

Occupational therapy for social change: The Facing Up example

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Occupational justice focuses on equitable access for marginalised groups. However, occupational injustice is part of the lived reality for many people. For example, the impact of poverty and apartheid in South Africa continues to have an influence on marginalised youth in Cape Town. Their opportunities and capacity to participate productively is compromised. Exposure and access to opportunities, does not guarantee changes in their participation. Occupational therapists have to think about how their practice could contribute to making the ideals embedded in occupational justice reality for youth such as these. This includes drawing on local contextual knowledge to guide practice. It also entails selecting and integrating interdisciplinary and critical theories to shape practice in order to address issues of equity. This paper discusses an innovative, contextually relevant approach to occupational therapy at Facing Up. Facing Up is a community organisation offering occupation based services to youth. The case story of "Vukhani ma'Afrika" (meaning "Wake Up/Rise Up Africa") is revealed. "Vukhani ma'Afrika" is a secondary school film club, whose story illustrates how social action can be facilitated through occupational therapy. The film club's journey from having the dream of becoming producers to producing documentaries that reflect their lives is narrated. Negotiating the complex historical, social, cultural and economic contextual influences are central to this intervention. The principles and strategies for occupation based practice drawn from organisational learning and development practice are presented. The specific team and action learning techniques are explained. The value of this for building youth's capacity and harnessing community activism is described. It offers a glimpse of how occupational therapy can potentially contribute to promoting occupational justice. The application of theory to practice explores modes of practice that honours the complexities of daily occupations with socio-economic and historical inequities. The opportunities that this creates for further research are identified.