Article Critique of “The Use of Dance with People Experiencing Homelessness”

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Homelessness is a prevalent issue in today’s society. Individuals and families are living in homeless shelters, on the streets, and under overpasses, all while trying to meet their basic needs. Recreation and leisure is secondary or neglected by the homeless as they are focused on survival. “It Gives Me Purpose: The Use of Dance with People Experiencing Homelessness” is an article that analyzes the benefits of dance programs for individuals living within homeless shelters. This article critique will include a summary of the article, strengths and weaknesses of the writing, an application of the article to TR, and a personal reaction.

Summary

The article begins with an explanation of the psychological effects of homelessness. The most common problems described by people who are or have been homeless are depression, alienation, hopelessness, and loss of personal identity. Other psychological effects include stress, interpersonal conflict, and shame. Many people who are homeless also neglect their physical health and well-being. Recreation is an effective way to help individuals cope with the problems that accompany homelessness. Recreational activities help homeless individuals manage stress and anxiety, facilitate social interaction, build supportive groups, and find meaning. The article then gives of short explanation of the use of dance in therapeutic settings. Therapeutic dance is a systematic process that addresses physical and psychological well-being by connecting the individual to the surrounding environment (Devine, Knestaut, & Verlezza, 2010).

In order to understand the benefits of dance among the homeless, Melissa Knestaut, a student studying Therapeutic Recreation and Dance Performance, volunteered to create a dance program at a homeless shelter in Ohio. She offered a free, 50-minute dance class twice a week for eight weeks to adults and children living at the facility. The program utilized hip-hop,
country-line dance, ballet, and creative movement/improvisation. The overall objective of the program was to relieve stress, make social connections, establish confidence, and promote self-determination. In order to assess the effect of the program, each attendee was given a questionnaire pre- and post-dance class in which they rated the degree to which they were feeling happy, motivated, relaxed, depressed, frustrated, energetic, sad, joyful, stressed, and tired. The program director analyzed the changes in the participant’s answers for each class (Devine et al., 2010).

Results from the questionnaires revealed that the participant’s positive affect either stayed the same or increased from pre- to post-dance class. Participants also indicated that they were happier, more energetic, and more relaxed after completing the program. Not only did the dance class increase positive feelings, but it also decreased negative feelings. Participants especially indicated a decline in stress. Although the dance program was overall successful, there were also challenges. The main challenge with the program was inconsistent class attendance due to individuals leaving the homeless shelter (Devine et al., 2010).

**Strengths**

The primary strength of the article is the detailed explanation of the program including the participants, setting, assessment, findings, and challenges. The explanation allows the reader to completely understand the dance program and the measures that were taken to create a therapeutic activity. Another strength of the article is the inclusion of the actual questionnaire that the program director used to assess the individuals before and after the dance class (Devine et al., 2010, p. 297). The questionnaire allows the reader to understand part of what the participant’s experienced while in the dance program.
Weaknesses

One of the weaknesses of the article was its focus on adults only, although children participated in the dance program. The article does not explain why this is or the effects the dance program had on the children. Another weakness of the article was the lack of quantifiable data. The article contained general, but not specific, results from the assessment. The effects of the program would be easier to comprehend with the use of specific data.

Application

The article is useful for all Certified Therapeutic Recreational Specialists, not just those working with the homeless. The article explains that home is more than shelter. Rather, “home provides certain meanings including comfort, control, privacy, well-being, and most importantly, a sense of identity and belonging” (Devine et al., 2010, p. 291). Many, if not all, recreational therapists will work with individuals who do not have a good home life. The article is useful in understanding how home life psychological effects individuals and what kind of therapeutic programs can be used to cope with poor home life.

Personal Reaction

I chose this article because I love to dance. I started dancing when I was seven years old. Dance is a therapeutic activity for me. It helps me express my emotions and de-stress. I was interested in how dance helps people experiencing homelessness and how those benefits differ from the benefits that dance provides me.

In conclusion, dance programs can help individuals cope with the problems that accompany homelessness. Homeless people need the benefits of recreation in their lives just as much as those who are living comfortably in homes.
References
