



Development of the Pittsburgh Employment Readiness Screen (PERS): A Stages of Change Approach to Address Unemployment in the Homeless Population

Jason Amado, Katie Grunewald, Emily Krut, Sara Lessem, Elissa Lichtman, & Alyson Stover, MOT, JD, OTR/L, BCP
University of Pittsburgh, Department of Occupational Therapy



Introduction

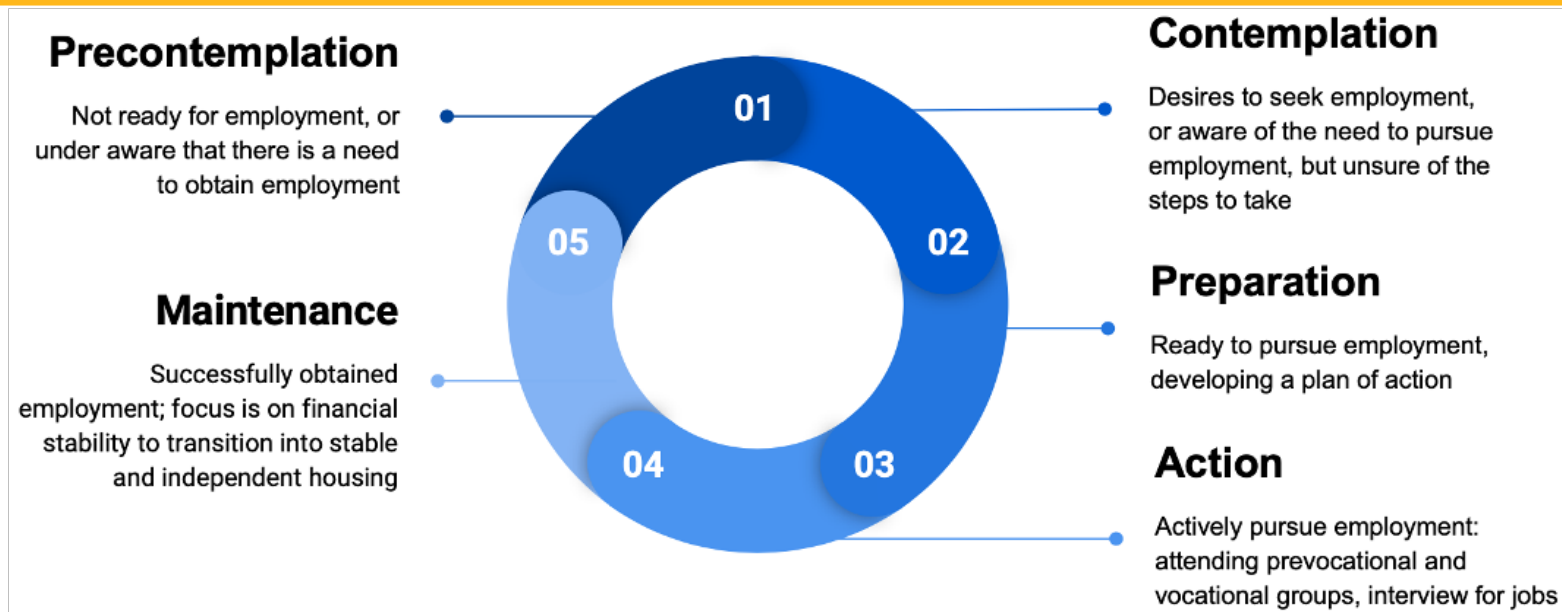
Background

- Department of Human Services (DHS) funds 120+ agencies that provide community services to underserved populations in Allegheny County.
- According to the Allegheny County DHS Point in Time count, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness increased from 774 in 2019 to 887 in 2020.¹

Significance

- Homelessness is a complex problem that is commonly interlinked with other individual and societal issues such as unemployment, lack of affordable housing, chronic mental illness, and poverty.²
 - A person's perceived stage of readiness to work is an area that is under-addressed in existing literature.
- Needs Assessment:** Agency employees identified the need for an objective, evidence-based employment readiness screening tool and resource guide.

Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM)



This is a non-linear, conceptual model of how people progress through behavior change, based on the idea that change occurs in stages over time.³
This framework can help tailor specific strategies to participants in different stages.³

Objectives

- Develop a screening tool and resource guide based on the Transtheoretical Model of Change related to employment readiness for agencies that work with individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Disseminate PERS screening tool and resource guide for agency employee implementation at select DHS-funded agencies.

Methods



Literature Search

- Unemployment and the employment process
- TTM and assessments using this theory
- Best practices in survey development

Participants Providing Feedback

- 11 Doctor of Occupational Therapy students
- 3 University of Pittsburgh Occupational Therapy faculty
- 9 Employees at DHS-funded agencies

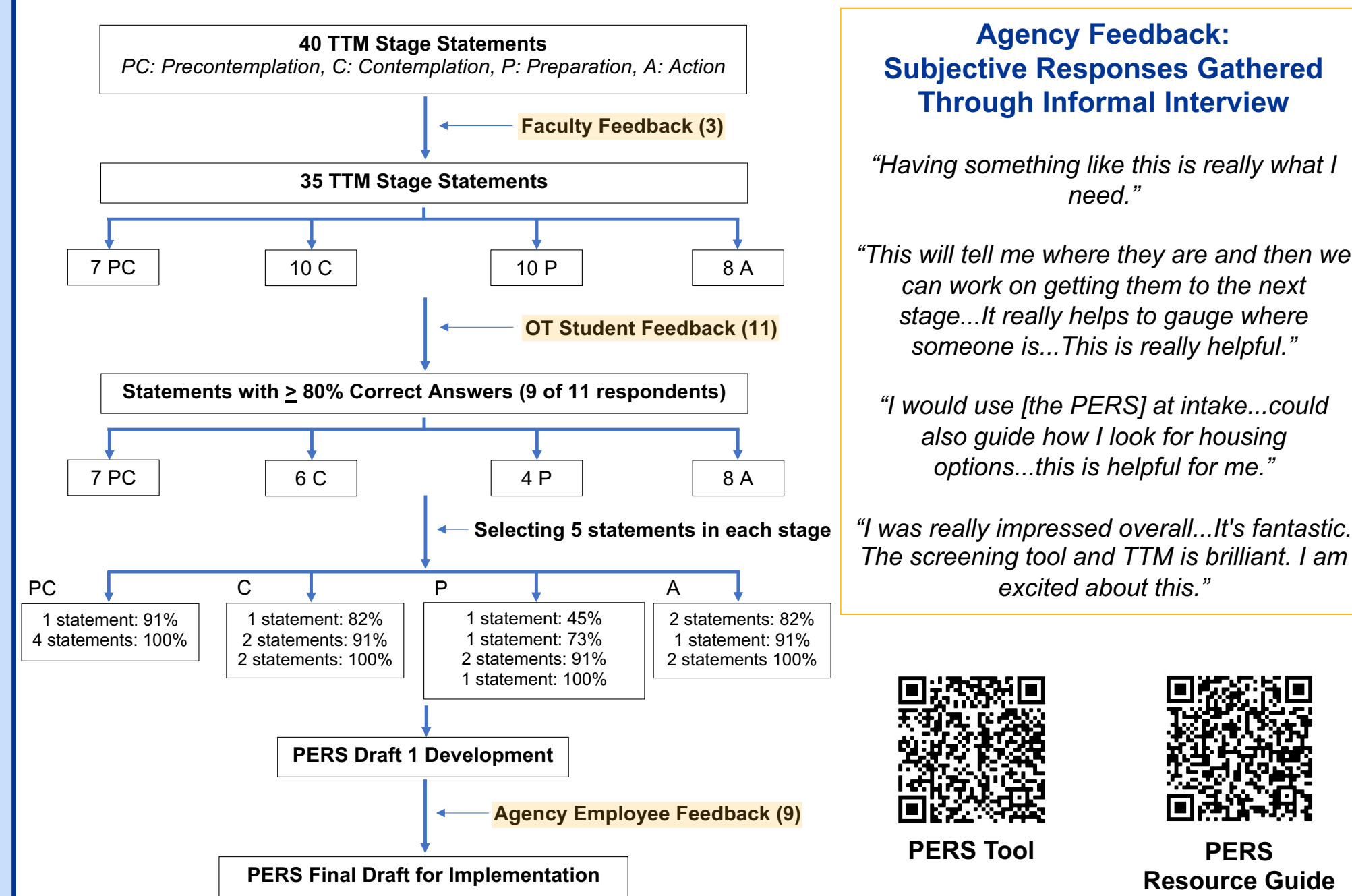
Pre-Implementation and Post-Implementation Surveys

- Employee knowledge of TTM stages
- Confidence administering PERS

PERS Implementation (5 Weeks)

- Implemented by 7 employees at 4 DHS-funded agencies
- Number of screens administered (N = 32)
- Participant stage results

Development of the PERS



Agency Feedback: Subjective Responses Gathered Through Informal Interview

"Having something like this is really what I need."

"This will tell me where they are and then we can work on getting them to the next stage...It really helps to gauge where someone is...This is really helpful."

"I would use [the PERS] at intake...could also guide how I look for housing options...this is helpful for me."

"I was really impressed overall...It's fantastic. The screening tool and TTM is brilliant. I am excited about this."



PERS Tool



PERS Resource Guide

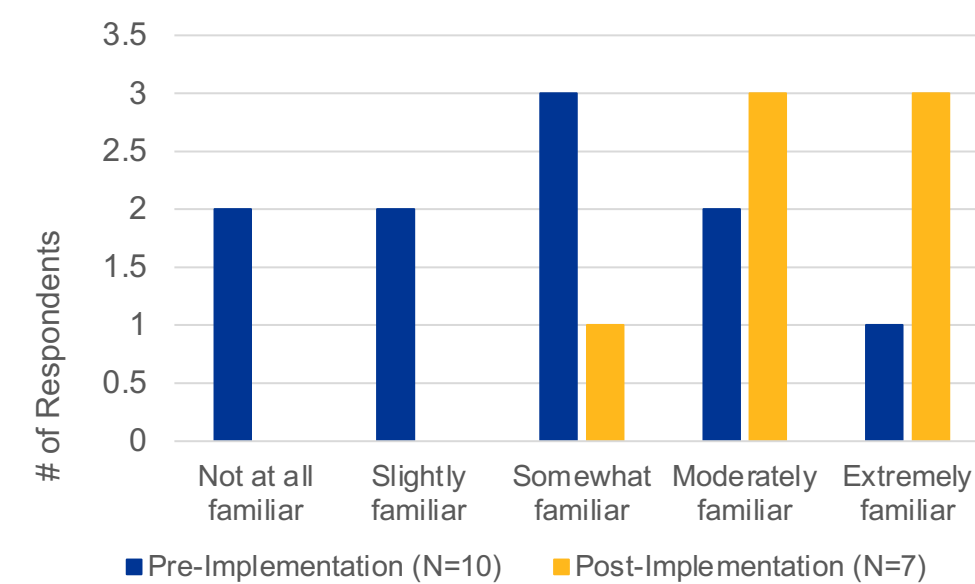
Results of Implementation

Agency Employee Confidence Administering PERS Tool

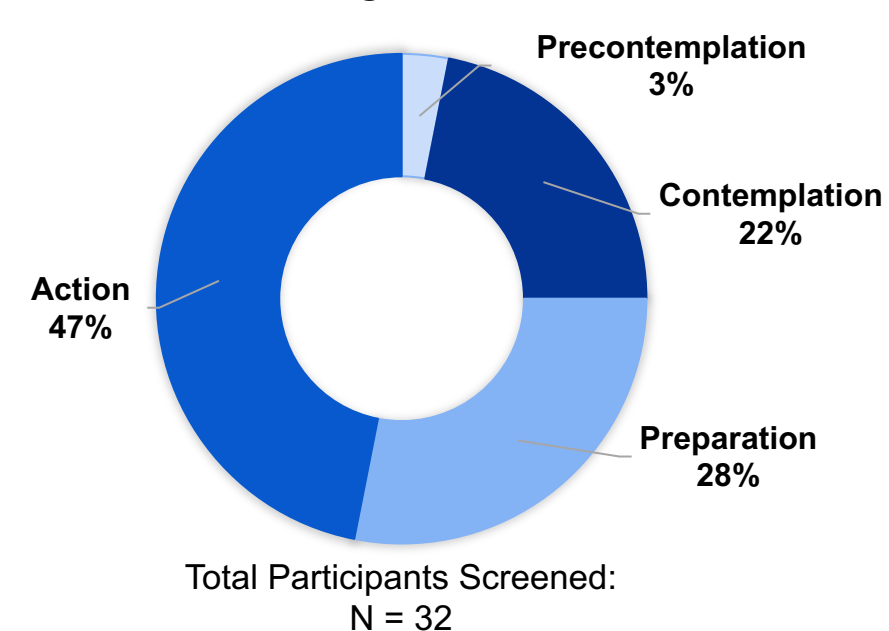
Confidence Rating	# of Respondents
1/5	0
2/5	0
3/5	4
4/5	2
5/5	26

1/5 = not at all confident ; 5/5 = extremely confident
N=32 participants, screened by 7 agency employees

Agency Employee Familiarity with the TTM



Participant TTM Stage According to the PERS



Subjective Responses Gathered Through Informal Interview

"I like the scoring system, really easy to understand and use."

"I thought it was well put together. Very clear. Explained a lot. Breaks down each stage as a teaching model – makes a lot of sense to me."

"I think the language is direct and simplistic for ease of use."

Discussion

PERS Development Trends

- Agency employees who participated in the **development** of the PERS:
- Exhibited increased familiarity with the TTM regarding employment readiness
 - Demonstrated increased competency in identifying stages within the model
 - Indicated that the PERS tool is an effective method to screen employment readiness of participants

PERS Implementation Trends

- Agency employees who **administered** the PERS:
- Demonstrated an increase in knowledge of the TTM
 - Increased their confidence administering the PERS tool to assess employment readiness
 - Indicated that the PERS can be used at different time points with participants, which demonstrates that it is an effective tool for use at an initial evaluation and for re-evaluation

Facilitators

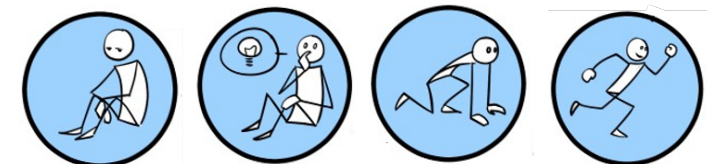
- Ease of use
- Screening tool design
- Number of agencies involved

Barriers/Limitations

- COVID-19 pandemic
- Participant insight
- Time constraints
- Sample size

Future Directions

- Study** the validity and reliability of the PERS
- Expand** implementation to include additional DHS-funded agencies
- Tailor** the PERS tool and resource guide
 - to include specific employment resources in Allegheny County, and 2) for varying populations



Conclusion

The TTM is an effective model that establishes a foundation for the development of an employment readiness screening tool for individuals experiencing homelessness. The PERS tool and resource guide were developed with a focus on sustainability and flexibility to support the diverse needs of community-based agency employees.

Implications for Practice

Occupational therapists are experts at examining the complex, individualized relationships between a person, environment, and the occupations in which they participate. Employment is a valued occupation that is vital to obtain and sustain housing. Using the TTM, a model rooted in psychosocial theory, an occupational therapist can assess an individual's readiness for behavior change and tailor interventions to meet the individual 'where they are at.' Furthermore, an occupational therapist can act as a consultant to community-based agencies to help guide participants towards independence and participation in meaningful occupations.

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