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Developing Community Participation Opportunities for People with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities: Implementation and Testing of Service Provider Intervention

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Introduction: With the World Health Organization's (WHO, 2001) shift in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) to include "participation" as a component of health, it is imperative that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) have access and support in their community participation opportunities. However, little is known about how people with I/DD desire to participate in their communities and how to support them in their pursuits. Furthermore, staff and administrators who serve adults with I/DD in community agencies and residential placements need to be key players in providing this support to people with I/DD, affording true choice and control in community participation.

Objective: The overarching goal of this research project was to empower people with I/DD in their community participation by working with staff to evaluate current participation programming and to strategize opportunities to expand and improve upon this programming.

Methods: This research project consisted of three main parts: (1) conducting a program evaluation of community participation programming in two community agencies that support people with I/DD in the United States, (2) developing and implementing evidence-based workshops and resource manual by an occupational therapist that focused on strategizing full community participation and that targeted staff at community agencies who serve people with I/DD, and (3) completing an evaluation of the workshop with workshop participants.

Results: Research findings indicate staff who participated in the project experienced increased confidence in supporting people with I/DD in their community participation. Furthermore, results indicated that through utilization of strategies for action-planning, staff were using information to plan and provide empowerment opportunities to support choice and control for their clients in their community participation.

Conclusion/Contributions to Occupational Therapy Practice: These findings demonstrate implications for community-based occupational therapy practice in providing professional and peer support opportunities to staff and administrators to evaluate and improve upon community participation programming for clients.