

Translating Occupational Therapy and Trauma-Informed Principles for Retreat Facilitators Supporting Individuals Impacted by the Carceral System

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Introduction

- Individuals impacted by the carceral system often experience disruptions in their occupational roles and overall well-being.
- This is statistically attributed to experiences of trauma and limited opportunities to engage in meaningful activities.
- Community reentry can be a difficult transition, often leading to recidivism. (Bellum et al., 2025)
- Targeting barriers and creating employment opportunities can help reduce recidivism rates. An occupational therapist can play an important role in the transitional services for pre- and post-release. (Jaegers et al., 2020)
- The capstone project was completed in collaboration with the Down North Foundation in Philadelphia, PA. They are a non-profit organization that supports individuals affected by the carceral system through employment opportunities.

Project Description

- The needs assessment revealed a knowledge gap in the staff's understanding of occupational therapy and trauma-informed principles.
- Identifying this gap led to the development of a structured training guide to enhance the foundation's programming and participant experiences.
- **Aloha**
Leading with humility to strengthen facilitator knowledge to support restorative and healing-centered work.
- **Kuleana**
Resources support facilitators in their ability to engage with participants, ensuring that activities are accessible.
- **Kokua**
The training guide is rooted in therapeutic frameworks that promote a non-judgmental, inclusive environment.
- **Pono**
Utilizing righteous evidence-based practice strategies that support facilitators to uphold an ethical standard.
- **Laulima**
Working closely with community partner to create a unified approach to supporting the participants.

Purpose/Aims

- The training guide supports individuals impacted by the carceral system by promoting engagement in meaningful occupations and redefining roles/routines.
- Facilitators will be equipped with trauma-informed and occupation-based strategies to enhance retreat experiences.

Aims included:

- Improve facilitators' perceived preparedness to facilitate trauma-informed and occupation-based activities.
- Enhance retreat safety and engagement.
- Ensure sustainability.

Figure 1.

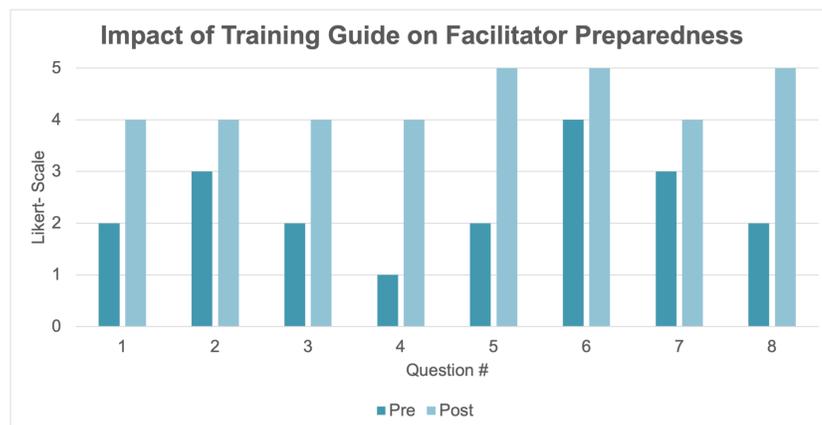


Figure 2. Sample page from the training guide illustrating an occupation-based activity



Methods

- Following the completion of the needs assessment it was identified that an evidence-based training guide would be the primary deliverable.
- Evidence-based literature and OT frameworks guided structured programming and therapeutic activities.
- The content in the training guide includes mindfulness exercises, gardening activity, prompted journaling, etc.
- Staff training was conducted to learn how to use and implement the guide during the retreat.
- Pre/post surveys consisted of 8 questions to assess preparedness.

Results/Outcomes

- Pre/post surveys received one response from a staff member at the Down North Foundation.
- **Figure 1.** depicts the results using a Likert Scale on perceived preparedness for carrying out retreat activities along with training other facilitators.
- The results from the pre/post surveys showed overall improvements in facilitator preparedness following implementation of the training guide.
- This suggests that there is increased facilitator capacity to promote therapeutic modalities within the retreat setting to support sustainability.

Discussion

- The project outcomes indicate that the training guide was an effective tool for strengthening facilitator preparedness.
- The significance of this project was the ability to translate evidence-based OT principles using a practical tool for non-clinical staff to support a therapeutic retreat.
- There were several limitations that should be acknowledged. There was only one survey response, which restricts reliability. A small non-profit foundation introduced challenges with staff availability and operational constraints. In addition, there was limited exposure and feedback from future retreat participants.
- Despite limitations this project provides a strong foundation for continued evaluation.

References

Scan QR Code for References and Resources

