

# Occupational Therapy and Substance Use

## 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 cannot 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.



## What is a Substance Use?

Substance use arises when people engage in an excessive pattern of using alcohol or mood-altering substances from illicit drugs to pharmaceuticals. An individual with a substance abuse problem chooses occupations that inevitably will have a negative impact on their physical, mental and social health.

According to the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, the social cost of substance abuse in Canada is estimated to be \$39.8 billion and this includes the burden on the health care and law enforcement, loss of productivity in the workplace and at home due to premature death and disability.

## How do occupational therapists help?

Occupational therapists work with clients struggling with substance abuse issues. They may work with individuals to help identify strengths, values, interests, resources and challenges in order to implement plans for recovery. Occupational therapists believe that occupational performance, organization, choice and satisfaction are influenced by the relationship between personal and environmental factors. Occupational therapists approach substance abuse with this unique perspective that considers a person's needs within the context of their family and community.

## What do occupational therapists do?

- Discuss and identify the negative effects of a substance abuse pattern in the client's life.
- Establish more satisfying and meaningful patterns of time use and create opportunities for self-discovery.
- Work with clients and their families to identify the occupations and activities that are important for family, personal and work life.
- Help replace unhealthy activities with healthy, meaningful activities.
- Help to plan, initiate and track short and long term goals that enable participation in other activities.
- Advocate for federal, provincial and territorial governments' investment in comprehensive substance use programs, legislation and policies to prevent and reduce substance abuse.

## Where do occupational therapists work?

Occupational therapists work with health care and other professionals in a variety of places, such as long term care facilities, community support services, family health teams, hospitals and clients' homes. Occupational therapists also work with organizations, such as government, policy makers, care providers and community agencies to develop programs and resources.

## Occupational therapy works!

*Ling works at a peer support centre for people who experience alcohol abuse. She has been committed to assisting people in path to recovery by establishing new programs and opportunities. The centre main focuses was on recovery, however with the assistance of an occupational therapist, Ling has developed a program that helps our clients to better understand the impact of drinking on their everyday life, develop a balanced routine that includes new hobbies such as painting and cooking and learn coping strategies to stay calm and prevent a relapse. Many of the former clients volunteer and help others overcome their addictions. Ling's clients have become the advocates for the centre and help relay our programs to others. Because of Occupational Therapy, her clients learn to engage in healthier occupations.*

