

Improving the quality of life of the elderly people.

Therapy Set – a set of therapeutic aids

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The aim of the project entitled "Improving the quality of life of the elderly people. Therapy Set - a set of therapeutic aids" is to improve the quality of life of elderly people, residents of social welfare homes, by increasing access to occupational therapy. The project was developed in close cooperation with the Ludwik and Anna Helcel Nursing Home in Kraków. During my observation, I participated for several months in occupational therapy workshops at the above-mentioned facility. The project solution meets the needs of two groups of recipients - able-bodied people, regular participants of occupational therapy, and people who do not leave their beds due to health condition. The latter group is particularly numerous in the center with which I cooperated - there are as many as 230 bed-ridden people living there.

The designed set is a work tool of occupational therapists and volunteers, thanks to which it is possible to introduce occupational therapy to the wards of the Nursing Home. It facilitates carrying out therapy in a manner adequate to the capabilities and needs of the participant. Qualified and well-prepared staff has a significant impact on improving the quality of life of the Nursing Home residents, occupational therapy participants.

In the first part of the paper, entitled *Analysis - a senior in a social welfare home*, I analyze in detail the user profile, which is a person over 65 years old. Age seems to be the only common feature of the representatives of this group, as the process of aging of the body takes place in a very individualized way. I describe the aging process of individual senses, small motor skills and the impact of medical conditions on the functional abilities of seniors. I then turn to the section on caring for the elderly, from family care to institutional care. I describe the living conditions in a nursing

home and the factors that influence the quality of life for residents. An important part of the daily schedule in any nursing home is occupational therapy. In the remainder of this paper, I go on to analyze occupational therapy from its origins, through the differences in contemporary understanding of therapy, to occupational therapy in geriatrics. Sensory activation is the concept of a method of working with seniors that aims to stimulate the senses, exercise small and large motor skills, and train memory by referring to memories.

In the second part of the paper, under the title *Research – observations and unstructured interviews*, I describe participant observation conducted in the Ludwik and Anna Helcel Nursing Home. The purpose of the observations was to investigate the needs of the staff and therapy participants. The aim of the unstructured interviews conducted with the therapists, a psychologist and a physiotherapist, was to compare the type of occupational therapy conducted in the Ludwik and Anna Helcel Nursing Home and in other social welfare homes and other centers, including hospital wards.

In the third part called *Project – set of therapeutic aids*, I describe the work on the project, cooperation with physiotherapist and occupational therapists employed in the institution and the first prototype of the project - a set of seven therapeutic aids, which was tested in the center.

In the fourth and last part titled *Testing the solution*, I describe a series of six workshops with the residents of the above mentioned Nursing Home and the testing of the project on the wards of the Nursing Home, which provided a basis for introducing changes in the project so that it meets the needs and expectations of the target group.

Project description

Therapy Set is a set of therapeutic aids designed for elderly people, residents of social welfare homes. The set consists of seven aids enabling comprehensive therapy for seniors. The aids can be produced by residents of social welfare homes within the framework of occupational therapy workshops as well as used in therapy and physiotherapy usually conducted at the bedside. An important element of the project are instructions for the realization of the aids and scenarios for activities and exercises. The project takes into account the possibility of conducting classes by unqualified persons – volunteers and families of residents.

Making therapeutic aids during occupational therapy workshops allows to reduce the price of the set. The cost of making all seven aids is about 180 PLN. All the aids are made of readily available materials (e.g. ready-made wooden elements, fabrics and materials available in small sheets).

Each of the aids is aimed at influencing a different sense, some of them have a polysensory effect. The exercise scenarios were developed by physiotherapist Barbara Basiura (Skalna).

"Memory" – sight

A perceptual and perceptive influence. Remembering the position of the cards and putting them into pairs.

"Threading beads" – sight, touch

Exercising fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination. Threading beads according to the instructions provided, beads vary in size.

"Threading beads II" – sight

Exercise of fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination. Threading beads according to the attached instructions, the beads vary in pattern.

"Weight bags" – proprioception, touch, smell

Interaction with proprioception (feeling one's own body). The bags can be used as a weight or as a thermophore.

"Scented sequences" – smell

Developing concentration, improving short-term memory. Arranging sequences of smells and guessing the names.

"Sound bingo" – hearing

Enriching cognitive skills and stimulating curiosity about the world. Identifying sounds and marking them on cards.

"Plasticity of memory" – touch

Relaxing and anti-stress effect. Referring to pleasant memories anchored in long-term memory.

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