

Occupational Therapy in Youth/Juvenile Justice

For decades, psychology was the dominant allied health profession in the forensic sector. However, in some jurisdictions throughout the world, Occupational Therapy (alongside Speech-Language Pathology) are showing that a multi-disciplinary approach can better serve the needs of the justice population. In fact, for over ten years Occupational Therapists from Block Building Therapies have worked in partnership with the Intensive Rehabilitative Custody and Supervision (IRCS) Program to help offenders develop the functional skills they need to live an independent and law-abiding lifestyle.

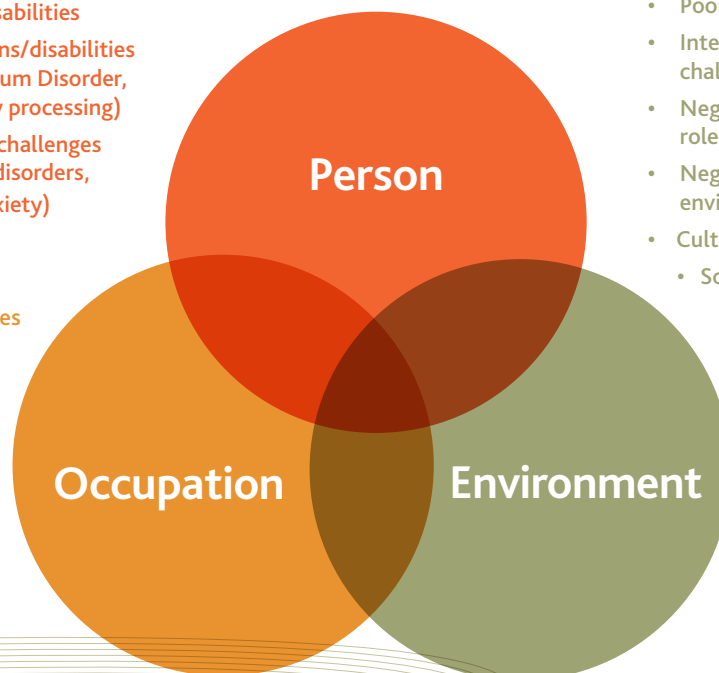
The Justice Population

The graphic below provides a broad overview to help understand the needs of the justice population. The common needs are divided into three categories – the Person domain includes the intrinsic factors that impact an individual ‘from within’, such as physical, psychological and emotional health; cultural background, personality, cognition. The Environmental domain includes the extrinsic, or external, factors such as the physical, cultural, institutional, social, and socio-economic environment. The Occupation refers to the groups of tasks that a person engages in to meet their self-maintenance, expression and fulfillment.:

Over-representation of:

- Childhood/developmental trauma
- Language and communication disorders
- Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD)
- Intellectual Disabilities
- Other conditions/disabilities (Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, sensory processing)
- Mental health challenges (attachment disorders, depression, anxiety)

- Individual has dominant roles and routines associated with anti-social behaviour
- Lack of engagement or opportunities with pro-social leisure activities
- Lack of opportunities to develop the skills they will require to be independent



- Poor education experiences/attainment
- Intergenerational mental health challenges
- Negative peer and intergenerational role modelling
- Negatively impacted by institutional environment (custodial facilities)
- Cultural disengagement
 - Socio-economic pressures & lack of resources/opportunities
 - Well-meaning staff/services 'doing for' rather than 'doing with'

The role of Occupational Therapists in the Justice system

Occupational Therapists work to improve an individual's ability to complete more tasks (or occupations) independently, while taking into consideration the Personal and Environmental factors listed above which can limit an individual's ability, willingness or motivation to engage. Broadly, an Occupational Therapist's role in the justice system is to:

- Improve an individual's skills to increase their independence. These skills can include:
 - o Self care
 - o Functional life skills (e.g. managing social services, finding and maintaining employment/accommodation)
- Provide the 'just right' level of support and scaffolding to develop new skills and meet demands
- Address the environmental barriers to success and support individuals to overcome these challenges
- Provide therapeutic interventions to overcome the intrinsic challenges that impact their ability to develop the skills they need, or develop compensatory strategies to live with disability or life-long challenges
- Help individuals to develop pro-social roles and routines
- Provide opportunities for successful independent living skill development.



For further assessment, therapy, consultation and/or education on Occupational Therapy in Youth/Juvenile Justice, contact Block Building Therapies at:

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Referral forms for new assessments are also available online at our website: www.blockbuilding.ca