

Lewis and Clark Community College Occupational Therapy Assistant Department Guides Open Play Activities

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ALTON – Visitors to last Friday Open Play at the Riverbender.com Community Center learned about being productive first-hand. Or maybe second hand.

The youths were guided by members of the Lewis and Clark Community College Occupational Therapy Assistant department as they participated in common activities with a twist. The youths were challenged to participate in writing/coloring drills, bag toss, Giant Jenga, Twister and candy pick-up activities, all while using their non-dominant hands.

“They began asking ‘why do I need to use this hand? I never use this hand’,” said LCCC OTA student Erica Behl. “Then I asked them to consider a situation they might face where they might not be able to use their dominant hand. It kind of turned their minds around. I told them to consider other people who might be in that situation. It made it a bit more challenging for them. They began to think about it and began to understand the difficulties someone in those situations might have.”

The LCCC OTA program was at the RBCC as part of the Center’s Community Partners /Mentoring Program.

“The program invites area businesses, churches, schools and civic organizations to partner with the RBCC by sending volunteers to lead activities at a specific event, using their expertise in their respective fields to interact with and mentor or educate the youth,” said RBCC Executive Director Jeff Allsman. “The programs are designed to be interactive and the partners get to share information with the young people about their groups.”

Occupational Therapy assistants help people with disabilities in numerous ways, from work or war-related injuries to people of all ages with all kinds of disabilities including developmental delays, autism, cerebral palsy, chronic illness, serious physical injuries, cognitive disabilities, mental illness, and neurological disorders. OTAs also help people who are healthy focus on wellness, productive aging, and preventative issues. OTAs help people return to productivity and are advocates who educate and assist people to identify and work towards maximum independence and quality of life.

And Friday, their demonstrations helped the youths appreciate their abilities.

“I explained to them that their task represented someone who might have a disability or someone who might be recovering from recent surgery,” said LCCC’s Jordan Lowry, who led the candy pick-up game. Youths tried to use “grabbers” to pick up candy from a bowl, but they had to use their non-dominant hand. “It was difficult for some of them. Then, they began to share that they could see their grandma or grandpa using this because they can’t reach things like they used to. It reflected to a family member and that made it more personal to them.”

The group used games like Twister to demonstrate using gross motor skills and played Giant Jenga with gloves on to demonstrate a feeling of numbness in the hand or fingers. And they had to try to navigate a coloring activity with their lesser hand.

“The kids responded really well,” said LCCC student Victoria Welch, who led the coloring activity. “They didn’t realize how difficult it is to have to use your non-dominant hand. But they got better the longer they participated.”

Leslie Maynard coordinated the effort to bring the OTA group to the Center to conduct the Open Play program. “I’ve been exposed to the Center before,” she said. “My kids have had birthday parties here. So I thought it was just a fantastic concept to take something that I’m learning in school and apply it to a real-world learning experience,” Maynard said.

“I think it was a really good thing,” Behl said. “The kids take their everyday activities for granted. I think it opened their eyes to see that some people really experience these challenges in their lives.”

Businesses or organizations interested in participating in the RBCC Community Partners /Mentoring Program should contact Allsman at 618-465-9850 or by email at jeff@riverbendercommunitycenter.org.

