to one side
- Neck roll to the other side
- Bend your knees, or *plié*

Repeat the movements above. Then, lead these warm-ups:

- Arm circles (both directions)
- Ankle-roll with right foot
- Ankle-roll with left foot
- Swing your arms
- Jazz square (both directions)
- 3- step turn clap (repeat x4)

Repeat the final series of movements. Then, lead one more round of stretches:

- Bend your knees, or *plié*
- Neck roll to one side
- Neck roll to the other side
- Bend to one side
- Bend to the other side
- Reach toward your toes
- Reach arms up

Affirm your performers for their participation, explaining how important it is to warm-up before doing any kind of choreography or exercise. Warming up the body helps to prevent injury and prepare us for movement both physically and mentally.

ACTIVITY

 30 minutes

It's time to learn the "Wildflower Ballet!" Before learning each step, watch the full dance together! The link to watch the full "Wildflower Ballet" choreography, as well as the soundtrack, can be found by scanning the QR code at the top of the lesson.

ASK THE TROUPE

1. How did the music make you feel?

Encourage the performers to share how the music made them feel. Point out the calming, rhythmic nature of the music. Does it make you want to take deep breaths? Have the performers join you in taking a few deep breaths to calm their bodies and prepare their minds to learn the choreography.

2. Who is ready to learn the choreography to the "Wildflower Ballet"?

Share that the "Wildflower Ballet" is broken into 3 parts:

1. Entrance
2. Seated Section
3. Exit

Appendix B

Appendix B consists of a one video lesson pulled from the 15-part video series for the course created during my doctoral residency experience. The video is targeted towards individuals with varying abilities. Due to copyright, the full 15-part video series cannot be provided for public use. Attached below is the link for the Lesson 05 video for reference.

Link to full Lesson 05 Video: https://youtu.be/mNUdKXj_pls

Appendix C

Appendix C consists of the evaluation created for parents or guardians to complete prior to and following participant engagement in the 15-week performing arts course.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScUfdax7gXN-2VDpesSHDp5q5FRSzD5d6SV6vkWTP5c-YcmDg/viewform>