

Advancing Occupational Justice in Institutional Settings: A Practice Based Enquiry Approach

Gail Whiteford¹, Katherine Jones², Gemma Weekes², Sophia Brindle²

¹Griffith University, Gold Coast, Qld, Australia, ²Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Introduction: Occupational deprivation is a potential risk for residents of institutions due to limited opportunities to engage in meaningful occupation due to social, physical, and environmental constraints and also because of policy limitations. Scenarios of institutional occupational deprivation can have negative and pervasive impacts over time.

Objectives: This paper presents a case study from Australia which utilised a Practice Based Enquiry Approach by a group of Occupational Therapists within a Forensic Mental Health Unit to advance an agenda of occupational justice within the institution.

Methods: Participants formed a community of practice scholars and generated data through reflections on everyday practice as well as generation of practice artefacts.

Practice Implications: A practice based enquiry approach enabled participants to develop a strong and unified professional identity enabling them to advocate for the occupational needs and rights of the residents of the unit. Participants' narrative accounts reflect greater ability to articulate their practice, enhanced use of occupational language, a re-design of the service to afford greater choice, control and opportunities of naturalistic occupational engagement and a rejuvenated institutional ethos.

Conclusion: Re-designing occupational therapy services in institutions in order to combat occupational deprivation and create more opportunities for occupational engagement as part of a commitment to occupational justice is a complex undertaking. A Practice Based Enquiry Approach can be an appropriate and powerful choice for such an undertaking.