Community Service: Structured Dance Class for Cerebral Palsy After School

C. López-Ortiz, MA, PhD1;2; T. Egan, PT3,4; D. Gaebler-Spira, MD2,3
1Sensory Motor Performance Program, Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
2Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University, Chicago, IL
3Pediatric Rehabilitation, Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
4Walter S. Christopher School, Chicago, IL
Contact: c-lopez-ortiz@northwestern.edu

Background

• The World Health Organization’s (WHO) International Classification of Function (ICF) emphasizes body structure and function as important outcomes with equal importance to activities and participation (1).

• Cerebral palsy (CP) is a chronic condition that often leads to poor social participation due to lack of available resources, lack of time, reduced motivation, and progressive impairments related to the primary condition (e.g. weakness, increased tone, restricted movement) (2).

• Dance for children with CP has been studied by our group as an activity to involve children with CP in physical and social activity in the community, with physical therapy benefits. Access to the established community program was not possible for children without available transportation (3).

Objectives

1. To improve health outcomes in body structure and function, activities and participation by increasing physical fitness and self-esteem through participation in the dance class.

2. To provide a program for children and adolescents with CP whom otherwise would be unable to participate in a dance class.

Description

• A structured dance class based on classical ballet and principles of strengthening, increasing range of motion, and training of selective motor control was designed and thought by a kinesiology and motor control expert with classical ballet teaching certification.

• The program duration was one month with one hour classes three times per week.

• Children/adolescents able to participate in the dance class were invited by their physical therapist in the school. The children/adolescents had to be able to follow directions, be medically stable, and be able to tolerate one hour of movement. The invites had to show interest in the dance program to be included in it. Parent

Permission was obtained for participation in the program.

• The demographics of the participants were:
  • Number of Children in Class: 6
  • Age Range: 7-15
  • Males: 4; Females: 2
  • GMFCS II: 4; GMFCS III: 2

• Transportation was provided to bring the children home via school bus after every class.

• The classes were by taught by a kinesiology and motor control expert with classical ballet teaching certification and was assisted by a physical therapist, physical therapy assistants, and volunteers assisted in every class.

• The physical therapist was a key link for the success of the program as she is affiliated with RIC and the Walter S. Christopher School.

• The participants in the class performed an open class demonstration on stage in the school’s theater in front of their classmates, teachers, and parents to conclude the program.

Significance

The structured dance class after school for children and adolescents with cerebral palsy is an innovative community service activity designed to improve the ICF outcomes of the WHO while being fun, artistic, and accessible.

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References