Intergenerational Wellness Programming in Occupational Therapy

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ABSTRACT. An intergenerational wellness program was implemented by occupational therapy students at Labouré House located in Chicago, Illinois, in the fall of 2001 as part of a grant funded by the National Service Corporation in conjunction with the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education. Program goals include: (a) developing students’ skills in evaluation and wellness programming by participating in an intergenerational service learning project, (b) providing occupation-based wellness programming for the residents, and (c) promoting wellness for the residents by encouraging them to find meaning in their lives through a variety of wellness/health promotion activities. Outcome measures used to assess change in the residents included the COPM (Canadian Occupational Performance Measure) (Law, Baptiste, Carswell, McColl, Polatajko, & Pollock, 1998) and the SF-36 (Ware, 1992). Tools used to assess stu-
students’ performance included internship assessment forms and qualitative data from students’ reflective journals. Preliminary results indicate improvement in awareness of wellness and health promotion activities by the residents as well as a positive learning experience for students.

**KEYWORDS.** Wellness programming, service learning, interdependent experience

**RATIONALE**

The importance of the “Awakening Wellness at Labouré House” grant project is three-fold:

a. it provides occupational therapy students with an opportunity to participate in an intergenerational service learning experience;

b. it provides programming in health promotion and wellness to an “at risk” population; and

c. it provides occupational therapy students with a nontraditional internship in the community.

Service learning is a process by which knowledge and skills combine with experience. Students have the opportunity to apply their knowledge while providing a service to the facility, or to a specific group of clients. Service learning includes planning projects, performance service and reflecting on the experience. As part of a graduate course, occupational therapy students participated in intergenerational service learning at the Labouré House in Chicago. Students developed wellness programming, implemented the programs on a weekly basis, and wrote weekly reflective journals. Research on service learning demonstrates that it promotes a heightened sense of personal and social responsibility, enhanced self-esteem, growth in moral ego development, and greater mastery of skills and content (Scheckley & Keeton, 1997).

The wellness and health promotion programming is another important aspect of the Labouré program. Wellness is one of the most effective ways of intervening with the elderly. Prevention of problems before they occur can enhance the quality of life for the older adult. Between 1982 and 1994, a time when lifestyle and wellness interventions came into wide use, the proportion of individuals over 65 reporting disability decreased from 24.9 to 21.9 percent (Manton, Stallard, & Corder, 1998).
Wellness “is considered a lifestyle approach to the highest states of health and work satisfaction” (Ardell, 1997, p. 3), and “health is seen as a priceless asset involving physical and psychological well-being” (Ardell, 1997, p. 3). Wellness implies a positive approach to the pursuit of health. The wellness programming at the Labouré House emphasized five components of wellness:

- self-responsibility,
- meaning and purpose,
- relationship dynamics,
- nutritional awareness and physical fitness, and
- emotional intelligence (Ardell, 1993).

Health promotion is a process that enables individuals to increase control over, and to improve their own health. This often takes place outside of traditional medical environments. The wellness programming at Labouré House was implemented outside of the traditional health care setting.

A third aspect of the grant was to provide graduate occupational therapy students with a nontraditional internship in the community. The benefit of a nontraditional experience is exposing students to different kinds of roles and opportunities available to them in the community. Community awareness of the benefits of occupational therapy is an indirect but positive effect as well.

**PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

**The Setting**

Labouré House is a unique intergenerational community established for low-income elders with limited financial or family support. Labouré House is a sub-station of the Senior Companion Program through Chicago’s Department on Aging and sponsored by St. Vincent de Paul Senior Services, an 80-year-old social service agency. The sixteen elderly residents who reside there live in a home-like setting with the aid of students who receive room and board in exchange for weekly service hours with the residents. Labouré House was identified as a community partner based on its mission, its affiliations, and its willingness to work with our institution and students through service learning. The mission of Labouré House is “to create an interdependent experience of collaborating individuals” (Labouré House, n.d.). Labouré House goals are “to enable older adults to live with dignity and interdependence while encouraging them to be contributing members of society” (Labouré House, n.d.) and to provide “young adults with experience in the field of human services” (Labouré House, n.d.).
The goal of the intergenerational service learning program was to provide meaningful wellness interventions for the elderly population at Labouré House. In addition, the program adds a service learning component to the Occupational Therapy curriculum at Rush University for second year entry level Masters’ students. The service learning component was added to an already existing Occupational Therapy course, OCC 513, an interventions course designed to apply theories and conceptual models including restoration of occupational performance. A co-requisite requirement is an internship consisting of one day per week experiences designed to complement the didactic coursework and provide a venue for students to practice clinical skills with adult and geriatric clients.

**Expected Outcomes**

The desired outcomes benefit both the residents and the students. The individual goal for each resident was to continue to find meaning in their life through a variety of wellness/health promotion activities. Under the guidance of faculty members, occupational therapy students conducted wellness groups for the residents once weekly for 8 weeks.

Residents were assessed using two outcome measures at the beginning and at the end of the 8-week period. The first is the Rand 36-item Health Status Survey, Short Form (Ware & Shelbourne, 1992), a self-report measure of health-related quality of life designed to measure health status efficiently from the consumer’s perspective. The SF-36 is a multi-item scale measuring each of eight health concepts including physical functioning, role limitations because of physical health problems, bodily pain, social functioning, general mental health, role limitations because of emotional problems, vitality, and general health perceptions. The SF-36 is internally consistent, has good construct validity and good criterion validity (Jenkinson, Wright, & Coulter, 1994; Lyons, Perry, & Littlepage, 1994).

The second tool is the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) (Law et al., 1998), an individualized measure of a client’s self-perception in occupational performance. Occupational performance consists of self-care, productivity and leisure. The COPM identifies problem areas in occupational performance, provides a rating of the client’s priorities in occupational performance, evaluates performance and satisfaction relative to these problem areas, and measures changes in the client’s perception of their occupational performance. While not specifically a wellness measure, the COPM can measure a client’s outcome with relation to prevention activities. The COPM demonstrates good content and criterion validity (Law et al. 1998), and also demonstrated test-retest reliability in a study of adults in rehabilitation (Sanford, Law,
Swanson, & Guyatt, 1994). This tool guides the client and the therapist through a process of identifying goals together and then evaluating their performance and satisfaction both before and after occupational therapy intervention.

The goal for the students was to develop skills in evaluation and wellness programming by participating in a service learning project. Working toward these goals in an intergenerational setting was a unique opportunity for both students and residents. One of the values of intergenerational programming is “the opportunity for different generations to be together in planning and implementing programs” (McMahon, 1987, p. 26).

In winter of 2001, the project coordinators met with the Labouré House coordinator, staff, and residents to identify potential service learning opportunities and activities. Since the Labouré House staff had a goal to increase health awareness and health education, a plan of wellness programming was developed to address these needs. This plan incorporated a variety of wellness experiences, including, but not limited to, a reminiscing group, a walking/mobility group, a horticulture group, a Tai Chi balance group, and a cooking class. The rationale for group programming was to provide socialization opportunities for the residents. Based on follow-up meetings with the residents and staff and the initial results of individual assessments (the Rand SF-36 and the COPM), the students further refined this plan to design meaningful group and individual wellness programming.

**Program Design**

The students developed a wellness program titled “Eight Weeks to Wellness.” One day each week, the students led a movement group, a wellness group, and a self-expression group. The groups were geared to the residents’ individual and collective interests and needs. The movement group included walking outside, exercising to music, and instruction in Tai Chi. The wellness group topics ranged from healthy eating and nutrition bingo to safety in the environment. Sample self-expression group topics included poetry to music, storytelling, and craft activities. The self-expression group for the final week culminated in a “Share Your Talent” event and party. Residents, students, and faculty shared a variety of talents, including playing musical instruments, dancing, singing, and telling jokes.

Students also worked individually with residents to address their unique health needs based on results of the assessments. Individualized sessions included interventions ranging from instruction in proper body mechanics and pain management techniques to reviewing home safety skills. As an example, one student developed an audio exercise program for a resident who had low vision. The student trained the resident to play the tape player and perform the exercises.
The impact of the service activities on the students and residents of the house were measured in several ways. Comparing initial and discharge data from the COPM, six of the eight clients evaluated demonstrated improvement in performance and satisfaction over the course of the eight-week program (see Table 1). The COPM scores were evaluated using a signed ranks test (see Table 2). The results of the COPM indicated that of the 8 valid scores that were evaluated pre- and post-wellness programming, the wellness intervention significantly increased the clients’ satisfaction and performance of occupational therapy goals (see Table 3). Results of the Wilcoxon signed ranks test are summarized in Table 4.

The impact of the service activities on the students was also measured through internship evaluation assessment forms completed by students at the end of the service learning period. Assessment forms indicated that the intergenerational service learning component enhanced the education of the students, particularly in the area of assisting the clients of Labouré House in establishing individual wellness plans and wellness programming.

### TABLE 1. COPM Performance and Satisfaction Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Case</th>
<th>Performance Scores</th>
<th>Satisfaction Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case A</td>
<td>Perf 1 = 9</td>
<td>Sat 1 = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perf 2 = 10</td>
<td>Sat 2 = 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case B</td>
<td>Perf 1 = 7</td>
<td>Sat 1 = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perf 2 = 10</td>
<td>Sat 2 = 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case C</td>
<td>Perf 1 = 3.67</td>
<td>Sat 1 = 3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perf 2 = 4.67</td>
<td>Sat 2 = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case D</td>
<td>Perf 1 = 6.4</td>
<td>Sat 1 = 4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perf 2 = 6.8</td>
<td>Sat 2 = 6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case E</td>
<td>Perf 1 = 9.4</td>
<td>Sat 1 = 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perf 2 = 9.4</td>
<td>Sat 2 = 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case F</td>
<td>Perf 1 = 9.4</td>
<td>Sat 1 = 9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perf 2 = 9.4</td>
<td>Sat 2 = 9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case G</td>
<td>Perf 1 = 8.5</td>
<td>Sat 1 = 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perf 2 = 8.5</td>
<td>Sat 2 = 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case H</td>
<td>Perf 1 = 1</td>
<td>Sat 1 = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perf 2 = 1</td>
<td>Sat 2 = 1.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Performance score 1 = preintervention)
(Performance score 2 = postintervention)
(Satisfaction score 1 = preintervention)
(Satisfaction score 2 = postintervention)
The students’ weekly journal entries also indicated a positive learning experience for the students. Students wrote weekly journal entries on specific questions that were geared to encourage reflection. The questions were: “What did you feel went well today?,” “What would you have done differently?,” “How do you feel about your interactions today with the clients?,” and “What did you learn today?”

Students’ responses regarding what they learned included experience in running a group, enhanced interviewing skills, improved understanding of needs and expectations of the clients, and improved observation skills. Additional comments included learning the importance of preparation, observing the different dynamics among residents, realizing that each member has individual wellness needs, and knowing someone by listening to the story of his or her history.

Students showed a good understanding of relationship development in their reflections on the question, “How do you feel about your interactions today with the clients?”

I feel as the day continued, my rapport with the individual residents and group members developed.

... as the day continued, I felt the rapport gained during the first week deepened.

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**TABLE 2. COPM Satisfaction and Performance Signed Ranks Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ranks</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum of Ranks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perf 2 – Perf 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative ranks</td>
<td>0 (a)</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive ranks</td>
<td>4 (b)</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties</td>
<td>4 (c)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat 2 – Sat 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative ranks</td>
<td>0 (d)</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive ranks</td>
<td>6 (e)</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties</td>
<td>2 (f)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- a. Perf 2 < Perf 1
- b. Perf 2 > Perf 1
- c. Perf 1 = Perf 2
- d. Sat 2 < Sat 1
- e. Sat 2 > Sat 1
- f. Sat 1 = Sat 2
The residents have opened up and are allowing us to become a part of their lives and share their stories.

One of the residents said she wished we came more often and will really miss us when we leave. Termination issues may be difficult.

It was encouraging and rewarding to know that our work made a difference and was enjoyed.

**PROJECT DISSEMINATION**

The dissemination of information from the project included a variety of mechanisms. Among these were presentations of the program and its results to the Rush University Occupational Therapy faculty and students, planned presentations at both the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education Conference and the American Occupational Therapy Association national conference, and development of a Website.

To sustain the program beyond the initial service learning period, staff and residents at Labouré House were trained so that structured wellness programs can continue. In addition, many of individual residents have been assisted in

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### TABLE 3. COPM Outcome Test Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Perf 2 – Perf 1</th>
<th>Sat 2 – Sat 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-1.841 (a)</td>
<td>-2.201 (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig (2 tailed)</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) based on negative ranks
(b) Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test

### TABLE 4. Frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Perf 1</th>
<th>Perf 2</th>
<th>Sat 1</th>
<th>Sat 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N Valid</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>6.7953</td>
<td>7.4713</td>
<td>5.4838</td>
<td>7.4563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>7.7500</td>
<td>8.9500</td>
<td>4.2000</td>
<td>8.9000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>3.0446</td>
<td>3.1951</td>
<td>3.5916</td>
<td>3.3036</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The residents have opened up and are allowing us to become a part of their lives and share their stories.

One of the residents said she wished we came more often and will really miss us when we leave. Termination issues may be difficult.

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developing their own personal wellness plan for participation beyond the service learning period. Future plans may incorporate the site into yearly internships/service learning activities as time and funding permits.

ASSUMPTIONS AND VALUES UNDERLYING THE LABOURÉ HOUSE PROGRAM

An important aspect of this intergenerational wellness program is congruence with the values, mission, and philosophy of the Labouré House. The Labouré House mission of creating “an interdependent experience of collaborating individuals” (Labouré House, n.d.) is consistent with the assumption underlying the design of the program: linking generations together is of benefit to both generations. A benefit of intergenerational programming for the students includes awareness of issues related to aging, whereas the older adults may benefit from the social involvement (Poole, 1993).

Combining intergenerational programs and service learning further enhances the benefits of this intergenerational collaboration. The assumption of service learning is that students can learn through applying their knowledge and skills while providing a service in the community (Weigert, 1998). Through the provision of wellness programming at the Labouré House, both the students and residents experienced the value of different generations learning from one another. The Occupational Therapy students not only gained skill in wellness programming but also gained a sense of what life is like for a person of an older generation. As a student wrote in her reflection paper:

I learned through observation about the sadness of memories. During the music group, one group member appeared saddened as he listened and spoke about the music and experiences in his life. The experience reinforced the lives the residents have led and their individuality. (Student Reflection Paper, fall 2001)

The program at the Labouré house was also based on the value of health and wellness. Wellness and health promotion activities enhanced the Labouré House goals of increasing health awareness and education. Since Labouré House residents are considered “at risk” older adults, the wellness and health promotion programming was very valuable. To incorporate occupation-based wellness principles into the program, students sought input from the residents on what occupations were meaningful and relevant for them.

Another assumption of the program is the importance of occupations; i.e., people find meaning in their lives through doing. Occupations are defined as the “ordinary and familiar things which people do every day” (Christiansen &
Baum, 1999, p. 600). Occupational therapy principles emphasize it is “through occupation that we express who we are, what is of value, and who we wish to be” (Christiansen & Baum, 1999, p. 598). In a study of the well elderly that examined 361 older adults who received occupation-based treatment over a 9-month period, results showed significant benefits for preventative occupational therapy treatment in various areas of health, function, and quality of life (Clark, Azen, & Zemke et al., 1997). Consistent with this study, programming was structured to incorporate meaningful activities to enhance wellness and promote health and quality of life.

**RELEVANCE TO OTHER LOCALES**

A positive aspect of this program is its relevance for many different groups of elderly individuals. The basic framework of this program easily translates to different settings and can be adapted for other disciplines besides occupational therapy. The program can be replicated or adapted for senior centers, retirement communities, senior-housing centers, and specific community programs. Other venues include the Department of Aging, local community agencies, churches, or the YMCAs. The program’s framework has been developed for well elderly or “at risk” elderly who live in the community.

As many other disciplines are also involved in wellness interventions, the program may be relevant to students or practitioners in a variety of different disciplines including nursing, gerontology, therapeutic recreation, and social work. This program may also work well with an interdisciplinary approach to include physical therapy, physical education, nutrition, or the arts.

**POLICY FRAMEWORK**

The program’s policy framework is driven by a number of systems and organizations. Underlying all these systems is the basic concept of seniors being able to live in a community that provides services to assist them in maintaining an independent lifestyle. At the community level, the support system is the Labouré House where funding includes a full range of social services for low-income seniors of Chicago’s north side areas.

Another system is the Occupational Therapy Department, at the College of Health Sciences of Rush University, which provided in-kind support of the grant funding. Faculty of the College of Health Sciences is committed to serve as practitioner-teachers. The intergenerational grant has given faculty an opportunity to integrate community service with classroom instruction.
The overlying funding system is the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education, which seeks to build and enhance opportunities for schools and universities to participate in service learning programs. Combining their efforts, the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education and Generations Together provided funding from the Corporation for National Service to develop intergenerational service learning in existing courses and this program.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS AND RESEARCHERS**

Intergenerational programs and wellness programs have grown considerably over the past several years. While various factors such as genetics, exercise, spirituality, social support, and nutrition have been identified to contribute to wellness, research in this area is more limited. Based on preliminary results, the occupation-based wellness programming showed a positive effect on the elderly who participated. Future research could focus on the benefits of intergenerational wellness programming and compare outcome results with elderly who receive programming with those who do not.

Occupational therapists can take a much more active role in developing intergenerational wellness programming by continuing to provide program services in underserved populations. Utilizing needs assessments enables therapists to determine how and where occupational therapy services can best address the issues of clients in the community across generations.

Working collaboratively with agencies can expand student service learning and internship experiences. Many opportunities exist for a variety of professionals within various systems to add their expertise in wellness programming. As practitioners expand their practice areas outside of the traditional health care structure, intergenerational programming opportunities in wellness can be developed for both student intern experiences and paid employment opportunities.

**REFERENCES**


Received: 01/22/02
Reviewed: 02/18/02
Revised: 04/01/02
Accepted: 06/18/02