

Inaugural Grants Awarded 2009

Ellen Nicholson:

Title: Occupation in Action and in Context: Practice-Scholarship in Paediatric Occupational Therapy Practice in New Zealand.

Summary: This project aims to investigate and affect the application of theory in the development of best practice with children and young people with physical and mental health conditions, and their families, in the New Zealand context and involves recruiting 12 paediatric occupational therapists as co-researchers to read the radically revised Enabling Occupation II text (Townsend & Polatajko, 2007), participate in collegial discussion, and contribute practice stories to an interactive discussion forum over a 9-12 month period. This project is part of an international initiative involving occupational therapy researchers in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and Finland, describing the clinical utility and outcomes of implementation of the revised CMOP framework in a range of practice settings, using a participatory action research approach. It is intended that the proposed study will be a valuable contribution to this discussion.

Update 2010: Winning one of the inaugural NZAOT Research and Education Grants was just the kick-start I needed to get my doctoral research project started. I had been very anxious and ambivalent about starting the project - questioning my validity as a researcher and wading my way through a seemingly treacherous (but actually very reasonable) ethics process - and the grant provided me the opportunity to purchase the Enabling Occupation II textbooks pivotal to the success of the study.

A call for participants early in the year resulted in six therapists joining the project as co-researchers and we have completed four project meetings to date. Each meeting is centered around a specific chapter, or chapters, in the Enabling Occupation II text and provides an opportunity for the therapists to review the specific content of the individual chapters and reflect on the “realities” of translating and applying ideas from the book into practice. We are currently in a dual reflect/action phase of the action research process and some of the preliminary themes drawn from the discussion to date focus on the challenges to implementation of authentic occupation-based paediatric practice within the current configuration of health, disability and education services; the realities of “client-centred practice” when working with multiple stakeholders; and managing expectations of “traditional” paediatric occupational therapy practice and roles. We are utilising GoogleWave (www.googlewave.com) as our online discussion software and there are some interesting discussion threads and resources available to the group online that supports the progress of the face-to-face meetings.

As principal researcher, I have been so impressed at how supportive and encouraging the therapists are of one another and their absolute commitment to providing the best for the children and families that they serve. And we are all extremely appreciative of the opportunity to read and review a significant

occupational therapy textbook, one chapter at a time, a professional development luxury in these financially pressured times. The project group are committed to meeting until the end of the year and we will review in the coming months the possibility of extending the project to ensure that we cover all the chapters and “enable” all the possibilities.

Once again, I would very much like to formally thank NZAOT and the Research and Education Trust, the project team, and my supervisors, Associate Professor Marion Jones and Associate Professor Clare Hocking, for their support and commitment to this project.

Emma Tokolahti:

Title: Leaping Hurdles: Evaluation of the effectiveness of an occupation-based group for children 10-14 years old addressing anxiety, low mood and occupational disruption, with a parallel parenting group

Summary: This project aims to conduct research to evaluate the effectiveness of an occupation-based anxiety and mood management group for children aged 10-14 years, (alongside a parallel parenting group). All children referred to the group will be invited to participate in the research. The research will use clinical measures: Beck Youth Inventory-II (BYI), Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL), Parenting Stress Index (PSI), and Occupational Questionnaire (OQ); as well as the clinician rated Children’s Global Assessment Scale (CGAS) and Health of the Nations Outcome Scale for Children and Adolescents (HoNOSCA). These measurement tools will be administered 3-4 times (waitlist, pre-group, post-group, 3 month follow-up) and analysed using appropriate statistical tools. This is a new treatment initiative developed by Occupational Therapists and provided by clinicians at the Kari Centre - Auckland District Health Board’s child and adolescent mental health service. This project is intended to comprehensively evaluate the new initiative within the service and within a New Zealand context.

Update 2010: I am an occupational therapist working at a community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and working towards my masters. Leaping Hurdles was found to be an acceptable and useful intervention for reducing child-, parent- and clinician-rated symptoms of anxiety and mood disorders while increasing functioning. The findings from this study support the use of Leaping Hurdles with a clinical population of 10-14 year olds and their parents. Furthermore, results indicate the intervention promotes positive change in being maintained or continued at follow-up. This research represented a significant opportunity to evaluate an occupation-based group treatment intervention for 10-14 year olds in New Zealand with moderate mental health concerns related to anxiety, depression and occupational disruption. Indications are that further research into this area is warranted.

I am employed as a generic clinical team member – not a researcher – and although this research was supported by my service, support did not extend to

the financial costs of time for the other clinicians involved and myself to write-up our findings. This is where the NZAOT grant enabled our research team to take time away from work (without the need to use annual leave) and write-up our findings, extending the value and utility of our efforts beyond our own service. A write-up of our findings has been submitted to a generic child and adolescent mental health journal in the hope of promoting this occupation-focused treatment intervention beyond the occupational therapy profession. It will also be presented at this year's NZAOT conference in Nelson. The best part of the project for me was facilitating the intervention and getting empirical data that supported the positive anecdotal feedback we were receiving from clients. Working with a great team, Cheryl, Laura and Sarah, made the process more enjoyable and manageable too. For anyone considering research in the future I recommend having a solid team you can rely on and not being afraid to delegate. Furthermore, do not be deterred by the paperwork required when submitting for funding – it's worth it. Thank-you.