

Level Up: An Innovative Educational Experience

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Background

- Young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face unique challenges during the transition from childhood to adulthood
- Young adults with ASD are often underemployed or face difficulty obtaining and sustaining work
- Occupational therapists (OT) often receive training in ASD, but primarily focused on childhood
- Young adulthood is often overlooked during OT's training

Purpose

- Support young adults with ASD during the transition to adulthood as moving from highly structured school environments to the workforce or higher education demands flexibility, social interactions and effective communication which often exceeds capability.
- Translate knowledge by using a mentorship program to prepare Masters of Occupational Therapy (MOT) students to gain knowledge and experience supporting individuals with ASD.

Discussion

In conjunction with national autism experts, the OT department developed an 8-week program called Level Up for young adults with ASD, referred to as autism ambassadors, which:

- Infused evidenced based practices of mentorship, cognitive behavioral therapy, and reflection in action
- Utilized activity-based learning sessions focusing on advocacy and sensory processing
- Paired each student with a professional mentor and young adult with autism

The weekly program included:

- Level Up topics complemented with a visual tool for self-assessment
- Videoconferences with breakout room meetings for student/autism ambassador partners
- Phone checks between each OT student and autism ambassador
- 45 minute mentorship session between OT students and the OTs

EMOJI LOG

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LevelUp Oklahoma Partnership Agreement
(to be completed together)

- Autism Ambassador
 - Name: _____
 - Mobile: _____
 - Email: _____
- MOT Student
 - Name: _____
 - Mobile: _____
 - Email: _____
- Communication expectations
 - Our weekly check-in meeting will happen on (circle one)
 - Sun Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat
 - at: _____ am/pm
- Our meeting will occur via:
 - Phone Calls
 - Text Messaging
 - Email
 - Zoom
 - Facebook Messages
 - Skype
 - Google Hangout
 - OTHER _____
- Our primary form of communication will be: _____
- Are there any specific days or hours that you will not be available?
 - Autism Ambassador: _____
 - MOT student: _____
- What time is too late to contact you?
 - Autism Ambassador: _____
 - MOT student: _____
- How will you handle conflict or disappointment? _____
- Additional information that may influence partnership: _____

Signature and date: _____ Signature and date: _____

Emoji log compliments of Abigail Hammons, OTS

Results

Results were overwhelmingly positive:

- 8/10 achieved their personal goals
- 10/10 ambassadors identified the experience as enjoyable
- 6/10 identified the program as effective

Conclusions

- The ambassadors found the cognitive behavior strategies most helpful and sensory strategies least helpful
- The OT students learned about ASD in adulthood, developed friendships and enjoyed partnering with ambassadors

Relevance to Allied Health

Level Up demonstrates an innovative training/mentorship program for Allied Health students.

- Bridges a gap in learning providing an opportunity to gain firsthand knowledge about the experience of individuals with ASD transitioning from adolescence to adulthood.
- Provides an opportunity for clinical experience with this population

References

Available upon request

Acknowledgements

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Contact

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