Progression of Autism Related Transition Services: A Toolkit for Support
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INTRODUCTION

Background
- The UPMC Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders (CADD) is a comprehensive outpatient treatment center for children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder, developmental disabilities, and/or co-occurring psychiatric or behavioral disorders.1
- Clients and families navigating the transition from school to adulthood face difficulties due to the lack of a centralized process for transition services.2
- Through a study done by Hoffman and Klima, parents are dissatisfied with the current lack of guidance and awareness of transition resources, correlating to increased feelings of frustration.2
- Studies show less desirable post-secondary school outcomes, such as those relating to education, employment, and independent living, for individuals with disabilities.3

Significance
- Successful transition into adulthood is supported through collaboration between students, caregivers, and health care practitioners promoting successful post-graduation.4
- Transition planning for individuals with autism or developmental disabilities can effectively close the disparity gap and help students be successful in post-school roles in the areas of work, community, and living.5

The UPMC Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders (CADD) is a comprehensive outpatient center that promotes success post-transition. CADD staff and participating families helped students be successful in post-graduation.6

METHODS

OBJECTIVES
1. To create a comprehensive toolkit, Progression of Autism Related Transition Services (PARTS), outlining transition resources to help families navigate the transition process, thus increasing the amount of support and decreased levels of stress and burden for families during the transition years.
2. To develop and implement educational workshops for staff to increase knowledge of occupational therapy, understand when to refer to occupational therapy, describe the importance of transition services, and apply an interdisciplinary approach when supporting an individual through the transition to adulthood.

METHODS

Fourteen staff (i.e., physicians, psychologists, counselors, nurses, and social workers) and three families of young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities participated in this study. Participants engaged in the project culminated below after attending a virtual workshop to review the toolkit resources and completing pre- and post-implementation surveys.

PRE-IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY

- Administered Qualtrics XM survey to staff to assess current level of knowledge and confidence in navigating the transition process.

POST-IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY

- Administered Qualtrics XM survey to staff and families to determine what resources in the toolkit are useful. (Allegheny County, Pennsylvania)
- Administered Qualtrics XM survey to staff and families to assess confidence and comfort in navigating the transition process after reviewing the PARTS toolkit.

Data Analysis

- Complished pre-implementation and post-implementation surveys for individual participants to assess changes in transition confidence and confidence in navigating the transition process.

PRE-IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY

- Administered Qualtrics XM survey to staff and families who attended virtual workshops to assess confidence and comfort in navigating the transition process after reviewing the PARTS toolkit.

Post-implementation Development

- Completed thorough research of transition services to create an educational toolkit for local transition services in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in hard copy and virtual format.

Toolkit topics include: role of occupational therapy, decision making support options, Pennsylvania waiver process, community outreach options, local transition programs, etc.

RESULTS

The PARTS toolkit was designed to address the lack of a centralized process for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Allegheny County who are transitioning out of the school system. By compiling relevant information into an easily accessible resource, the toolkit supports young adults, their families, and the staff who work with these individuals to navigate the transition process.

This project demonstrates how the implementation of support through workshops and toolkits can promote successful transitions for clients aging out of the school system. Similarly structured toolkits and support services should be considered for implementation in relevant areas of practice to promote successful transition for clients preparing to enter adulthood.

The combined approach of a toolkit and educational workshops showed an increase in staff and family confidence in navigating transition services. Additionally, the results demonstrate that the implementation of a toolkit to support both staff and families through the transition into adulthood is beneficial in increasing competence in toolkit resources. The increase in toolkit resources reflected an expected improvement in proficiency of managing transition services.

The transition compliance scores of staff familiarity of the role of occupational therapy increased, individual scores were inconsistent in improvement. Therefore, despite providing education on the distinct role of occupational therapists, the need for continued professional development and further training in the role of occupational therapy is evident.

Recommendations
- Staff should continue to implement the PARTS toolkit by providing resources to appropriate clients and families while utilizing the resources on the toolkit to reach the appropriate audiences.
- Staff should be proactive in providing early education of the transition process and local services and families with autism spectrum disorder:
- Occupational therapists should be included in interprofessional discussions at CADD to develop staff understanding of the role of occupational therapy within the healthcare team.

Limitations
- A limited number of family participants engaged in our workshops due to challenging connections with potential family participants within the clinical environment.
- The PARTS toolkit is designed to provide information regarding the transition process and services within the Allegheny County region of Pennsylvania. It is not an exhaustive list of all potential resources within the state or country for transition-related services.
- A limited number of staff completed post-surveys after the virtual workshops, which decreased the amount of data that could be used in analysis.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The PARTS toolkit was designed to address the lack of a centralized process for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Allegheny County who are transitioning out of the school system. By compiling relevant information into an easily accessible resource, the toolkit supports young adults, their families, and the staff who work with these individuals to navigate the transition process.

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REFERENCES


