

Occupational Therapy and Aboriginal Health

What is Occupational Therapy?

Life is made up of meaningful everyday activities or occupations such as walking the dog, gardening, preparing a meal, painting, doing the laundry and playing games. Occupations are part of life; they describe who we are and how we feel about ourselves. Occupations help bring meaning to life.

When we can't participate in daily occupations, due to injury, illness, disability or social and environmental circumstances, occupational therapists help find solutions to address the meaningful everyday activities of life. Occupational therapy also helps prevent disability or illness and enhances the way we participate in our communities and lives. Occupational therapy helps us engage in the occupation of living.



Why is Aboriginal Health important?

There is growing recognition of the need for improving the health of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada. The health status of Aboriginal Peoples is below the national average. The experience of many Aboriginal People with the mainstream health system has been negative often due to cultural differences. Frequently, cultural differences and the inability of health providers to appropriately address these differences have contributed to high rates of noncompliance, reluctance to visit mainstream health facilities even when service is needed and feelings of fear, disrespect and alienation.

How do occupational therapists help?

Occupational therapy service can influence the health, well-being and occupational justice of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. Occupational therapists understand the dynamic relationship between the person, occupation, and environment. Occupational therapists provide effective, compassionate, culturally safe and collaborative services with First Nations, Métis and Inuit people.

What do occupational therapists do?

- Work closely with the community to identify and develop programs
- Adapt activities and develop individualized educational and health plans for community taking into consideration different abilities
- Work with clients and their families to identify and facilitate the occupations and activities that are important for family and personal life
- Assess skills, interests, values, and strengths in order to help a client find an appropriate job
- Implement activities that teach valuable skills e.g. social skills training with a peer support group

Where do occupational therapists work?

Occupational therapists work with health care and other professionals in a variety of places such as communities, schools, workplaces, hospitals, private practices, residential homes and prisons.

Occupational therapy works!

Diane is a principal of a First Nations school in south-western BC. The school has an occupational therapist who has been coming once a month for the past three years and has spent time developing strong and trusting relationships with the teaching staff and the students. The occupational therapist worked closely with the staff to develop a fine motor and gross motor skill program for the preschool to grade 3 children. The occupational therapist helped get special computer equipment and developed and adapted the classroom activities to the individualized needs of the children. The occupational therapists also worked with the student's families to implement a health literacy programs. The occupational therapist is a great asset to the school.

