

# Occupational Therapy and Social Inclusion

## 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 social inclusion and why is it important?

Social inclusion is a concept that aims to ensure that all people have access to the same rights, services and benefits as well as access to employment and work, income and economic resources, material resources, education and skills, health, housing, social resources, community resources, and personal safety. Social inclusion recognizes and values diversity, by focusing on people's sense of belonging and ensuring social equality and participation. Social inclusion can impact the delivery of national, regional and local programs and services to meet the needs of a diverse clientele.

According to Statistics Canada Canadian Survey on Disability, 2012, about 3.8 million people, or 13.7% of Canadians aged 15 and older, reported being limited in their daily activities because of a disability. Statistics Canada also reports that 14.9 per cent of Canadians have low income (or living below the poverty line), with 13.3 per cent of children living in poverty.

## How do occupational therapists help?

Occupational therapists have the knowledge and skills to identify factors that allow people to engage in daily activities and to facilitate the removal of barriers to participation. Occupational therapists strive to support individuals to realise their potential by enabling them to participate in and contribute to society.

## What do occupational therapists do?

- develop policy and programs that are founded on the principles of social inclusion
- help modify teaching strategies to include more verbal support, problem solving and videotaped instruction for clients with a variety of needs
- collaborate with stakeholders such as national and regional jurisdictions, professional associations, health and human service organizations and communities to promote social inclusion in programs and services in order to promote social inclusion
- promote understanding of the relationship between social inclusion, occupational engagement and health and well-being
- educate general public, services providers and decision makers with social inclusion resources
- collaborate in research to promote social inclusion

## 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!

*Rob owns a martial arts studio and is a martial arts instructor. The studio has a number of students who have issues with their attention and/or motor coordination. Rob and his fellow instructors have struggled with how to effectively teach people with a variety of learning styles so that they have an optimal and enjoyable experience. Rob consulted an occupational therapist who helped the instructors understand the learning challenges of specific students and helped modify teaching strategies to include more verbal support, problem solving and videotaped instruction. The occupational therapist also suggested equipment adaptations that allow for a more gradual progression of activities. As a result of the input, the studio has developed a positive reputation in the community as a welcoming and inclusive program which has been very helpful in business development. Because of occupational therapy, Rob can offer martial arts training to more people.*

