

Project Proposal

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How can utilizing arts in health decrease: language deprivation, communication barriers, and isolation experienced by the Deaf community?

Introduction

There are many programs available for the deaf community to receive services. However, for many decades decisions were made about what was best for deaf people without including them in the decisions. More awareness, advocacy, and laws are in place to ensure that discrimination and lack of language are not affecting cognitive development and education. When services lack updated approaches, it can negatively impact the wellbeing and mental health of deaf individuals. It is beneficial to have skills to navigate in a hearing society but not as an exchange for their own voices. Hearing society methods include speech therapy, cochlear implants, signed English, reading lips, and use of technology that provide a way to communicate with others through video chat, and text to speech.

There are numerous sources available including research from Deaf people themselves about concerns and barriers they experience despite services in place. The findings conclude that there is limited training and access to resources available to support the well-being and mental health of the Deaf community. This proposal is organized to address the common struggles experienced by the Deaf community specifically language deprivation, communication barriers, and isolation.

Gaps in Effective Resources

This study conducted by Furness, et al (2019) explored the role of schools and teachers in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. This was done by conducting an interview with teachers who directly support the education and well-being of

DHH children from 12 different mainstream schools. Thematic analysis was used to conclude the information collected. Based off the response's teachers play a significant role in supporting mental health and well-being of DHH but, a theme of several restraints was found. The four themes identified are *culture of professional practice*, *operationalized practice*, *constraints to practice*, and *solutions for constraints*. The results concluded that there is limited training and access to resources to better understand and effectively support the mental health and well-being of DHH children.

Ryan and Johnson (2019) provide insight and thorough research concerning language deprivation and the impact on mental health within the Deaf community. It is the first of its kind to provide an in-depth discussion from multiple perspectives across disciplines to discuss the issue of language deprivation. The text concluded that language deprivation is caused by misinformation or lack of information to effectively serve the Deaf community and that it is our ethical responsibility to keep ourselves well informed.

King (2020) discussed art and art therapy unique potential to better serve the needs of the Deaf community. By de-centering verbal and audiological communication, art practitioners and educators can become allies to the community. In her experience, she learned that at deaf community services few providers are culturally adept or use signed language. A Deaf Youth Literacy Camps collective art project reminded King of why she wanted to become an art therapist-to create art therapy services where Deaf clients can express themselves freely and be free from the stigma of the medicalized view of deafness. In addition, King (2020) mentions how Deaf people lack critical information due to the shortage of people who are fluent in ASL. Audism is term used to describe how Deaf people are expected to conform to hearing norms.

Audism is a form of oppression that contributes to cultural trauma, frustration, depression, anger, and social isolation (King 2).

King (2020) mentions that as a visual modality, art therapy complements Deaf people's strengths, culturally relevant, and minimizes language barriers present in oral-only approaches. Given that many Deaf children experience language deprivation a culturally appropriate art therapy can be effective in evaluating psychological well-being and emotional receptive skills. Also, storytelling is a strong form of art using visual language in the Deaf community. Storytelling is valued in the Deaf community regardless of age. Storytelling can be used in helping Deaf clients work on identity, relationships, and recover from trauma. Making arts in health more widely available will change how deaf students are educated, challenge systemic ableism, and create inclusivity integrating a shared cultural identity

Steps Toward Change

Hahn's (2017) article consisted of feedback provided after a Deaf visual Arts Festival. It has a theme of positive expressions, the festival consisted of theatre performances, comedy performances, exhibitions that allowed Deaf artist to buy, sell, and display their art. It was hosted by DEAF Inc a company founded in 2008 to provide services and support to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and to strengthen communication between their community and the hearing community. The comments mentioned how Deaf culture is something they want to share with the rest of the community and how their art truly educates others about their challenges. One man said, "Art is a universal language. It can be very visually accessible to all people. Art doesn't require any additional communication (Hahn 1)".

Kovačević and Đoković (2023) research focuses on the development of artistic expression in Deaf and Hard of hearing community specifically in preschool children. They studied the significance of artistic development and the therapeutic effect of artistic expression. Through expressive and aesthetic development, children expand their knowledge and skills in nonverbal, visual, auditory, sensory, and verbal experiences. They found that the artistic expression of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children did not fall behind the hearing children. Visual representation is much more realistic to Deaf and hard of hearing children. Visual perception is much more detailed orientated enabling them to grasp things efficiently. Children use art to communicate with themselves and the environment. In Deaf and Hard of Hearing preschool children, it is necessary to develop all functions of nonverbal and verbal communication through artistic expression.

Silver (1999) talks about how art is a cultural bridge between the hearing culture and Deaf culture. She said that as a child she felt like art was her native language and first learned to communicate with hearing adults through crayons. Art was an escape and she later pursued art as a career. She mentions what ways artistic expression communicates the deaf experience. Deaf artistic expression communicates culture, language, identity, and heritage. It also offers therapeutic benefits, a part of Deaf studies, and acts as a visual weapon. Ann mentions how Deaf people are automatically visual learners and being an artist is part of being Deaf. She wants to bring Deaf arts into mainstream culture to communicate efficiently and immediately since the visual culture is more dominant than reading. Baird (2004) was a part of the De'VIA movement which means Deaf View/Image art. It was to communicate through arts the Deaf experience in a hearing world. Hearing people learned about deaf history and culture through De'VIA. It is used

to communicate political expression, communication barriers, cultural affirmation, and visual sound.

Preparing For Change

Utilizing arts in health decreases language deprivation, communication barriers, and isolation experienced by the Deaf community. The problems addressed are caused by lack cultural knowledge and proper training to support the Deaf community. Utilizing arts in health offers a way to express themselves in the presence of non-signers and is natural since their visual perception is enhanced. Utilizing arts for expression early is necessary to develop all functions of nonverbal and verbal communication for the Deaf community decreasing language deprivation. It acts as a bridge between hearing culture and provides cultural understanding of the Deaf experience. This lessens the isolation and provides inclusion in mainstream culture creating a sense of pride and community. Further research is needed to provide specific ways in how to integrate arts in health as an effective resource to support the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community starting from an early age.

Mental Health Website

This website will provide a platform for mental health resources, education, and support that is inclusive and accessible to the deaf community. Currently, there are not any websites and/or apps that are accessible and inclusive to the mental health needs of the deaf community as well as other communities. Available platforms are mainly assistive technologies that provide a way communicate with family, friends, and other people in their day-to-day life. Borguts, J et al (2022) interviews concluded that the deaf community wanted to see an app that can benefit other communities and not exclusive for the deaf community. They suggested that it does not directly

mention that it is a mental health app but provide education within the app to help reduce the stigma. They expressed the desire to have direct communication with deaf workers live promptly for support, and language access to all language levels and preferences. Many deaf people face challenges navigating an ableist society and getting access to effective resources. They face many systemic barriers such as not enough interpreters, and lack of evidence based culturally competent mental health workers, and advocates.

I want to create a website and/or app that supports the deaf community as well as other community members. I want to integrate arts in health and the desired features deaf members expressed they would like to see. They mentioned how they already use technology and online sources to support their well-being. They mentioned spiritual classes, Meditation, ASL yoga, and websites to find practitioners who sign. They also expressed the desire to have online communities, support groups, and outlets to express themselves through different art modalities. As I develop this project, I will actively get feedback from the deaf community and provide a starting point to what I call “Hands On.”

Citations

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