Proposal of a One-on-One Meeting Program to Enhance the Sense of Self-Usefulness Among Residential Care Workers at a Children's Home: A Prototype-Based Evaluation

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Abstract

This study focuses on enhancing the subjective well-being of residential care workers at a children's home by enhancing their sense of self-usefulness and self-acceptance. A prototype of a one-on-one meeting program was developed and its effectiveness was examined. The program consists of two components: an introductory interview that encourages reflection on work experiences and a one-on-one session using photographs of children to enhance self-usefulness and self-acceptance. The program was implemented with eight residential care workers at a children's home, and both quantitative assessments using psychological scales and qualitative evaluations through semi-structured interviews were conducted. The findings suggest that the program demonstrated preliminary effectiveness in enhancing sense of self-usefulness, self-acceptance, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being.
Keywords: One-on-One Meeting, Care Worker, Self-Usefulness, Self-Acceptance, Subjective Well-Being.

1 Introduction

Adverse childhood experiences such as abuse, neglect, and parental mental illness have been widely reported across various countries and regions [1]. In Japan, approximately 600 children's homes have been established for children who lack guardians or whose caregivers are deemed unable to provide appropriate care. These homes accommodate around 23,000 children, of whom 71.7% have experienced abuse [2]. Children with such experiences often exhibit behavioral challenges, including poor social skills, inattention, aggression, and self-harm [3][4].

Residential care workers at children's homes (hereinafter referred to as "Care Workers") are required to engage with these children's emotional instability and problematic behaviors on a daily basis. To do so effectively, they must possess the ability to empathize with the chil-dren's adverse experiences and emotional pain. However, increased emotional involvement also raises the risk of emotional entanglement, potentially undermining their professional objectivity. Such circumstances may lead to a diminished sense of self-usefulness among Care Workers [5][6].

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In recent years, there has been a growing body of research focusing on workers' well-being [7][8]. Not only research on stress reduction and burnout prevention, but also efforts to enhance subjective well-being have become increasingly important for care workers. However, despite the recognized need for support, empirical studies and intervention-based approaches aimed at enhancing the subjective well-being of Care Workers remain limited [9].

Our previous research [10] suggested that Care Workers' sense of self-usefulness may influence their subjective well-being through the mediating effect of self-acceptance. However, no concrete intervention programs have yet been adequately developed or empirically tested based on these research results.

2   Literature Review

2.1   Previous Studies Related to Enhancing the Sense of Self-Usefulness

The sense of self-usefulness refers to the feeling that one plays a meaningful role in relation to others or society, and it is formed through the fulfillment of social expectations and roles [11]. While it is similar to self-efficacy, self-usefulness is distinct in that it is experienced in the context of interpersonal relationships, such as feeling that one is helpful to others [12].

Major theoretical frameworks related to self-usefulness and self-efficacy include Bandura's self-efficacy theory [13] and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) [14]. Self-efficacy has been shown to positively correlate with job performance, job satisfaction, and retention intention [15]. SDT posits that the fulfillment of three psychological needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness—promotes intrinsic motivation and well-being. Within child welfare settings, supporting Care Workers' autonomy contributes to enhancing their sense of self-usefulness [16]. These findings suggest that supporting both self-efficacy and autonomy is crucial for fostering a greater sense of self-usefulness among Care Workers.

2.2   Previous Studies Related to Enhancing Self-Acceptance

Self-acceptance refers to the ability to embrace one's entire self, including both strengths and weaknesses, as part of one's identity [17]. One of the most recognized theoretical frameworks for promoting self-acceptance is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which consists of six core psychological processes: (1) contacting the present moment, (2) cognitive defusion, (3) acceptance, (4) self-as-context, (5) values, and (6) committed action [18][19]. ACT promotes a healthy relationship with the self by encouraging perspective-taking, increasing self-compassion, and fostering cognitive defusion. These processes help individuals create psychological distance from negative self-perceptions and emotions, thereby facilitating greater self-acceptance [20]. ACT, as a comprehensive and evidence-based intervention framework centered on self-acceptance, has potential applicability in providing psychological support to Care Workers.

2.3   Previous Studies on Support for Care Workers at Children's Homes

In children's homes, supervision is widely implemented as a form of professional support for Care Workers. Supervision has been reported to enhance professional competence, improve the quality of care, reduce stress, and prevent turnover [21][22]. However, when supervision

overly emphasizes administrative or evaluative aspects, it may fall short in providing adequate emotional support or opportunities for reflection [23].

As a response to this limitation, Strengths-Based Supervision (SBS) has garnered attention. SBS focuses not on workers' deficits or problems but on their strengths and past successes. This approach has been shown to improve the quality of support relationships and increase workers' sense of satisfaction [24]. However, in practice, Care Workers often struggle to perceive positive changes in children who have experienced adversity, such as abuse, and may find it difficult to recognize the outcomes of their own efforts [25]. Even when positive changes do occur, they are often not verbalized or shared with colleagues. Although SBS holds promise, there remains a lack of concrete methods for enabling Care Workers to reflect on and visualize their own successful experiences.

3   Research Methodology

3.1   Research Purpose

The aim of this study is to enhance the subjective well-being of care workers at children's homes by enhancing their sense of self-usefulness and self-acceptance through the development and evaluation of a prototype one-on-one meeting program.

This program incorporates the perspective of Strengths-Based Supervision (SBS), focusing on the Care Worker's successful experiences. In particular, the program uses photographs as a visual medium to facilitate dialogue and promote reflection. By encouraging Care Workers to verbalize the significance and impact of their interactions with children—specifically, recognizing the children's growth and changes—the program aims to foster a deeper sense of self-usefulness and self-acceptance. To clarify the focus of the present study, the following research question was formulated:
Research Question: Does participation in the one-on-one meeting program enhance Care Workers' sense of self-usefulness, self-acceptance, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being?

To address this question, quantitative evaluations were conducted using validated psychological scales, and qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews.

3.2   Rationale for Using One-on-One Meeting Program with Photographs of Children

This study employs one-on-one meeting program using photographs of children as the core format to enhance Care Workers' sense of self-usefulness and self-acceptance. There are three main reasons for this approach:

First, since Care Workers frequently deal with the emotional instability and behavioral issues of children, they themselves require emotional support. However, conventional supervision often emphasizes administrative aspects, limiting the depth of emotional support it provides [23]. For effective implementation of SBS, which focuses on emotional experiences and personal reflections, a one-on-one format is more suitable for encouraging deeper individual introspection.

Second, in daily work settings, Care Workers are more likely to recognize children's negative behaviors and problems, while positive changes such as growth and development are often overlooked [25]. Photographs can capture subtle, non-verbal expressions and relational changes that are easily missed. By visually highlighting these overlooked positives, photographs help Care Workers rediscover the value of their involvement and thus enhance their sense of self-usefulness.

Third, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) emphasizes the need for a psychologically safe and trusting environment to promote self-acceptance [19]. The one-on-one meeting format provides a private and nonjudgmental setting where Care Workers can openly disclose and reflect on their own vulnerabilities and emotional challenges, fostering a deeper process of self-acceptance.

For these reasons, this study positions one-on-one meeting using photographs of children as the central component of the program.

3.3   Overview of the One-on-One Meeting Program

The proposed one-on-one meeting program (hereinafter referred to as "the Program") consists of two main components: (1) an introductory interview for reflecting on work experiences, and (2) one-on-one sessions comprising two types of work—one to enhance self-usefulness and another to enhance self-acceptance. The total duration of the Program is approximately 150 minutes.

(1) Introductory Interview

The purpose of this interview is to provide Care Workers with an opportunity to reflect on their professional experiences. Participants are encouraged to talk about their motivations for entering the field, the meaning they find in their work, and their thoughts and hopes toward the children. This process is intended to clarify personal values and the significance they attach to their roles, thereby laying the psychological and cognitive foundation for the subsequent sessions.

(2) One-on-One Sessions Using Photographs

In this part, Care Workers engage in dialogue based on pre-selected photographs of children. In the self-usefulness enhancement session, they reflect on the child's growth or change as depicted in the photo and recognize how their own involvement contributed to that development. In the self-acceptance enhancement session, participants revisit a past experience of personal difficulty and conduct a form of self-supervision from a current perspective. They offer words of encouragement or affirmation to their past self, thereby reconstructing the meaning of that experience and fostering deeper self-understanding and acceptance.

The following sections provide a detailed explanation of components (1) and (2).

3.4   Work to Enhance Self-Usefulness

This session is conducted using three photographs of children, prepared in advance by the participating Care Worker. The dialogue is structured around the following three themes:

Theme 1: About the Child in the Photo

The Care Worker is asked to describe the situation captured in the photo—who is in the picture, when and where it was taken, and what the child is doing. They are then encouraged to share the child's strengths or positive traits and explain why they perceive them as such. Finally, they are asked to imagine the child's emotional state at the time, thereby promoting perspective-taking and deepening understanding of the child.

Theme 2: The Child's Past

The Care Worker reflects on the child's condition and challenges at the time of admission and throughout their life in the facility. This process encourages the worker to recall the child's developmental trajectory.

Theme 3: Interaction with the Child

In this part, the Care Worker describes their own support and interactions with the child. They are encouraged to verbalize how their involvement may have contributed to the child's growth or transformation.

Through these reflective dialogues, Care Workers are given the opportunity to objectively revisit their own contributions and the outcomes of their support—factors that may otherwise go unnoticed in day-to-day tasks. This process is expected to foster a renewed sense of meaning in their work and enhance their sense of self-usefulness.

Care Workers are presented with three photographs of children. For each photo, they respond to the following sets of questions and engage in reflective dialogue:

1.About the Child in the Photo
  • Who, when, where, and what happened?
  • What are the child's strengths or positive qualities?
  • How do you think the child was feeling at the time?

2. The Child's Past
  • What was the child like?
  • What was their condition or situation at the time?

3. Interaction with the Child
  • What kinds of interactions or support have you provided?
  • How do you think your involvement influenced the child's growth or change?

Figure 1: Content of Work to Enhance Self-Usefulness

3.5 Work to Enhance Self-Acceptance

This session consists of two reflective themes designed to promote self-acceptance through structured one-on-one meeting program.

Theme 1: Supervision for Your Past Self During a Difficult Experience

The Care Worker selects a photograph that relates to a personally challenging or emotionally difficult episode. From their current perspective, they conduct a form of self-supervision by offering words of encouragement, affirmation, or compassion to their past self.

They are then asked to imagine how their past self might feel upon receiving those words, as well as to reflect on how their current self feels about having offered such support. This

reflective process facilitates a shift in perspective, encouraging the Care Worker to reframe and reinterpret their past difficulties in a more constructive and accepting light.

Theme 2: Vision for Myself as a Care Worker

In this part, the Care Worker reflects on their aspirations and goals for their future self in their professional role. By verbalizing their hopes and expectations for how they wish to grow or be as a Care Worker, they are encouraged to recognize and embrace the efforts and choices they have made thus far. This narrative process is intended to deepen self-understanding and foster greater self-acceptance.

Care Workers select one photograph of the child, answer Questions 1 and 2, and articulate their reflections in a narrative format.

1. Supervision for Your Past Self During a Difficult Experience
   • What message would you like to give to your past self from your current perspective?
   • If your past self received that message, how might you feel?
   • What impression do you have of your present self who gave that message?

2. Vision for Myself as a Care Worker
   • How would you like to be as a residential care worker in the future?
   • What do you hope for your future self?

Figure 2: Content of Work to Enhance Self-Acceptance

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with the approval of the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Well-being at Musashino University (Approval No. R6-005). All participants were provided with written explanations detailing the research purpose, content, and publication procedures. Informed consent was obtained in writing prior to participation.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time. It was also clearly stated that the results would be published in a form that ensures individuals cannot be personally identified.

4 Results

4.1 Participants and Evaluation Method

The Program was conducted with eight individual care workers at children's homes (hereinafter referred to as "participants") in March 2025 (see Table 1). To examine its effectiveness, both quantitative and qualitative evaluations were conducted.

Table 1: Survey Participant Profile

Participants	Genger	Age Group	Type of Occupation	Total Work Experience
P1	Male	20s	Childcare Worker	6
P2	Female	20s	Childcare Worker	3
P3	Female	20s	Childcare Worker	7
P4	Female	20s	Childcare Worker	4
P5	Male	20s	Childcare Worker	5
P6	Female	20s	Childcare Worker	4
P7	Male	30s	Family Social Worker	10
P8	Male	40s	Childcare Worker	6

For the quantitative evaluation, a pre- and post-intervention survey was administered using validated psychological scales to measure participants' levels of self-usefulness, self-acceptance, self-efficacy, and subjective well-being.

Each psychological scale was selected based on its theoretical and conceptual alignment with the research question:

The Sense of Self-Usefulness Scale and Self-Acceptance Scale were employed to directly assess the two primary constructs targeted by the program: self-usefulness and self-acceptance [26][17]. The General Self-Efficacy Scale measured participants' perceived ability to deal with professional challenges, which was considered a potential secondary effect of the intervention [27]. The Psychological Well-Being Scale captured core components of eudaimonic well-being such as autonomy and self-acceptance, which are conceptually consistent with the objectives of the program [17]. The Satisfaction with Life Scale assessed participants' overall life evaluation, and the Interdependent Happiness Scale focused on interpersonal harmony—a key aspect of well-being in collectivist cultural contexts, particularly relevant for care professionals [28][29]. The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) was used to capture short-term emotional fluctuations before and after the program [30]. Together, these scales provided a comprehensive evaluation of the program's impact on both targeted internal constructs (self-usefulness and self-acceptance) and broader psychological outcomes.

Given the small sample size (n = 8) and the violation of normality assumptions for several of the difference scores—as assessed by the Shapiro-Wilk test —the Wilcoxon signed-rank test (two-tailed) was employed using SPSS to examine pre- and post-intervention differences across all psychological measures. The level of statistical significance was set at 5% (p < .05).

Upon completion of the program, participants were also asked to rate its perceived effectiveness and appeal using a five-point Likert scale. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants to gather qualitative insights into the impact and subjective experience of the intervention.

4.2 Quantitative Results

The results of the quantitative analysis are presented in Table 2. The mean score for self-usefulness increased from 19.13 (SD = 4.19) to 20.88 (SD = 2.64), with a mean difference of 1.75 points. Although this change did not reach statistical significance (Z = −1.807, p = .071), the effect size was large (r = .639), suggesting a potential trend toward improvement.

In contrast, statistically significant improvements were observed in psychological well-being (Z = −2.201, p = .028, r = .778) and a significant reduction was found in negative affect (Z = −2.380, p = .017, r = .841), both indicating very large effects.

While increases in self-acceptance and self-efficacy also showed large effect sizes (r = .639 and r = .598, respectively), they did not reach conventional significance thresholds (p = .071 and p = .091). However, given the context of a pilot study, these results may still indicate practical relevance and suggest promising directions for future research.

These findings indicate that the Program contributed meaningfully to participants' psychological functioning, particularly in enhancing well-being and reducing negative emotional

states, while also suggesting promising effects on self-usefulness, self-acceptance, and self-efficacy.

Table 2: Mean Scores Before and After Program Implementation

Item		Pre(n=8)	Post(n=8)	Mean Difference	Z-value	p-value	Effect size r
Self-Usefulness	mean	19.13	20.88	1.75	-1.807	0.071	0.639
	Std. Deviation	4.19	2.64	3.11			
Self-Acceptance	mean	14.25	15.75	1.50	-1.807	0.071	0.639
	Std. Deviation	2.92	2.12	2.00			
Self-Efficacy	mean	20.50	23.00	2.50	-1.691	0.091	0.598
	Std. Deviation	4.28	4.21	3.38			
Psychological Well-Being	mean	95.00	102.63	7.63	-2.201	0.028	0.778
	Std. Deviation	9.13	9.24	6.70		*	
Life Satisfaction	mean	21.75	23.38	1.63	-1.272	0.203	0.450
	Std. Deviation	5.39	4.10	4.63			
Interdependent Happiness	mean	32.13	33.13	1.00	-0.947	0.344	0.335
	Std. Deviation	4.32	4.45	2.88			
Positive Affect	mean	26.88	28.50	1.63	-1.491	0.136	0.527
	Std. Deviation	5.52	7.03	2.72			
Negative Affect	mean	26.88	22.00	-4.88	-2.380	0.017	0.841
	Std. Deviation	6.85	6.07	3.76		*	

Note: * indicates statistical significance at the 5% level ($p < .05$, two-tailed).
Note: Effect sizes are interpreted as follows: small ($r \approx .10$), medium ($r \approx .30$), large ($r \geq .50$), and very large ($r \geq .70$)

Participants' subjective evaluations of the Program were similarly encouraging (see Table 3). Regarding the effectiveness of the Program in enhancing self-usefulness, 87.5% of participants responded positively, with 37.5% indicating "strongly agree" and 50.0% "somewhat agree." Similarly, 75.0% of participants reported that the Program was effective in enhancing self-acceptance. In terms of overall interest in the Program, all participants gave positive responses, with 37.5% selecting "strongly agree" and 62.5% selecting "somewhat agree." These results demonstrate that the Program was broadly accepted and positively evaluated by the participants.

Table 3: Evaluation of this Program's effectiveness and interest
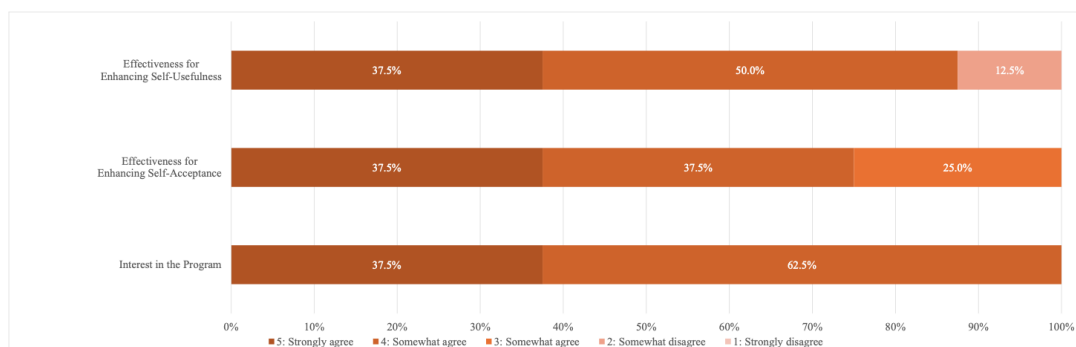
4.3   Qualitative Results

Participants' qualitative feedback further supported the quantitative findings, particularly with regard to enhanced self-usefulness. One participant remarked that although it is often difficult to feel a sense of purpose in day-to-day work, the opportunity to reflect on both the child's changes and their own involvement allowed them to find meaning in their role (P2). Another participant reflected on the unique challenge of providing care without clear answers or outcomes. They noted that, although they rarely have opportunities to assess whether their approach is appropriate, the dialogue facilitated by photographs enabled them to engage in self-reflection grounded in clear rationale (P6). These responses suggest that the Program effectively supported Care Workers' introspection regarding their professional role and contributions.

In relation to self-acceptance, participants emphasized the value of the Program in confronting past difficulties. One participant shared that, in a field where there are no clear solutions, it had been challenging to feel confident about their caregiving. However, through the Program, they were able to develop a sense of acceptance toward themselves (P4). Another participant expressed that reflecting on their past efforts allowed them to recognize how hard they had worked and to appreciate their own perseverance (P7). These insights suggest that the Program served as a catalyst for reappraising and affirming their own struggles, thereby promoting self-acceptance.

Participants also described the Program as a refreshing and eye-opening experience. One noted that they rarely had opportunities to focus on the positive traits of children, and that this reflection helped them notice the children's growth (P2). Another participant shared that they were able to positively reframe their own involvement, which led to greater self-confidence. Yet another participant reported that the process allowed them to access emotions and thoughts not typically encountered in daily routines, making the experience feel novel and meaningful (P5). These reflections underscore the Program's role in facilitating emotional connection, renewed motivation, and deeper awareness of one's caregiving work.

5   Discussion

5.1   Factors Behind the Lack of Significant Improvement in Self-Usefulness and the Structural Characteristics of Care Work

The quantitative results indicated that although self-acceptance and self-efficacy showed tendencies toward significant improvement, there was no statistically significant change observed in participants' sense of self-usefulness. One possible explanation for this lies in the structural characteristics of care work within children's homes.
Care Workers devote a significant amount of time and effort to managing children's behavioral problems and crises on a daily basis. As a result, they have limited opportunities to attend to children's inner changes or positive developmental progress. This may hinder the formation of a cognitive foundation that enables Care Workers to recognize the outcomes and contributions of their own support, which are essential for developing a sense of self-usefulness.

Moreover, as several participants (e.g., P4 and P6) noted, caregiving in children's homes is often a process of trial and error, with no single "correct answer" available. This professional reality may incline Care Workers toward self-critical or overly reflective evaluations of their own performance.

To foster a more stable sense of self-usefulness among Care Workers, it is essential to intentionally create spaces where they can engage in reflection through supportive dialogue and assign positive and objective meaning to their caregiving practices.

5.2   Components of Subjective Well-Being and the Scope of the Intervention's Effectiveness

Among the four scales used to measure subjective well-being, significant changes were observed only in the Psychological Well-Being Scale and the Negative Affect Scale. No significant differences were found in the Satisfaction with Life Scale or the Interdependent Happiness Scale.

This discrepancy may be attributed to the different components each scale measures. The Psychological Well-Being Scale captures psychological elements such as self-acceptance and autonomy, which are closely aligned with the goals and content of the present intervention. In contrast, life satisfaction and interdependent happiness encompass broader and more long-term dimensions such as overall life evaluation and social relationships. These elements are less likely to shift as a result of a short-term, individualized intervention.

Therefore, to enhance these broader aspects of subjective well-being, future programs may require long-term or ongoing implementation, as well as the incorporation of interpersonal elements, such as mutual recognition and support among colleagues, supervisors, and other professionals.

5.3   The Significance and Potential of Photo-Based Reflection

Comments from participants revealed that while they had prior experience reflecting on work-related matters, they rarely had opportunities to reflect on themselves. This type of reflection refers not to an evaluation of task performance, but to a more personal introspection on one's values, emotions, struggles, and motivations for working in child welfare.
As Participant 4 expressed, the opportunity to reflect using photographs enabled them to perceive their involvement with children as meaningful. This suggests that visual stimuli served as a catalyst for an introspective process, prompting Care Workers to reinterpret and positively reframe their caregiving efforts.
Photographs contain nonverbal information such as facial expressions, gestures, and relationships between individuals—elements that are often difficult to recall through words or memory alone. By making these subtle, positive changes visible, photo-based reflection allows Care Workers to concretely recognize the outcomes of their support, thereby contributing to the development of a stronger foundation for their sense of self-usefulness.

6   Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research

6.1   Conclusion

This study aimed to enhance the subjective well-being of care workers at children's homes by focusing on the enhancement of their sense of self-usefulness and self-acceptance. To this end, a prototype of a one-on-one meeting program was developed and evaluated through both quantitative and qualitative methods. The Program consisted of two main components: an introductory interview to reflect on professional experiences and a one-on-one session using photographs of children to promote self-usefulness and self-acceptance. The Program was implemented with eight participants. The findings suggested that the program demonstrated preliminary effectiveness in enhancing self-acceptance, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being. These results indicate the potential of the Program as a means of supporting the emotional and psychological well-being of Care Workers.

6.2   Limitations, and Future Research

However, two main limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study was conducted as a pilot evaluation with a small sample size, which limits the statistical power and generalizability of the results. Nonetheless, the study successfully demonstrated the feasibility of implementing the program in a real-world care setting and yielded promising trends in key psychological outcomes. These insights serve as a valuable foundation for future full-scale studies that aim to rigorously validate the program's effectiveness using larger samples. Second, the study employed a single-group pre-post design without a control group, which restricts the ability to attribute observed changes solely to the intervention. It remains possible that the effects observed were influenced by extraneous variables, such as participants' expectations or other contextual factors. To improve the internal validity of future research, it is essential to include a control or comparison group—for example, care workers receiving conventional supervision or engaging in standard reflective dialogue. Employing randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental designs would allow for a more robust evaluation of the program's specific impact and clarify its distinct contributions compared to existing support methods.

Despite these limitations, this pilot study offers novel insights by introducing a theoretically grounded and practically feasible one-on-one meeting program that incorporates photographic reflection. The findings highlight the program's potential to meet the emotional and reflective needs of residential care workers and point toward a new direction for evidence-based support interventions in child welfare practice.

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