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Occupation-Based Wellness within the Veteran Population

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Occupation-Based Wellness within the Veteran Population

Jennie Burdette, S/OTD, Mike Brown, M.A., & Barbara Milliken, Ed.D, OTR/L, CVW

Abstract

According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2021 there were 16.5 million military veterans in the United States, making up about 6.4% of the nation's population entirely. Research indicates that veterans' successful transition back to civilian roles is critical for their overall well-being. However, among our military veterans, transitioning from military to civilian life often leaves veterans with long-lasting difficulties which includes physical and mental health challenges that affect different aspects of daily functioning. This capstone, at **Baldwin Wallace University's Student Veteran Center**, provided occupation-based education and resources through weekly informal groups, wellness handouts and an occupation-based wellness manual to **promote mental health and overall well-being** of veterans. Capstone work was completed alongside site mentor, Mike Brown, a former Marine and veteran himself, to meet the wellness needs of student veterans at the university.

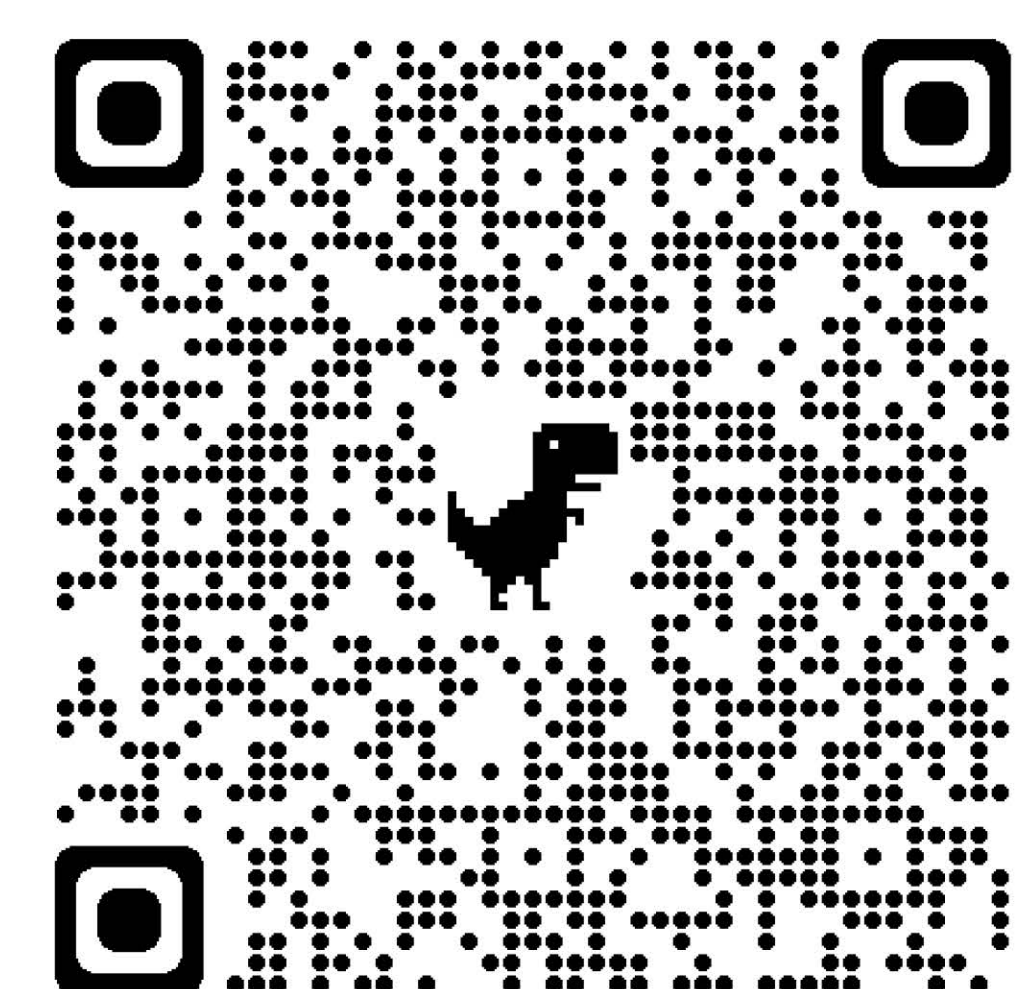


Synthesis

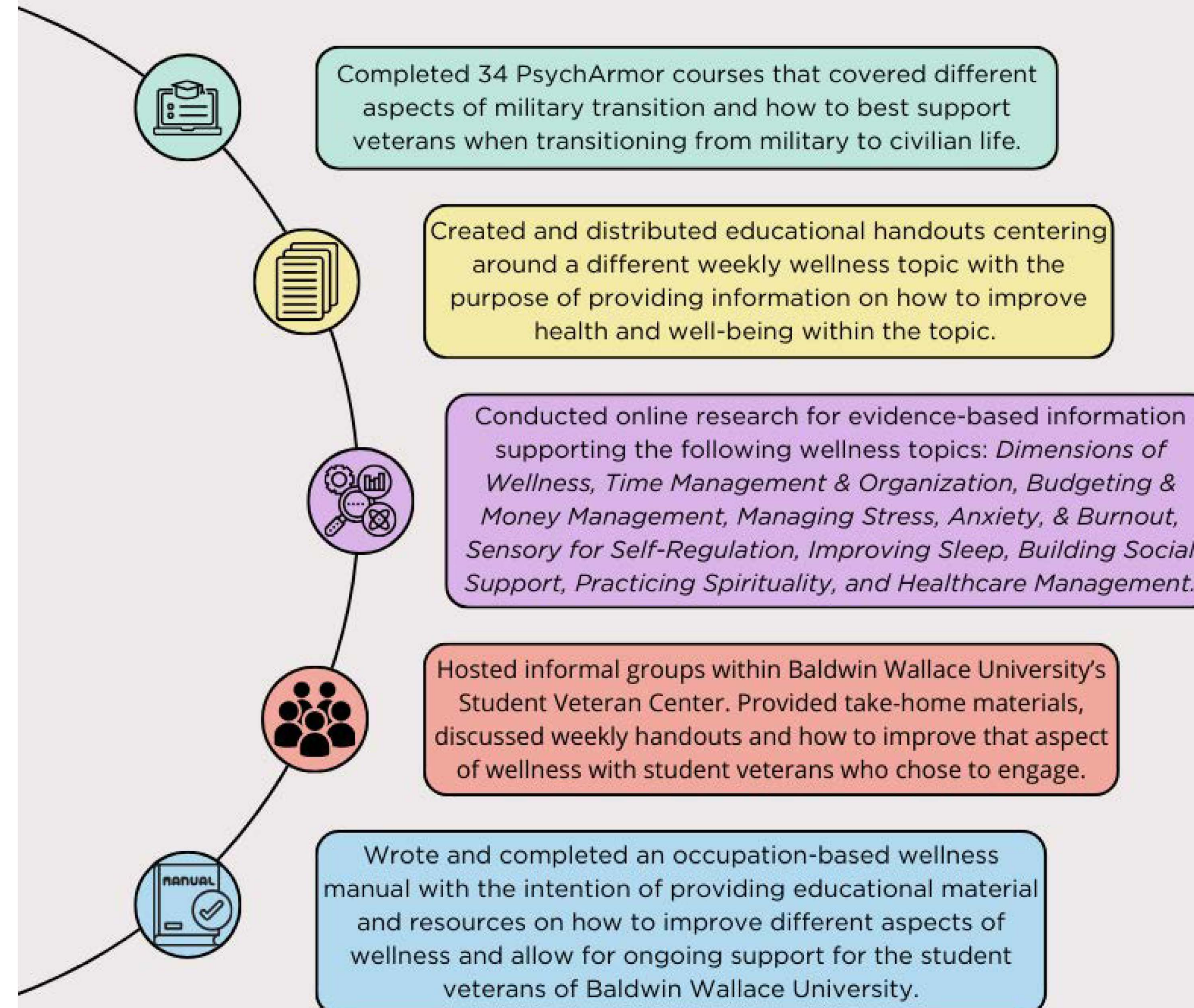
- Research has indicated the numerous challenges veterans tend to encounter due to military experiences, proving a great need for mental health services within this population.
- The aim of occupational therapy services in mental health is to help all individuals develop and maintain positive mental health, prevent mental illness, and recover from mental health challenges in order to live full and productive lives.
- Developing evidence-based wellness handouts/resources and an occupation-based wellness manual allows for veterans to utilize the information provided to improve their mental health and promote their overall well-being.
- This capstone project opens the door for continued education, advocacy, and potential for future program development in hopes to target more veterans transitioning from military to civilian life.

Brief Biography

My name is Jennie Burdette, and I am an occupational therapy doctoral student at Cleveland State University. My capstone focuses on promoting mental health and overall well-being within the veteran population. In the future, I hope to continue my work with veterans, as this is a population I have always been passionate about. In general, I tend to gravitate towards treating adults and have particular interest in Spinal Cord Injury. Wherever my OT future takes me, I will continue to expand my knowledge and skills to provide the best care for my clients. Please scan the QR code below for a link to my professional website.



Capstone Experience Activities and Implications



Deliverables

Manual

Educational Handouts



Accomplishments, Challenges & Recommendations

Accomplishments

- Creation of evidence-based educational handouts and wellness manual that can be used to help current and future veterans.
- Establishment of rapport with veterans and advocating for the role of OT in mental health & wellness.

Challenges

- Being unable to provide direct occupational therapy services to student veterans due to an OT not being on site. Having an OT mentor on site would be beneficial.
- Finding a balance between offering VA related and non-VA related resources. Not all veterans are inclined to seek VA services for a multitude of reasons, so non-VA resources were necessary.

Takeaways

- Veterans face physical and mental health challenges as a result their experiences in the military.
- OT services can provide a foundation for veterans to develop coping skills and promote healthy occupational engagement.
- Cultural values learned and executed in the military influence the veteran's decision to seek treatment even after transitioning home. Rapport-building and demonstrating cultural humility is crucial when working with veterans.

What's Next?

- Student veterans should continue to receive indirect OT services with the intention of promoting mental health and improving overall well-being. In the future, the addition of a sensory room to Baldwin Wallace University's Student Veteran Center could be beneficial by allowing student veterans to decompress and self-regulate as they encounter daily life challenges.

Key References

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