

0452

Building Effective Foundations for Living and Learning:

**An occupational framework for therapists in multidisciplinary
and cross sector community service settings.**

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Australian Community Support Organisation

At ACSO, our vision is a safe and inclusive community, freed of crime and prisons and our mission is to help people transition from prison, assist them in the community, stop them from reoffending and to divert others from committing crime.



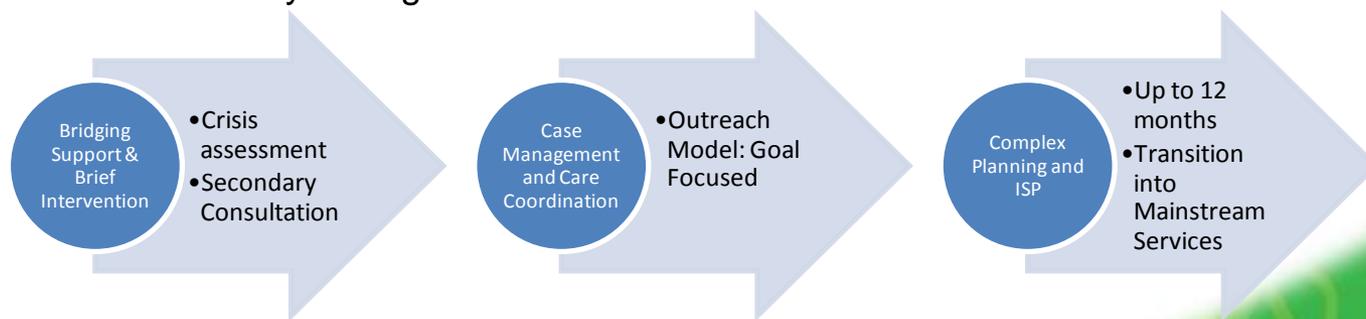
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Introduction

OTs are in a strong position to challenge silo mentality across professions and services. When working with complex clients- including those with an intellectual disability, mental illness, substance use and criminal justice issues –we are able to foster positive outcomes by exploring opportunities to actively integrate service delivery; by focusing on the relevant components of functioning and disability and considering how contextual factors influence activity and participation.

The OT approach is in harmony with recovery oriented practice, enabling continuous evaluation at several levels, with individuals and carers being able to track their own progress. Using the individual's experiences of care to inform quality improvement activities, we work to enhance reporting on key outcomes indicative of recovery, including housing, employment, education, social and family relationships, health and well being.

As our pathways emphasise a process of engagement and transition to other agencies and providers, it is vital to meet the challenge of working collaboratively across sectors , assertively imparting an occupation driven approach to fostering living and learning opportunities for our clients in mainstream community settings



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Objectives

With a focus on client identified needs and goals, we work with clients , colleagues , other service providers and peak bodies to facilitate better outcomes, for individuals, the client group as a whole and community.

We embrace and generate Occupational opportunities to improve approaches to cross sector and multi-disciplinary work, in order to ensure a holistic, integrated framework. This is undertaken through liaison with community service professionals, whilst maintaining the integrity the occupational frame of reference.

As occupational therapists, this requires us to have a strong professional voice actively collaborate. Reflection; the use of an occupationally based framework and assessments; supervision; connection to OT practice and theory are vital to the process. We reflect on how we build on and maintain effective foundations for the work we do, when there could be a risk of the contributions being diluted or marginalised, given the significant service demands, in comparison to the resources available...

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Approach

ACSO has a foundation of recognising the importance of client centred practice and embraces principles of recovery oriented practice: as occupational therapists we bring a professional framework, with a client centred focus and approach that is aligned with best practice approaches and directions and our organisational approach. Client centred practice and feedback informs quality improvement activities and we are working to enhance reporting on key outcomes that indicate recovery. These outcomes include housing, employment, education, social and family relationships, health and well being

In collaboration with our clients & the interdisciplinary team-including peer facilitators (see presentation 0455)- we have developed a range of programs focused on gaining and retaining hope, understanding of one's abilities and disabilities, engagement in an active life, personal autonomy, social identity, meaning and purpose in life, and a positive sense of self and being a valued member of the community.

An example of this is our Life Skills Program, a group based intervention aiming to reduce the likelihood of offending behaviour related to life skills deficit and strengthen community connectedness and social inclusion, using a strengths-based, cognitive behavioural model to impart life skills training. Modules provide opportunities for participants to progress to a higher level of community integration and foster connections with external stakeholders and mainstream community based programs. Those successfully completing the Modules are also invited to return to the groups as a peer facilitator, offering a sense of commitment, community and contribution whilst building individuals' confidence and self esteem as they give back to the groups and the Life Skills team who have supported them....



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Practice Implications

Making a difference and having a point of difference can be a challenge for occupational therapists working with complex needs clients in community settings. Imparting occupation based focus day in day out whilst still actively contributing at a generic level requires high level communication skills and passion. For the therapist, there is a need to maintain and nourish a sense of professional well being and an acknowledgement that it is usual to at times feel that contributions are being watered down, that one is losing a sense of identity or being overwhelmed by the demands and challenged.

Recognising that it is vital to meet our practice challenges, we work collaboratively across the sector and assertively impart an occupation driven approach, fostering living and learning opportunities for our clients in mainstream community settings. Strategically, and for individual clients, we contribute to building recovery pathways and opportunities for community integration for complex client groups; transitioning from custodial and institutional settings into independent living.

In our experience, resilience and professional effectiveness is enhanced and built through investing in collaborative efforts towards system reform, networking, keeping abreast of opportunities within the sector, linkages with professional bodies and associations; networks and of course supervision, peer support, communities of practice and claiming reflective space and skill building opportunities. Importantly, talking to others about occupational therapy practice in occupational language enables us to reframe our work, refresh our approach and face the challenges anew.

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Conclusion

Occupational Therapists are in a strong position to challenge silo mentality across professions, as we have the skills and role opportunities to truly integrate service delivery “by working at the boundaries” with clients with complex care needs; within teams and across services . Adopting strong occupational frameworks of practice has allowed for evolution of ACSO's current programs, fostering independence and true community connectedness and client centred practice.

It is important for OTs working in the field to acknowledge and address the complexity of the challenges faced in order to achieve better outcomes, at the level of person, occupation and environment prepares therapist well for challenges of working with Co – Occurring disorders /Dual Disability/ Forensic field.

To sustain themselves and strive to meet the challenges of working at an individual, organisation and systems level, occupational therapists need to develop ways of maintaining and renewing themselves in occupational practice. We have found that integrating the lived experience and eliciting consumer participation and feedback; having an evidence-based approach which integrates clinical reflective practice; making time for knowledge development; supervision; communities of practice and peer input improve the delivery of services; builds professional resilience and hones our practice craft.