

A European Learning Partnership: Empowering Learning for Social Inclusion through Occupation (ELSITO)

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ORAL PRESENTATION

Introduction

With over 90 million people facing poverty in Europe the social exclusion is an important item on the European Union agenda and a matter of increasing urgency for occupational therapists. 'Empowering Learning for Social Inclusion through Occupation' (ELSITO) is a learning partnership of occupational therapy education and practice programmes in six European countries within the Grundtvig programme of the European Union. Within the creation of inclusive communities the partnership aims for empowerment, collaborative learning and sharing of good practice in projects that promote occupation and particularly employment for vulnerable people, specifically persons with mental health problems and immigrants.

Objectives

It will explore the limitations of traditional occupational therapy in fulfilling societal needs and will present the ELSITO partnership and alternative practice approaches.

Description

Community based occupation, particularly employment, is difficult to achieve within traditional services, existing power structures, a deficit practice model and social stigma. We must question the socio-political determinants of marginalization, enable empowerment and collaborative learning with communities, focusing on recovery as defined by the client movement, citizenship and human rights. However developing new approaches requires the exchange of good practice and support. ELSITO involves service users, occupational therapists (practitioners, educators and students) in a process of mutual learning during which service users play an active role (presenting their narratives). The partnership works to establish networks both locally, to support the development of community based projects, and throughout Europe, to provide examples of good practice and a forum for all stakeholders.

Conclusion

Changing practice is difficult, particularly towards practice that requires extended competences in networking between economic, health, social and political institutions, in empowerment and in collaborative learning with service users. ELSITO aims to provide the required learning forum for this purpose.

Contribution to practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

Occupational therapists must be proactive and social activists, working in the political arena to position occupation as a right for all citizens.

Key words: occupational justice, citizenship, social participation. Field: inclusive communities. Age: adults