

Perspectives of high needs families on visiting the museum: A pilot study exploring social prescribing

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Introduction

- Social prescribing (SP) is an innovative movement in which health professionals prescribe social activities to combat isolation and promote psychosocial wellbeing¹
- Although SP programs have been successful in improving wellbeing of older adults at risk of social isolation^{1,2,3}, research evaluating SP programs for children & families is limited
- Mental health concerns and social isolation are also more prevalent in families of low income status⁴
- The Vanier Social Pediatric Hub (VSPH) serves high needs and diverse families facing significant socioeconomic barriers to accessing community activities

Objectives

We designed a pilot study to “prescribe” free museum passes to families attending the VSPH and to explore their thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to this museum visit.

Methods

- The VSPH partnered with the federally-funded Museum of Nature to “prescribe” free day-passes to children and parents of six families (N = 23, aged 3-38-years old)
- Demographics were collected from chart review
- **Pre-visit survey:** Immediately on arrival, participants completed age-appropriate surveys of open-ended questions regarding their current feelings and their anticipated feelings and expectations for the visit
- **Post-visit survey:** Participants responded to open-ended questions regarding their museum experience. Photovoice was used to capture children's perspectives.
- **Follow-up telephone interview:** 2-6 months post-visit to elicit caregivers' thoughts and feelings about the visit
- **Data analysis:** Thematic analysis was performed with NVivo software

Results – Participant demographics

Variable	Total Sample N = 23, (%)
Caregiver Identity, n (%)	
Fathers	2 (25)
Mothers	6 (75)
Number of children in family	
2-children	3 (50)*
3-children	2 (33.3)
4-children	1 (16.7)
*one child did not participate	
Age, M (SD)	
Caregivers	34 (3.42)
Children	6.44 (2.94)

Variable	Total Families N = 6, (%)
Ethnicity	
Nigerian	3 (50)
Syrian	2 (33.3)
Canadian	1 (16.7)
Immigration status	
Refugee claimants	3 (50)
Permanent residents	1 (16.7)
Immigrants, status unknown	1 (16.7)
Canadian citizens	1 (16.7)
Families involved in out-of-school activities	2 (33.3)

Results – Thematic Analysis

Family perceptions of museum visits

Positive sentiments

1. Anticipatory feelings
2. Feelings about the visit
3. New experiences

Fostering connections

1. Spending time with family
2. Sharing with others
3. Cultural, environmental & community connections

Learning at the museum

1. Learning about nature
2. Nature is fun
3. Interactive activities

Future directions

1. Challenges and barriers
2. Interest in returning & long-term passes
3. Other activities

1. "happy", "excited", "good" and/or "great"

2. "I and my kids had great experience. We got the opportunity to see most animal, space, birds and many more."

3. "That was my first ever in my life going to museum! Like when I saw bones, I saw life."

1. "My favourite pictures are the one of my children and the butterfly exhibit."

1. "It was special to go as a family all together. That way the family could spend time together, especially the daughters. During that visit, it was the first time with all the family."

3. "The first thing in my experience is that it allowed me to learn more about the history of Canada. They pulled the dates of when and how it happened. It's really nice history."

2. "I sent all the pictures to my mom and sister in Syria. It was amazing."

1. "I learned about the magmatic rock it's made when magma is cooled. Metamorphic rock it's made when a preexisting rock is transformed by the heat of the earth into a new rock."

2. "It is a good thing to have family going for such visits. After all, nature is fun."

1. "It looks so real. It's dinosaur poop."

1. "Financial would be the only reason not to go. It is something that I can't afford right now because I have to support by children."

2. "Yes to learn some other things we couldn't finish learning about."

1. "It's hard as a lower income person to be able to go to the museum. I couldn't believe how much it cost to go to the museum for a sleep over or even for the butterfly exhibit."

3. "saw ice, [...] I touched, my hands got wet."

3. "That's me and daddy. We were playing something. [...] That's [brother's name]."

1. "Oh my god, it made them so happy. To today, they still talk about it. It gave them a new chance to learn new things."

3. "It was very fun, finding rocks, got this fossil and got to trade rocks."

Discussion

- ### Identification of challenges and perceived benefits
- The main factors preventing this population's ability to take part in this educational and social outing involved financial challenges, which were negated by the free pass
 - Participants of all ages reported multiple perceived benefits including positive emotions evoked by visiting and learning at the museum, which mirrors the two emotions of 'absorbed' and 'enlightened' reported by older adults taking part in a SP program with museum visits²
- ### Emphasis on learning about the natural world, interactive activities and building family relationships
- Museums for decades have been known to promote family learning and facilitate child-parental play^{5, 6}, which was recognized and embraced by our families
 - Spending time with family and strong parental-child relationships are key to children's psychosocial wellbeing⁷
 - The museum facilitates engagement with nature, a practice that has declined significantly due to rapid urbanization⁸
- ### Interest in long-term passes to the museum
- Families universally wished to return, with the shared sentiment that a one-day pass was insufficient to explore the entirety of the museum

Conclusions

- A visit to the museum is viewed by high needs families as offering unique and positive experiences that facilitate stronger connections within families, communities, and to the natural world, and promote excitement around learning
- The findings of this study highlight the potential for SP programs to improve psychosocial wellbeing in children and have implications for securing long-term, open and free access to all 7 federally-funded museums in Ottawa for low income and high needs families

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