AUTISTIC AWARENESS SUPPORT GROUP FOR FOSTER PARENTS IN DCFS: A GRANT PROPOSAL

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Introduction

• The first type of impairment is social interaction, which is difficulty with social relationships including, being withdrawn, appearing aloof and indifferent, and not fitting in easily. Children with autism may seem insensitive to the feelings of others, which can lead to challenges socializing with other children.

• The second type of impairment is social communication, which is difficulty with verbal and non-verbal communication. They are challenged in the areas of speech development, repetitive and formal use of language. They may also have some difficulty not fully understanding gestures, facial expressions and tones of voice.

• The third type of impairment is when autistic children have problems in social imagination, which can impact understanding how others think and feel. This kind of difficulty has an effect on their development of interpersonal play and imagination.

GOAL
• The goal of this project is for foster parents and caregivers to increase their awareness of autistic spectrum disorder and the behaviors that are manifested by marked of qualitative impairment in social interaction, communication and restricted repetitive. It will provide them with the skills and tools necessary to help identify these symptoms and understand why the behaviors occur.
Social Work Relevance

• Social workers can be teachers who educate people (foster parents, community providers, parents and children) to make positive choices (Fountain, King, & Bearman, 2010). Social workers implement the strength-based perspective to focus on the clients’ positive attributes and how they can apply those attributes for positive outcomes.

• Social workers can show the chow their situation is similar to that of other individuals and what various coping strategies can be used. Social workers are responding to clients with autism through therapy, at schools, the community, and family. Social Workers have been part of the development of federal, state and local support systems by advocating, lobbying, and pressuring politicians to create awareness for ASD as pertaining to policies and laws.

• It is important for service providers and policy makers to address the needs of these youth through awareness, support programming, and planning to provide training, services, work experience, and supportive networks to autistic children.
Cross-cultural Relevance

- A research study in California among Hispanics and White non-Hispanics appears to link the issues to ethnicity groups, which may be due to disparities in socioeconomic standing and education. Therefore, in communities with differing levels of educational and financial resources, the visibility of children with autism and access to health services may also differ in their tendency to facilitate or delay diagnosis. In being able to grapple issues of isolation of children with autism, early diagnosis is the crucial first step to early intervention.

- Research shows that it is important that early interaction happens sooner rather than later, for behavioral and cognitive outcomes in autistic children (Landa, Holman, & Garrett-Meyer, 2007). Timely diagnosis depends partly on the social contexts in which children are embedded. Information about typical child development, as well as the availability of resources, may flow to parents through contact with persons and institutions.

- As autism has become more prevalent and visible, the impact of community characteristics on the age of diagnosis has faded. However, some individual-level risk factors remain important, particularly parental education. The gap in the age of diagnosis between the highest and lowest socioeconomic status children has declined over time, but a substantial and persistent gap remains.
Methods

- Foster parents who are a part of the child welfare system are the target population for this program. More specifically, the targeted population is foster parents who have children with special needs who work collaboratively with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and who have been certified by the state of California.

- These children come from low socioeconomic backgrounds living in the South Los Angeles area, a community with high need of services. The Autistic Awareness Support Group (AASG) will be designed to provide educational workshops and a support group for these foster youth.

- The program will also seek to educate them on special education laws and rights. Services would be available to approximately 250 foster parents, over a 2 year period.
Several methods were used to explore possible funding sources and foundations for this project. Among these, non-profit, government, and public websites were utilized to seek potential grant funding. For grants, local, state, and national funding will be considered.

In searching for funding for AASG, an emphasis on the grant goals will be considered to ensure there is a good match between the funder and requested grant proposal. The grant websites include: Grant.gov (www.grants.gov), Get Grants (www.getgrants.ca.gov), Funds Net (www.fundsnetservices.com), Foundation directory (www.foundationdirectoryonline.com), Grant station (www.grantstation.com), Los Angeles County Office of Education (www.lacoe.edu), and K12 (www.k12.org). On the other hand, Yahoo, Bing, Google search engines were used to look for funding sources.
The proposed total project cost for Autistic Awareness Support Group presented in Table 1 will require a budget of $200,000. The budget includes the cost of personnel salaries and benefits, direct and indirect costs and in-kind resources that the partner agency will offer.

Program Director: The program director will be a part-time employee with a salary of $43,680.00. The minimum requirement for this position is a Master’s degree in Social Work or related field, and has experience with leading groups. The director will ensure the program runs as planned and ongoing evaluation is completed to ensure program goals are met. The director will be leading the educational and support groups and workshops along with co-facilitators.

MSW Practitioner: The MSW practitioner will be a part-time employee with a salary of $32,990.00. The practitioner will assist the director in leading the educational and support groups and workshops. The minimum requirement for this position is to have a Master’s in Social Work or related field and experience working with diverse population.
Grant Proposal

• The literature review demonstrated the effectiveness of autistic intervention programs, particularly support groups for children to enhance social skills, social relations and modifying attitudes in a safe space environment (Barbero, et al., 2012.)

• Although, there are some awareness and supportive programs for the parents of children with autism, the problem is still common that there is a lack of resources that can assist parents and caregivers of autistic children.

• Many parents/caregivers feel frustrated and unsupported due to the lack of resources and information. Allocation of appropriate resources and funding to continue in awareness and interventions programs are needed to continue to target at multiple levels the vital problem of early diagnosing and awareness about autistic spectrum disorder.

Objectives:

• To help foster parents/caregivers understand the common behaviors of autistic children and understand why the child’s specific behavior occurs.

• To help foster parents/caregivers learn behavior modification techniques to help their foster children exhibit appropriate behaviors.
A modified version of the questionnaire will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the grant proposal project. Group members will anonymously fill out a questionnaire at the beginning of the initial fall workshop, midyear group session and during the session at the spring workshop prior to the last group session.

Thus, group members will be asked to complete the questionnaire. For those members whose parents’/caregivers’ primary language is Spanish, the homework and evaluation tool will be translated to their language. In addition to the post test that will be given to group members and foster parents and caregivers’, group members will also be asked to complete an evaluation of the group consisting of approximately 3 questions during the last session of the group.

The post-test will include open-ended question recommended by Kleinpeter et al. (2010) that will enable members to give the co-facilitators information on ways to improve upon the group for future participants.

These questions will be “(1) What two or three things did you like most about the group? (2) What two or three things did you like least about the group? (3) What suggestions do you have to improve the group? (p.132). Lastly, an additional open-ended question will be asked to incorporate the strengths-based component of this group, “What strengths did you find in yourself while attending this group that you will apply now (or in the future) when challenges arise? Throughout the group process, the social worker should document the challenges the member’s faced and the successes they achieved.

Once the group is over, the social worker can compare their own observations of how effective they believe the group sessions were with the group member’s feedback on the evaluation surveys (Greif & Ephross, 2010). This can inform the social worker of future changes that can be implemented to improve the effectiveness of the group.
Lessons Learned/Implications for Social Work

• Social workers wear various hats. Social workers’ can be teachers who educate people (foster parents, community providers, parents and children) to make positive choices (Fountain et al., 2010). Social workers implement the strengths-based perspective to focus on the client’s positive attributes and how they can apply those attributes for positive outcomes. For instance, social workers can show the client how to build their self-esteem, confidence, connect with a social support network, and speak with their families.

• Social workers can show the client how their situation is similar to that of other individuals and what various coping strategies can be used. Social workers are responding to clients of autism through therapy, at schools, the community, and family.

• Social workers have been part of the development of federal, state and local support systems by advocating, lobbying, and pressuring politicians to create awareness for autism spectrum disorder as pertaining to policies and laws. However, much more awareness is needed to help foster parents feel that there is support to assist them with their daily struggles.

• It is important for service providers and policy makers to address the needs of these youth through awareness, support programming, and planning to provide training, services, work experience, and supportive networks to autistic children.

• Social workers are continuously faced with budget cuts to the services and programs. Grant writing is one of the methods that can be used to put forth and obtain funding from an array of sources that have similar interests in helping those in need. Through grant writing, social workers can support the programs and maintain continuity in providing the services that are essential to the community.


