

COMMUNITY BASED REHABILITATION: A COEXISTENCE GROUP FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN A POOR NEIGHBORHOOD IN SÃO PAULO

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This is an investigative research about the development of a coexistence group of adults with disabilities and the wider community, who experience poverty and social exclusion. The group was held in a community center and was attended by 10 adults with disabilities, six women and four men. Five had mental disability, three physical disabilities and two multiple disabilities. Some conditions were observed in relation to the participants: home isolation, limited participation in community activities and a social support network restricted to their families. The creation of a coexistence group was one of the alternatives for addressing the situation of isolation, which is considered a risk factor for these people. Jewelry making was the activity used. **The objective of this research** was to understand the process of group formation by people with disabilities and identify the changes within the individual and collective scope. **During 2006, a case study** was carried out and records of the activities in thirty three two-hour-week meetings were kept in a field diary by the researcher. Also, semi-structured and dialoged interviews about the experience of being part of this five-participant group were collected. **The development of the group in a community center** made the problems faced by people with disabilities clear and promoted the discussion of their social rights. Lack of adapted transport, presence of architectural barriers, right of access to benefits and assistance in rehabilitation, were some of the topics discussed by participants and their families, during groups and interviews. The lack of autonomy and initiative are the most important characteristics of the participants and they have been the targets of interventions to promote participation of people in all the activities made by the group (purchase of materials, manufacturing and sale). **This experience promoted** affective exchanges, discovery of manual and creative skills, the holding of individual differences, the improvement of self-esteem and communication between participants. These aspects contributed to increase social participation and reduce the risks of home isolation. **The study examined alternative care** in territorial Occupational Therapy and identified strategies for its implementation, which may be used in other assistance settings.