

Peer-Matching for Neurodivergent Young Adults

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LITERATURE REVIEW/ THEORY

Neurodivergent Young Adults (NDYA) experience significant barriers to social participation, including:

Person Factors

- Interpreting social situations [10]
- Mental health [13,14]
- Limited experience [10]
- Sensory processing differences [12,3]

Environmental Factors

- Bullying or stigmatization [10]
- Reduced inclusive environments [3]
- Inconsistent support (e.g., reduction in transition services) [10]
- Pressure to mask or camouflage [15]
- Social skills programs vs. environmental-focused programs [3]
- Double-Empathy Problem [13]
- Competing occupational demands (e.g., independent living, work) [13]

Environment > Social Skills =

Neuroaffirming Approach [3,7]

The Model of Social Interaction (MSI) describes: [6]



PROGRAM GOALS

To enhance social participation, belonging, and self-efficacy among NDYA by facilitating meaningful peer relationships through a structured peer-matching program.

OBJECTIVES

Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment using surveys and interest flyers.

Implement a facilitated social meetup with interest-based roundtables and activities for NDYA

Establish peer matches based on survey responses and observed connections at the social gatherings.

Implement a second facilitated social meetup using participant feedback.

Facilitate up to 6 structured peer social activities. When peer matches are not established, continue with recurring group meet-ups.

Assess program feasibility, acceptability, and effectiveness.

Table 1. ACTIVITIES – PROGRAM PROCEDURES

Social Meetup Preparation	Facilitate Social Meetup	Support Peer-Matches	Support Hangouts
Decide on potential dates and times	Environmental set-up	Identify mutual peer-matches (as needed)	Outreach process to peer
Check for space availability	Assigning roles and responsibilities	Send “peer-match” email	Planning (when, where, what activity)
Outreach (surveys, emails)	Facilitating engagement	Provide support	During the hangout (OT support)
Gather all materials, games, and activities	Supporting regulation, inclusion, and peer interactions	OT guided facilitation	Reflection post-hangout
Frequently check survey responses for attendance	Facilitate feedback forms	Follow-up support	

EVALUATION METHODS

Mixed-methods approach to evaluate progress toward program goals and objectives while addressing participant outcomes.

Pre-Testing:

- *Inquiry survey* to better understand participant interests, social goals, sensory differences, support needs, and preferred communication styles/modes.
- *The CFQ* measured friendship quantity, friendship quality, beliefs and values regarding friendships, and satisfaction with friendships. [15]
- *The TUCPM* assessed the frequency and importance of various forms of community participation among four participants. [4]

Post-Testing/ Ongoing :

- Ongoing evaluation included qualitative data gathered through *informal interviews* and *survey responses*, such as perceived connections made at the meetups, feedback for improvement, preferred support during peer-match hangouts, and feelings of relatedness to other NDYA participants.
- Modified versions of the assessments, the *CFQ-M* and *TUCPM-M*, were administered due to participant time constraints and the priority to maintain a low-pressure program.

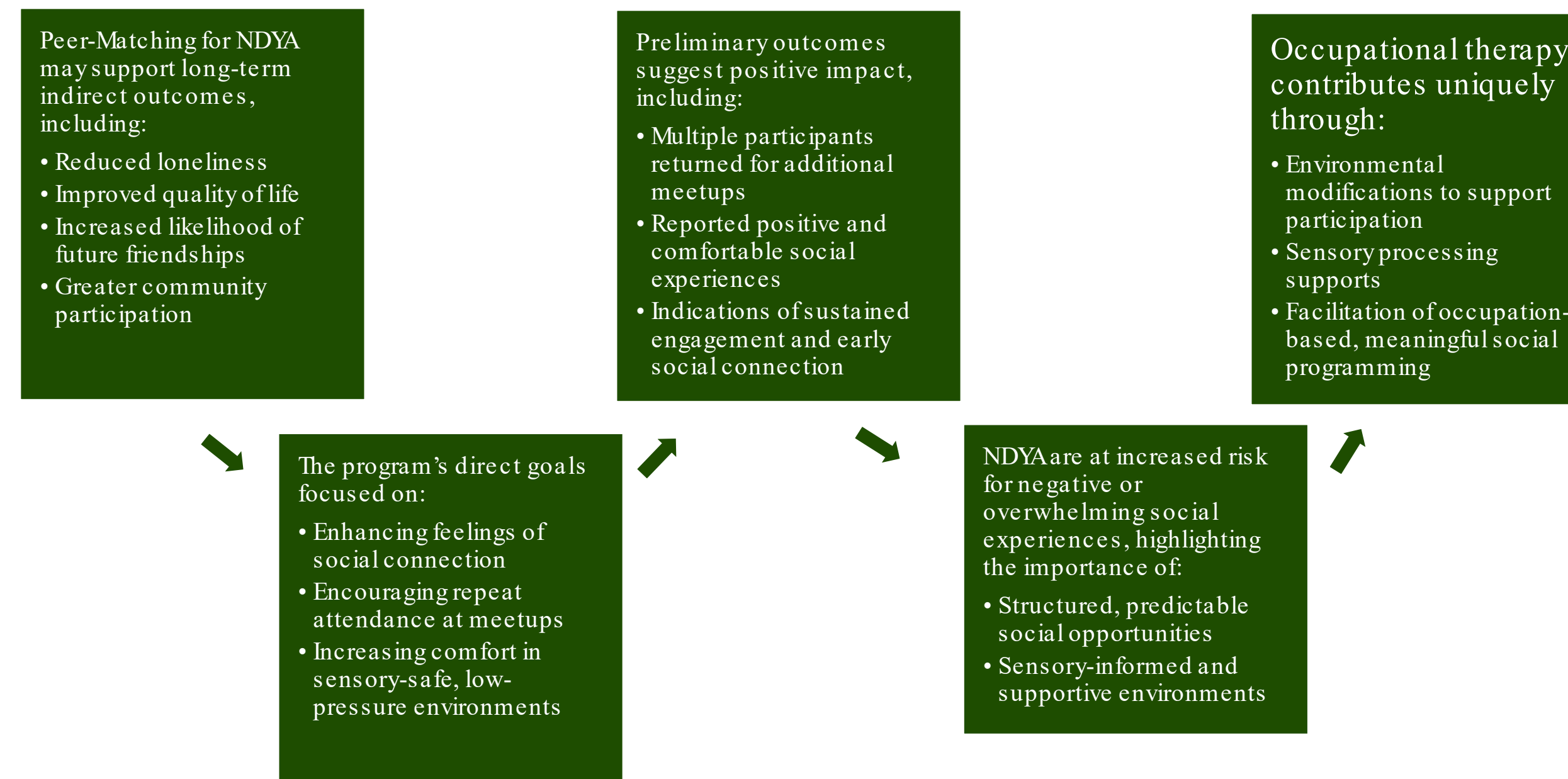
FINDINGS

Overall, findings suggest that attending meetups led to small but meaningful increases in social awareness, comfort, and engagement rather than large-scale changes. Some participants reported greater need for or frequency of social interaction, particularly in meeting peers and meeting daily social needs, while other areas such as making new friends remained unchanged. Decreases in confidence or participation may reflect increased self-awareness or external factors (e.g., schedule or health changes) rather than reduced motivation. Overall, results highlight a persistent gap between desired and actual social participation, suggesting the need for continued social opportunities and environmental supports to promote growth in areas important to NDYAs.

Domain	Increase / Improvement	No Change	Decrease / Ongoing Need
Confidence	↑ Comfort discussing feelings (Alex)	→ Interest in friends (all) → Difficulty making friends (Alex, Eric)	↓ Ease discussing feelings (Eric) ↓ Confidence making friends (Sam)
Engagement	↑ Meeting frequency (Eric) ↑ Daily social need (Eric)	→ Stable engagement (Sam)	↓ Meeting frequency (Alex) ↓ Satisfaction with frequency (all)
Community	↑ Friend visits (Alex) ↑ Transportation & events (Sam)	→ Many activities unchanged	↓ Social groups (all) ↓ Classes/structured activities (Eric, Sam)
Experience	↑ Connection reported (Alex, Sam)	→ Mixed experiences	↓ Desire for more opportunities (Eric) ↓ Sensory barriers (Sam)

*Names are changed to protect participants' rights

DISCUSSION/ CONCLUSION



DELIVERABLES

A comprehensive document was created for program sustainability and ongoing facilitation. This included:

1. Procedures for Implementing a Social Meetup:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Environmental setup with labels
- Specific materials needed for meetups (e.g., meetup schedules, visual labels, QR codes for game rules, poll with a variable group games, conversation cards, communication cards, printable feedback forms, etc.)

2. Procedures for Facilitating a “Peer-Match”:

- Peer-match email template
- OT role in supporting peer-matches
- Potential “mismatched” peer-matches

3. Procedures for Supporting the Hangout Process:

- Planning a Hangout – Participant Version using hyperlinks for more information
- Planning a Hangout – Facilitated Version using OT support during the process
- Independent and/or facilitated reflection post-hangout

4. Related Definitions

5. Social Participation as a Human Occupational Right

6. Actionable Next Steps for Implementation

7. Impact of Social Participation in terms of Accessing Communication/Language

8. Related Definitions

7. Environmental Adjustments for Social Meetups & its Implications

8. OT Role in Supporting a Neuroaffirming Approach

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KEY REFERENCES

Scan the QR Code to references.

