

Here We Come Ready or Not: Occupational Therapy Program to Help Prepare Prisoners for Reentry into Society

Jeffrey L. Crabtree, OTD, MS, OT, FAOTA, Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy, School of Health and Rehabilitation Science, Indiana University; David Ohm, BS, Jarrod Wall, BS, MS, Joseph Ray, BS, all Participation Action Researchers; Mackenzie Cheesman, BS, Lainey Goldman, BA, Emilea Ridener, BS, Kelsey Rosswurm, BS, all Department of Occupational Therapy graduate students

Abstract

Background: In 2013 about 10 million people were involved in various stages of imprisonment world-wide. In that same year there were about 1,574,700 persons in state and federal prisons in the United States, and 29,905 in Indiana (state and federal) prisons. Most of those people will return to society, but for how long? According to the most recent data available, a little over two-thirds (67.8%) of those released were arrested for a new crime within 3 years and over three-quarters (76.6%) were arrested for a new crime within 5 years. Education is one of the most effective reducers of recidivism, but it is unclear what kinds of education best prepare people to not only return to society, but to thrive in society. **Objectives:** The first of a two-part study explored how 27 residents of a minimum security prison responded to an Occupational Therapy Community Living Skills Program (OTCLS) developed to help prepare residents for successful reentry into society. **Method:** Using a participatory action research (PAR) approach, we interviewed 27 residents who completed the program. Once the semi-structured interviews were transcribed, the PAR team conducted a summative content analysis of the data. **Results:** Initial content analysis yielded five concepts: doing; information; re-entry fears (socialization); technology; and self-worth. Participants seemed to gain a sense of self-worth by doing activities related to information gathering, socialization, and technology. Further interpretation yielded three overlapping themes: 1) validation of self-worth (participants expressed how self-validating it is to have “real people” come in to help), 2) doing (role playing, a common activity, “...was kind of nerve-wracking at first then [I] began to slowly ease into it...”), and 3) concerns about the future (one resident summed up the value of the program: having “...something real positive you’re looking forward to...helps in dissipating the fears perhaps in reentry.”). **Conclusions:** This retrospective study identified potentially powerful elements of a successful re-entry program. In the second part of the study we will evaluate a revised program using a pre-test; post-test and follow-up approach to learn more about what kinds of education best prepare people to not only return to society, but to thrive in society.