MINDFULNESS-BASED SELF-CARE TRAINING FOR CHILD WELFARE WORKERS: A GRANT PROPOSAL PROJECT

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May 2017
Introduction

- Compassion fatigue is a common condition among child welfare workers (Conrad & Guenther, 2006).
- Compassion fatigue is caused by exposure to the traumatic experiences of clients (Figley, 2002).
- Those who suffer from compassion fatigue experience symptoms such as hypervigilance, intrusive thoughts, nightmares about clients, sleep disturbances, anxiety, depression, and social isolation (Salloum, et al., 2015).
- The Mindfulness movement started with Jon Kabat-Zinn, a professor of Medicine who created the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program at University of Massachusetts Medical School (Kabat-Zinn, 2011).
- Mindfulness-based interventions are effective in preventing and reducing compassion fatigue among helping professionals (Setti and Argentero 2014; Smith, 2014).
- The purpose of this project was to write a grant proposal to fund a six-month mindfulness self-care training program for social workers at Families Uniting Families (FUF), a non-profit foster care agency located in Long Beach, California.
- Through promoting effective self-care skills for child welfare workers at FUF, this grant project aims at maintaining an effective workforce for the child welfare profession.
Social Work Relevance

- Compassion fatigue damages social workers’ overall health and hinders their capacity to convey empathy to their clients.
- Social work is an extremely stressful profession, and child welfare is known as one of the most stressful sub-field in social work.
- If the goals of this project are achieved and it becomes a fundable project, it offers a potential solution to reducing compassion fatigue for child welfare workers in FUF.
- Through training in mindfulness, social workers and interns will acquire valuable self-care skills to combat compassion fatigue, which will in turn empower them to work more effectively with vulnerable children and families.
Cross-Cultural Relevance

• Children of color continue to be over represented in the child welfare system. For instance, while African American children constitute only 13.8% of the general population, 22.4% of children in foster care are African American (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016).

• Child welfare workers are not immune from having racial biases influence their decisions about placement. Some researchers found that worker bias contributes partially to the problem of racial disproportionality in child welfare (Dettlaff et al., 2011).

• According to Luke and Gibson (2014), mindfulness meditation has been found to be helpful in recognizing racial bias. Research participants with higher levels of mindfulness are less likely to exhibit racial bias on the IAT (Implicit Association Test).

• By helping workers recognize racial biases, mindfulness practices could help improve the services they provide to children in the child welfare system.
Methods

• Target Population
  • The target population of this proposal are the child welfare workers working for Families Uniting Families (FUF), a non-profit agency located in long beach, California.

• Strategies for Identifying Funding Sources
  • Potential funding sources were mainly obtained through the Grantsmanship Center’s (www.tgci.com) database. The grant writer also conducted searches on Google, using key phrases such as “child welfare grants” and “mindfulness grants”.

Funding source Identified
  • Based on the Weignart Foundation’s history of improving the child welfare system, the Weingart Foundation was chosen as the primary funding source for the proposed program.
Sources Used for Need Assessment

The researcher used mostly peer-reviewed academic articles to support this grant proposal. The articles mostly come from journals on mindfulness and compassion fatigue. Government database, such as the Child Welfare Information Gateway, was also referenced.

Funding Range

The total budget required to implement the program, including employee salary cost and program cost, will be $47,850.00. The program will be implemented by a certified mindfulness teacher. A program evaluator will also be paid to evaluate the outcome of the program.
Grant Proposal

- Program Summary and Description
  - The proposed program is a six-month mindfulness curriculum aimed at teaching mindfulness techniques to FUF employees. Through practicing mindfulness, child welfare workers at FUF will learn mindfulness skills to manage stress, increase self-awareness, and skillfully process trauma experiences. This program will increase the workers’ resilience and efficacy in working with vulnerable children.

Population Served

FUF has 16 employees. Eight employees are child welfare workers that provide direct service to children and families. These eight employees’ positions include foster care social worker, adoption social worker, case manager, adoption manager, and clinical supervisor. The majority of FUF social workers are women in their 30s and 40s with at a master’s degree in social work. Two supervisors are licensed clinical social workers (LCSW).
• Program Activities
  • In these mindfulness meetings, FUF employees will practice mindfulness skills such as breathing meditation, walking meditation, body scan, and loving-kindness meditation. These activities are traditional mindfulness techniques aimed at increasing awareness of one’s body and environment, as well as developing self-compassion and compassion for others. In dealing with the nature of compassion fatigue, trauma-focused meditation practices will be incorporated into the curriculum.

Expected Outcomes
• The expected outcomes of the program are: (1) the mindfulness skills learned through the curriculum will become protective factors against compassion fatigue for FUF employees; (2) reduction in FUF employees’ stress levels and compassion fatigue symptoms; (3) being able to respond to compassion fatigue symptoms mindfully and skillfully; (4) FUF employees will experience improvement in overall emotional wellbeing; and (5) FUF employees will be able to work with clients more effectively.
The program evaluator will decide the proper methods and tools of evaluation based on his/her prior work and research experiences. The evaluation procedures will be based on the most current research in the social sciences. One method of evaluation could be a pre-test/post-test design, aimed at measuring the participants’ levels of mindfulness and compassion fatigue before and after the completion of the curriculum.
Lessons Learned

• In order to protect and enrich the lives of clients, social workers are willing to place themselves in circumstances that are harmful to their own mental health.

• Social work is one of the most stress and unpaid professions in the U.S. Yet, social work is absolutely vital for the flourishing of the nation.

• However, in order for social workers to work effectively, they must be able to take care of themselves first.

• When social workers are physically and emotionally healthy, they are more competent and energized in serving their clients. In this sense, mindfulness meditation can help social workers advance social justice.

• If this proposed program is successful, perhaps more agencies will model after it. It is the hope of the grant writer that the social work profession will place a heavier emphasis on self-care training for social workers.
References


