



UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE

OUTREACH SCHOLARS ACADEMY
PROJECT PROPOSAL

C. Douglas Simmons, Ph.D., OTR/L

Assistant Professor,
Occupational Therapy Department
DSIMMONS@UNH.EDU

Project Title: Social Interaction as a Focus in Community Health Programs

Project Description:

I am currently working on developing a model to guide how social skill development is addressed in community-based health programs for adults experiencing acquired brain injury. This model will guide UNH students participating at the community program and the way in which they integrate social skill intervention and development into their current role at the program. This model will also be used to educate program staff and program members.

Background information/statement of the issue/problem:

More and more individuals that experience a brain injury are being saved by new technology in medicine. However, these individuals are finding that many previous skills that they had are either absent or impaired after injury. These issues are addressed in the early stages of recovery, but as time passes and insurance coverage expires, these individuals dealing with chronic health and functional performance problems are seeking new programming options to assist them with continued support and skill development. One issue that is consistent for this population is that of being socially isolated secondary to social skills in social situations. At the same time, most community programs are oriented towards meeting physical and cognitive performance issues but lack a model of addressing social skill performance. Finally, as more services for occupational therapy professionals are being developed in the community it is important for students from University of New Hampshire to have skills associated with social skill development for adults to meet these growing community practice needs.

Project details:Goals and Objectives:

This project intends to develop and integrate a model for addressing social skills and social interaction as well as an outcome measurement method into a community-based program providing services for adults with acquired brain injury in which UNH occupational therapy students are involved. The Occupation Social Skill Model will be housed in the occupational therapy department at the University of New Hampshire and will be available for use by students and practitioners at SteppingStones, other local community health programs as well as to occupational therapists in the United States as and around the globe.

The members at SteppingStones who will be involved in using the model will be tracked across several semesters to determine the effectiveness of the model in meeting their social interaction needs.

The outcomes of this project will be a theoretical and practice model for social skill development that is taught in two UNH occupational therapy courses. This model will focus on the use of everyday occupations (activities) in therapeutic group format as a mechanism to develop, practice, enhance, and adapt social skill performance. This information will be shared with the external partner SteppingStones, as well as the profession of occupational therapy and those individuals experiencing acquired brain injury, through professional literature and educational workshops.

Target Population/Audience:

The target population is around 160 adults experiencing performance issues as a result of acquired brain injury participating in a community-based health program called SteppingStones.

Methods:

A pilot group of members (10 – 20) will be assessed using the *Evaluation of Social Interaction*, a criterion based assessment that uses 27 social skills to compute a Social Skill Performance Measure.

The occupational therapy department at UNH has been at SteppingStones for over 6 years and students are responsible for facilitating therapeutic groups at the program during the fall and spring semesters. These students will be trained to also focus on social skill development as an aspect of the groups they facilitate at the program. The program staff will be utilized in the development of this model of practice as well as members to assure the designed group format is meeting member and program needs.

At the end of spring semester 2010, post Evaluation of Social Interaction assessments will be completed and Social Skill Performance Measure scores compared along with focus groups with members about their satisfaction and perceived effectiveness of groups.

Evidence of External Collaboration and Partnership

Through contacts made in the Outreach Scholars Academy as well as knowledge and skills gained from the Academy several meetings have occurred with program staff and administration at SteppingStones. Conversations have centered around the needs of the members at the program, the best way to introduce the model without disrupting the routine of the program and ways in which UNH Faculty and SteppingStones Staff can work to understand the project focus, integrate students and facilitate student learning and assure outcome measures are obtained.

Expected Impact

The external partner, SteppingStones, will gain a deeper understanding of the social interaction and social skill needs and performance abilities of the individuals it is providing services to. Program focus and policies will be broadened to consider social performance in a systematic and program outcomes method.

University of New Hampshire Occupational Therapy students will be able to incorporate social skill development into their clinical reasoning and be able to better meet this societal need post graduation. Another expected impact is that more students will seek employment at the community level as opposed to traditional medical-based employment settings.

Scholarly Connection

This project is part of my broader research trajectory of developing criterion-referenced measurement tools exploring concepts of social participation and health for adults living with chronic health and performance issues. This project will assist in further exploring the psychometrics of the Evaluation of Social Interaction as well as its utility in guiding practice for occupational therapists in evolving areas of practice. The outcomes of this project will be used to assist the external partner in programming decisions and expansion.

Evaluation plan

The evaluation plan of this pilot project will consist of pre and post ESI outcome measures related to how the model affected member performance. Focus groups with SteppingStones members and staff to assess external partner satisfaction and understanding of the project intent will be completed at least once per semester. Student learning will be assessed through traditional methods of exams and written work, but a specific question about their understanding and satisfaction will also be placed on the teacher evaluation form given at the end of each semester. The findings of the pilot project will be submitted for publication in the Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy.