

Occupational Opportunities for Asylum Seekers (OOFAS)

Welcome to the second edition of OOFAS! If you have not received this edition through the OOFAS list serve, I encourage you to join today on the following link!

https://www.jcu.edu.au/mailman/listinfo/occupational_opportunities_for_asylum_seekers

Clarifying Vision

Right from the start, let's get one thing straight. *OOFAS aims to address occupational deprivation with detained asylum seekers, TPV holders post detention and refugees in the community.* OOFAS uses "asylum seekers" in its name because detained asylum seekers experience the most grotesque occupation deprivation but OOFAS is concerned by the how occupational deprivation affects wellbeing across the whole refugee trajectory.

The last coordination team meeting, expanded and clarified our vision to help direct OOFAS projects.

OOFAS assists OT's, OT students, concerned public and professional community to address the issue of occupational deprivation of detained asylum seekers and refugees post-detention with occupational initiatives.

Note how the vision will assist our project planning -

- Retain the unique and exclusive "**occupational angle**" to complement and not duplicate other organizations
- **Stakeholders prioritised:** OT's OT students, concerned public and then professional community.
- **Vision for OT's:** appropriately *plug OT's into the trajectory* (inspire, empower, equip, initiate)
- **Vision for OT students:** *raise interest and plug into OOFAS*
- **Vision for concerned public:** *Educate RE occupation* as essential for health, occupational deprivation and the potential role of OT.
- **Vision for professional community:** *OT to be a visible and active member of the professional community representing the needs of asylum seekers*

Community Resource Directory

Click this link to start making connections with your local community organizations

<http://www.coss.net.au/cgi-bin/search/search/search.pl?collection=directory&ss=migrants>

Initiative Pack – Get Involved!

OOFAS is aiming to develop an electronic “Initiative Pack” so that OT’s have a starting point in discovering what “their groove” may be. Different people have different skills, time available to invest, different knowledge and levels of enthusiasm. OOFAS wants to be able to meet people where they’re at and respond to the question, “yes, but what can I do?”

Contact OOFAS if you have some ideas to contribute. How have you taken action thus far? Some categories of opportunity include advocacy, inservices, developing resources, surveying community organizations, networking, coordinating communications, designing websites, doing literature searches, writing comments, articles, liaising with universities, project management, interviews, research or convening a local special interest group – and that’s not all! There is a groove for everyone, so we want to hear from you to create a snazzy “initiate pack”.

Children & Youth in Detention

The following is an excerpt from a report “Chilout” has prepared to be presented to DIIMA that reviews the reports on the treatment of children in detention. Highlighted are sections you can read with “occupational eyes” – especially considering the effects of occupational deprivation.

“All adolescents interviewed expressed **extreme distress at not being able to access education and activities**. Teenagers interviewed by the legal team

uniformly reported high levels of boredom, depression and lack of motivation.

Involvement of adolescents in adult activities was rare. Adolescents expressed the feeling that “there was nothing to do” and that this was of significant concern to them. Some of them reported that ***when they first came to Woomera Detention Centre they were keen to be involved in activities. As time passed however and if their applications for temporary protection were rejected, adolescents became too depressed to participate in education or recreational activities...*** low participation rates of adolescents in activities are directly related to the management of the detention centre...

Interviewees attribute low attendance to depression amongst asylum seekers caused by the environment and lack of motivation by Australasian Correctional Management program organizers. The ACM activities officer acknowledges that apart from the school, participation in activities is very low. She commented that participation would be very high on intake, but would deteriorate to very low levels, as a consequence of depression and the time taken to process visas.”

(The Association of Major Charitable Organisations 2002)

The full report can be accessed at http://www.chilout.org/files/ChilOut_report_to_DIMIA.doc

Website FAQ

The Refugee Council of Australia www.refugeecouncil.org.au is a wealth of resources, updates and links. I recommend the FAQ stats and facts as a great place to start getting your head around the broader issues. If you've visited a great website, write in!

Book Review

An estimated 80% of the world's 24 million refugees are women and children. Women often have unique occupational roles that cement communities together, bring up children and care for elders. So assisting women to cope with refugee experiences is pivotal for the future of the entire community.

"Nobody Wants to Talk About It – Refugee Women's Mental Health" is a snapshot into the experiences of refugee women and provides a unique opportunity for occupational therapists to read with "occupational eyes" considering impact on occupational performance.

By introducing common issues refugee women face (eg. life in refugee camps, rape as systemized torture, the loss of family, bureaucracy etc), OT's can begin to build a picture of occupational issues such as occupational adaptation, loss of occupational identity, skills for living, healing occupations for trauma and so on.

Following chapters address specific issues such as employment, female genital mutilation, gender role change, trauma and links it with mental health. This research is a

great overview and a great opportunity to see the occupational issues and impacts between the lines.

Ferguson, B. & Pittaway, E. (Eds) (1999) *Nobody wants to talk about it – refugee women's mental health*. Sydney: Transcultural Mental Health Center.

Service in the Spotlight

The *refugee claimants center* in Brisbane provides a drop in centre, English language classes, emotional support, information and referral, no interest loans for employment purposes, limited emergency relief, computer skills, and assistance with accommodation, food, employment and health (including dental health).

Other activities include murals, camping, a soccer team, a choir, regular parties and lunches at the Centre. Browse for more info - <http://www.refugees.org.au/>

What about *your local area*? Email in a service spotlight so we know what is out there and where OT may fit into the picture!

Radio National Transcripts

The following link will take you direct to a sensational collection of reports and interviews from a simple key word search of the site. Enjoy.

http://search.abc.net.au/search/search.cgi?form=simple&num_ranks=20&collection=abcall&meta_w=rn&meta_v=rn&query=detained+asylum+seekers

Introducing. . .

**The OOFAS Coordination Team:
Clarissa, Jeanette & Melina**

(Melina will feature next edition)

Jeanette Isaacs-Young

As a new graduate, in Melbourne in the early seventies, I was privileged to be on the State OT executive. My contemporaries included a number of inspiring role models for OT with personal commitment to social justice issues, who brought these ideals into their professional roles with great effect.

I met Elizabeth Townsend, of CAOT, when we were both tutoring in OT schools, and have kept a close eye on her impact in the international OT realm over the interceding decades, while I withdrew to raise my young women.

Meeting Clarissa when she was a student on placement left a strong impression, and we naturally gravitated to similar streams at the OT National conference 2003. I have been excited to also meet Mel, about whom I heard at an OT week breakfast 2002, when a paper about her work in Nepal was read by a colleague.

My career has been punctuated by travel to many of the countries from which refugees and asylum seekers originate, and a compassionate response to 'those less fortunate' has been a fundamental value in my family. To encourage this initiative has been a most natural and rewarding opportunity.

Clarissa Wilson

After a stint in India, I dreamed of taking the potential of OT "outside the box" with marginalized populations. I went to the OT22 National Conference (2003) very conscious of occupational deprivation because I see it's effects everyday in at work in a high secure forensic setting.

OOFAS sprung out of a realization that detained asylum seekers are also being damaged by occupational deprivation. And since occupation is our core business, we have an ethical responsibility to respond. After keeping in touch with Jeanette and Melina, OOFAS was born!

It's been a thrill to see the situation through "occupational eyes", the potential OT role, the openness of the profession and the realization that this initiative could go as far and as wide as we have the initiative to take it!

It's also exciting to think that the development of OOFAS could inspire, empower & equip OT's to initiate action with other marginalized populations through a shared model, resources and processes!

OO4AS Wants to Hear From You!

Let's get the communication rolling in 2004! Zap a paragraph for the next edition highlighting who you are, how you came to be interested in OO4AS, any pursuits thus far and your vision for the OT role.

Please alert the Coordination Team if you don't want to receive future editions of OOFAS NEWS