

Exploring OT practice in the U.S. criminal justice system: Occupational justice through a jail-based re-entry program

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Introduction/Rationale: Occupational therapy in the U.S. criminal justice system is an emerging practice area. Occupational therapists advocating for occupational justice in incarceration settings offer a shift in perspective regarding correctional policies impacting this marginalized population. Occupational justice applied with this population promotes participation in occupations designed to maximize participation after release from incarceration.

Objectives: **1.** Describe Saint Louis University's occupational science and OT Transition to Employment Program within an urban jail in St. Louis, Missouri. **2.** Explore collaborative program development and implementation to equip residents with life skills to promote functional community living, obtain employment, and reduce recidivism. **3.** Examine the experience of a jail-based OT actively implementing occupational justice programming.

Approach: We performed a review of planning notes and therapist logs to describe the development of this collaborative, pre- and post-release re-entry program. Our OT practitioner used a reflective approach to describe her perspective of practice roles during the first year of program implementation.

Practice Implications: There are many challenges to program implementation when practicing OT in U.S. criminal justice settings. However, the focus on rehabilitation in re-entry programming through the use of meaningful occupation promotes occupational justice and improved quality of life and well-being for incarcerated populations within criminal justice systems.

Conclusion: Saint Louis University's OT-based Transition to Employment Program has implemented a collaborative, interprofessional program within an urban jail. Jail-based occupational therapists in re-entry programming can assist correctional facilities in reducing rates of recidivism and promoting occupational justice.