

Community Project Placements: Producing Advanced New Graduates

Kathy MAGGS^{2,1}, Claire HEATH^{1,2}, Aimee GERONIMO^{1,2}

¹Monash University, Victoria, Australia, ²Austin Health, Victoria, Australia

Introduction:

Monash University in Australia provides a uniquely structured learning experience to third and fourth year undergraduate Occupational Therapy (OT) students:- a Participatory Community Project (PCP) placement. Over a period of 12 months with a community agency, students developed projects that benefit agencies while increasing students practice skill. This presentation highlights the value of projects as a learning experience from the perspective of students and the supervisor managing the project.

The presenters will outline processes of community project management, using the example of a project undertaken at Austin Health, a major provider of tertiary health services and health professional education in Victoria, Australia. The learning experiences from the projects will be related to the work of new-graduate OT's.

Objectives:

The objective of this presentation is to review the educational experience of students and supervisors in the PCP at Austin Health. Further discussions will focus around the relevance of the PCP educational program in OT practice, in comparison to the traditional clinical placement model.

Description/Report:

The project at Austin Health consisted of a review of service provision of outpatient Cardiac Rehabilitation to determine the need for service improvement, an experience that has been documented through the use of reflective journals. At the conclusion of the project, final critical reflections will be documented by students and supervisor, focussing on the strengths/weaknesses of the placement and how it may inform new graduate OT practice.

Results/Discussion:

Preliminary results have identified valuable learning experiences. Project management skills and proficiency in working within a community partnership model have been developed throughout the educational program.

Conclusion:

The experience gained through the PCP education program at Monash University has been a highly beneficial experience for both students and supervisor. The project management skills developed throughout the duration of the project have provided opportunity to expand on the diverse personal/interpersonal skills necessary for practice as future OT's.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of OT:

The PCP addresses the ways in which health, wellbeing and occupations of populations/communities may be impacted by political, social and organisational factors, providing students with the practical and theoretical skills necessary for entry-level OT practitioners.