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Living A Trustful Life: A Trauma-Focused Mentorship Program For Foster Youth

Michelle Ann McNamee

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LIVING A TRUSTFUL LIFE: A TRAUMA-FOCUSED MENTORSHIP PROGRAM FOR
FOSTER YOUTH

by

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Occupational Therapy Doctorate, University of North Dakota, 2023

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APPROVAL

This scholarly project, submitted by Michelle McNamee in partial fulfillment for the Degree of Occupational Therapy Doctorate from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisor Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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In honor of my Aunt Mary,
thank you for the support, the laughter,
and encouragement you provided for me and our entire family!
Love and miss you, Minnie.

ABSTRACT

Background: Foster youth can experience many challenges as they transition into adulthood which can threaten their success in achieving whom they wish to become. Often, foster youth are exposed to physical, mental, and sexual trauma leading to their removal from their biological home (Engler et al., 2020). Adverse experiences at a young age can be multi-dimensional and long-lasting, leading to negative consequences in occupational performance including self-isolation and hesitation to trust others (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Paul-Ward & Lambdin-Pattavina, 2016).

Purpose: The product of this scholarly project is a mentorship program for youth preparing to age out of foster care. The program provides foster youth with a mentor to promote social stability and guidance as they prepare for their future endeavors. This product is necessary because it has the potential to improve foster youths' personal stability and self-confidence, with the help of a mentor, as they work towards achieving their goals in adulthood.

Methods: A comprehensive literature review was completed in the initial stages of product development to gain a holistic understanding of the gap between foster youths' skills and abilities and their participation in meaningful occupations. The person-environment-occupation (PEO) model served as the primary framework to guide this program by determining how to create a better fit between the person, environment, and occupation for optimal occupational performance as foster youth age into adulthood (Law et al., 1996).

Results: The product, *Living a Trustful Life*, was developed to enhance occupational performance by creating an evidence-based mentoring program that provides an opportunity for foster youth to experience a sense of belonging through the relationship with a mentor which can serve as a guide and promote social stability that youth may have lacked prior to their placement in foster care.

Conclusion: *Living a Trustful Life* was created to fill the gap that exists in foster youths' abilities to actively participate in meaningful occupations after aging out of foster care. It is anticipated that this mentorship program will help to enhance self-esteem and empowerment as foster youth further discover whom they wish to become as adults and the goals they hope to accomplish as they prepare for their autonomous life.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Traumatic events can vary in anyone's life, affecting individuals differently. According to Mitchell (2018), traumatic events can often leave a foster child to grieve and mourn a symbolic loss of stability or normalcy. This loss can lead to long-term negative consequences in the child's occupational performance if it is not addressed. Foster youth are two and a half times more likely to develop a mental health disorder due to trauma exposure and environmental instability than non-foster youth (Jankowski et al., 2018). The needs of every child can differ depending on the trauma they encounter. However, they often lack secure social relationships because of the symbolic loss they experienced from the abrupt removal from their biological home and family and placed into an unfamiliar environment (Mitchell, 2018).

This project addresses the potential difficulties foster youth can have with social participation due to the traumas and instability they experience. Occupational therapists are qualified to provide services to foster youth to improve their performance in occupations such as social participation and health management by addressing their cognitive, social, and behavioral needs that personal instabilities may have disrupted (Deutsch et al., 2015; Gypen et al., 2017). Through a structured mentoring program, youth will be encouraged to develop skills to experience success in their meaningful occupations with guidance from a mentor. Since occupational therapy can help improve foster youths' performance in daily occupations, this mentoring service can further expand their abilities to enhance their engagement in occupations as they enter adulthood.

Product

This scholarly project, titled *Living a Trustful Life*, is a mentorship program designed for foster youth preparing to age out of the foster care system. The purpose of this program is to support foster youth as they prepare to enter adulthood and enhance occupational performance through participating in a mentoring relationship. The program will provide mentors with tools, from training and the mentor guide, to help youth build a trusting relationship, overcome obstacles from past experiences, and develop coping skills to prevent any barriers that may limit their occupational performance in adulthood. The product contributes to the occupational therapy profession by providing strategies to address the disparities between the foster youths' instabilities and their participation in adult occupations.

Theoretical Frameworks

Person-Environment-Occupation

The person-environment-occupation (PEO) model served as the primary guide throughout the development of this project. This model identifies a dynamic relationship between the person, environment, and occupation and how the three components fit together in a transactive relationship to represent optimal occupational performance (Law et al., 1996). Occupational performance is the “Dynamic experience of a person engaged in purposeful activities and tasks within the environment” (Law et al., 1996, p. 16). The PEO model guided the program design based on the conclusive results of the needs assessment of the foster youth population. The model is also appropriate to guide this project because it is easily understandable by other disciplines involved in caring for foster youth (Law et al., 1996).

Person

According to Law et al. (1996), the person (p) component is viewed as a unique individual who constantly interacts with their surrounding environment across their lifespan. The model's personal factors include performance patterns, physical aspects, social aspects, cognition, development, and cultural background (Law et al., 1996). For product development, the person is a youth currently in the foster care system.

Environment

Within the PEO model that Law et al. (1996) developed, the environment (e) is where the person participates in their occupations. The environmental components that the PEO model considers include the physical, social, temporal, cultural, institutional, and virtual aspects of one's environment (Law et al., 1996). The environmental aspects can either support or hinder the person's occupational performance. The physical and social environmental aspects are further analyzed in Chapter II, as foster youth lack physical and social stability while in the foster care system (Steenbakkens et al., 2017).

Occupation

The occupations (o) within the PEO model are described as the tasks and activities the person needs and wants to do to demonstrate optimal occupational performance (Law et al., 1996). This domain encompasses three categories: self-care, productivity, and leisure. Self-care includes maintaining one's hygiene for optimal physical and mental health. The model considers productivity tasks when determining youths' occupational performance, including work, attending school, and volunteering. Lastly, the model identifies a leisure occupation as tasks

where a person finds a personal interest, such as hobbies during free time (Law et al., 1996). This product allows freedom for foster youth and their mentor to explore leisure activities for youth to determine which hobbies they wish to occupy their time in adulthood.

Transactive Relationships

According to Law et al. (1996), the three components mentioned above are dependent and affected by each other, and they dynamically interact to understand one's occupational performance. The transaction between these components indicates a certain degree of "fit" between them, demonstrating the amount of occupational performance achieved. When optimal occupational performance is not achieved, aspects of the person, environment, or occupation can be adapted to improve the "fit" between the transactions to ultimately increase occupational performance (Law et al., 1996). The p x e transaction represents the fit between foster youths' personalities and abilities within their natural environment. The p x o transaction represents the fit between the foster youths' abilities to actively participate in meaningful occupations. Finally, the e x o transaction showcases how the foster youths' external environment supports or hinders their performance in their typical occupations.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

In addition to PEO, Maslow's hierarchy of needs was utilized as a secondary guide in the planning phase of product development to understand the product's outcome goal. This framework describes the ascending pattern of human needs, including physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Despite the youth's physiological and safety needs adequately being met while in foster care, it is a fundamental

human right to achieve belongingness and self-esteem to enhance their quality of life when they enter adulthood (Steenbakkers et al., 2017). PEO and Maslow's hierarchy of needs helped guide the product to holistically understand the person (foster youth) and their level of human needs.

Cole's Seven Steps

Cole's seven steps framework was utilized in the beginning stages of product development (Cole, 2018). The steps include an introduction, activity, sharing, processing, generalizing, application, and summary (Cole, 2018). The three components in the PEO model were incorporated into these steps to structure an outline of the program sessions. The purpose of implementing the framework into the product is for the mentee and mentor to participate in one structured activity together per month and reflect on their feelings post-activity (Cole, 2018).

Key Terminology

- **Dyad:** A social group consisting of two people. A dyad for this product comprises the foster youth as the mentee and the relationship with the adult as the mentor.
- **Foster Care System:** A temporary service through the state to provide a safe and secure placement setting for children suspected victims of abuse and neglect of their basic needs by their guardians (Crabill & Hanson, 2018; Steenbakkers et al., 2017). The overarching goal of foster care is to reunite children with their families or locate a permanent home if returning home is not feasible.
- **Occupational Therapy (OT):** "The therapeutic use of everyday life occupations with persons, groups, or populations to enhance or enable participation" (AOTA, 2020, p. 1).

- **Trauma:** An individual's exposure to physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological abuse and neglect resulting in significant risk for long-term negative consequences (North Dakota Department of Human Services, 2022). Foster youth can experience trauma directly, indirectly, or by witnessing the event.
- **Youth:** For this scholarly project, youth are defined as 15-17 years old still in the foster care system.

Summary

The focus of this scholarly project will be explained in further detail in the following chapters. An extensive literature review needs assessment analyzes trauma exposure, foster youths' barriers with their personal abilities, environment, and meaningful occupations, and evidence-based interventions to address these barriers are discussed in Chapter II. Chapter III describes the methods used to develop the product and the research process, including how literature was gathered and analyzed. The final product that was developed for this scholarly project based on the literature review is outlined in Chapter IV. Chapter V summarizes the strengths, limitations, and recommendations for future use of this scholarly project. Appendix A includes the actual program, *Living a Trustful Life*, and a resource handbook for mentors is included in Appendix B.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Approximately 25,000 foster youth age out of the foster care system annually in the United States and often lack the skills necessary for success in adulthood due to poor social and environmental stability (Paul-Ward & Lambdin-Pattavina, 2016). Foster care is a temporary service in which many children are placed due to suspected maltreatment or the inability of biological parents to adequately meet their basic needs (Crabill & Hanson, 2018). According to Mitchell (2018), youth in foster care can experience various types of symbolic loss, such as stability or normalcy in their life. Youth may often grieve this loss, fear the future, or experience mental health challenges as a result. Furthermore, the trauma children often experience that initially led them to their placement into foster care can lead to additional stress (Engler et al., 2020). Trauma can result in immediate or long-term consequences in their behaviors and social realms, resulting in occupational performance deficits as they transition into adulthood (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Paul-Ward & Lambdin-Pattavina, 2016).

Occupational therapists can play an essential role with foster youth by enhancing their social participation skills to help them cope with their traumas and experience success in adulthood. Based on the existing literature, there are a limited number of available trauma-focused programs to enhance coping skills while promoting social stability with the support of a mentor. This scholarly project aims to identify the needs of foster youth and develop a foster youth-mentor dyad program that can guide and support youth toward the path they wish to take as they prepare for their autonomous life. This literature review contains information about the

foster youth population, various barriers to their occupational performance during the transition to adulthood, existing services that address foster youths' common deficits, and emotional/mental support related to past traumatic experiences. This chapter will further analyze the need for this program to address foster youths' instabilities.

Occupational Therapy's Role

Occupational therapists are trained healthcare professionals to help individuals across the lifespan by implementing individual and group-based interventions to address performance deficits and create optimal participation in everyday occupations (AOTA, 2020). Although there is limited evidence on the roles occupational therapy can play within a social service setting, there is significant evidence regarding the role of occupational therapists within the pediatric population. Occupational therapy services can provide intervention to foster youth for their deficits in performance skills such as behavior, cognition, developmental, or social using an occupation-based approach (AOTA, 2020). Additionally, occupational therapists can use a community-based approach to advocate for foster youth and practice social participation skills to build self-esteem (AOTA, 2020). The complexity of trauma exposure and the instabilities youth experience while in foster care can be quickly overlooked. This aspect must also be addressed for youth to succeed better in their new autonomous life.

Occupational therapists are qualified to address certain occupations, including activities of daily living (ADLs), instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs), health management, sleep and rest, education, employment, social participation, play, and leisure (AOTA, 2020). While focusing on the foster youth population, occupational therapists can use various approaches to

help enhance their social, behavioral, cognitive, and developmental needs that may have been disrupted due to childhood trauma (Deutsch et al., 2015; Gypen et al., 2017).

Person-Environment-Occupation Model

The person-environment-occupation (PEO) model was carefully selected to guide the product development process for several reasons. It is a holistic, client-centered, occupation-based model that considers the person, environment, and occupation domains and their interactions to understand one's occupational performance (Law et al., 1996). This model suggests that the "fit" between each domain determines the person's occupational performance across the lifespan (Law et al., 1996). Therefore, if there are deficits identified within any of these three domains, it will poorly reflect in the person's success to participate in their meaningful occupations. Youth in foster care often experience placement instability (Paul-Ward & Lambdin-Pattavina, 2016), which can disrupt the fit between their environment and participation in daily occupations. The PEO model is appropriate for foster youth as their personal variables, environment, and occupations are everchanging as they develop and prepare for adulthood. This literature review discusses the challenges threatening occupational performance depicted from the person, environment, and occupation domains to identify a need among the foster youth population.

Barriers to Occupational Performance

Foster youth encounter many barriers concerning their personal variables, environment, and occupations youth their age typically engages in. According to Rosenberg and Kim (2018), the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 expanded services

for children in the foster care system up to 21 years old. However, every state in the United States has differing regulations, and some states expect foster youth who turn 18 years old to age out (Rosenberg & Kim, 2018; Woodgate et al., 2017). For this literature review, youth preparing to age out of foster care are 15-17 years old and have not reunited with their biological parents or been legally adopted.

Person Factors Impacting Occupational Performance

The literature identified that foster youth often experience barriers in their skills due to many factors, including but not limited to past traumas and lack of stability in their life. These barriers can result in deficits in regulating behaviors and emotions and pose a risk for mental health concerns, all of which must be addressed for a successful transition into adulthood (Hall & Semanchin, 2018; Rosenberg & Kim, 2018; Woodgate et al., 2017). Engler et al. (2020) explained how foster youth demonstrate increased deficits in their emotions, behaviors, and development compared to their peers. Therefore, this can negatively impact their ability to engage in meaningful occupations typical for their age, such as social participation, school, health management, and leisure (AOTA, 2020).

Physical barriers

Foster youth often experience many barriers that threaten their physical health. Approximately 35-50% of the foster youth population have specific physical health needs compared to less than 20% of non-foster youth (Deutsch & Fortin, 2015, p. 287). Foster youth may not always have the luxury of receiving routine medical services due to their socioeconomic status, which can lead to chronic health conditions when they are not treated (Deutsch et al.,

2015; Steenbakkers et al., 2017; Turney & Wildeman, 2016). If these health problems persist, it can eventually result in a decline in the youths' occupational performance due to their physiological needs not being adequately met. Foster youth often have complex health needs because of their exposure to trauma and various substances. Many healthcare providers cannot recognize and adequately treat this vulnerable population (Deutsch et al., 2015). Further, failing to address these health needs while in the system can cause a barrier for youth to manage their physical and mental health when they age out of foster care. These health risks can create a poor "fit" between foster youth, their environment, and their occupations if they do not receive adequate treatment.

Mental health barriers

Due to the maltreatment foster youth have endured at a young age, they pose a greater risk than non-foster peers of experiencing more mental health challenges (Turney & Wildeman, 2016). The most common psychiatric diagnoses of children in foster care include post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, reactive attachment disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder (Engler et al., 2020). According to Engler et al. (2020), foster youth transitioning into adulthood are up to four times more likely to develop a mental health disorder than youth not in foster care.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Foster youth are prone to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from memories of trauma intrusively entering their thoughts, which can interrupt social and academic occupations. PTSD symptoms can stem from intrusive nightmares, flashbacks, hyperactivity, anxiety, behavioral outbursts, and avoidance of specific people or situations (Engler et al., 2020). To holistically

understand foster youths' needs, practitioners need to find information on the potential maltreatment they experienced before being placed in the system to focus on their needs (Crabill & Hanson, 2018). This practice is encouraged so practitioners can better understand the youths past traumatic experiences and treat them accordingly to promote optimal occupational performance.

Depression.

Depression is another common mental health condition found in foster youth. According to the literature, children in foster care are seven times more likely to display depressive symptoms compared to children not in foster care (Turney & Wildeman, 2016). Patterns of self-isolation and withdrawal from others commonly demonstrate depression. Further, placement instability can make these abnormal behavioral patterns challenging to identify (Deutsch et al., 2017). These depressive symptoms must be a priority to monitor when providing treatment for foster youth as it can result in a lack of motivation to participate in various occupations and achieve their goals in adulthood.

Reactive Attachment Disorder.

Reactive attachment disorder can result from the symbolic loss they experienced when they were removed from their biological home and into foster care (Mitchell, 2018). Youth who have experienced neglect by a biological parent are more likely to demonstrate insecure attachments to others compared to youth who have not experienced neglect (Turney & Wildeman, 2016). Therefore, this can demonstrate a poor fit between foster youth and their social environment.

Oppositional Defiant Disorder.

Youth who present with oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) symptoms demonstrate frequent behavioral outbursts, including anger, aggression, and difficulty regulating tempers. These behaviors can further progress and cause long-term mental health consequences due to abuse and neglect if mental health is not addressed (Engler et al., 2020). Furthermore, these ODD behavioral symptoms can play a significant factor in why foster parents quit their caregiver role, leading to a placement change for the youth and creating further environmental instability (Cooley et al., 2015). The literature identified a positive correlation between foster children who experience frequent placement changes and increased mental health issues such as depression and behavioral outbursts (Parekh, 2022).

Social barriers

In addition to the mental health barriers, foster youth have significant social deficits that can affect their performance in meaningful occupations. Parekh (2022) indicated that foster youth experience social deficits, including self-isolation from peers, siblings, and foster parents. These deficits demonstrate concern about their occupational performance in the youths' social participation, education, and leisure occupations (AOTA, 2020). These self-isolating behaviors suggest the lack of trust and attachment youth often have with others due to the symbolic loss they experienced, abruptly losing the stability of their biological home and family (Mitchell, 2018). As a result, this can hinder their ability to reach out to someone for help or resources as they prepare for adulthood.

Youth who have experienced trauma are more likely to demonstrate externalizing behaviors, including disruptive behaviors and impulsivity (Engler et al., 2020; Steenbakketers et al., 2017). If these behaviors are left unaddressed, they can be a risk factor for increased placement changes, leading to further social instability and increased externalizing behaviors (Engler et al., 2020). Behavioral problems with the youths' social interactions often contribute to why foster parents cease this role, resulting in an abrupt removal from the home and creating further instability (Cooley et al., 2015). Therefore, the trauma the foster youth have experienced also can result in poor fit with their occupational performance in social participation with their peers and adults.

Developmental barriers

Existing literature has found a correlation between how youths' exposure to maltreatment at a young age can alter brain activity resulting in developmental deficits. Developmental barriers can hinder their ability to successfully carry out meaningful occupations typical for their age. Early life stressors such as emotional instabilities disrupt children's brain development, leading to challenges with academics and memory skills (De Bellis et al., 2009). De Bellis et al. (2009) also identified that the brain areas most vulnerable to early life stressors include the prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and corpus callosum, all influenced by stress responses from the child's trauma exposure. Disrupting these developing brain structures can lead to challenges in how an individual appropriately responds to stress (De Bellis et al., 2009).

Additionally, the research identified that exposure to trauma as a child could result in a decreased size of the hippocampus and amygdala structures of the brain (De Bellis et al., 2009).

The hippocampus is a brain structure responsible for memory, and when smaller in size, the child experiences challenges with recalling past and present moments correctly (De Bellis et al., 2009). The amygdala is responsible for responding to fear. When structurally smaller, it cannot react appropriately to external stimuli that cause fear and therefore sends increased stress responses as a result (De Bellis et al., 2009). After exposure to trauma, foster youth can experience altered brain development, resulting in various cognitive impairments and creating barriers to participate in various occupations.

Cognitive barriers

Studies have shown that youth placed in the foster care system are at higher risk for academic dropout in comparison to their peers who are not in foster care due to academic failure, cognitive delay, lack of motivation, and behaviors that negatively disrupt school (De Bellis et al., 2009; Gypen et al., 2017). This can result from selective attention youth may have because of the other competing stressors that may distract them. According to De Bellis et al. (2009), foster youth who have experienced maltreatment demonstrated deficits depicted in lower IQ scores, language, visual-spatial processing, memory, and executive functioning skills compared to non-foster peers. Gypen et al. (2017) identified that approximately 64% of foster children in the United States graduate high school compared to 91% of the general population due to these cognitive deficits that hinder youths' performance with academics. In addition to personal deficits, foster youth are at risk of experiencing environmental instability that can threaten their success in adulthood.

Environmental Factors Impacting Occupational Performance

Foster youth may live in a foster home that may not be conducive to their learning and development during their teenage years. Existing literature highlighted the challenges foster youth experience, especially within their physical and social environments, ultimately disrupting their occupational performance.

Physical barriers

Studies have found that foster youth frequently experience disruption in their living environment. This environmental instability can include transitioning from one foster home placement to another, moving in and out of foster care, or frequent changes in the school they attend, increasing the sense of instability in their life (Paul-Ward & Lambdin-Pattavina, 2016). Placement instability is when children in foster care frequently move from one foster home to another, and according to Cross et al. (2015), youth can be transferred up to three or four times while in foster care. These abrupt changes in their physical environment are often challenging for youth. Because of the environmental instability, the need to address their trauma-related behaviors and emotions is often left untreated.

Social barriers

Foster youth often demonstrate difficulty maintaining social relationships to enhance a sense of belonging due to the maltreatment that led them into foster care (Steenbakkens et al., 2017). Youth often have a difficult time transitioning into adulthood due to their lack of social support during this life change which their peers who have not been in foster care often do receive (Gowdy & Hogan, 2021). Social support can help enhance intrinsic motivation to

achieve goals, and without the support, it could lead to further disinterest in participating in occupations when youth enter adulthood. Additionally, the literature identified that foster parents are often stressed and overwhelmed with the demand of caring for foster youth in their homes, which can limit their ability to connect and create a sense of belongingness for the youth (Cooley et al., 2015). Foster parents often have not experienced the youth's maltreatment, making it challenging to empathize and be readily available to them.

Steenbakkers et al. (2017) highlighted Maslow's hierarchy of needs theoretical framework because basic human needs are necessary for healthy growth. Like their non-foster peers, foster youth need continuous stable relationships to provide them with a secure attachment and sense of belonging that they often lack with others who have not encountered the same traumas (Steenbakkers et al., 2017).

Institutional barriers

While the institutional component of the PEO model was considered and is a vital factor in the environment domain, this component will not be the project's focus.

Temporal barriers

When youth in foster care age up into the late adolescent years, this often follows with various transitions as they prepare to enter adulthood which can be challenging to handle alone. This transitional time can include but not be limited to moving out and living independently, finding employment, and attending a new school (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Woodgate et al., 2017). Youths' occupational performance during this transition into adulthood is limited due to lack of support and can result in a poor fit between the person and their environment.

Virtual barriers

While the virtual component within the environment domain was considered a vital component of the PEO model, it will not be the focus of this project.

Occupational Factors Impacting Occupational Performance

In addition to environmental barriers, foster youth can also experience limitations in participating in their daily occupations that are typical for their age. According to the occupations defined in the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework, youth ages 15-17 typically engage in social participation, education, IADLs, leisure, and health management (AOTA, 2020). The literature described below identifies some barriers foster youth experience in their daily occupations.

Education

Education is an occupation that foster youth have in common with their non-foster peers; however, they need more skills and resources to succeed in continuing education after transitioning into adulthood. Foster youth typically have higher rates of absences at school, grade retention, and disciplinary referrals than their peers due to many complicating factors, including a lack of social and environmental stability and motivation (Paul-Ward & Lambdin-Pattavina, 2016). The existing mentorship programs have positive long-term benefits for foster youth by allowing them to practice relationship-building skills, show improved self-confidence, motivation to complete high school, and interest in post-secondary education (Woodgate et al., 2017).

Social participation

The literature suggested that the limited connection youth have with their foster parents or peers can lead to emotional outbursts and feelings of not belonging, leading to repetitive self-isolation behaviors (Steenbakkers et al., 2018). Foster youth can experience challenges building a relationship with another peer or adult because of the insecure attachments they instinctively developed from being removed from their biological family and placed with an unfamiliar one (Mitchell, 2018). Because of these instinctive untrustworthy behaviors, youth often lack the skill to engage in social participation to build a stable relationship (Engler et al., 2020). If the barriers to social participation are overlooked, this can lead to a negative disruption in successfully participating in meaningful occupations when foster youth transition into adulthood.

Summary of the Barriers to Occupational Performance

According to the literature, there are many barriers foster youth experience that can threaten their occupational performance. Youth in foster care can experience frequent placement changes, promoting a lack of permanence within their environment (Cross et al., 2015). Additionally, foster youth often experience challenges with participating in typical occupations at their age social participation due to various person-centered deficits and disrupted stability.

All the barriers foster youth encounter from the three domains of the PEO model can cause further disruption to their occupational performance and success in adulthood if they are not properly addressed. These barriers can eventually lead to many severe conditions, including but not limited to mental health conditions, cognitive delay, developmental delay, emotional dysregulation, and social isolation (Deutsch et al., 2015). While all components that encompass

the PEO model are significant, this project will primarily focus on the behavioral and social components of the person from the PEO model. Overall, foster youths' ability to actively participate in meaningful occupations can be hindered due to the identified barriers with the person variables, their environment, and occupations.

Interventions

Many existing intervention approaches are available for foster youth that address life skills, independent living, and locating access to housing and employment. Although these programs are proven effective by researchers, they lack the holistic perspective of addressing the needs and barriers youth encounter due to trauma exposure. According to Paul-Ward and Lambdin-Pattavina (2016), often, programming is not being used effectively due to poor communication with youth, lack of appeal within the program, and the youths' distorted perceptions that they do possess the skills necessary for adulthood. According to existing literature, skilled programming is lacking to address the youths' trauma through building a social, trustworthy relationship with a mentor using a holistic lens.

Youth-Mentor Dyad

Youth exposed to trauma demonstrate a higher risk of behavioral/emotional outbursts, developmental delays, and social skill impairments than their non-foster peers resulting in occupational performance deficits (Cooley et al., 2015; De Bellis et al., 2009). The Youth-Initiated Mentoring (YIM) approach is an evidence-based mentorship intervention where the youth-mentor dyad reported satisfaction with their relationship and indicated that social stability

in their lives helps youth feel more confident in themselves and their skills after participating in the program (Spencer et al., 2018).

According to Hall and Semanchin (2018), a foster agency developed the Intensive Permanence Services (IPS) model that uses a strategy for foster youth to connect with an adult. The model addresses trauma exposure with four phases: trusting, healing, connecting, and supporting. These phases can help establish a youth-adult relationship to aid with coping with past trauma to help with the transition into adulthood. Furthermore, foster youth have identified an increased sense of belonging with the use of the model and some permanency in their life as they begin to learn how to cope with their traumas and gain trust with adults (Hall & Semanchin, 2018). This type of mentor programming addresses the person's abilities and engagement in social participation with another trusted adult, which is the overarching outline of this scholarly project.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is a unique approach commonly used to address mental health. This intervention implemented by therapists is shown to lower rates of substance abuse and criminal justice issues when youth enter adulthood. CBT aims to gain awareness and assist in altering distorted thinking patterns so youth can have better control over intrusive thoughts (Woodgate et al., 2017). The practitioner and the youth can then collaborate to reframe distorted thinking into more positive and realistic beliefs.

Conclusion

Foster youth can experience challenges with participating in typical occupations for their age due to the traumas they have experienced in their biological home. This literature review highlighted the deficits currently existing for foster youth with mental health and social instability noted as significant barriers when addressing their deficits. Occupational therapists possess client-centered skills to address these deficits and implement client-centered care to optimize occupational performance. Although there are many identified barriers to occupational performance, existing literature suggests probable solutions that can allow occupational therapists to improve the fit between the person, environment, and occupation for foster youth to experience a successful transition into adulthood.

This literature review identified a gap in that limited services are available to promote social participation and health management for youth preparing to age out of foster care. Based on the findings, there is a solution where occupational therapists are qualified to design occupation-based programming for foster youth that focuses on coping with their traumas, building a relationship with a mentor, and identifying goals to achieve whom they wish to become. With guidance from the PEO model, this product has the potential to demonstrate carry-over success in adulthood as it can provide youth with social stability and support from a mentor before youth embark on their adult lifestyle to maximize their occupational performance.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This chapter outlines the research process utilized to synthesize the literature for product development and describes the theories that were used to design the product. *Living a Trustful Life* was developed for implementation at a state social service agency in the Midwest region. A comprehensive literature review needs assessment helped to understand the needs of foster youth transitioning out of foster care and to determine evidence-based services that can be implemented to enhance their success as they enter adulthood. Additionally, the role of occupational therapy in a community-based setting to serve foster youth was analyzed throughout the literature review to ensure a quality product from a therapeutic standpoint.

Literature

In the beginning stages of the literature review process, various databases were utilized from the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences Library, including PubMed and PsycINFO. The search terms including phrases such as “(foster care system) OR (child protective services) OR (temporary placement),” “(youth) OR (teenager) OR (adolescent),” AND “(occupational therapy) AND (interventions OR services),” AND “(trauma) OR (maltreatment),” AND “(mentoring) OR (relationships) OR (emotional stability) OR (behavioral deficits)” were used during the research process. Articles were also obtained from *Elsevier*, *Child and Youth Services Review*, and *Journal of Public Child Welfare* to gather additional information to gain a holistic understanding of foster youths’ underlying deficits in their personal skills, environment, and meaningful occupations. American Occupational Therapy

Association (AOTA) was also utilized as a professional organizational website. Most articles that fit the inclusion criteria for this literature review include the following: published in or after 2015, written in English text, and having a population sample of adolescents in the foster care system. Additionally, a 2009 publication fit the criteria because it provided quality neurological statistical data regarding the underlying reasons for foster youths' developmental delays caused by trauma. There is new research published since the 2009 publication; however, these articles either do not maintain a focus on the effects trauma has on the brain or do not have a strong level of evidence.

To ensure success with this product, additional analysis of the setting was completed alongside the literature review needs assessment. A further understanding was gained in a social service setting through discussions with case managers, social workers, teachers, counselors, and foster care parents to gain a holistic understanding of foster youth in the community. The youths' behaviors, health needs, and physical needs were continuously analyzed to better understand the person (foster youth) of this project. With the concurrent information from the discussions at a social service setting in conjunction with the literature review, it was determined there is a poor fit between the person's skills and abilities and their participation in health management, leisure, and social participation. Additionally, there is a poor fit between the person and their environment due to the instability of frequent placement changes (Cooley et al., 2015). Based on this evidence, it was determined that there was a need for a trauma-focused mentoring program to be designed specifically for foster youth to enhance participation in the occupations mentioned above as they prepare to enter adulthood.

Theoretical Frameworks

Person-Environment-Occupation

The person-environment-occupation (PEO) model (Law et al., 1996) served as the primary framework throughout the program development and to determine the need for the product in the initial planning phase. This framework analyzed the dynamic transactive relationship between the person (foster youth), their environment, occupations, and where to intervene to address the poor fit determined from the research process described above (Law et al., 1996). According to PEO, the three components include the person, environment, and occupation, which can impact one another to determine the person's overall occupational performance in meaningful activities (Law et al., 1996). Additionally, PEO uses simple terminology, which can make it easy to understand by other disciplines who work closely with foster youth (Law et al., 1996).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

In addition to PEO, the product design utilized Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. This theory comprises a five-tiered pyramid of basic human needs, including physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, where the first need must be satisfied to move further up the pyramid (Maslow, 1943). According to existing literature, foster youth need more than their basic human needs, such as food and clothing, to help limit insecurity, anxiety, and behavioral issues when they enter adulthood (Steenbakkers et al., 2017). Maslow's hierarchy of needs was used as a complementary framework to outline the program's purpose to ensure that foster youth have the opportunity to meet their belonging and self-esteem needs. This evidence-

based product aims to provide youth with a stable, positive social relationship to increase their sense of belonging with guidance and support from a mentor as they prepare for their future.

Cole's Seven Steps

Cole's seven steps framework served as a template to develop and outline the mentor training sessions and the agenda for the mentor-mentee sessions. This template will allow consistency and structure throughout the session to optimize evaluation results. The program coordinator will follow each step when implementing the training sessions. Each step is listed respectively: introduction, activity, sharing, processing, generalizing, application, and summary (Cole, 2018). Additionally, the dyads will follow the template during their sessions when they complete the required activity each month to enhance organization throughout the program.

Ethical Considerations

The *Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics* was utilized throughout the research process to ensure that the product appropriately follows occupational therapy practitioners' standards. The autonomy principle is respecting the person's self-determination, privacy, confidentiality, and consent (AOTA, 2020). With each session the youth have with their mentor throughout the program, they will be encouraged or invited to participate rather than forced to participate. Hence, the program ensures the privacy and safety of personal information.

Summary

Chapter III included a description of the theoretical frameworks utilized to guide the creation of *Living a Trustful Life* and the methods used to guide the literature review research process. Chapter IV, the product, includes a thorough description of the product developed for

this scholarly project. The instructor handbook materials are in Appendix A, and the mentor handbook is in Appendix B.

CHAPTER IV

Product

Background

Foster youth can experience many challenges, including personal instability, that many individuals may not encounter throughout their entire lifetime. Therefore, this can hinder their ability to participate in meaningful occupations and work towards goals they hope to accomplish in adulthood. The instabilities that foster youth experience can be due to their past traumas or neglect caused by a biological parent they thought they could trust, abrupt changes in their foster placement, and where they attend school (Deutsch et al., 2015). By synthesizing existing literature and conducting an ongoing needs assessment at a social service agency in the Midwest, a mentoring program was identified as a beneficial service to reduce emotional instabilities foster youth may have as they prepare for adulthood. This mentoring service can help support health management and social participation and aims to enhance the youths' participation in these occupations with stable social support.

Product Description

The product created for this scholarly project, *Living a Trustful Life*, is a mentorship program for foster youth preparing to age out of the foster care system. This product aims to support foster youth by building trust with a mentor, coping with their past, and establishing goals to enhance self-confidence and a sense of belonging. Having a mentor can help to overcome youths' instabilities moving forward as they embark on their future endeavors.

Living a Trustful Life was created to build mentoring relationships across six months. The program includes an instructor handbook for the program coordinator who will implement the program and a mentor guide as a resource for the mentor to carry out the pre-determined topics throughout mentoring. Before meeting their mentee, the mentors will attend training sessions to gain competency and knowledge to fulfill a mentor role. The outline of these sessions is in a detailed template in the instructor handbook that can be delivered in-person or virtual platform of choice at the program coordinator's discretion. The instructor handbook is in Appendix A, and the mentor guide is in Appendix B. The product materials are available upon request.

Each month's topics during mentoring include building rapport, setting boundaries and communication, setting goals, acting on personal goals, coping strategies to heal from the past, and self-confidence and empowerment, respectively. The literature review needs assessment and utilizing Maslow's hierarchy of needs were an asset in developing the outline of the topics for each month.

Product Implementation

Living a Trustful Life is a program developed for foster youth between 15-17 years old and an adult serving as a volunteer mentor in the community. The program is designed to be flexible by expanding the inclusion criteria of the youths' age range depending on their needs and abilities. To ensure confidentiality and rapport building, it is recommended that there is one youth for every mentor. However, this can also be adapted based on the youth's needs. The product contains a template of four training sessions for mentors and an outline of mentoring for six months. It is anticipated that *Living a Trustful Life* will be used and implemented by another

interdisciplinary team member working with foster youth. Therefore, concise language was emphasized throughout the product to be easily understandable. The use of one required activity per month will be utilized to enhance foster youths' social participation and health management occupations, which are necessary for success in adulthood. At the end of six months, the goal is for foster youth to continue to generalize the strategies they learned throughout mentoring to prioritize their needs and goals. The outline of the mentoring sessions in Table 1 provides an example of the PEO transactions integrated into the required activity each month and which occupation is addressed.

Table 1: Example of PEO Transaction Outline

Month One Topic	Activity	Person (p): Who is the activity for?	Suggested Environment (e): Where will the activity take place?	Occupation (o): What is the activity for?	Occupational Performance:
Building Rapport	"The Perfect Day"	The mentee (foster youth) and their mentor	A quiet, safe environment that is comfortable for the participants to concentrate.	Social Participation	The dyad can work collaboratively on their own handout to determine their "perfect day" based on their individual characteristics (p x o).

Month Two Topic	Activity	Person (p): Who is the activity for?	Suggested Environment (e): Where will the activity take place?	Occupation (o): What is the activity for?	Occupational Performance:
Setting Boundaries & Communication	Boundaries Handouts	The mentee (foster youth) and their mentor	A quiet, safe environment that is comfortable for the participants to concentrate.	Social Participation	The dyad can work collaboratively to establish boundaries they may find beneficial for their relationship as well as boundaries to implement in their daily life (p x e).

Month Three Topic	Activity	Person (p): Who is the activity for?	Suggested Environment (e): Where will the activity take place?	Occupation (o): What is the activity for?	Occupational Performance:
Setting Goals	Obstacle Course Game	The mentee (foster youth) and their mentor	A quiet, safe environment that is comfortable for the participants to concentrate.	Leisure, employment, and/or education (dependent on the type of goals)	The dyad can work as a team to communicate how the other person can complete the obstacle course blindfolded (p x o).

Month Four Topic	Activity	Person (p): Who is the activity for?	Suggested Environment (e): Where will the activity take place?	Occupation (o): What is the activity for?	Occupational Performance:
Acting on our Goals	Treasure Map activity	The mentee (foster youth) and their mentor	A quiet, safe environment that is comfortable for the participants to concentrate.	Leisure, employment, and/or education (dependent on the type of goals)	The dyad can work collaboratively on their treasure maps to identify how they can reach their goals and any barriers they may encounter along the way (o x e).

Month Five Topic	Activity	Person (p): Who is the activity for?	Suggested Environment (e): Where will the activity take place?	Occupation (o): What is the activity for?	Occupational Performance:
Coping Strategies to Heal from our Past	Imagery Exposure	The mentee (foster youth) and their mentor	A quiet, safe environment that is comfortable for the participants to concentrate.	Health Management	The dyad can work collaboratively through the imagery exposure worksheets to help identify stressors in their life and how to cope with them appropriately (p x e).

Month Six Topic	Activity	Person (p): Who is the activity for?	Suggested Environment (e): Where will the activity take place?	Occupation (o): What is the activity for?	Occupational Performance:
Self-Confidence & Empowerment	Gratitude Journal	The mentee (foster youth) and their mentor	A quiet, safe environment that is comfortable for the participants to concentrate.	Health Management	The dyad can work on their own journal to help reflect on their feelings, managing their emotions, and expressing needs based on their individual characteristics (p x o).

Product Objectives

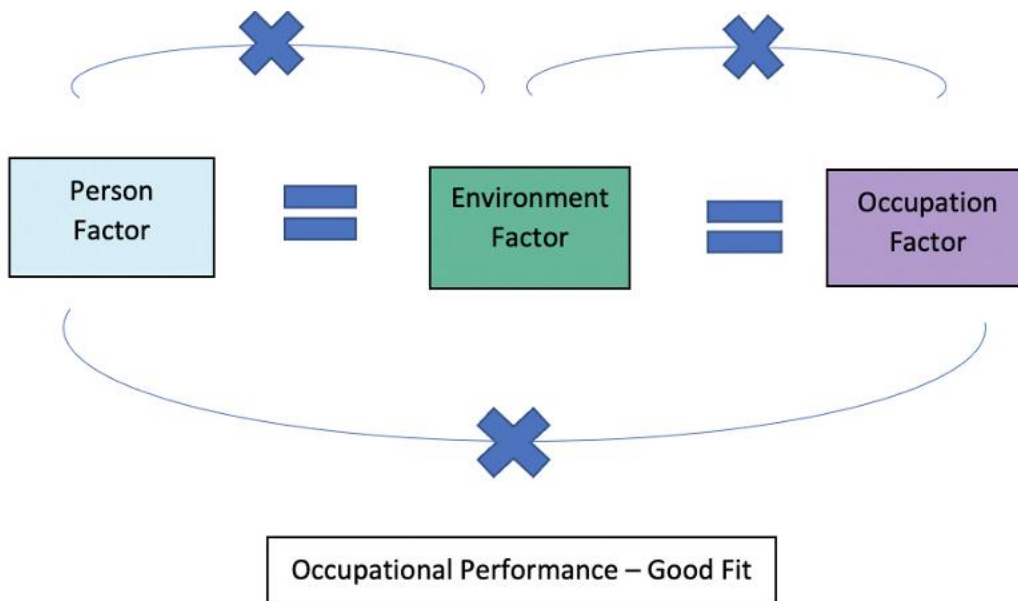
- The youth-mentor dyad will participate in one leisure occupation each time they meet in a safe and controlled environment. (o x e)
- The youth will be able to explore their personal feelings by verbalizing at least three current stressors or past stressful events to assist with regulating their stress interfering with their participation in occupations. (p x o)
- The foster youth will demonstrate a carryover of lessons they learned from the activities to their everyday life. (o x e)

Theoretical Frameworks

There was a total of three conceptual frameworks used to guide product development. The primary guide of the project was the person-environment-occupation model; Cole's seven steps and Maslow's hierarchy of needs served as complementary frameworks (Cole, 2018; Law et al., 1996; Maslow, 1943). These theoretical frameworks were utilized conjointly to enhance the fit among the person, environment, and occupation prior to adulthood (Law et al., 1996).

Person-Environment-Occupation

The person-environment-occupation (PEO) model was used primarily to identify the deficits that foster youth encounter by analyzing the person (foster youth), their environment, and their occupations (Law et al., 1996). PEO was used to determine what factors to address to increase foster youths' occupational performance as they enter adulthood. This model was also chosen as the primary guide due to the simple language that can be understandable by other disciplines (Law et al., 1996). Therefore, this allows other disciplines who work with foster youth to understand the purpose and goal when they use and implement the program.



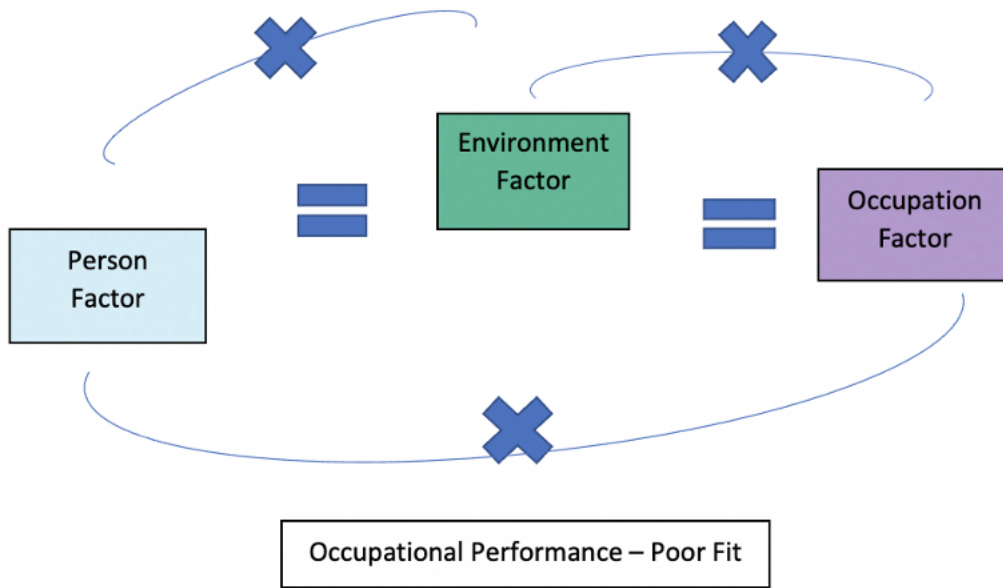


Figure 1. The figure above describes the concepts within the PEO model developed by Law et al. (1996). When the transactions (x) between the person factor, the environment factor, and the occupation factor are all equally weighted, a good fit is achieved, therefore supporting occupational performance as demonstrated in the top figure. A poor fit describes how the transactions between the person factor, the environment factor, and the occupation factor are out of balance as demonstrated by the bottom figure.

PEO component:	Color Key:
Person	Blue
Environment	Green
Occupation	Purple
Occupational Performance	Gray

Figure 2. This color key figure was intentionally created to identify each of the components in the PEO model by a particular color throughout the sessions in the mentoring program.

Cole’s Seven Steps

A complementary framework used alongside PEO was Cole’s seven steps. This framework was used to organize and layout a template for both the mentor training sessions

(Cole, 2018). Additionally, the framework outlined the mentoring sessions for when the dyads complete the required activity, as reflected in Table 1. The goal of incorporating this framework into the product is to enable active participation during shared activities (Cole, 2018). Each step allows participants to share and reflect on their thoughts and feelings that arise after completing the activity to apply the learning outcome to their daily lives (Cole, 2018).



Figure 3. This figure was created to visually understand the integration between the PEO model and the outline of the sessions throughout the program. The figure serves as a structured guide

for the training sessions and mentor-mentee meetups by following Cole's seven steps and can be adapted at the program coordinator's discretion and the participants' needs (Cole, 2018).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Finally, Maslow's hierarchy of needs was utilized in developing the topics for each month of mentoring (Maslow, 1943). This theory comprises of a five-tiered hierarchy where human needs are met from a bottom-up approach (Maslow, 1943). When youth are still in foster care, their physiological and safety needs are met with their caregiver providing adequate housing and food (Steenbakkens et al., 2017). Integrating this theory into the program aims to allow youth to meet their sense of belonging and self-esteem needs through the support of a mentor relationship.

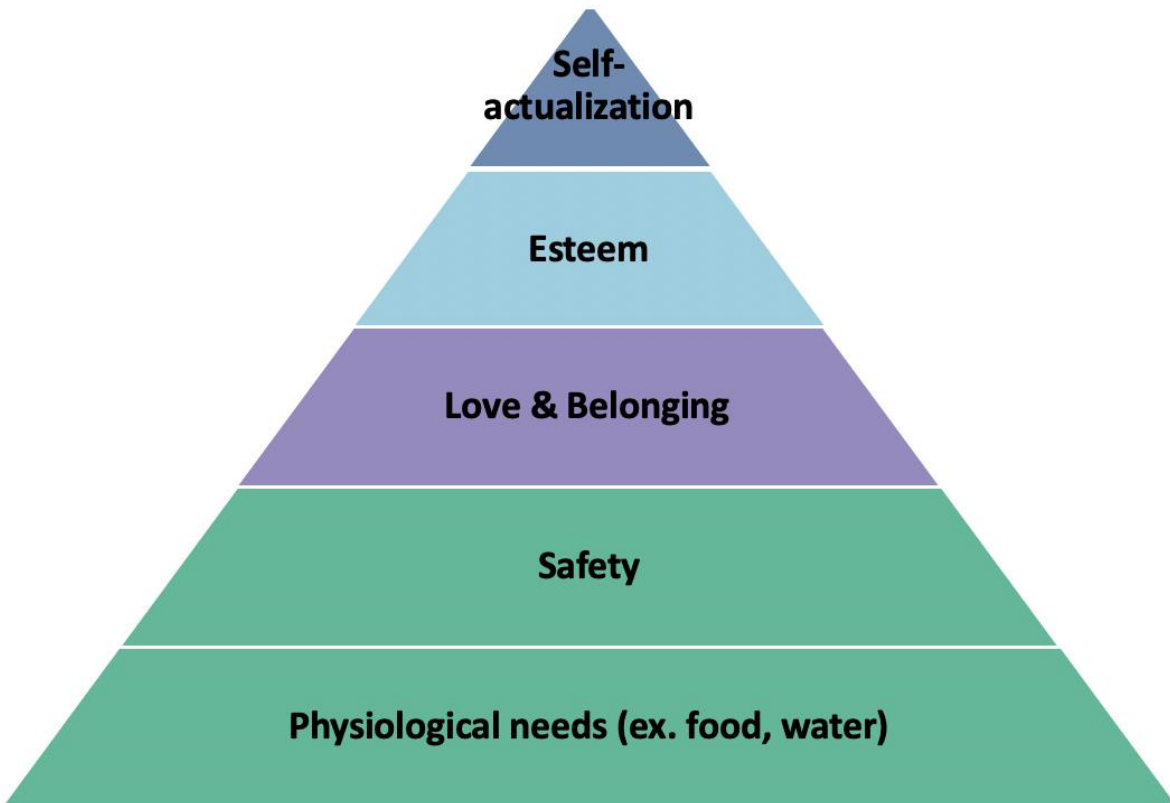


Figure 4. This figure describes the concepts in the Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which is demonstrated in a public domain (Protzman et al., 2018). Again, the PEO model is integrated into the hierarchy with the color key to represent the component that each of the human need addresses.

Operational, Financial, Marketing

The materials required to implement this program successfully are in Appendix A. The anticipated expenses the agency will expect to see are the cost to print copies of activity handouts, the mentor guides, and the cost to pay an employee to conduct mentor training sessions before mentoring begins. If the agency receives additional funding, this can help eliminate the participants' out-of-pocket expenses, including mentor background checks and activity expenses the dyads wish to participate in. Each month of mentoring will cost the agency approximately \$5-10 per dyad for printing handouts, writing utensils, and notebook paper. If the agency receives additional funding, the monthly cost may increase to reimburse for other

expenses. The limit to which the dyad can spend per month would be determined at the program coordinator's discretion. It is not anticipated that the agency will receive revenue for the implementation of *Living a Trustful Life*.

The product's target market is youth in the foster care system and preparing to age into adulthood. Each of the six months of mentoring has suggested activities that the dyad can participate in, along with pictures. Allowing the dyad to participate in appropriate activities enhances the feeling of autonomy and independence, which is often of interest to adolescents. Additionally, the marketing strategy of utilizing pictures makes the program more eye-catching for both the mentor and mentee and encourages participation in an unfamiliar activity.

Product Evaluation

The evaluation tool created to analyze the program's effectiveness is a satisfaction survey. This survey is located in Appendix B and is used as a collaborative approach where the dyads will complete it together at the end of each month. The survey will measure the activities they enjoyed, stressful parts of the month, the level to which the mentor agrees or disagrees in a series of statements, and any additional comments the dyad may have. The scale for the statements is intended to be answered from the foster youths' perspective with guidance and support from their mentor. The subjective questions will be answered from both participants' point of view. The surveys will include the same questions each month and help the program coordinator determine if the program is effective or needs adaptations for future use.

Summary

This product integrated concepts from PEO, Cole's seven steps, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theoretical frameworks to create a detailed mentoring program that highlights foster youths' needs depicted from the literature. The instructor handbook in Appendix A includes mentor training sessions and a description of the theoretical frameworks. The mentor guide is in Appendix B, which consists of an outline and handouts of the activities for each month of mentoring. In conclusion, by addressing foster youths' needs regarding disruption in their social participation and health management, *Living a Trustful Life* can positively impact the success of foster youth as they transition into adulthood.

CHAPTER V

Summary

This chapter includes an overview of the *Living a Trustful Life* program and the proposed use for this scholarly project. This chapter also highlights the strengths, limitations, and recommendations to make further accommodations to the program for future implementation.

Program Description

Living a Trustful Life is a mentorship program that will span six months, where the dyad sessions scheduled by the foster youth and their mentor occur approximately once per week. Three conceptual frameworks guided program development: the person-environment-occupation (PEO) model, Cole's seven steps, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Cole, 2018; Law et al., 1996; Maslow, 1943). Each month has a carefully selected topic and short-term goal from identifying foster youths' needs through the literature review needs assessment and language from Maslow's hierarchy of needs framework (Maslow, 1943). Additionally, this program includes four mentor training sessions intended for implementation before the dyad sessions begin for mentors to gain competence in their new roles. The mentor training and dyad mentoring sessions will last between 90 to 120 minutes. The product includes an outline of the training sessions and each month of mentoring, which follows Cole's seven steps framework (Cole, 2018). The training and mentoring sessions are adaptable at the program coordinator's discretion.

Discussion

This scholarly project aimed to develop a program for foster youth that focuses on coping with past traumas with support and guidance from a mentor to enhance social stability before transitioning to their autonomous life. A comprehensive literature review needs assessment was a significant component in identifying the gap among foster youths' abilities to participate in their

meaningful occupations as they transition into adulthood. Further, this gap indicates that youth lack social stability while in foster care, which can inhibit normalcy in their life as well as a sense of belonging (Mitchell, 2018; Steenbakkers et al., 2017). The literature indicated that one solution to fill this gap is a mentor to provide stable social support for foster youth (Hall & Semanchin, 2018). The information gathered from the literature review needs assessment, observation, and discussions in a social service setting guided the program development.

Recommendations

There are recommendations for *Living a Trustful Life* to ensure long-term sustainability for its success. Before implementing the program, it is recommended that the program coordinator familiarize themselves with the instructor handbook and the mentor guide to understand the activities provided within the program. It is also recommended that the mentors who participate in the program know the community and its various resources to determine activities they may wish to participate in with their mentee. Another recommendation is for the program coordinator to ensure that the mentors have equal access to the training materials and one copy of the mentor guide. This will allow equal opportunities for each dyad to build quality rapport and meet the monthly short-term goals outlined in the mentor guide.

Additionally, it is recommended that the program is used as it was designed, with the mentor and their mentee meeting in person approximately once a week. This recommendation aims to prevent the dyads from meeting virtually or inviting friends along, which could potentially skew the evaluation data when analyzing the program's effectiveness as well as limit rapport. The last recommendation is that the program coordinator adds additional mentoring sessions or adjust the monthly short-term goals if they feel it will better meet the program's objectives of optimizing foster youths' occupational performance in adulthood.

The completed product has the potential to be adapted and expanded upon for future use. Researchers could complete a longitudinal study to determine the program's long-term effects on youth who participated after they have lived on their own for a specified time. This data could demonstrate further evidence that the program is a quality service to assist foster youth before this transitional life change into adulthood. This study would help to understand whether there is a statistical decline in homelessness, incarceration, and unemployment rates in youth who participated in the program (Rosenberg & Kim, 2018).

Strengths and Limitations

There are several strengths identified in this scholarly project. Since mentoring focuses on enhancing trust and promoting social stability in the foster youths' lives, one strength is that minimal materials are required to implement the program. Therefore, there is no high cost to deliver this program. However, additional funding for future use could cover background check expenses for the mentors and the dyad's activity expenses which would serve as an appealing marketing strategy for prospective participants. Another strength is that the program was developed collaboratively with an expert review from staff working in child welfare. Therefore, it is anticipated that the program holds strong validity in how the pre-determined topics each month can be related to the foster youths' occupational performance as they transition into adulthood.

While this product has significant strengths, it also poses some limitations. The program was created collaboratively in a social service setting in which there is substantial expertise about the foster care system. However, it has limitations by the occupational therapy student's minimal expertise and training in foster care and not having an OT on staff. The program recommends a 1:1 dyad ratio to enhance trust and social stability among foster youth. Therefore, this will

require numerous adults in the community willing and able to participate in the program. In some circumstances, there may be insufficient mentors depending on the number of youths interested in the program. Therefore, the dyad ratio may need to be adjusted at the program coordinator's discretion. Finally, another limitation is that the program expects the mentor and the youth to pay for the activities they participate in out-of-pocket with no reimbursement. However, this can change if the program demonstrates the effectiveness and additional funding becomes available.

Future Implications

Living a Trustful Life addresses the gap with instability experienced by foster youth. This program promotes an evidence-based and occupation-based intervention that is utilized in occupational therapy practice and other professions qualified to work with foster youth. This scholarly project demonstrates how occupational therapy practitioners view the person, the foster youth, holistically and have the training to provide services that promote social participation, health management, and leisure. Additionally, this product emphasizes foster youths' capabilities rather than focusing on their deficits, further clarifying how this product can translate into occupational therapy practice. Implementing this program would equip youth preparing to age out of foster care to find success with their transition into adulthood through the development of coping strategies, social support, and self-confidence, which are focused topics in the program.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Living a Trustful Life* was created to fill the gap between the social instability foster youth can often experience caused by trauma exposure and their participation in meaningful occupations as they age into their adulthood phase of life. The product developed for this scholarly project is a mentorship program for youth who are in the foster care system. It is anticipated that this program will further enhance foster youths' self-confidence in their skills

and abilities from the social stability and guidance they receive from a mentor. As a result of participating in the program, it is suspected that youth will actively engage in meaningful occupations as they transition into their autonomous life.

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