

Canadian occupational therapists' multi-layered work with communities: Moving Beyond the individual

Heidi Lauckner¹, Leanne Leclair², Cindy Yamamoto²

¹*Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS, Canada,* ²*University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MA, Canada*

Introduction: Although community development has been identified as an important domain of practice for occupational therapists, many occupational therapists in Canada and elsewhere struggle to clarify their roles and processes in this practice area.

Objectives: From a study that explored the community development practice processes of Canadian occupational therapists, this presentation presents findings to the research question: Drawing on the experiences of occupational therapists working in community development, how do occupational therapists engage at different levels in the community?

Methods: Using interpretive description, individual interviews and focus group discussions were conducted via telephone with 12 occupational therapists from across Canada. Thematic analysis informed data analysis.

Results: While there was some uncertainty regarding the community development terminology, occupational therapists reported good fit between occupational therapy and community-centred approaches. Four layers of community-centred practice were identified, with the latter two approaching community development: individual, group, community of interest, and systems. At the individual level, clients were linked to community services. At the group level, relationships and skills were developed. When working with emerging communities of interest, the focus was on working with community members, partners and champions to create safe spaces to engage in meaningful occupations. At the systems/policy level, the focus shifted to the structures and services that support or hinder the community's well-being. Occupational therapists attended to, and moved between, these layers.

Conclusion: The conceptualization that emerged from this study can assist occupational therapists in reflecting on and further strengthening their work with communities.