

Empowering Carers of Children with Disabilities in Zambia: A Participatory Group Approach

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Introduction: In Zambia, unemployment leads to poverty and increased prevalence of disease. Some parents have to face both challenges of having a child with disability and of poverty. They find it difficult to provide all the necessities of life for their children to survive, including frequent medical attention. Those whose children require adaptive equipment face greater challenges because such equipment may not be available and, if available, can be very expensive. Most carers are female; many of them are single mothers or grandmothers. The occupational therapy department at the Central Hospital in Livingstone developed a project to support carers in their care of the disabled child.

Objectives: Provide an arena for sharing experience and knowledge between carers and professionals
Empower carers in supporting their children's development and participation in family life and play

Approach: Carers of children with disability met twice weekly for five weeks. The program included information and supervision from occupational therapists, sharing experience and making corner seats for each child in the group, using appropriate paper-based technology.

Practice implications: The project increased the knowledge and skills of carers and produced adaptive equipment for children. The carers shared experiences, encouraged each other and imparted hope. When the project ended, they formed a support group which now includes 11 carers and receives support from a local non-governmental organization: Zambia Community-Based Rehabilitation.

Conclusion: This empowerment approach enables occupational therapists to provide opportunities and support for carers to network and mobilize resources.