

0922

Urban Renewal: A new house does not a new life make

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Introduction

Limerick, the third largest city in the Republic of Ireland with a population of 91,000, has had serious criminal activity for many decades, with feuding between local criminal gangs and now further fuelled by drug related crime. In an effort to address these issues, the Irish government established an initiative to address social inclusion, crime and disorder issues via a programme of regeneration. The regeneration themes include: housing and community; social; children, youth and family support; physical and economic regeneration. The objective of Limerick Regeneration is to improve quality of life for residents within key marginalised Limerick City locations. This is to be achieved through the implementation of a Programme for a radical new landscape, which, among other things, will incorporate quality-designed homes, improved community facilities and integrated services.

Objectives

This paper will present a case for involvement of occupational therapy in an urban renewal initiative. Practical strategies and examples of interventions at different stages and the complexity of involvement in the project will be discussed.

Description

Occupational therapy is concerned with how people participate in their environment and live in their communities and as such its philosophy resonates strongly with regeneration initiatives. For residents in the areas of marginalisation, participation in health enabling behaviours which promote positive community involvement are limited resulting in a further perpetuation of the cycle of deprivation. The ensuing occupational deprivation has negative consequences for the health and wellbeing of the individual and the community.

Discussion

The Department of Occupational Therapy at the University of Limerick has formed teaching and research collaborations with local agencies in the regeneration areas. These include initiatives such as Access Campus, Limerick Youth Service and the Youth Justice Service in Limerick. Opportunities such as these explore the meaning and importance of occupations in promoting health and provide an insight into the occupational alienation which results from living in marginalised areas with high levels of crime.

Conclusion/Contribution to practice

The paper will conclude that occupational therapy has the potential to make a broad and sustainable difference to urban renewal and is an emerging role for the discipline.