

2012-2013 Award Winners- Project Abstracts

ACT with Wisdom: Utilizing a Group Model of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to Increase the Level of Psychological Resilience in Older Adults

Principal Investigator: Blaise Amendolace, Psy.D

Broward County will be one of ten counties within the United States to have the highest number of older adults per capita (US Census Bureau, 2000). Addressing a growing need, recent reports like Re-engAGE for Good (The Community Foundation of Broward, 2008) describe the need to provide innovative opportunities for the growing number of baby boomers to be civically engaged as they age. In light of these profound changes, this study is launched to improve services and therapeutic growth opportunities for older adults and those who serve them by expanding the scope and delivery of life-enhancement services in the community. The particular aspect of life enhancement we seek to develop is the psychological quality of resilience, a critical factor in aging well. We intend to do this through an 8 week group based on the evidence-based principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) which is itself an outgrowth of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT). While ACT has a proven track record in enhancing and/or developing psychological resilience, this successful approach has yet to be offered to older adults in a group format.

The Community Foundation of Broward (CFB) has a long range commitment to its Re-engAGE for Good Project which focuses on civic engagement. Providing a group to enhance and/or develop psychological resilience by including an exploration of values will provide a new component to CFB's effort. In identifying values, a key component of both ACT and resilience in older adults, is the ability to be meaningfully engaged in a variety of pursuits. It is likely that pursuing opportunities within the community will be a part of this process, thus uniting the opportunities being developed by CFB with the emerging interests of the group participants.

The principal investigators for this project will address the need for older adults in Broward County to have increased access to programs which focus on improving their overall quality of life by developing the psychological quality of resilience. Through the implementation of a pilot group targeting older adults, utilizing the principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), we would be making a significant and positive impact on the lives of the participants to meaningfully engage in their own lives and the life of their community. The investigators will utilize a mixed methods approach for data collection and evaluation (see section E). Upon the successful completion of the pilot group, our goal is to continue to offer this group for older adults in Broward.

Preparing Foster Care to Support Individuals with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities

Principal Investigator: Susan Kabot, EdD, CCC-SLP, Principal Investigator

The Quality of Life grant proposal, *Preparing Foster Care to Support Individuals with Autism and other Developmental Disabilities*, will address the ability of the Jewish Adoption and Foster Care Agency (JAFCO) to effectively address the growing numbers of children with autism and other developmental disabilities, who are in foster care in Broward County. JAFCO,

serving abused and neglected children in Broward County since 1992, is about to begin construction on a Respite and Family Resource Center for Children with Developmental Disabilities to open in 2013. Since the announcement of this construction project, JAFCO has seen a sizable increase in referrals of children with autism and other developmental disabilities to its agency. The community response to JAFCO's initiative to fill a critical void in the foster care system has been heartwarming, but the demand for the service has preceded JAFCO's ability to develop the trained staff to meet the need. The Mailman Segal Center for Human Development and the Institute for the Study of Human Service, Health, and Justice have joined together to provide a staff training program at JAFCO to address this challenge. The staff training program will build the skills of the current foster care staff and prepare them for the opening of the respite center that will soon serve children with autism and other developmental disabilities. A pretest-posttest single group design will be used to measure the effectiveness of the training activities. Training activities will include didactic lectures, on-site modeling and coaching, and practice introducing the competent provision of visual supports to be into the current foster care programs. A *t* test for dependent measures will be used to analyze the differences between pretest-posttest knowledge of autism and developmental disabilities, staff self-efficacy, and fidelity of the implementation of visual supports.

P.L.A.Y. (Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters) Project Training Program)

Principal Investigator: Sheryl Rosin Ph.D.,CCC-SLP

The development of a reliable, cost-effective form of intensive intervention for the treatment of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is a major priority for both the health and educational systems in this country. A large majority of states, including Florida, do not provide such interventions because there is a national shortage of trained professionals and because such interventions are very expensive. Thus, the P.L.A.Y. (Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters) Project was developed to address these concerns by creating a community-based autism training and early intervention program dedicated to empowering parents/caregivers to implement intensive, developmental interventions for their young children within their homes (Solomon, R., J., Necheles, C. Ferch, and D. Bruckman (2007). In this model, the parent/caregiver becomes the main interventionist and provides therapy daily (intensive) and the cost of treatment is drastically reduced because the families pay only for their in-home training (once per month) by the professional. The P.L.A.Y program uses a "train-the-trainer" model so that the professional (e.g., speech pathologist/occupational therapist) trains the parents/caregivers in the community the theory and methodology of the treatment in order to become their child's main interventionist. Additionally, the program addresses the problem regarding a national shortage of trained professionals because graduate students in programs in speech-language pathology and occupational therapy at Nova will be taught/mentored to implement the family-centered interventions alongside seasoned professionals so that they can continue to provide this type of training to families of children with ASD post their degrees. The use of a community-based approach such as this will promulgate developmental and relationship-based interventions among families in the surrounding areas. The need to train parents is essential so that they can work effectively with their young children with ASD and

become their child's best play partner. This makes sense because not only does every parent want a better relationship with their child, but they have the strongest commitment to help their children and can provide the necessary hours needed to make change. Lastly, the methods of the P.L.A.Y. project foster generalization of skills outside of school into the home, where the skills are essential. The P.L.A.Y. program is based on the DIR/Floortime framework, an evidence-based practice recognized by the National Academy of Sciences (Lord C. & McGee J.P., 2001). A study will be conducted to examine the effectiveness of the P.L.A.Y project. Assessments of: 1) interaction and social skills; 2) language and communication; and 3) stereotyped or repetitive behaviors will be taken pre and post intervention to measure change. Comparisons will be made between preschoolers in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs receiving the home-based intervention and a control group of preschoolers in ESE without. The procedures include training in a three step process: 1) Principal and Co-Investigator attend a 4 day training in Ann Arbor, MI; 2) The PI/CoPI return to the Broward community to put the program into practice by training graduate students in speech and occupational therapy programs at NSU to implement the P.L.A.Y. program with the PI/CoPI within the homes of families of children affected with ASD in Broward county ESE pre-school programs; and 3) Twelve months of parent training in P.L.A.Y. project (meet each family once per month) and data collection of home visits with families in the study where outcomes will be measured through assessments and review of video sessions of parents implementing the program at home.

Understanding the Post-Deployment Experiences of OEF/OIF Marine Corps Veterans: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Elda Kanzki-Veloso, Ph.D.

Approximately 2 million U.S. servicemen and women have been deployed to combat zones since September 2001 (Tan, 2009). Research has shown that many of these veterans have encountered serious challenges readjusting upon their return home, but do not successfully access needed services pertinent to their overall functioning (Institute of Medicine, 2010; Hoge et al., 2004). As such, current methods of mental health service delivery have been criticized for being inadequate, although investigation into the barriers that veterans face remains "sparse" (Devi, 2011; Robinson, 2004; Vogt, 2011 p. 140). A paucity of qualitative research investigating these issues also exists as only 2 qualitative studies were identified in a recent literature review of barriers to veteran care (Vogt, 2011). Scientific inquiry examining this phenomenon has also tended to focus largely on the U.S. Army population, with little attention paid to how membership within one of the various service branches affects later experiences as a veteran (Sharkey & Rennix, 2011). This study will seek to bridge these gaps through a qualitative investigation of how veterans of the United States Marine Corps (USMC) experienced post-deployment and how they believe their service history experiences have impacted the ability to functionally reintegrate into civilian society. Furthermore, inquiry into what barriers exist in accessing needed services will be explored. Participants will be recruited from local veterans' services organizations and semi-structured individual interviews with participants will be used to examine veterans' experiences. Analysis of the data will be conducted utilizing the Moustakas' (1994) adaptation of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data. Finally, findings will be used to make recommendations for service delivery as well as provide suggestions for future research.