

Supported Education Programs in Mental Health: An Occupational Therapists Role?

Laura Aitken, Norma Clark, Debroah Hewson
NHS Fife, Cupar, United Kingdom

This article utilizes the Model of Human Occupation as a framework to argue the need for Occupational Therapists working in Mental Health to ensure that returning to education is identified as a key component of psychosocial rehabilitation and outlines the benefit of this to service users. Evidence for supported education initiatives have been predominately developed within the Socialwork literature. This article argues that Occupational Therapists are best placed to facilitate supported education initiatives.

A literature search was conducted; search terms began with 'supported education programs' and 'mental health education programs'. This was then narrowed down to 'evidence based practice in supported education programs' and 'Occupational Therapy mental health'. The search was refined further to only retrieving articles in the medical, social and life sciences fields' as well as the education field.

The benefits to Mental Health service users are identified through the structure of The Model of Human Occupation. That is through the subsystems of Volition, Habituation, Performance Capacity and Environment. Benefits included improvement in self-identity and self-esteem (Gilbert et al, 2004), the development of a socially valued role as a student (Unger, 2003), improvement in concentration and memory (Isenwater, 2002), and the fact that supportive environments provide a sense of belonging (Iannelli & Wilding, 2007).

Alongside the positive effects on health there are also some documented negative effects, such as an increase in stress and anxiety, issues with transportation, financial aid and stigma of college staff (Mowbray et al, 2001).

Occupational Therapists are concerned with productivity (Mosey, 1996), skilled in assessing real life task performance and understanding the impact of specific performance components on participation in occupations. Furthermore they are concerned with facilitating collaborative relationships that enable service users to develop positive roles within their communities.

These noted improvements in mental health will also encourage Occupational Therapists to consider education as opposed to traditional interventions to facilitate recovery from mental health problems.

Laura Aitken

Occupational Therapist