

Perspectives of high needs families on visiting the museum: A pilot study exploring social prescribing

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Introduction

- Social prescribing (SP) is an innovative movement in which health professionals prescribe social activities to combat isolation and promote psychosocial wellbeing¹
- Although SP programs have been successful in improving wellbeing of older adults at risk of social isolation^{1,2,3}, research evaluating SP programs for children & families is limited
- Mental health concerns and social isolation are also more prevalent in families of low income status⁴
- The Vanier Social Pediatric Hub (VSPH) serves high needs and diverse families facing significant socioeconomic barriers to accessing community activities

Objectives

We designed a pilot study to “prescribe” free museum passes to families attending the VSPH and to explore their thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to this museum visit.

Methods

- The VSPH partnered with the federally-funded Museum of Nature to “prescribe” free day-passes to children and parents of six families ($N = 23$, aged 3-38-years old)
- Demographics were collected from chart review
- Pre-visit survey: Immediately on arrival, participants completed age-appropriate surveys of open-ended questions regarding their current feelings and their anticipated feelings and expectations for the visit
- Post-visit survey: Participants responded to open-ended questions regarding their museum experience. Photovoice was used to capture children's perspectives.
- Follow-up telephone interview: 2-6 months post-visit to elicit caregivers' thoughts and feelings about the visit
- Data analysis: Thematic analysis was performed with NVivo software

Results – Participant demographics

Variable	Total Sample $N = 23$, (%)
Caregiver Identity, n (%)	
Fathers	2 (25)
Mothers	6 (75)
Number of children in family	
2-children	3 (50)*
3-children	2 (33.3)
4-children	1 (16.7)
*one child did not participate	
Age, M (SD)	
Caregivers	34 (3.42)
Children	6.44 (2.94)

Variable	Total Families $N = 6$, (%)
Ethnicity	
Nigerian	3 (50)
Syrian	2 (33.3)
Canadian	1 (16.7)
Immigration status	
Refugee claimants	3 (50)
Permanent residents	1 (16.7)
Immigrants, status unknown	1 (16.7)
Canadian citizens	1 (16.7)
Families involved in out-of-school activities	2 (33.3)

Results – Thematic Analysis



Discussion

Identification of challenges and perceived benefits

- The main factors preventing this population's ability to take part in this educational and social outing involved financial challenges, which were negated by the free pass
- Participants of all ages reported multiple perceived benefits including positive emotions evoked by visiting and learning at the museum, which mirrors the two emotions of ‘absorbed’ and ‘enlightened’ reported by older adults taking part in a SP program with museum visits²

Emphasis on learning about the natural world, interactive activities and building family relationships

- Museums for decades have been known to promote family learning and facilitate child-parental play^{5, 6}, which was recognized and embraced by our families
- Spending time with family and strong parental-child relationships are key to children's psychosocial wellbeing⁷
- The museum facilitates engagement with nature, a practice that has declined significantly due to rapid urbanization⁸

Interest in long-term passes to the museum

- Families universally wished to return, with the shared sentiment that a one-day pass was insufficient to explore the entirety of the museum

Conclusions

- A visit to the museum is viewed by high needs families as offering unique and positive experiences that facilitate stronger connections within families, communities, and to the natural world, and promote excitement around learning
- The findings of this study highlight the potential for SP programs to improve psychosocial wellbeing in children and have implications for securing long-term, open and free access to all 7 federally-funded museums in Ottawa for low income and high needs families

References

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