Decreasing Social Isolation in Adults via a Cognitive Wellness Program

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RESULTS (continued)

In October 2015, Buzzards Bay Speech Therapy and Coastline Elderly Services, Inc., addressed collaboration concerns regarding healthy aging in New Bedford. According to the 2014 Massachusetts Healthy Aging Data Report, New Bedford scored lowest in the state with regard to healthy aging, with 31 health indicators rated below the state average, including depression, mental illness, stroke and Alzheimer’s disease. Recognizing that these indicators can lead to social isolation and further exacerbate health concerns, we developed a program focusing on cognitive wellness in order to enhance social engagement.

INTRODUCTION

In Part 1: 2015-2017, we developed two outcome measures:

1. A 13 question pre/post questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale adapted from the OAES (Yaras, Coleman, Quesal, 2007) and
2. A 7 question binary (Y/N) response satisfaction survey administered post participation in our program.

Sample questions from the pre/post questionnaire:

(Q6) I avoid situations where I have to communicate with others.
(Q9) I do not have confidence in my ability to communicate.
(Q11) I leave my home at least once a week to socialize.
(Q13) I am optimistic.

Sample questions from the satisfaction survey:

(Q2) I have more confidence in my communication skills since taking this class. (Y/N)
(Q5) I have formed or renewed a friendship since taking this class. (Y/N)
(Q7) I would recommend this class to others with similar issues. (Y/N)

METHODS

The program uses class-based instruction and lively activities to educate and engage participants while practicing tips and techniques to improve thinking, memory, communication and socialization skills. Our program travels throughout the community, as we hold classes in local Senior Centers, Councils on Aging and congregating housing.

RESULTS

Part 1: Quantitative Results

Using the pre/post questionnaire and calculating Gain Scores, we determined that the classes were most helpful in:

- Providing participants with a sense of optimism (Q13)
- Increasing participants‘ likelihood to socialize outside of their home (Q11)
- Decreasing participants‘ willingness to have others speak for them (Q7)
- Decreasing participants‘ avoidance of situations where communication is necessary (Q6)
- Increasing participants‘ confidence in their communication skills (Q9)

Benefit of Classes to Participants as measured by Average Gain Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit to Participants</th>
<th>Average Gain Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased participation</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased satisfaction</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased self-esteem</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSIONS/DISCUSSION

We believe that participation in cognitive wellness programs can enhance well-being in adults, decreasing the risk for social isolation and the health concerns that accompany such risk.

NEXt STEPS

We are interested in continuing our program in its current form and in expanding our service delivery to include programs which are participant driven with interval support from our program leaders.

In addition, we welcome the opportunity to partner with other communities in order to establish/expand cognitive wellness programs in those locations. We believe that regular access to community based programs of this type can decrease social isolation and enhance healthy aging for adults.

SELECT REFERENCES


CONCLUSIONS/DISCUSSION

Quantitative and qualitative outcome data collected since 2015 reveals that our classes are effective at decreasing social isolation, encouraging the formation/renewal of friendships, and the trying of new things, and improving confidence in cognitive-communication skills. Additionally, data reflects that the factor most susceptible to change following participation in our program is a feeling of optimism, born out of camaraderie within the class, gains in self-confidence and self-acceptance, and motivation to improve.

We believe that participation in cognitive wellness programs can enhance well-being in adults, decreasing the risk for social isolation and the health concerns that accompany such risk.

Through Participatory Action, we have identified barriers to on-going access to programs such as ours and are excited to undertake action whereby adults with limited resources will be empowered to take charge of their own cognitive wellness.

SELECT REFERENCES


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