ABSTRACT

Objective: To initiate a peer support program for parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Richland and Lexington Counties.

Background: Parents of children with ASD have increased stress and a poorer sense of well-being relative to parents of children with typical development. This parent population in Richland and Lexington Counties identified lack of support as a major stressor. The parenting support model initiated (e.g. Parent to Parent program) is an evidence-based intervention used to provide peer support to parents of children with ASD. The training of veteran parents is essential in the development and initiation of a Parent to Parent (P2P) program which was the focus of the DNP project.

Methods: Initial recruitment consisted of posting flyers through community agencies with access to parents of children with ASD. Initially, I planned to recruit prospective veteran parents, provide the veteran parent training, and evaluate parental interest and satisfaction by response to recruitment effort and post-training questionnaire. This method posed many challenges and barriers. Using the feedback from the initial method to address barriers of scheduling, time, childcare, and unfamiliarity, I modified and adapted the recruitment method to a family-centered approach by partnering with a local clinical psychologist who specializes in providing services to children with ASD. I was able to engage the parents who had to be present for services being provided for their children at the clinic. I initiated a portion of the veteran parent training during a scheduled social skills/parent training session and evaluated the perceived satisfaction of the training using a 5-ordinal point, Likert-type questionnaire.

Results: Twenty potential veteran parents attended and were introduced to the P2P program. They completed a portion of the veteran parent training and wellness promotion activities. The
purpose of this was to introduce the program and gather interests in becoming veteran parents. All participants completed the questionnaire. The overall composite score was 4.19 with a standard deviation of 0.2192. The parent scores indicated a high level of satisfaction with the content and the delivery method.

**Conclusion:** Potential veteran parents are interested in participating in the veteran parent training and P2P program. They acknowledged a need for the P2P program, understood its values and benefits, and were satisfied with the veteran parent training. Due to unique challenges in this parent population, it may be best to coordinate with a health care professional who has an established parent clientele and employ the peer support program in conjunction with an ongoing program.