



Circus Mojo Inpatient Survey Results Summary

Demographics

Between April 2014 and February 2016, Circus Mojo collected data from parents, psychiatric hospital staff members, and staff members from a residential home who answered questions about child participation in a Circus Mojo program or class in order to indirectly evaluate the psychological, physical, and social effects of Circus Mojo on the children. Children participated in the Circus Mojo program through two local¹ schools, one local inpatient psychiatric hospital, and one residential home. Of these first 60 surveys collected, 14 were completed by the parent of a child with a learning disability and 10 were completed by parents from a second school. Both schools participated in Circus Mojo as part of an after school program. Thirty-three of the surveys were completed by a staff member of the inpatient psychiatric hospital and three were completed by staff members at the residential home; the staff members completed one survey per group of children who participated. The children consisted of both boys and girls and ages ranged from 5 years to 17 years old. The children from the schools and residential home participated in several Circus Mojo sessions, while the children from the inpatient hospital typically participated in only one Circus Mojo session.

Of the 48 adults who completed the entire survey, 94% believe that their child should continue with the circus because their child enjoys it and positive effects are visibly apparent in both the child's behavior and mood. No respondent stated the child he or she was discussing should not continue with the Circus Mojo program or class, though 6% were undecided as to whether or not the child should continue with the circus.

Surveys

The survey used was created for the Effective Circus Group evaluation and assessed a variety of areas, including the psychological, physical, and social effects of the circus program. Additionally, it assessed the circus instructor, the views from the parents, and overall improvements in child care². Each answer to the questions on the survey was presented on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*). The surveys were then broken down into six categories: psychological effects, physical effects, social effects, circus instruction, the views of the parents, and parent/staff to child interactions.

Results

The results of each section are outlined below. An average/mean score (depicted with *M* = mean score) of 4.50 to 5.00 indicates that the parent or staff **strongly agreed** with the statement as it referred to the child. A mean score of 3.50 to 4.49 indicates that the parent or staff **agreed**

¹ Local refers to the Greater Cincinnati (Ohio) and Northern Kentucky area.

² *Child care* is the terminology used in the survey to delineate the interactions between the parent or staff members and the child participant. For the purposes of this summary, child care will be referred to hereinafter as "parent/staff to child interactions".

with the statement as it referred to the child. It is important to note that, on average, no parent or staff member rated neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree with any of the statements.

Psychological Effects

The measures of psychological effects included in the survey assessed the child's emotional state and excitement about being involved in the circus, as well as the child's self-expression and his/her ability to concentrate. The responses (based on a 5 point Likert scale [1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*]) indicated:

- The child enjoys him/herself in the circus ($M = 4.75$)
- Circus is uplifting ($M = 4.60$)
- The child is excited about the circus ($M = 4.50$)
- Circus has encouraged the child to express himself/herself ($M = 4.34$)
- Circus has strengthened the child's ability to concentrate ($M = 4.08$)

Identifying activities where the child can truly enjoy himself/herself and that aim to improve the child's mood, especially in at-risk children, can help alleviate mental health symptoms. Mental health treatment adherence is a prevalent issue that can lead to relapse and poor health outcomes (Kauppi, Hätönen, Adams, & Välimäki, 2015). Finding a program like social circus that has a positive impact on the child's mood, while also engaging that child so that he or she has a desire to participate, can be a vital aspect of his/her treatment plan. Further, through circus skill teaching programs, the child will learn tasks that he or she can do independently or in a group that likewise bring him or her satisfaction and a sense of involvement. This type of program also teaches the child a potential new vocational skill or hobby (such as juggling) that he or she can continue on his or her own, outside of the program.

Physical Effects

The survey assessed the physical effects of the circus program including the child's physical activity and body control. The results (based on a 5 point Likert scale [1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*]) indicated:

- The child has learned new skills in circus ($M = 4.56$)
- Circus has given the child many experiences of success ($M = 4.41$)
- Circus has increased the child's physical activity ($M = 4.19$)
- Circus has strengthened the child's life skills ($M = 4.09$)
- The child's body control has improved ($M = 4.00$)

Sedentary behavior has been linked to exacerbation of poor mental health symptoms including depression and anxiety (Biddle & Asare, 2012). Routine physical activity has been associated with increased cognitive functioning (including increased academic performance), improvements in self-esteem, reduced anxiety, and reduced depression. Daily physical activity in children has also been positively correlated with a variety of physical health benefits, including better bone density, lower obesity rates, and healthy blood pressure levels than in children who did not exercise daily (Janssen & Leblanc, 2010).

Social circus is a way to incorporate physical activity in an environment that may not have exercise equipment or sufficient space to get cardio activity such as running. Circus Mojo brings equipment, such as a tight-rope and large globe, to the site, and provides additional equipment,

such as juggling balls, for the child to utilize at home. Social circus not only improves children's moods and amounts of exercise but it also promotes an enthusiasm in children to participate in activities without prompting from adults or without the need for organized activities. For these reasons, this type of program is important to incorporate as an intervention into treatment plans that aim to decrease mental health symptom severity and foster well-child coping mechanisms for anxiety and depression.

Social Effects

The survey measured the social effects of the program, mainly focusing on group dynamics and cooperation. The results, rated on a 5 point Likert scale [1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*], indicated:

- The child receives good feedback in circus ($M = 4.66$)
- The child receives attention in the circus group ($M = 4.53$)
- The child fits in well with his/her circus group ($M = 4.54$)
- The circus group has a good time together in the circus ($M = 4.49$)
- The child has been able to have a say in what skills he or she will learn more about in circus ($M = 4.38$)
- The child has a good relationship with the other members in his/her group ($M = 4.32$)

Children who are at-risk or who have a disability can have issues participating in group activities. An important part of improving mental health, as well as developing pro-social skills, is social interaction. The respondents indicated that the social circus exposure not only gave children positive attention, which can help a child garner a sense of achievement and worth, but also helped improve group interactions and the desire to interact with others.

Identifying problems that are a hindrance to children's success can be beneficial; however, research reveals that motivation and positive feedback are more successful tactics as they instill hope in children (Pedrotti, Edwards, & Lopez, 2008). Instilling hope in children, through encouragement and positive feedback, can help them realize their full potentials and has been linked to many positive benefits. Among these benefits are increased academic success, better athletic performance, improved physical health, and positive psychological adjustment. Positive psychological adjustment can assist children in feeling more comfortable in social settings and thus promote social interactions.

The Views from the Parents

The parents answered surveys related to how the child's participation in the circus has affected the entire family dynamic. The results, rated on a 5 point Likert scale [1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*], indicated:

- In my opinion, circus is a good hobby for a child/young person ($M = 4.58$)
- Our family thinks that the circus is a great thing ($M = 4.48$)
- Our family is interested in the child's circus activity ($M = 4.42$)
- Circus has increased the time we spend together as a family ($M = 3.95$)

A child's family plays an integral role in the success of a treatment plan through their role in teaching skills such as perseverance and motivation (Heckman & Masterov, 2004). Children from disadvantaged environments often lack the promotion of these crucial skills. Programs that target children from these environments can help teach children and caretakers/families these skills that they can later utilize at home. Teaching children these important coping skills has been linked to success later in life, including reduced involvement in crime and improved labor market outcomes. By developing and practicing skills such as perseverance and self-motivation outside of, but also in conjunction with a clinical or school setting, children can feel comfortable utilizing these skills in a variety of settings on their own.

Parent/Staff to Child Interaction

Parents and staff members rated three statements regarding their sense of interacting with the child. The results, rated on a 5-point Likert scale [1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*], indicated:

- I have a better idea of the child's abilities due to circus ($M = 4.04$)
- I find that child care has gotten easier due to the circus activity ($M = 3.80$)
- I have gotten great ideas for things I can do with the child ($M = 3.94$)

Parents and staff members both encounter struggles when working with children with disabilities. They balance attending to the child's individual needs while helping him/her learn social skills and daily living activities. A program that can give parents and staff members a better idea of a child's interests and abilities can help the adults introduce new activities that are likely to engage the child. By successfully engaging children, parents and staff members are better able to balance the power struggles inherent to those relationships when caring for the child.

Circus Instructor

When asked to rate the circus instructor on a 5 point Likert scale [1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*], all adults strongly agreed that:

- The circus instructor is a good leader for the group ($M = 4.72$)
- The circus instructor gives clear directions ($M = 4.69$)
- The circus group practices tricks that are appropriately difficult ($M = 4.61$)
- The circus group concentrates well ($M = 4.57$)
- The cooperation with the circus instructor has been effortless ($M = 4.37$)

When deciding whether or not to enroll a child in a program, knowing that the program's instructor is capable of leading the class in a competent manner that will best facilitate the benefits of the program is very important. The parents and staff members agree that Paul Miller and the Circus Mojo staff are good leaders and capable instructors who give clear direction and practice skills that are appropriate for the participants both in the skill level and the challenge they pose.

Respondent Comments

Several inpatient staff members and parents commented that the circus had a positive effect on the children. They stated that the children were willing to participate in new activities, which was encouraging to see and, sometimes, surprising because many of the children were often reluctant to participate in any activities previously offered. The respondents also commented that

they noticed improvements in the children's hand-eye coordination and concentration. One inpatient staff member said that the children, who were typically resistant to treatment, became more open to participating in activities while the circus was present. One parent said his/her child was usually loud and silly, and the circus offered positive ways in which to express that energy, allowing the child to see that there are appropriate ways to behave in certain situations. Parents and staff members stated that having positive peer interactions was helpful to the child and that the children's self-confidence improved as they tried new, and sometimes difficult, tasks and experienced the satisfaction of success in so doing. Results also revealed that the children not only learned new skills, but they were also excited to do so. Additionally, as a result of the circus program, children were described as better able to follow instructions. All in all, the circus was considered a positive experience for children, parents/guardians, and staff members.

Summary

Social circus is an innovative program designed to promote positive physical and mental well-being of at-risk children. Similar programs have been evaluated in several countries, including Finland, Israel and Germany, for instance. Circus Mojo is involved in a long-term evaluation program to replicate these findings in the Northern Kentucky and Greater Cincinnati area. As part of the evaluation program, 60 respondents completed a survey evaluating the psychological, physical, and social effects of the social circus program on child participants, as well as the circus instructor, parent/staff to child interactions, and the views of the parents. Of the respondents, 24 were parents of children from local schools, 29 were staff members of an inpatient psychiatric unit or residential home, and seven left the respondent field blank. The results indicated that the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the Circus Mojo program had beneficial effects on the child's psychological, social, and physical well-being. The respondents also agreed that the social circus program had positive effects on the child's family dynamics and parent/staff to child interactions. According to the respondents, Circus Mojo provided good instruction during the program, ensuring that the children worked together cohesively and performed appropriately difficult tasks by building skills over the course of the program. Having a trained and knowledgeable instructor/team is important to ensuring the effectiveness of the program. Overall, parents and staff members agree that social circus provides a myriad of positive outcomes and that the Circus Mojo staff played an integral role in ensuring that the children experienced these positive outcomes.

References

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