Development of the Pittsburgh Employment Readiness Screen (PERS): A Stages of Change Approach to Address Unemployment in the Homeless Population

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Introduction

Background
- Department of Human Services (DHS) funds 120+ agencies that provide community services to underserved populations in Allegheny County.
- According to the Allegheny County DHS Point in Time count, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness increased from 774 in 2019 to 887 in 2020.1

Significance
- Homelessness is a complex problem that is commonly interlinked with other individual and societal issues such as unemployment, lack of affordable housing, chronic mental illness, and poverty.2
- A person’s perceived stage of readiness to work is an area that is under-addressed in existing literature.

Needs Assessment: Agency employees identified the need for an objective, evidence-based employment readiness screening tool and resource guide.

Objectives
1. Develop a screening tool and resource guide based on the Transtheoretical Model of Change related to employment readiness for agencies that work with individuals experiencing homelessness.
2. Disseminate PERS screening tool and resource guide for agency employee implementation at select DHS-funded agencies.

Methods

Literature Search
- Unemployment and the employment process
- TTM and assessments using this theory
- Best practices in survey development

Participants Providing Feedback
- 11 Doctor of Occupational Therapy students
- 3 University of Pittsburgh Occupational Therapy faculty
- 9 Employees at DHS-funded Agencies

Pre-Implementation and Post-Implementation Surveys
- Employee knowledge of TTM stages
- Confidence administering PERS
- PERS Implementation (5 Weeks)
- Implemented by 7 employees at 4 DHS-funded agencies
- Number of screens administered (N = 32)
- Participant stage results

Development of the PERS

Agency Employee Confidence Administering PERS Tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidence Rating</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Precontemplation</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>1/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>3/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pre-Implementation (N=10) and Post-Implementation (N=7)

Agency Employee Familiarity with the TTM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Responses</th>
<th>Not at all familiar</th>
<th>Somewhat familiar</th>
<th>Fairly familiar</th>
<th>Extremely familiar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Implementation (N=10)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Implementation (N=7)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Precontemplation 3%
Contemplation 22%
Preparation 28%
Action 47%

Participant TTM Stage According to the PERS

Agreement: 33/35

Subjective Responses Gathered Through Informal Interview

“Like the scoring system, really easy to understand and use.”

“I thought it was well put together. Very clear. Explained a lot. Breaks down each stage in teaching model – makes a lot of sense to me.”

“I think the language is direct and simplistic for ease of use.”

Results of Implementation

Agency employees who participated in the development of the PERS:
1. Exhibited increased similarity with the TTM regarding employment readiness.
2. Exhibited increased confidence in identifying stages within the model
3. Indicated that the TMM tool is an effective method to screen employment readiness of participants

Implementation

- Disseminate PERS screening tool and resource guide for agency employee implementation at select DHS-funded agencies

Facilitators
- Ease of screening tool design
- Number of agencies involved

Barriers/Limitations
- COVID-19 pandemic
- Participant insight

Future Directions
Study the validity and reliability of the PERSTool and resource guide for additional DHS-funded agencies
Tailor the PERS tool and resource guide
1) to include specific employment resources in Allegheny County, and 2) for varying populations

Conclusion

The TTM is an effective model that establishes a foundation for the development of an employment readiness screening tool for individuals experiencing homelessness. The PERS tool and resource guide were developed with a focus on sustainability and flexibility to support the diverse needs of community-based agency employees.

Implications for Practice
Occupational therapists are experts at examining the complex, individualized relationships between a person, environment, and the occupations in which they participate. Employment is a valued occupation that is vital to obtain and sustain housing. Using the TTM, a model rooted in psychosocial theory, an occupational therapist can assess an individual's readiness for behavior change and tailor interventions to meet the individual's where they are. Furthermore, an occupational therapist can act as a consultant to community-based agencies to help guide participants towards independence and participation in meaningful occupations.

Acknowledgements
Thank you to our site mentor, Peter Harvey, as well as the following Allegheny County DHS-funded agencies for their participation and support throughout this educational capstone experience: Bethlem Haven, Haven for Victims, East End Cooperative Ministry, Goodwill of Southwest PA, Partner 4 Work, and Sister’s Place. The University of Pittsburgh Department of Occupational Therapy supported the development of this program with primary oversight by Alyson Stover, MOT, JD, OTR/L, BCP.

References
2. Lam, C. S., Wiley, A. H., Siu, A., & Emmett, J. (2010). Assessing readiness to work from a stages of change perspective: I development of this program with primary oversight by Alyson Stover, MOT, JD, OTR/L, BCP.