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## **Facilitating Recovery: Improvisational Theatre to Address Societal Stigma Surrounding Mental Illness**

Christine Urish

*St. Ambrose University, Davenport, IA, United States*

Persons with mental illness often encounter stigma. Stigma is defined as negative perceptions, stereotypes, labels and misconceptions which exist in society. A lack of knowledge about mental illness combined with negative attitudes contribute to the impact stigma has upon persons diagnosed with mental illness. Contact with persons with mental illness was found to be one of the best strategies to change negative attitudes. Improvisation does not use a script and there is no right or wrong. The use of improvisational theatre can serve as a carefully structured contact experience in which persons with mental illness educate an audience. As a result persons with mental illness have the opportunity to engage in social participation in the community which facilitates improved communication and interaction skills and self advocacy. Due to the spontaneity of improvisational theatre as therapeutic intervention, persons with mental illness are challenged to notice/respond to the ongoing dialogue of the scene, accommodate to the situation being acted out and adjust their interactions based upon the feedback from the audience. The concept of recovery from mental illness provides hope for the future. In order for an individual to achieve recovery, one must develop a new worldview which includes their disability as a part of their reality. Participation in improvisational theatre, can facilitate acceptance of mental illness which can facilitate a change in self concept, a key element in recovery. Improvisational theatre led by an occupational therapy practitioner provides a mechanism which can facilitate the recovery.

### Objectives

Demonstrate an understanding of how consumer involvement in an improvisational theatre troupe is empowering, facilitates recovery, increased self advocacy, and educates others about mental illness in an innovative fashion.

Identify potential funding and training resources to assist occupational therapy practitioners in the development and implementation of an improvisational theatre troupe in a community setting.

Critically examine the clinical benefits that can be obtained for consumers, family members and community participants through participation in an improvisational theatre troupe designed to address the stigma associated with mental illness.

1.5 hours

Teaching methods: video/audio clips, lecture, small group discussion, practice, & performance of improvisational techniques.

Maximum number: 75