INTRODUCTION

The South Central Crisis Center is a State Operated Services Mental Health facility in Mankato, Minnesota. The center is designed to offer people suffering an acute mental health episode, such as suicidal thoughts, or who need a medication adjustment or other psychiatric services, up to a few days in a safe, secure environment. The center accepts referrals from law enforcement, county or health care professionals in these participating counties: Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, Freeborn, Le Sueur, Martin, Nicollet, Rice, Sibley and Watonwan.

Recently, the program has been serving a larger amount of clients who have a diagnosis of Asperger’s Disorder or high functioning Autism along with other comorbid mental health diagnoses. These clients pose a new challenge to the program as their behavior and learning styles differ from those of other clients the program serves. In order to better serve their clients, the staff at South Central Crisis Center requested training materials on behavioral traits and learning styles of clients who are diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome and other Pervasive Developmental Disorders.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

To meet the needs of the clients at the South Central Crisis Center, a literature review was conducted, looking at various studies of behavioral traits and learning styles of adults with Asperger’s Disorder and high functioning Autism. From this literature review an electronic training module was developed. This module consisted of a power point presentation and a learning manual.

To begin the process, a literature review was completed. Literature consisted of evidence-based intervention techniques and strategies that make up this disorder. Literature was based on primarily on adults with Asperger’s Disorder, although some of the findings included adolescent case studies. Literature consisted of:

- Case-studies
- Evidence-based text
- Evidence-based behavioral tools
- Qualitative studies
- Literature reviews

After fully reviewing the literature, a power point and training manual was developed to serve as a training tool for the staff at the South Central Crisis Center. The goal of this tool was to educate the staff on typical behavior and learning styles of adults who have been diagnosed with Asperger’s Disorder. By following the training modules it is hoped that staff will be more comfortable working with people who have this diagnosis who present to the South Central Crisis Center.

LITERATURE REVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Measures</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social Challenges and supports from the Perspective of Individuals with Asperger Syndrome and other autism spectrum disorders</td>
<td>18 adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
<td>Qualitative Analysis of Individual Interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>An Explanatory Study of the Specifics Associated with a Diagnosis of Asperger’s Syndrome: The Mental Health Impact on the Adolescents and Young Adults Diagnosed with a Disability with a Social Nature</td>
<td>Parent of adolescents and young adults diagnosed with AS who participated in a qualitative study conducted in 2002. Second group consisted of volunteer sample of parents. There was a total of 10 adolescent and young adults analyzed</td>
<td>Cross-sectional study using a self-administered mail questionnaire and a web-based questionnaire</td>
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<td>Suicide Ideation and Suicide Risk in Adolescent and Young Adults Diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome: A population at risk.</td>
<td>10 adolescents and young adults diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome</td>
<td>Cross-sectional study using self-administered mail questionnaire and a web-based questionnaire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diagnostic Assessing Asperger Syndrome in the Elderly A series of Case Presentations</td>
<td>10 cases studies</td>
<td>Developmental History/Diagnostic Questionnaires and Cognitive Assessments</td>
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<td>Standing Out and Fitting In: A Report on a support group for Individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome using a personal approach</td>
<td>10 adolescents and young adults diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome</td>
<td>Qualitative study, Snowball sampling and volunteer sampling</td>
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<td>Peer Victimization in Adolescents and Young Adults Diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome: A Link to Depression, Anxiety, Symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorder and Social Self Awareness.</td>
<td>Many stated that peer victimization was an issue. 30% met criteria for a diagnosis of major depressive disorder and 30% met criteria for a generalized anxiety disorder.</td>
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<td>Evidence of a Divided-attention Advantage in Autism</td>
<td>20 adults with high-functioning autism and Asperger’s Syndrome and 20 adults matched to the experimental group on education.</td>
<td>Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale</td>
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<td>peer behavior</td>
<td>19 individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome and 19 age and gender matched adults described as typically developed.</td>
<td>Measured ability of adults with AS to manage competing auditory tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotionality in Adults with Asperger’s Syndrome: Using the Multifaceted Emotionality Test (MET)</td>
<td>11 high-functioning adults with PDD and 11 adults typically developing adults served as the control group.</td>
<td>PPT Pretest to assess empathy</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
<td>Females and 8 make ages 21-25 diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome</td>
<td>Pretest scores on an individual assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motor function in adults with Asperger’s disorder: A comparative study</td>
<td>Motor skills assessed with an individual assessment</td>
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RESULTS

- Literature review conducted on 25 evidence based literature.
- Material was taken from this literature and compound into easily retainable information provided in a training module format.
- The electronic training module was presented to 5 of the staff at the South Central Crisis Center.
- Key learning concepts and Training Module goals:
  - Gain a better understanding of diagnoses that fall under Pervasive Developmental Disorders.
  - Autism
  - Asperger’s Disorder
  - Retts Syndrome
  - Childhood Disintegrative Disorder
  - PDD, NOS
- Form an understanding of behavioral and learning traits that are common among individuals more information to assist with Asperger’s or High Functioning Autism.
- Learn treatment tools that have proven to be affective when working with adults diagnosed with PDD.

FEEDBACK

For the most part feedback on this project was positive. The staff have been wanting some more information to assist with learning more about Asperger’s disorder and most of them felt that this was an appropriate tool to use.

A great way to learn the basics of this diagnosis! I’m sure we can use this as a tool to educate our staff for future clients who have Asperger’s!” employee @ SCCC.

This will be a great tool to use to train all of our current and new staff. These training modules offer explanations of symptoms and behaviors that are associated with people who are diagnosed with Asperger’s. The benefits of understanding a diagnosis can help our clients successfully complete their goals,” employee @ SCCC.

RURAL SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS

- This project has shown the importance of developing skills and awareness of all clients that are served within a program.
- Enhancing knowledge in specific areas assists in enhancing productivity and usefulness of programs located in rural areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Transforming the power point presentation into a tool that is useful for electronic training with a more interactive presentation.
- Develop a system of measurement for determining the impact of the electronic training module on staff and clients.