Implications for Occupational Therapy in Community Re-Entry

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Abstract

The United States has the highest rates of incarceration in the world (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). Long periods of incarceration lead to occupational deprivation, alienation, and decreased autonomy. A longitudinal study from 2005-2010 found that 67.8% of incarcerated individuals were re-arrested for a new crime within three years and 76.6% within 5 years (Durose et al., 2014). The purpose of this research is to further determine the role of occupational therapy within the criminal justice system and how it can promote occupational justice, improve overall well-being, and decrease the rates of recidivism. The continuous high rates of recidivism signal a call to action, to modify the programming in place to better serve those that it affects. This research took place over a 14-week period at both a work-release facility and a non-profit organization. An interest survey was sent out to participants who have utilized Public Advocates in Community Re-entry (PACE) resources. A total of 74 responses were collected and the data was analyzed to determine the levels of interest in different types of programming. Pre/Post-test surveys were also administered at Duvall Residential Center regarding the PACE career readiness course. Data was collected to identify gaps in knowledge, areas of improvement, and overall general feedback regarding the course. A total of 36 responses were collected. Occupational therapists can provide direct support as well as serve as a consultative role within this setting. OT’s can also provide client-centered and/or group-based programming to work with individuals to meet their personal and professional goals through a client-centered approach. While more research is needed to fully determine the role of OT within the criminal justice setting, survey results indicate that there is a need for OT.

Keywords: Occupational therapy, occupational deprivation, recidivism
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The United States has the highest number of incarceration rates around the world. According to Sawyer and Wagner (2020):

The American criminal justice system holds almost 2.3 million people in 1,833 state prisons, 110 federal prisons, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,134 local jails, 218 immigrant detention facilities, and 80 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. Territories.

There has been a 500% increase in incarceration rates in the U.S. within the last 40 years, although research has shown that mass incarceration is not an effective strategy for increasing public safety (The Sentencing Project, 2020). Incarceration rates disproportionately affect people of color. It is known that African American individuals are incarcerated at more than 5 times the rate of white individuals, although African American individuals make up only 32% of the U.S. population (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2020). The estimated cost of mass incarceration in the United States is $182 billion (Wagner & Robuy, 2017).

Incarceration commonly leads to occupational deprivation, alienation, decreased self-efficacy, and autonomy.

Recidivism

Recidivism is defined as criminal acts that result in rearrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without new sentencing within a three-year period from an individual’s initial release (National Institute of Justice, n.d.). A study completed between 2005 and 2014 found that 83% of individuals released were re-arrested within 9 years (Alper, 2018). In 2016, 36.95% of offenders released recidivated within three years in Indiana (Indiana Department of Corrections,
According to Indiana Department of Corrections (2019), the younger an individual is upon release the more likely they are to reoffend.

Justice-involved individuals are faced with an extensive number of barriers post-incarceration including difficulty obtaining employment, housing, educational opportunities, and more. “The cyclical manner of people being transferred from their community and then reintroduced to that community without sufficient support has a massive impact at individual, community, national, social, and economic levels (Jaegers et al., 2020). According to Crabtree et al. (2016), “challenges are often deeply rooted in past lived experiences and circumstances such as homelessness, limited marketable work experience, intellectual disabilities, poor education, mental health conditions, little to no family support, affiliation with gangs, or a history of substance abuse” (Crabtree et al., 2016, p. 402). A lack of knowledge regarding basic life skills contributes to recidivism rates. It is important to address each individual holistically in order to promote successful re-entry.

**Barriers**

Individuals who have experienced incarceration face many barriers upon release including but not limited to healthcare, education, job searching, housing, etc. The Affordable Care Act has made it possible for individuals who have a felony conviction to receive health insurance. They must apply for and receive Medicaid through a 60-day application window post-incarceration, however prior to the Affordable Care Act this was not possible. It is important that individuals receive health insurance post-release, as individuals may have health issues that went unaddressed during incarceration such as substance use disorder, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, etc.
Limited access to education poses a large barrier to individuals within the criminal justice system as, “29% of the U.S. population in 2008, compared to less than 4% of formerly incarcerated people, held a college degree. The difference is even more pronounced among those who hold a high school diploma or GED, “while those in the general public have a 1 in 3 chance of attaining a college degree, a formerly incarcerated person’s chance is less than 1 in 20,” (Couloute, 2018). Some individuals may have the opportunity to receive their High School Equivalency (HSE) Diploma or General Education Diploma (GED) while incarcerated, however individuals must maintain good behavior and have a long enough sentence to do so. Individuals who have a background face barriers when applying to college as college applications continue to ask questions regarding criminal history, which research has shown is a deterrent thus causing students to disregard the application process due to possible discrimination, hindering their ability to be accepted into a college program (Couloute, 2018). Individuals convicted of a drug-related offense or an involuntary civil commitment for a sexual offense are not eligible to receive federal financial aid or a Federal Pell Grant. While there are loopholes in this clause, without assistance, individual’s post-incarceration may not know how to supersede these rules to receive aid. Individuals may apply for and be accepted into trade schools; however, they must pay close attention to barriers that may inhibit their ability to become certified, which varies from state to state.

Job applications in most states require individuals to check a box that asks if they have ever been convicted of a felony. Individuals may assume that because they are checking the box for being convicted of a felony they may be automatically denied, thus failing to complete the application. Many places of employment will not hire individuals who have been convicted of specific felonies, thus limiting job opportunities. This may force individuals to take jobs that
have less pay, or to take jobs that may be considered more dangerous. According to Couloute (2018), “there is a 27% unemployment rate among formerly incarcerated people, we find that those with low levels of formal education face even higher rates of unemployment rates.” Education levels and criminal history go hand in hand and are both considerable barriers to employment.

**Site Background**

Public Advocates for Community Re-Entry (PACE) is the site of this project. PACE is located on the Northeast side of Indianapolis and they primarily serve individuals within Marion County. The mission of PACE is “to provide a variety of services to help offenders, ex-offenders, and their families to lead productive and responsible lives in their community” (PACE, 2017). The individuals who are able to receive services from PACE must have a felony conviction or a minimum of five misdemeanor charges. The age range of individuals being served by this organization ranges from 17 to 70 years old. PACE currently has programming in place that addresses career readiness training, financial coaching, income supports coaching, Moral Recognition Therapy (MRT), and obtaining a Highschool Equivalency Diploma partnered with Marion University. PACE also has a contract with Duvall Residential Center, which is a work release facility for men. PACE provides Job Readiness Programming and Pre-Release meetings to help with their continuation of services at PACE upon their release.

In 2019, PACE served, 3,769 clients, 1,123 being new clients (PACE, 2019). The recidivism rate in Marion County in 2019 was 44%, with the entire state of Indiana’s being 34% (PACE, 2019). PACE’s recidivism rate was only, 4.3% (PACE, 2019). In 2018, 2.9% of clients were re-arrested (PACE, 2018).

**Problem Statement and Purpose**
While PACE already has several programs in place to address employment barriers and substance use disorders, additional programming addressing life-skills at an individual level would be beneficial in promoting occupational balance and independence. The role of occupational therapy within the criminal justice system is an emerging area of practice, however the scope of occupational therapy within this community site would benefit the participants and increase overall independence. Occupational therapy as a consultant role would also benefit this site through providing education on evidence-based practice and trauma informed care to PACE employees.

The purpose of this capstone is to identify the need for forensic occupational therapy and how it can be utilized within community re-entry programming as well as the criminal justice system to assist affected individuals in re-learning or learning life skills, promoting occupational independence, and to ultimately reduce the risk of recidivism.

Chapter 2: Needs Assessment

Needs Assessment Interview

A virtual interview in the form of an email took place with Rhiannon Edwards, the Executive Director of PACE. The types of questions asked were pertaining to demographics, identified needs, and current programming. Some areas of occupational deprivation identified that could use program development were technology, self-efficacy, cooking, and building relationships. Through the interview it was identified that depression, Borderline Personality Disorder or BPD, and schizophrenia are the most common mental health diagnosis seen within participants at PACE. PACE does supply bus passes when needed to address barriers with transportation.
Next, questions regarding the legal system were asked. It was asked if participants attend groups at PACE voluntarily, or if they are court ordered to attend. The answer was that it varies on a case by case basis, but some individuals are attending via court order. It was also asked if the site could benefit from grant writing, in which they concurred. Rhiannon expressed that it would be beneficial to create a presentation regarding occupational therapy and its role within this setting for staff members. It was asked if Rhiannon could foresee any restrictions or challenges with the completion of this project at PACE. Rhiannon expressed that it may be hard to obtain buy-in from participants and that it may also be difficult to keep participants engaged.

Lastly, Rhiannon was asked if she had any comments or questions to share. Rhiannon shared that occupational therapists have not been involved in the community within this population or within this re-entry network in Marion County. She expressed that it could potentially be an area of a new best practice.

**On Site Observation**

Once on site, there were two weeks of observation of the AYC course one taking place inside Duvall Residential Center and one taking place at PACE. It was noted that the styles of teaching were different and the 3-day course at Duvall had additional barriers due to it being a locked facility. Individuals inside of Duvall are not allowed to have access to technology and instructors do not have access to internet, which is a barrier. It should be noted that some individuals at Duvall appeared to be disengaged and unmotivated, which may be due to them being ordered to participate in the course. Many of the individuals have complex backgrounds causing a multitude of barriers regarding employment, housing, education, and overall independence.
An occupational therapy presentation was given to the entire staff at PACE to educate them on the background of OT and OT’s role within this setting. After the presentation additional questions were raised from Rhiannon including: types of agencies like ours that use OT’s and how, funding sources to pay for an onsite OT, ways OT is used to address childhood trauma in adults, and Is there an area of best practice for OT’s within transitional housing as PACE is looking at creating a transitional housing program. PACE employee’s also showed interest in referring clients to OT for specialized needs.

Chapter 3: Gap Analysis

This community site provides many great resources to address community re-entry including employment coaching, financial coaching, income supports coaching, and groups regarding substance use and recovery, traumatic brain injuries (TBI), and moral recognition training (MRT). However, there is a lack of occupation-based, client-centered care. This population would benefit from occupation-based programming to promote occupational independence, increased self-efficacy, and increased knowledge regarding life-skills. Programming should provide education regarding technology, building and rebuilding healthy relationships, developing healthy coping strategies, identifying healthy leisure activities and hobbies, goal setting and attainment, as well as grocery shopping, nutrition, cooking, and budgeting to assist with successful re-entry. The staff at PACE will also be educated on the profession of occupational therapy and its scope of practice as OT provides evidence-based, client-centered care. OT may also serve as a consultant role to assess and adjust current programming in place as well as to provide employee training surrounding trauma informed, client-centered care.
Chapter 4: Literature Review

Occupational Deprivation

Occupational deprivation is “the influence of an external circumstance that keeps a person from acquiring, using, or enjoying something,” (Willock, 1995, p. 1). Occupational deprivation may initially occur while an individual is incarcerated, however this translates into life post-incarceration as well thus hindering an individual's ability to successfully reintegrate into the community. Those incarcerated are required to follow strict rules and guidelines that are created for them, not allowing them the ability to make their own decisions. Individuals who are incarcerated for an extended period of time experience institutionalization, which affects their ability to think and act independently.

It is important to note that individuals within this population often lose their sense of autonomy including loss of independence. The self-determination theory (SDT) suggests that autonomy is a fundamental and universal psychological need, which is necessary to individuals’ well-being and quality of life (van der Kaap-Deeder, 2017). Research studies have shown that allowing an individual to make their own choices has a positive impact on motivation, effort, task performance, and perceived confidence, however there is little to no research in reference to autonomy and individuals in the prison system. The longer an individual's sentence, the longer they will go without utilizing basic life skills that are needed to function in society. Autonomy and independence are vital to success in everyday life. Individuals within this population need guidance to re-learn how to make their own decisions and learn or re-learn basic life skills to assist them in participating in prosocial roles to thus increase an occupationally balanced routine, while reducing the risk of returning to previous antisocial occupations (Connell, 2016).

Mental Health and Incarceration
There are a large number of individuals within the criminal justice system that have experienced at least one symptom of a mental health condition. Research has shown that the rate and risk of recidivating is higher among individuals who experience at least one symptom of a mental health condition compared to those who report no symptoms. According to Bronson & Berzofsky (2017), between 2011 and 2012 approximately 1 in 7 individuals held in state or federal prisons and one in four inmates self-reported symptoms consistent with serious psychological distress (SPD). The most common psychological disorders reported within this population include depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), personality disorder, and schizophrenia in this order (Brown et al. 2019). According to Bronson & Berfosky (2017), 88.1% of prisoners and 90.3% of jail inmates had received mental health treatment during their lifetime for a history of a mental health problems, however for both groups only about 37% were currently being treated for a mental health problem.

Occupational therapists can provide education regarding coping strategies, symptom management, and prosocial behaviors to decrease mental health symptoms to improve overall function and independence. Thomas et al. (2019) found that individuals diagnosed with mental health conditions often have very low rates of community involvement post-release and very high rates of recidivism, which emphasizes the need for community re-entry programs to bridge that gap. It is also important for programs to include areas of community involvement and reintegration, including peer support. It was found that the development of positive social and community supports improves the reentry and re-integration process post-release (Thomas et al., 2019).

Rowe and colleagues (2009) developed an intervention utilizing the citizenship theory for individuals who have behavioral health disorders and criminal justice histories based on the
principle of civic engagement. They define citizenship as, “a measure of the strength and form of the individual’s connection to the rights, responsibilities, roles, and resources that society offers to people through public and social institutions and through the informal, “associational” life of neighborhoods and local communities,” (Rowe et al., 2009). Their intervention included, “a didactic, skill-building component, a valued role project, and wraparound peer mentor support to increase access to community-based resources and to facilitate integration,” (Thomas et al., 2019). Overall, there are many different models and methods that can be utilized to guide programming when addressing community re-entry and mental health, however a there is a clear role for the use of occupational therapy.

**Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice is an alternative method that can be utilized when working with justice involved individuals. “The aim of restorative justice is to repair the harm done by the crime by bringing together the people most affected by the offense to determine how to deal with the offence,” (Bradshaw, 2005). Bradshaw & Roseborough (2005) discuss three types of restorative justice dialogue: victim-offender mediation (VOM), family group conferencing, and peacemaking circles; VOM being the most established model. The restorative justice approach can be beneficial in building social support, learning the importance of accountability, and healing trauma. Another restorative justice model that may impact individuals who have a history of criminal justice involvement and a psychiatric disability may be the circles of support and accountability, a branch of the peacemaking circles, however this has not yet been implemented within this population to know the effect that it may have (Rowe et al., 2009).

Individuals within this population have identified a strong desire to participate in programming regarding building and rebuilding healthy relationships. Individuals serving long
and/or multiple prison sentences often develop strained relationships with their family members. Addiction and individuals’ choices while actively suffering from addiction also impact individuals’ relationships with their family. Programming centered around restorative justice may help these individuals re-build relationships with their loved ones, while in a safe space.

**Education and Employment**

“Using data from the National Former Prisoner Survey, this report reveals that formerly incarcerated people are often relegated to the lowest rungs of the educational ladder; more than half hold only a high school diploma or GED, and a quarter hold no credential at all,” (Couloute, 2018). Education while incarcerated or upon release is an important factor in preventing recidivism. It has been found that education ultimately reduces recidivism, and this can be seen throughout many different types of educational programs including General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or Highschool Equivalency (HSE), basic literacy classes, vocational education, as well as postsecondary education (Davis et al., 2013). Individuals who participate in correctional education programs while incarcerated have 43% lower odds of recidivating when compared to inmates who do not, which translates to a 13% reduction in recidivism for those who participate (Davis et al., 2013). It was also found that completing correctional education could also increase the ability to obtain employment post incarceration. “The odds of obtaining employment post release among inmates who participated in correctional education (either academic or vocational) was 13% higher than the odds for those who had not participated,” (Davis et al., 2013). Educational training may include subjects such as obtaining a GED or vocational skills training, but it may extend as far as developing coping skills, increasing self-awareness, and knowledge regarding community mobility.
About 650,000 incarcerated individuals are released every year from prisons and jails in the U.S. of which approximately 2/3 will be re-arrested within three years (Yelowitz & Bollinger, 2015). A study by Yelowitz & Bollinger (2015) looked at a program that provides intense job-readiness and skills training between a one- and two-week period. The program, America Works emphasizes both interpersonal skills and practical skills such as: time management, anger management, resume preparation, interview techniques, and job search strategies (Yelowitz & Bollinger, 2015). The organization also partners with employers who are willing to hire ex-offenders, therefore increasing potential successes in securing jobs (Yelowitz & Bollinger, 2015). “The key finding is that training designed to quickly place former inmates in jobs significantly decreases the likelihood that ex-offenders with non-violent histories will be re-arrested,” (Yelowitz & Bollinger, 2015). The study found that only 31.1% of nonviolent offenders who received the enhanced training were rearrested during an 18 to 36-month period compared to a 50% rearrest rate for individuals who received standard training (Yelowitz & Bollinger, 2015). This program cost an estimated $5,000 per participant and an estimated average savings of $231,000 for each non-violent participant who needed extra help (Yelowitz & Bollinger, 2015). Job-readiness and interpersonal skills training promotes independence, reduces recidivism, and overall could potentially save government dollars in the long run.

**Occupational Therapy**

Occupational therapists utilize their skills along with theories and models to analyze an individual, their environment, and their occupations to decipher how to best assist the individual in becoming as independent as possible in all aspects of their life (AOTA, 2020). “Occupational science tenets regarding the establishment of functional roles, habits, and routines inform habitation and rehabilitation approaches to sustain people as they return to society from
Incarceration settings,” (Jaegers et al., 2020). Occupational therapy within the criminal justice system is an emerging area of practice and more research is needed to allow for a more evidence-based practice (Munoz et al., 2016). For example, Balint & Buciag (2012) found that individuals who did not receive occupational therapy services re-offended quickly after release in comparison to those that did receive occupational therapy services. However, Balint & Buciag (2012) had a small sample size of only two participants, which is a limiting factor.

A study by Munoz (2016) looked at the role of Occupational Therapy in the U.S. criminal justice setting. The study found that OT’s commonly used the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure and self-report assessments such as the Sensory Profile, the Interest Checklist, the Occupational Self-Assessment, and the Role Checklist when giving evaluations within the criminal justice setting (Munoz, 2016). Interpersonal communication and social skills, problem solving skills, stress management skills, coping skills, goal setting skills, employment, re-entry, and wellness skills were rated among the top 50% of reported interventions by OT’s within this study (Munoz, 2016). The interventions listed above fall within the scope of occupational therapy practice and are consistent with intervention methods utilized across a multitude of settings (Munoz, 2016). “Services that focus on skill development, relapse prevention, community reintegration, and employment are appropriate interventions for occupational therapy programming in criminal justice settings.” (Munoz, 2019).

Rehabilitation is defined as programming that is implemented to reduce crime by addressing the needs of an individual to address areas of deficits and to “repair” them (National Institute of Justice, n.d.) As the rates of incarceration and recidivism in the U.S. continue to rise there continues to be a lack of a rehabilitation as well as continuity of care within the prison system. Occupational therapists can provide client-centered, evidence-based, and trauma-
informed care in both group and individual settings while addressing areas of deficits such as coping strategies, stress management, building and re-building healthy relationships, and so much more.

Chapter 5: Guiding Model

The Participatory Occupational Justice Framework (POJF) was the foundational model guiding the doctoral capstone project at PACE. This framework was developed to facilitate social inclusion through the use of raising awareness of occupational injustices. “Social inclusion focuses on ensuring that people have opportunities, resources, and capabilities to fully participate in life and that they are supported to be contributing citizens in the society in which they live,” (Whiteford et al., 2018). This model utilizes a non-linear progression, therefore there is no starting or stopping point, which is important when working with this population as every individual is beginning their journey at a different place. This model is also not intervention based as it focuses on the use of collaborative action to address instances of occupational injustices (Whiteford et al., 2018, p.1).

The five key areas of the POJF model include: raising consciousness of occupational injustices, engaging collaboratively with partners, mediating agreement on a set plan, strategizing resource funding, supporting and implementing continuous evaluations, and lastly inspiring advocacy for sustainability or closure (Whiteford et al., 2018). This model allows occupational therapists to assess the needs of the population and utilize a collaborative model to meet individuals where they are in order to provide them with the appropriate recourse and support. Advocacy is an important factor for this project, both for justice-involved individuals and for the role of occupational therapy within this setting.
Chapter 6: Project Plan and Process

Goals and Objectives

**Goal 1:** Student will demonstrate ability to create a sustainable occupation-based life-skills program within a community re-entry setting to establish and improve program development skills.

**Objective 1:** Student will identify the needs of program participants through surveys.

**Objective 2:** Student will design an evidence-based program including assessment measurements to determine the effectiveness and success of the future program.

**Objective 3:** Student will utilize collected data and participant feedback to perform program evaluation to make the curriculum more sustainable for future program leaders.

**Goal 2:** Student will demonstrate advocacy for the role of occupational therapy within the criminal justice setting.

**Objective 1:** Student will utilize research to advocate for the role of OT within the criminal justice and re-entry setting.

**Objective 2:** Student will give presentation to staff at PACE regarding OT and our role within the criminal justice setting.

**Objective 3:** Student will work to publish research in scholar works to develop professional and academic skills.

**Goal 3:** Student will demonstrate appropriate communication skills with program participants and site mentors via active listening to develop rapport with participants and professional development skills.
**Objective 1:** Student will acknowledge and recognize professional boundaries as well as respond to all communication in a timely and efficient manner to build rapport with participants and to develop professionalism skills

**Objective 2:** Student will communicate effectively and efficiently to continue development of professionalism and communication skills

**Objective 3:** Student will develop a therapeutic relationship with clients to build rapport and encourage participation throughout the program

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**Y Chapter 7: Implementation**

**Background**

This project continued to change and evolve throughout the development and implementation stages, partially due to COVID-19. The project took place on-site at both PACE and at Duvall Residential Center over the course of 14 weeks. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, virtual on-site hours were also completed. There was also a significant amount of time spent collecting and reviewing research and data regarding occupational therapy and community re-entry. Duvall is a locked, work-release facility. At this site, time was spent helping to lead an advance your career readiness course, which is mandatory for individuals to get a job during their time in the facility. The key areas the course addresses are explaining your felony conviction comfortably during a job interview, identifying hard and soft skills, and developing resumes. Pre/Post-test surveys were administered for 6 weeks of the project to identify the courses benefits and also to identify areas of improvement. Research was also collected regarding evidence for the use of OT’s within the criminal justice setting, including the identification of gaps within the AYC course at Duvall. Lastly, the occupational therapy student or OTS developed and presented an introduction to cellphone technology course to those
interested to assist with closing the gap between technology related knowledge. The OT worked closely with several employees at PACE and answered questions regarding how OT’s can provide trauma-informed care, what a consultant role would look like, different types of grant funding to obtain an OT, and more.

Chapter 8: Project Evaluation

Evaluation

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected through electronic and paper surveys. The interest surveys were given to participants (n=? 74?) to gather general program interests within this population to guide future occupational therapy interventions. Levels of interest were measured utilizing a 5-point Likert scale, 1 being very un-interested and 5 being very interested. Pre and post-test surveys were administered for six weeks during the AYC course at Duvall Residential Center. General feedback from participants regarding the course was also gathered and can be viewed in Table 2. Participants reportedly enjoyed having an occupational therapist present. Feedback can be found in Table 2.

Survey Results

There was a total of 74 responses collected regarding the interest checklist survey. This survey was sent out via email and via paper to PACE participants including individuals currently residing at Duvall Residential. The survey questions are referenced in Appendix B below. The survey found that the three highest areas of interest within this population included: finances and budgeting, building and re-building relationships, and stress management and coping strategies. The three categories listed above each averaged a 3.66 or above which demonstrated a strong consensus for interest in these areas. Listed in Table 1 are additional comments and suggestions regarding types of programming that individuals are interested in.
Thirty-six pre-surveys and 33 post-surveys were distributed to the participants at Duvall Residential. Three individuals did not complete the course due to violations of their court order. The surveys are referenced below in Appendix C and Appendix D. The results of this survey were inconclusive as the scores showed very little improvement when comparing pre and post-test results. Specific program feedback can be found in Table 2.

Chapter 9: Discussion & Impact

Discussion

The majority of this project was spent assessing the AYC course via PACE at Duvall Residential Center. Participants were required to complete this three-day course in order to be approved for employment, which was a requirement for their sentencing. Through the time spent evaluating and assessing the AYC course at Duvall, it became evident that residents at the facility would benefit from occupational therapy intervention to address conflict resolution, coping skills, general mental health, as well as staff education regarding trauma-informed care and therapeutic listening skills.

Individuals within the facility typically arrived from the county jail, prison, or from their home due to a probation or house arrest violation. Due to COVID-19 and security reasons, residents of Duvall are not allowed to attend outside programming or go to PACE for any additional resources thus creating additional barriers to their success. The AYC course lasted for three days, which was not enough time to get to know each individual or spend the time that they needed and deserved to address goals, frustrations, and general concerns.

While the course focused on advancing careers through interview preparation, explaining felony convictions, and general interview formalities; it fails to address individuals as a whole, career exploration, coping skills, and positive replacement hobbies and interests. At Duvall,
individuals are often given any job that they can obtain, which impacts job longevity and can limit life satisfaction. It is important to give individuals jobs that interest them and that they feel they would be successful at, which is why OTs serve an important role, to maintain a client-centered and holistic approach within this population. Individuals frequently get fired and/or lose their job due to poor emotional regulation skills and losing their temper on the job. This causes difficulties with their sentencing, job history, and even self-esteem. Conflict resolution and appropriate coping strategies are an important component to add to the AYC course to assist individuals in their ability to appropriately handle conflict on and off their jobs to facilitate job retention and overall success for individuals. Through this course, individuals also created their own resume’s on paper, which is an accomplishment in itself. However, at this time individuals do not get a hard or digital copy of their resume. A recommendation has been given to ensure that each individual who completes a resume gets a copy of it to take with them, which may help increase their confidence and odds of obtaining a job.

Generally, individuals appeared to feel more confident when they explained their felony conviction during a job interview prior to the course. This could be related to individuals not having fully thought out what they might say, or due to previous knowledge they had been given. It is important to practice explaining felony convictions and to feel comfortable in doing so in order to promote success for job retention, which is an important factor in reducing recidivism.

There are some variants in the data, which may be due to lower education levels, failure to understand the questions, and answering questions too quickly. Limitations include low education levels, intellectual disabilities, rushing through questions, and length of prison time served. These results may not be generalizable to all justice involved individuals due to the small
sample size, and more research is needed to understand how occupational therapy programming can best impact this population.

**Occupational Therapy Significance**

OT’s ultimate goal is to ensure that clients become as independent as possible to promote success and increased quality of life in all areas. OT interventions are needed within this population to assist individuals in regaining the necessary skills to be successful and independent within the community. OT’s can help break the cycle by providing education regarding conflict resolution, coping skills, replacement occupations, providing trauma-informed care, and so much more (Munoz, 2019). It is noted that commonly used assessments for OT interventions within this setting include Canadian Occupational Performance Measure, Sensory Profile, Interest Checklist, and Role Checklist (Munoz, 2016). Occupational therapists have access to assessments that allow individuals to self-report and based on the results of those assessments develop a treatment plan as well as interventions that work best for each individual to promote success and increase occupational justice. Interventions may include, but are not limited to role-play, journaling, drawing, narrative medicine, vision boards, creating SMART goals, guided meditation, etc.

**Impact**

Advocacy for the need of OT within this setting was a primary area of focus throughout the duration of this project both to the capstone site and staff members within PACE and Duvall. The researcher also gained in-depth knowledge regarding the criminal justice system and how it works including sentencing procedures, roles within locked facilities, etc. Although the researcher did not have the opportunity to implement occupational therapy-based programs due to COVID-19, the researcher was able to identify gaps within the programming and literature
that can be used to further research occupational therapy within this setting as well as possible occupational therapy interventions.

Occupational therapists are trained to lead both individual and group therapy sessions, educated on trauma-informed care at length, and are able to maintain client-centered care while working with many different clients. Individuals at Duvall were very receptive to having an occupational therapist and responded well to the education given. After completion of the AYC course one participant stated, “Thank you to Ms. Breea. I am more confident in obtaining my career in barbering. I realize now how much experience I have, even without a job. I know I have potential and would like to start a career in barbering.” Another participant responded stating, “Thank you for the help to feel comfortable in a job interview. I know my skills”.

As an occupational therapist within this setting it is important to utilize therapeutic listening and motivational interviewing skills to assist individuals in reaching their goals. It was noted before interventions that most individuals demonstrated poor self-efficacy and felt they didn’t have much to contribute, but after taking the time to work with them individually they were then able to identify solid skills that they do have and were able to feel more confident in their goal of obtaining a job. Individuals within this setting commonly struggle with substance use disorder, which is also an area that OTs can address through the utilization of interest checklists to identify replacement occupations for their addiction.

**Sustainability**

The occupational therapy student worked to advocate for the role of OT to PACE as an organization and also to its employees. The conclusion of this project marks the second occupational therapy student that has partnered with PACE. The staff within PACE now understand what occupational therapy is and the type of impact they can have in working with
this population. PACE is currently working to develop transitional housing, but also trying to identify if an occupational therapist is needed and how one can be funded. The occupational therapy student made incredible partnerships with employee’s at PACE and worked to provide resources to assist with grant writing and funding for a future on-site OT.

**Limitations**

The occupational therapy experienced barriers to implementation due to COVID-19. Initially, the proposed project was to create and implement occupation-based programming, but that had to change. Also, due to the occupational therapy student completing the project in a locked facility there were additional barriers as far as limited access to technology and the internet as well as limited access to allowed activities and items to bring in. There was also a barrier to participation as some individuals violated, got into trouble, and/or started a job early thus hindering their ability to finish the course.

**Chapter 10: Conclusion**

Mass incarceration in the United States paired with high recidivism rates demonstrates the need for change within the criminal justice system, to promote rehabilitation rather than debilitation. Overall, more research is needed to clearly identify the role of occupational therapists within the criminal justice system and community re-entry; however, the ultimate goal is to help individuals obtain occupational justice and more importantly independence. Feedback from the community site and from participants demonstrated a need for paid occupational therapists within this setting. Occupational therapists can work with individuals to help re-store basic life-skills, but also to assist with emotional regulation, conflict resolution, general social skills, and obtainment of resources.
References

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NAACP. Criminal Justice Fact Sheet. [https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/](https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/)


https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/money.html

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Appendix and Tables

Appendix A: Email Communication

**Bold** indicates questions asked by Breea Vest, OTS and *italicized* indicates responses from Rhiannon Edwards, director of PACE.

1. General population and demographics (mainly residents of Marion county? do all individuals have a felony conviction? general age range?)  
   *The majority do live in Marion County, but we do have a small number who come from other doughnut counties. They must have a felony conviction or at least 5 misdemeanor convictions. The age range really varies. They could be as young as 17 (if waived to adult court) and we have had as old as someone in their 70’s.*

2. What areas of occupation do you feel that most individuals need help with? (cooking, self-efficacy, technology, following directions, building relationships, etc.).  
   *Technology, building relationships, general life skills of how to live on your own, etc.*

3. Are there any common mental health diagnosis (schizophrenia, BPD, Depression)?  
   *This really varies across the board.*

4. Do individuals have reliable transportation to and from PACE?  
   *Not necessarily but we try to raise money so we can give bus tickets as much as possible.*

5. Are the participants of PACE voluntary? or are they made to go there?  
   *The majority are voluntary, but some are court ordered or ordered by their community supervision agency.*

6. Do staff know what occupational therapy is and how we can work with this population?  
   *I would say for the most part no so we could use a mini session describing this at some point.*

7. Could the organization benefit from grant writing?  
   *Most definitely!*

8. If the group is successful is there anyone who would be able to run the type of group sessions once I am gone?  
   *Yes as long as we are trained. This may even be something we look to find a volunteer to manage.*

9. What would be the best time to implement a group program, night or day?  
   *Really either work. We have groups that happen during the day and evening so it would just depend on if there is space available on the day and time you want to have the group.*
10. Are there restrictions/challenge that you may foresee in completing my project with PACE? Marketing this group to get the clients interested in attending. Once we get them in the room, keeping them engaged will also be challenging as they have a lot of outside things occurring that lessen their engagement in programming.

11. I am currently reading a lot of literature and research about different types of activities that can be incorporated into the program I am planning to implement, however if you have any suggestions and/or ideas please feel free to share them. Thank you so much for taking your time to answer these questions. I think this is something that has not been done in the community with this population in our local re-entry network so this could really turn into a new best practice. I think once you are able to shadow some workshops and talk to some clients you may be additional ideas to implement with this as well. I am not sure if I told you think but we receive a grant this year to expand our kitchen so we will have a fully operational kitchen with two bay sinks, stove, dishwasher, etc.
Appendix B: Interest Survey

The following survey was given out both on paper and virtually throughout the course of 12 weeks.

Please rate your level of interest or need on the topics below

1. A life-skills class that addresses **technology**
   
   Very uninterested  1  2  3  4  5  Very interested

2. A life-skills class that addresses **cooking**
   
   Very uninterested  1  2  3  4  5  Very interested

3. A life-skills class that addresses **grocery shopping**
   
   Very uninterested  1  2  3  4  5  Very interested

4. A life-skills class that addresses **nutrition**
   
   Very uninterested  1  2  3  4  5  Very interested

5. A life-skills class that addresses **finances & budgeting**
   
   Very uninterested  1  2  3  4  5  Very interested

6. A life-skills class that addresses **leisure activities and hobbies**
   
   Very uninterested  1  2  3  4  5  Very interested

7. A life-skills class that addresses **stress management & coping skills**
   
   Very uninterested  1  2  3  4  5  Very interested

8. A life-skills class that focuses on **rebuilding and/or building relationships**
   
   Very uninterested  1  2  3  4  5  Very interested
9. A life-skills class that addresses **decision making & emotional regulation**  
   Very uninterested  1  2  3  4  5  Very interested

10. A life-skills that addresses **disease management & prevention**  
    Very uninterested  1  2  3  4  5  Very interested

Please list any other types of classes you may be interested in, but aren’t listed:
Appendix C: Pre-Course Survey

The following survey was given out prior to the start of the AYC course at Duvall Residential Center.

1. **Please rate your level of comfortability explaining your conviction during a job interview**
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very uncomfortable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Very comfortable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. **Do you want to obtain a career job?**
   
   Yes   No

   If no explain: ____________________________________________________________

3. **Do you know how to create a resume?**
   
   Yes   No

4. **Do you have potential career interests in mind?**
   
   Yes   No

   If yes explain: ____________________________________________________________

5. **Do you feel capable of obtaining a career job?**
   
   Yes   No

   If no explain why: _______________________________________________________

6. **Do you feel that you have access to resources to assist you in obtaining a job?**
   
   Yes   No

7. **If answered yes to number 6, do you know how to access those resources?**
   
   Yes   No

Please provide any additional comments below (ie: what you hope to learn, why you’re here, goals):
Appendix D: Post-Course Survey

The following survey was given out after the completion of the AYC course.

1. Please rate your level of comfortability explaining your conviction during a job interview

   Very uncomfortable  1  2  3  4  5  Very comfortable

2. Do you want to obtain a career job?

   Yes    No

   If no explain: _______________________________________________________

3. Do you know how to create a resume?

   Yes    No

4. Do you have potential career interests in mind?

   Yes    No

5. Do you feel capable of obtaining a career job?

   Yes    No

   If no, why: _______________________________________________________

6. Do you feel that you have access to resources to assist you in obtaining a job?

   Yes    No

7. If answered yes to number 6, do you know how to access those resources?

   Yes    No

8. Please rate your level of satisfaction upon completion of this course

   Very Unsatisfied  1  2  3  4  5  Very Satisfied

9. Did you find this course helpful?

   Yes    No

Comments:
Table 1: Interest Checklist Suggestions

The following are responses in regard to other types of classes that individuals may be interested in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A class that would interest me would be one that focuses on how to effectively identify and cope with workplace discrimination. Diversity and acceptance are other topics of interest.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proper self-maintenance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit repair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing and rental assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes to gain certificates (i.e.: medical assistant)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals and future Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home maintenance &amp; repair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drug addiction recovery &amp; home ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A “How to” class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survival in the ghetto (economic – political – social)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction &amp; trades</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bringing better opportunities and trade skills to prisons to better recidivism rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Table 1: Interest Checklist Suggestions**

The following are responses in regard to other types of classes that individuals may be interested in.
Table 2: Post-Survey Comments

The following are comments regarding the Advance Your Career Course given via PACE at Duvall Residential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank you to Ms. Breea. I am more confident in obtaining my career in barbering. I realize now how much experience I have, even without a job. I know I have potential and would like to start a career in barbering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am willing to learn new things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am motivated, dedicated, and determined to obtain a job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanks for your time and this opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for the help to feel comfortable in a job interview. I know my skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love the fact of how great, helpful, and patient they were.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I know how to express my skills and show I am trainable. Thank you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We should get a family pass when we complete the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Job!! Great Course!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It let me know to stop talking about it. Do it this time and try something else in life besides getting high and stealing. Focus on the positive things and once you do that then things will get better for you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>