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Spring 2024

Occupational Therapy Program Fostering the Development of School Readiness Skills in Refugee Children

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Cleveland State University

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Reminder, Grace, "Occupational Therapy Program Fostering the Development of School Readiness Skills in Refugee Children" (2024). *Occupational Therapy Doctoral Student Capstone Posters*. 68.
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Occupational Therapy Program Fostering the Development of School Readiness Skills in Refugee Children

Grace Reminder S/OT

Site Mentors: Cassie Mattix, MOT, OTR/L, Rachel Rogers, MOT, OTR/L, Faculty Advisor: Karla Reese, DHSc, OTR/L

Abstract

- The world has experienced an uncontrollable number of acute threats which has led to the displacement of many individuals. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is estimating that the global forced displacement has reached 103 million by 2022.
- The resettlement process is not easy. Less than 1% of refugees are resettled and many will spend their whole life waiting to be considered for resettlement.
- U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)- Cleveland offers programming and services that help immigrants, refugees, and uprooted individuals transition to life within the United States.
- There is a lack of programming for pre -school aged refugee children at USCRI Cleveland.
- The resettlement process can be extremely difficult for children. Refugee children face challenges with socialization, mental health, and experience a great deal of trauma and are unable to engage in meaningful activities.
- Creating programming that fosters the development of school readiness skills needed for pre- school aged refugee children, that exposes them to new occupations and skill development, can increase their quality of life, self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Creating programming under a trauma informed approach will help refugee children and youth express their emotions in a positive way.

Needs

- Limited exposure to
 - structured environments
 - routines or habits
 - toys and self-regulation resulting in a need for play exploration
 - age-appropriate sensory activities
- Differences in hygiene routines & skills
- Limited familiarity in skills needed for school in America
- Decreased health literacy

Growth & Progress

- Improved
 - English skills
 - confidence and socialization in the community setting
 - familiarity with being in a structured/school environment
 - sensory and emotional regulation skills
 - parent engagement
- Developed positive skills needed for school
- Developed routine and structure

Brief Bio

My name is Grace Reminder and I am an occupational therapy student. Throughout my education I have developed a passion for working with marginalized populations. Throughout my career, I hope to always serve as an advocate for underserved communities. After graduation, I hope to continue working with marginalized populations in a variety of different settings.

To learn more about my capstone project and experience at CSU, please scan the QR code provided.



SCAN ME



Capstone Experience and Implications

11-week program fostering the development of school readiness skills



Ran four days a week



Each week had two days of corresponding activities

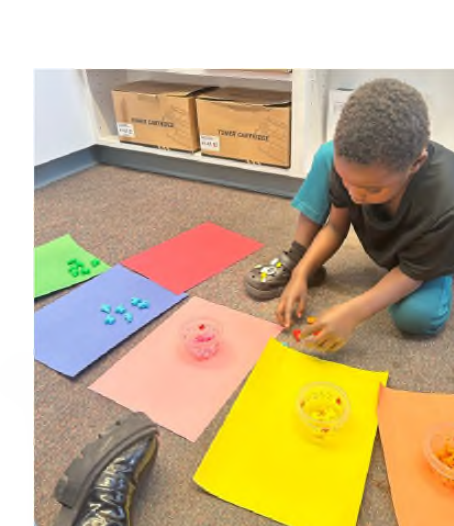
Weekly Group Themes:



Week 1:
Play & routine



Week 2:
Sensory Exploration



Week 3:
Colors & Numbers



Week 4 & 5:
Fine Motor



Week 6:
Gross & Visual Motor



Week 7:
Pre-writing



Week 8:
Holiday themed skills review



Week 9:
Field trip to *We Rock the Spectrum*



Week 10:
Life skills: hygiene week



Week 11:
Final group celebration/ graduation

- Other aspects of the program included:
 - Conducted midterm and final meetings with the parents of the participants to discuss progress.
 - Gave parents individualized sensory recommendations for their children and informed parents about ways to increase skill development in their children.
 - Participants received a take home binder with activities and handouts for continued skill building.

- Program Manual:

- Compilation of all lesson plans, visual aids, schedules, and details about specific crafts and activities.
- In the future: other USCRI offices that have OTs can use the manual to replicate the school readiness groups.



Synthesis

Though working with refugees is an emerging area in occupational therapy, there is a huge gap in literature about how to best support pre- school aged refugee children. This capstone identified the need for services for refugee children and created a program to help maximize their quality of life and develop the skills needed for school. USCRI Cleveland is the only USCRI field office that has occupational therapists. This capstone brings awareness to how occupational therapists at USCRI Cleveland serve as leaders when working with the refugee population and demonstrates how OTs can best support pre – school aged refugee children throughout the resettlement process.

Challenges & Recommendations

| Limitation | Challenge | Recommendations |
|---|---|--|
| 1 Health Literacy | Explaining sensory needs and common health practices to participant's family members. | Parents should have access to more trainings/ interventions regarding these topics. Interpretation should be used when discussing health related topics. |
| 2 Community Understanding | The Cleveland community lacks accessibility for non-english speakers. There was limited understanding of occupational therapy from community members. | Education should be provided on skilled occupational therapy interventions regarding refugees. Accessibility of the community for non-english speakers should increase. |
| 3 Services for Pre-School Aged Refugee Children | There are currently no other available programs for pre-school aged refugee children to attend, leaving a gap in services. | Structured programming should be developed for pre-school aged refugee children to ensure their holistic development and successful integration into their new communities. |
| 3 Logistics | Parents of the pre-school aged children had difficulty attending group due to bus and work schedules. The environment in which the groups took place was not conducive to learning. | When scheduling groups, availability of transportation and parent schedules should be taken into consideration. Groups should take place in an environment that will allow for the most development. |

Key References

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Acknowledgements

- Rachel Rogers, MOT, OTR/L and Cassie Mattix, MOT, OTR/L, for their endless guidance and support throughout this capstone experience. They go above and beyond to help, inspire and impact refugee families and individuals and I am lucky to have worked with them.
- All team members at USCRI, for their willingness to share knowledge during my capstone experience.
- Karla Reese, DHSC, OTR/L, for providing continued knowledge and guidance throughout this experience.
- John Bazyk, M.S., OTR/L, for his invaluable advice and support.