

Playfulness in care: Enhancing quality of life for children living in out-of-home care.

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Introduction

Play and playfulness are key occupations of children. However children with a disability, particularly those in out-of-home accommodation, may lack the physical and intellectual ability to independently seek playful experiences. Care-staff therefore need to facilitate this experience when adopting absent family roles.

Objectives

Participants will understand the importance of playfulness in the lives of children. In addition, participants will learn about methods of enhancing playfulness in the lives of children with disabilities, particularly for children in out-of-home care. Participants will also gain an overview of government run disability services for children and young people in New South Wales, Australia.

Description/Report

It was identified that many government employed carers need support to increase their playfulness with young residents and to facilitate an age appropriate environment. Occupational therapists with expertise in play and disability were approached to develop a training package to address this need. The training aimed to improve the quality of life for children with a disability living in out-of-home care through a shift in carers' attitude and behaviour. An outline of the history leading to this project, the processes taken, and a summary of the final product will be presented.

Results/Discussion

Outcomes measures include pre and post training survey of staff perceptions of playfulness in their care of children. Interviews by the author and an independent blinded auditing body, pre and post training, are planned to further identify changes in carers' attitudes and behaviour following training.

Conclusion

There is strong support for the need of playful interactions when caring for children, including those with disabilities. Carers can be supported to be appropriately playful when working with children who are unable to live at home. Occupational therapists are well equipped to enhance the quality of life of disadvantaged children by providing this support.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy.

Occupational therapists have expertise in play and disabilities. This paper summarizes some of this knowledge and demonstrates how it can be applied practically to stimulate positive change within organisational care.