

Using therapeutic theatre to enable occupational well being with people who experience mental illness

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Introduction: This paper presents theatre as an occupation that promotes health and well-being. It is the story of how the unique natural occupational form of theatre has facilitated change in communities of people who live with severe and enduring mental illnesses in South Auckland. Understandings presented have been gathered from pantomime performances held over the last four years, research and my own theatre experiences. Theatre is an occupation that has the power to join communities together in a celebratory event; the moment of doing and being as one.

Objectives:

1. Outline the historical roots of theatre in occupational therapy.
2. Discuss how the occupational form of theatre supports recovery, health and well-being.
3. Outline the models used to inform this project.
4. Describe social participation.

Description: This paper focuses on an occupational perspective of pantomime. Discussion around what makes theatre a unique therapeutic occupation. Looking at the natural occupational form of theatre, models used and how selecting the script, casting and production team need to be planned carefully. Other necessary skills are also identified. The different roles that people have the opportunity to experience, and what this means is discussed. Included also is how the strengthening of communities has facilitated a natural process of social participation. Considerations around the environment and the actual theatre space are presented.

Discussion: This community based project facilitated social participation in creating a celebratory event. A summary of supporting feedback from cast, production team, supporters and the audience, along with additional wisdoms gained from this process.

Conclusion: Pantomime enhances occupational competence by providing a medium that enables different specific skills and occupations that we all use as part of our daily lives. This creative space becomes a micro world within our own lives.

Contribution to the practice: Pantomime has huge occupational potential for all those involved in the experience. That yes, Occupational therapists do have a framework and skills in which to facilitate theatre.