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Fostering Healthy Therapeutic Relationships: Foster Parent Education Program

Sydney Barboza
A.T. Still University

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Background

- Children who have been placed in the foster care system due to trauma often have difficulty coping with past experiences.
- Traumatic experiences can often affect their development, both physically and mentally, along with emotional regulation, relationships, and attachment.
- As of April 2021, more than 13,400 children are placed in the foster care system in Arizona.
- While removing children from their birth home to a more safe environment is critical, it brings along many challenges.

Purpose

Provide free education classes to foster parents of Jose's Closet/foster care community through an occupational-based approach designed to increase parenting skills and knowledge while also identifying education gaps and unmet needs.

Program Questions

- 1) What do we know about foster parents' perceptions of satisfaction with foster parent training and what are their current needs?
- 2) Do foster parents perceive themselves as competent in tasks of foster parenting subsequent to taking classes/training?

Program Design

Design: Program development (14 weeks)
All classes were held virtually (with classes offered twice a week)
Topics discussed: Attachment, Challenging Behaviors, Grief & Loss, and Transracial Adoption
Recruitment: Foster families at Jose's Closet, email and foster Facebook groups
Pre and Post Surveys: Quantitative and qualitative questions
Population: Foster, adoptive and kinship parents (49 participants) *Children not included

Program Outcomes

Pre-Survey

Ranking of Current Needs

1. Trauma
2. Managing challenging behaviors
3. Self Care/How to manage grief
4. Cultural Diversity
5. How to engage birth families
6. Parenting needs
7. Agency expectations of foster parents role and responsibilities

Perceptions

Majority of foster parents answered agree-somewhat when asked whether previous foster parent training was meeting their current needs and if they were receiving adequate support and services.

How satisfied are you with current foster parent training/classes?

- Parent 1: "I liked the online training"
Parent 2: "Satisfied"
Parent 3: "Good"
Parent 4: "Very satisfied"
Parent 5: "Somewhat, would like more trainings during day when kids are in school"
Parent 6: "7/10"
Parent 7: "Good"
Parent 8: "Very satisfied"
Parent 9: "Good"

Post-Survey

Classes offered	Level of Confidence after taking class
Attachment & Trust: Building Therapeutic Relationships	N=16 Majority answered very confident
Challenging Behaviors: Understanding Behaviors in Foster Care	N=22 Majority answered very confident
Fostering Children through Transition, Grief and Loss	N=12 Majority answered very confident
Embracing a Child's Culture: Transracial Adoption	N=6 Majority answered fairly confident- very confident

References

See provided references

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Community Mentor: Wendy Esquibel, Founder and Director of Jose's Closet

Implications

- More programs that focus on advanced training for trauma-informed care and challenging behaviors.
- Continued education on transition, grief and loss especially in group homes would be relevant and appropriate for future classes
- More education on transportation safety (between parents & child protective services)
- Occupational therapy practitioners may partner with child welfare agencies to provide training and education parenting classes for foster families working to understand the unique needs of foster children.

Discussion

- Foster parents are satisfied with current foster parenting training/education programs available.
- Levels of satisfaction and confidence increased after enrolling in the Fostering Healthy Therapeutic Relationships Program.
- Capstone project identified gaps within research and education programs available for foster parents.
- Parents found handouts, discussions, parent experiences, and videos beneficial.
- Jacob's law: Ensuring better access to behavioral health services for foster care children .

Conclusion

- This capstone project aimed to identify education gaps for foster parents.
- There is a growing interest in attending more advanced training.
- Parents continue to benefit from education classes that are relevant and focus on their current needs.
- OTs can support development of healthy therapeutic relationships in order to improve attachment styles, behaviors, and mental health.
- Additional suggestions include support groups, more advanced training, resources, and individualized interventions for foster children.