

Effectiveness of an OT Life Skills Program at a County Justice Center: Key Community Stakeholder and Former Student–Provider Perspectives

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DOI: 10.5014/ajot.2022.76S1-PO113

Date presented: April 2, 2022

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Occupational therapy (OT) services in justice-based settings continue to increase as knowledge of the benefits of OT in corrections becomes more widespread, often focusing on life skill development to enhance community re-entry (Dillon et al., 2020). An OT life skills program was established at a county jail in Ohio in 2012. This program was initially organized and approved by key community stakeholders, including OT faculty, and has been delivered by Level II fieldwork students under the supervision of an OT faculty member. Since its inception in 2012, the focus was primarily on establishing and delivering the OT life skills program. A more direct study of program outcomes was proposed and approved in 2020 but was unable to be implemented due to COVID-19 restrictions at this county jail. Two additional studies were approved in 2021 to determine the satisfaction with and perceptions of the life skills program effectiveness by key community stakeholders and former Level II fieldwork students who delivered this program. These studies were non-experimental and phenomenological, focused on two different participant groups with significant familiarity regarding the participation of these individuals in this OT life skills program. Both studies were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection. All Level II fieldwork students who have administered the life skills program since 2012 were selected to receive a survey about the efficacy of the life skills program, including strengths, weaknesses and potential program enhancements. Upon receipt of the survey results 6 former students were randomly selected to be interviewed for a more detailed explanation of their experiences delivering the life skills program. Various community professionals who have provided support for the development and initiation of this OT life skills program and have followed the progression of the program since 2012 were also interviewed. These key stakeholders were interviewed either in person or via an online face-to-face tool using a semi-structured interview developed by the research team. Interview questions were generally focused on specific, personal, environmental and occupational factors that may have impacted the delivery of the life skills program to these individuals and the perceived general effectiveness of the life skills program as delivered. The online survey tool calculated the results of the Likert Scale questions in the Level II fieldwork student survey and a thematic analysis was completed on all interview questions asked of both the key stakeholders and the former fieldwork students. Results generally indicate strong support for this OT life skills program and how participating in this program benefits the individuals who complete all five week-long modules. Former Level II fieldwork students identified specific program strengths that prepare inmates for post-incarceration community living and provided suggestions that could enhance the overall effectiveness of specific modules. The key community stakeholders provided generally positive feedback about the development and delivery of this life skills program and indicated that OT in general and this life skills program are an important addition to the overall scope of services offered to these individuals who are incarcerated. These data provide an initial indication of the benefits and efficacy of this specific OT life skills program. As operations at the county jail return to normal post COVID-19, the initially proposed outcome studies will be conducted in order to obtain further valuable information on the impact of the role of OT in this setting and the impact of this OT life skills program.

References

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