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| Brought to you by MiOTA’s Research & Education SISMay is Foster Care Month May 2024 is National Foster Care Awareness Month, an initiative of the Children’s Bureau (Childwelfare.gov, 2024).  The goal is to raise awareness of issues related to foster care, while acknowledging families and professional who help children and youth in foster care, with their journey toward adult independence. Children in foster care is not a population often considered when discussing OT interventions, but it is gaining distinction as an emerging practice area in OT literature. Foster Care StatisticsIn 2022, over 390,000 youth were in foster care with over 600,000 passing through the foster care system annually. Eight is the average age that children enter the foster care and adolescents make up nearly 40% of the population While in foster care, children are at elevated risk for delays in achieving social and developmental milestones. Approximately 23,000 young adults age out the system each year (McCallum, 2024).  Generally, children exit the foster care system at age 18, without the benefit of family reunification nor permanent housing. There are numerous health and well-being risks associated with this entrance into adulthood without support. These young adults experience bouts of homelessness, unemployment, poor academic attainment at high rates.  There is increased risk for serious emotional challenges, substance abuse and early or unintended pregnancy.  Further 60% of sex trafficking victims have been interfaced with the foster care system at some point (McCallum, 2024).Occupational therapy literature has identified some specific needs for this population such as the difficulty with attachment formation, establishing peer relationships, cognitive and educational deficits, and the lack of life skills acumen needed to manage adulthood occupations (Smith, 2020). Enter OT“Occupational therapists possess unique skills to use occupations as a means of intervention to target a variety of physical, cognitive, and mental health needs of the whole person as a means of promoting participation in occupations needed for daily life,” (Smith, 2020). Through direct or indirect services, OT’s can help mitigate negative sequalae associated with foster care experiences, while encouraging the development of some essential adult life skills, i.e. social and educational skills, home management and vocational skills, financial and health management. Further, extended foster care has been associated with better outcomes and represents a time span where OT interventions could potentially enhance client success with their transition to adulthood (Courtney, et al. 2023).Armstrong-Heimsoth and colleagues (2020) provide one approach based on the PEOP Model which considers the person, environment, occupation, and performance. Authors suggest at the person level, clients can address topics encompassing emotional regulation, roles, leisure interests and health literacy. Therapists can focus on environmental and occupational performance needs by working with transitions team to maximize a goodness of fit for clients to enhance their occupational performance. Similarly, at the population level, OT practitioners can consult with state and federal systems through advocacy, education, and targeted promotion. The creation of resources and toolkits, as well as research evidence to promote opportunities for OT input through training and interventions is another strategy. OT Students: Preparing For OT Involvement With Foster CareOne OTD student (Kent, 2022) suggests that students seek extracurricular activities exposing them to aspects of the foster care systems in regional clinics and community settings. They should also education themselves on related subspecialties like trauma-informed care, mindfulness practices and prevention strategies. Networking and mentorship relationships with those already skilled in addressing the foster care challenges is helpful to developing and advancing relevant OT skills. Also, advocacy for working in this emerging practice area, while continuing research to confirm efficacious approaches for OT services with those in foster care. REFERENCES Armstrong-Heimsoth A, Hahn-Floyd M, Williamson HJ, Lockmiller C. Toward a Defined Role for Occupational Therapy in Foster Care Transition Programming. Open J Occup Ther. 2020 Fall;8(4):13. doi: 10.15453/2168-6408.1726. PMID: 33101787; PMCID: PMC7584147. Childwelfare.gov. (2024). About Foster Care Month. 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