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Being through doing: Increasing Occupational Performance of children in a refugee hostel

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Introduction: When refugee children leave their home country, they leave behind everything they know including their mother tongue, daily routines and friends. Arriving in a foreign country they live in a refugee hostel with a lack of privacy, games and toys. From an occupational perspective this has an enormous effect on their childhood in terms of occupational opportunities and fulfilment. The age-typical occupations are often restricted to them which might influence their further development and participation.

Objectives: To describe the changes in occupational performance of children in a refugee hostel during an offered arts and craft project.

Method: From September to December 2016 ethnological field observations were made during an arts and crafts project for children in a refugee hostel in Düsseldorf/GER. The field notes and memos were used to execute content analysis. Inductive and deductive coding, using the AMPS criteria has been combined. The findings have been validated with the help of member check with two OTs who work within this project.

Results: Refugee children show a huge interest in the regular offer of the project. Positive development can be observed in the process skills especially organizing space and objects, temporal organization and applying knowledge. Further development was noticed in the occupational performance skills including speech, social behavior, involvement in occupations and self-esteem.

Conclusion: Regular offers of leisure time activities for refugee children attended by occupational therapists increase the children's occupational opportunities and chances of a healthy development.