Family Centered Support Groups for Families Receiving Early Intervention Services at Northwest Center

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INTRODUCTION
This project was completed in collaboration with Northwest Center, which provides services to adults and children with developmental disabilities in the Seattle area. Early Intervention (EI) therapy services, such as those provided by Northwest Center, are increasingly provided in home and community settings, rather than clinic-based locations. This trend towards natural environments has made it more difficult for parents of children with special needs to meet other parents in similar situations. The purpose of the project was to provide a venue for parents of children receiving EI services at Northwest Center to meet other families in similar situations, have their children interact, and build upon their abilities to interact with their child through play. Over a series of three months, we organized and implemented a family-centered support group for parents receiving services at Northwest Center.

METHODS
● Reviewed literature on the unique needs of parents raising a child with special needs and the benefits of support groups
● Interviewed parents using the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM)
● Created and administered a parent questionnaire to determine group structure and logistics
● Discussed findings with community mentors to develop plan
● Created content for activity-based meetings
● Organized parent participation in three social outings
● Conducted exit interviews with participants

NEEDS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

ACTIVITY BASED MEETINGS
● We organized and implemented three activity based meetings.
● Activities were simple and hands-on, which allowed for easy social participation and engagement.
● Activities used common, inexpensive materials and revolved around parent interests and expertise.
● Each meeting started with a short icebreaker game.
● Activity choice allowed us to address other identified parental needs, such as stress and household management.
● Take-home sheets for additional activities were provided after each meeting.
● A resource binder with group protocols for future meetings was created and provided to Northwest Center to support the continued success of this group as well as initiation of new groups.

PROJECT OUTCOMES
● Four out of the initial five mothers participated in the group meetings.
○ These participants reported that the group was:
 ■ Meeting their needs for social participation
 ■ Benefiting their child
 ■ Something they plan to continue
● A parent was selected to take a leadership role
○ We supported the parent leader by:
 ■ Creating an activity and resource binder
 ■ Establishing a relationship between the parent leader and a Northwest Center group advisor
● Families were connected with other families in similar situations for social participation.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS
We recommend the following for the sustainability of family-centered Northwest Center parent support groups:
● Conduct interviews with group participants to assess their most immediate needs before determining the content for the group. Group content should be tailored specifically to meet the needs of the members involved.
● Conduct ongoing check-ins with parents to ensure their needs are being met.
● Select and support a parent coordinator.
● Adjust clinician presence in the group according to the parents’ needs.
● Grade child-centered activities to match the developmental needs of participating children.
● Include 8-12 parents in group membership to increase the likelihood of group met.

REFERENCES