

# Culturally Relevant Health and Wellness Program for Children Attending the Boys and Girls

## Club of Moody County

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### BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

#### Introduction

Occupational therapists have an established role in addressing the health and wellness among a variety of populations and communities to prevent disease and increase healthy lifestyles, especially in youth and children (Kugel, et al.,2016; Stoffel, 2015). However, community-based programs focusing on the health and wellness for Native American children have not been extensively explored or integrated in occupational therapy practice (Murphy et al.,2017).

#### Literature Review

Native Americans, especially children and youth, suffer from many physical, emotional, and mental health disparities (Henson et al., 2017; Kelley, & Lowe, 2018; Pickner et al., 2016). The leading causes of mortality and morbidity among Native American adults can be linked back to childhood behavior (Henson et al., 2017). Many of these negative behaviors are due to environmental exposures in the home, community or school settings, ultimately leading to inimical health effects (Henson et al., 2017).

#### Purpose Statement:

The purpose of the capstone experience was to develop a program for Native American children that utilizes occupational therapy theory and culturally relevant, occupation-based activities to facilitate health and wellness.

### Theoretical Foundation

#### Model of Human Occupation:

The maladaptive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the students had resulted in the inability to integrate the mind and body to perform meaningful occupations that confirms ones identity (occupational adaptation) (Kielhofner, 2008). In order for change to occur among the students, there had to be an alteration in any of the components to emerge new adaptive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Kielhofner, 2008). The capstone experience was centered on the motivation, interests, habits, and roles that affect the children's abilities to follow health and wellness recommendations to maintain a healthy lifestyle and prevent chronic disease later in life (Ferlin et al., 2019). The students engaged in meaningful, healthy activities to create new occupational identities to sustain a pattern of participation (occupational competence) to increase overall health and well-being.

#### Revisions:

Although culture is a primary part of the environmental construct of the model, it is suggested that cultural components be more emphasized throughout the other constructs including volition, habituation, and performance capacity. Instead of the environment and culture surrounding the individual, it needs to be constantly interacting and influencing the person. It may be beneficial for the model to create an assessment to distinguish cultural interests, values, and participation especially when one is uncertain on what type of cultural activities may be important to integrate throughout intervention.

### Methods

#### Needs Assessment:

In order to prioritize concerns and address community issues, a needs assessment consisted of researching demographics and epidemiological data, interviews with key stakeholders, researching past programming activities, completing a focus group with the boys and girls staff members, and constructing a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis.

#### Program Development:

An 8-week health and wellness program, Wakanyeja Wozani, was developed for the boys and girls club addressing four primary concerns including physical activity, stress management, nutrition, and general healthy habits. Additionally, cultural activities were integrated into the program based on information gathered from observations at the Flandreau Santee Sioux Health Clinic and various online trainings and books on Native American culture.

#### Program Implementation:

The stress management and healthy habit units of the program were implemented for four weeks. Program implementation included creating the program schedule, recruiting students, gathering all materials, administering the outcome survey, and leading each group session. 17 female students between the ages of 6-11 participated in the program.

### Implications for Occupational Therapy

#### Practice:

With community-based practice becoming a primary practice area in occupational therapy, occupational therapists can be given the opportunity to engage and empower children to integrate health-promoting occupations into daily habits and routines. Occupational therapists have a unique skill set and role in health promotion and are well suited to create programs that support the physical or mental components of any population. Additionally, occupational therapists, when working with diverse populations, need to be aware of the culture and understand how diversity can impact occupational engagement.

#### Research:

Future research would be beneficial in exploring occupational habits, routines, and behaviors based on cultural norms. Understanding the impact of culture is vital when providing community-based programming. Research is needed to determine the effectiveness of health and wellness programs among specific cultural groups using MOHO as the primary theoretical theory.

#### Education:

Occupational therapy curriculum should continue to integrate cultural awareness and provide opportunities for students to interact with different cultural groups through fieldwork placements, classroom lectures, and guest speakers. This will help students understand the impact that culture has on occupational performance and how to tailor intervention to incorporate these aspects. Additionally, the curriculum should continue to emphasize community-based practice, especially on the level of program development.

### Outcomes/Conclusions

- The primary outcome of the capstone experience was the development of the program, Wakanyeja Wozani, which is a culturally relevant health and wellness program for Native American students. A program manual was created for the Boys and Girls Club of Moody County.
- There was an overall improvement in health and wellness among the participants, as the survey results indicated that the students met the goals created for the program.
- Staff and student responses from the interviews indicated that the developed program was a success and will continually be implemented.
- The positive responses validates the role of occupational therapy in community-based settings to develop and implement programs to improve health and wellness.

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