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The Implementation of a Career-Readiness Program for Youth in a Group/Foster Care Setting

Brianie Clarke
vg0304.bc@gmail.com

Brianie Clarke
Nova Southeastern University, bc1426@mynsu.nova.edu

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The Implementation of a Career-Readiness Program for Youth in a Group/Foster Care Setting

Brianie Clarke, OTD-S

Jynelle Armstrong (Program Director)- A Kids Place

Gustavo Reinoso, Ph.D., OTR/L



Figure 1.

Introduction

- About 70% of foster care (FC) youth desired to go to college, similar to their non-fostered peers, but only about 20% enrolled in college.
- The transition from high school to any form of postsecondary education can pose a huge challenge for individuals living in a group home and/or foster home setting. This can be due to decreased outlets of support, reduced academic preparation, and lack of or inconsistent guidance from the the adult staff surrounding the FC individuals.

Site Description



Figure 2.

Vision Statement: To create, implement, and sustain a program which raises the standard of residential care for foster children

Mission Statement: Provide a safe, loving, and nurturing home for foster children

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Primary Focus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To keep sibling groups together in a safe, stable, home-like environment until a more permanent placement can be provided as they continue to heal from the trauma they've endured. |
| Services Currently Offered | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residential services/care to children from birth to age 18, who have been removed from their homes throughout the Tampa Bay area Provision of Independent Life Skills education |

Literature Review Summary

- Significant relationship existed between career readiness and the attainment of a job (Gates et al., 2018).
 - Career readiness preparation for foster care (FC) youth, while being under the care of the US welfare system, is very important as these youth transitioned into the world of employment (Rios & Rocco, 2014).
- Many support services that were available to FC youth were inadequate and lacked true forethought. The current FC infrastructure, with variability across states taken into account, has not established efficient programs to provide FC youth with the skill development needed to successfully transition into self-sufficient adulthood (Gates et al., 2018; Paul-Ward et al., 2014).
 - Support services should assist FC youth in overcoming barriers and establishing networks of support to increase access to resources (Unrau et al., 2020).
- FC individuals must be well-versed in federal and state laws to benefit from federal and state programs that are available to fund their education (Unrau et al., 2012).
- Support from similar-aged peers and/or professional support can benefit FC individuals as they progress along their educational journeys (Kirk et al., 2011; Morton et al., 2018).



Figure 3.

Summary of Needs Assessment

- Develop a program for career exploration and the curation of realistic career tracks to accomplish educational goals
- Explore various trades in an interactive format and establish connections with professionals in different trades
- Create accessible resources for 13+ year old individuals to use as they move through the educational system

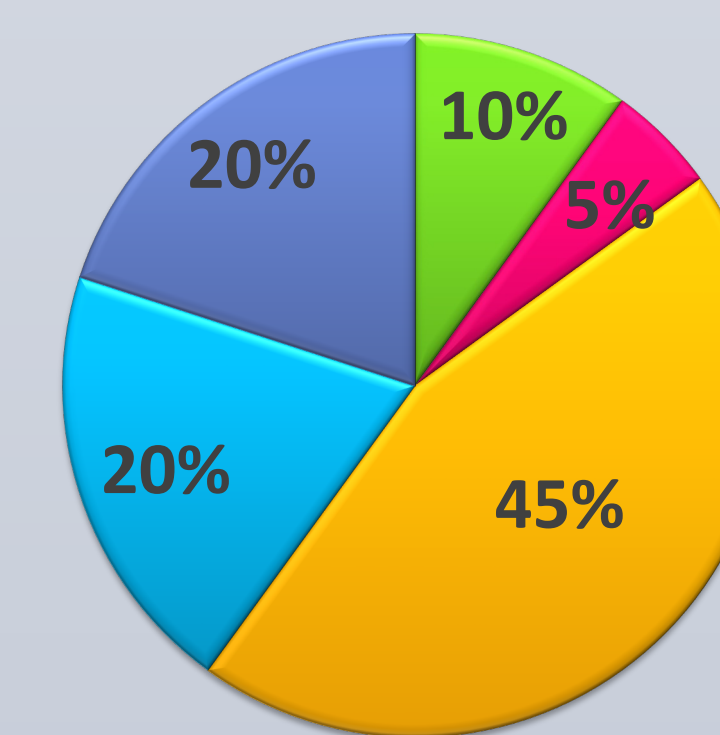
Capstone Project Description

A sixteen-week career readiness program focused on gauging what each person's interests are, curating a realistic career pathway/plan that will aid in the accomplishment of their goals, and creating resourceful materials that will prepare participants to begin postsecondary education. Each plan is individualized based on the participant's interests, but the program itself exposes them to various career options.

Target Population: Individuals who reside at A Kid's Place (AKP) who are 13 years of age and older

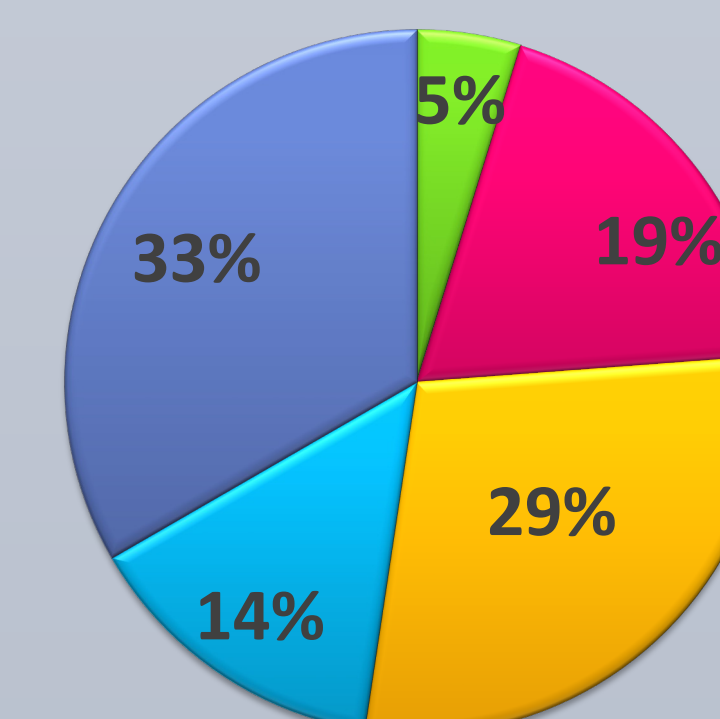
Program Outcomes	Limitations
Materials created will be added to the independent life skills program as an extension of independent living	Length of capstone project (16 weeks) was too short to implement the program and take note of its impact on participants over time
Participants increased exposure to various career options and the necessary requirements	Individuals are constantly being placed within and are leaving AKP
	Series of processes to adhere to when working with individuals who are wards of the state inherently makes it more challenging work with these participants at times
	Majority of the participants are between 13 and 14 years old (just about to start high school), so many of the participants focused on other aspects of independent living

Pre - Test



Level of Readiness: 1 2 3 4 5

Post - Test



Level of Readiness: 1 2 3 4 5

Learning Objectives Achieved

- Designed a physical and virtual platform for easy access to career-readiness resources and educated participants on the importance of self-advocacy (conducting their own searches, seeking out additional assistance, etc.).
- Obtained ratings from participants via administration of a pre and post program implementation survey regarding level of career readiness to assess program effectiveness.
- Provided an in-service training for staff members on how to use resources created to best support their teens on their postsecondary educational journeys.



Implications for OT Practice

- Professionals must be aware of their place of privilege when working with this unique population and address the kids appropriately to increase buy-in.
 - Building rapport and trust is top-priority when working with these individuals and creating materials for them to use.
- The incorporation of meaningful, occupational-based programming in this emerging practice area would allow for the provision of baseline assessments, identification of perceptions of self-efficacy, short and long-term goal setting, activities for skill development and mastery, and much more.
- Williams (2016) suggests that future research should be done on different ways to enhance the educational opportunities of FC youth, including the development of comprehensive college-readiness programs.
 - Job positions within independent life skill programming would benefit from the knowledge, skills, and creativity that occupational therapists can provide (Paul-Ward et al., 2014).

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