



Disability Services: The Effects of COVID-19 on Organizations Providing Services to Individuals With Developmental Disabilities



INTRODUCTION

- OK LEND is an Interdisciplinary Training Program that includes students, residents, fellows, family members and self-advocates from multiple colleges on the OUHSC campus, other universities, and the community.
- Includes didactics, practicum, and research experiences
- 4 Core Principles
 - Family/Person-Centered Care
 - Cultural Awareness
 - Interdisciplinary Teaming
 - Inclusive Practices
- 19 Long-Term Trainees representing 13 disciplines

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding quarantines presented an unprecedented challenge to individuals with developmental disabilities and the organizations who serve them. For the Team Project portion of the 2020-2021 OK LEND class, the trainee team was inspired to study the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent quarantines.

METHODS

The 2020-2021 trainee team conducted an email survey, using Qualtrics, of 25 organizations who serve individuals with developmental disabilities, to quantify changes made as a result of the pandemic. Once the topic was chosen, the group broke the process up into 8 components. Each trainee signed up to work on 1-2 components. We benefitted from trainees working on tasks they had expertise in from their disciplines. Less experienced trainees learned from working with more experienced trainees.

SURVEY

1. What organization do you work for?
2. In regards to services that your organization provides, please describe the areas where you have seen:
 - a. An increase in requests for services:
 - b. A decrease in requests for services:
 - c. An increase in ability to provide services:
 - d. A decrease in ability to provide services:
3. What has been your organization's biggest challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e. financial, event cancellation, modified programs, client health concerns, public outreach/awareness, virtual/technology issues, staff loss, forming relationships digitally, changes in office space, etc.)?
4. What positive changes that have occurred because of the COVID-19 pandemic would you like to see continue in the future (i.e. increase in telehealth, insurance changes, virtual therapies, increased social media presence, more community awareness, increased program attendance, work from home policies, etc)?
5. Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, how have you seen your clients' quality of life change in each of the following categories?
 - Equipment: better, same, worse, N/A or unknown
 - Access to healthcare: better, same, worse, N/A or unknown
 - Emotional Support: better, same, worse, N/A or unknown
 - Job opportunities: better, same, worse, N/A or unknown
 - Transportation: better, same, worse, N/A or unknown
 - Food/Nutrition: better, same, worse, N/A or unknown
 - Community Integration: better, same, worse, N/A or unknown
 - In-Home Services: better, same, worse, N/A or unknown
 - Education: better, same, worse, N/A or unknown
6. If known, please describe new disability-related challenges your clients have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic:
7. Is there anything else you would like to share related to COVID-19 and its impact on the disability community?

DISCUSSION

We are hopeful to gain a picture of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected organizations serving individuals with disabilities and their families in positive and negative ways. We plan to share those results with organizations, agencies, stakeholders, and future LEND groups. We hope our results help organizations to maintain improvements that have resulted from the pandemic. Future research could examine the long term effects of the pandemic on the services provided by these organizations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the Faculty members of the OK LEND Interdisciplinary Training Program, especially including our co-directors, Megan Roberts, PT, DSc, PCS and Ami Bax, MD, MS-CTS for their inspiration and support.

FUNDING

This project was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under grant number T73MC00033 for Oklahoma LEND. This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.