

News

from the Kazakh Ergotherapy Association

May 2016

Volume 1, Issue 2

Word from the President

Evelien Visser

The country of Kazakhstan is developing incredibly fast. It is a privilege to watch this happen, and at the same time to be a part of it! As an association we never run out of ideas of how to develop Occupational Therapy (OT) in Kazakhstan. There are many opportunities to grow our profession as there is such a need for OT. We think about hospitals and health care centres that could use Occupational Therapists; about all the equipment that could be distributed; and about courses that could educate future OTs.

But before we consider all this we need to answer the question that we get asked many times: i.e.: "What is Occupational Therapy?"

In this newsletter a few of our Occupational Therapists working in Kazakhstan will share stories about how Occupational Therapy has improved somebody's quality of life.

We hope that you will enjoy these fantastic stories and will become interested in growing our profession in Kazakhstan!



Occupational Therapy: it's all about quality of life

Gerdine Lok – Shymkent

Let me introduce you to a special girl: Ainura* (12 years old). She was born after a normal pregnancy as the fifth child in the family. She was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy, a dislocated hip (she never received treatment for this), and blindness. I met Ainura with her mum at the children's hospital.

Ainura wasn't able to talk, sit or walk, not to mention eat or play by herself. Her mum was able to communicate with her by 'reading' her facial expressions. Ainura spends the whole day at home lying on a mattress, while her mother is busy taking care of the other children and running the household. You might wonder what quality of life she has and whether there's anything we can do for her. The answer is: YES!

Ainura is just an example of situations where OT can be of great help. One of the core values of OT is striving for quality of life for both the child and his/her environment. In Ainura's case we were able to help the mother to find new positions for her daughter to sit. These were on the couch with the support of pillows; on the floor, and using corners to support her. We were able to explain that Ainura might not be able to sit all by herself, but these new positions will improve her blood circulation and will make her more a part of daily life (instead of spending the whole day in her own room), and will give her mother a much better position to feed in her since swallowing is easier when sitting. We made some simple drawings of the different positions and places of support for the mother to take home. She had always thought and heard that it's best for her daughter to lay down. We wish that we had seen Ainura when she was much younger!

Every person, every child is unique and defines quality of life in a different way. This is the strength of OT: valuing every human life from a holistic point of view and helping them to reach the highest quality of life – within the limitations and disabilities that are there.

*For privacy reasons, names have been changed

Enabling occupation: the first steps

Nathan Visser

Ajalum could never move by herself. Her mother and caretakers were constantly carrying her everywhere.

The Occupational Therapist determined that with a backward walker equipped with a sling Ajalum would be able to take steps. Her balance and muscle power wouldn't be sufficient to keep walking, but a sling would enable her to sit down safely if she needed. Trying this out for the first time, Ajalum took her first steps and she loved it!

When she received her own walker Ajalum was excited. Her mother said: "Thank you so much for making my daughter's first steps possible!"

A month later Ajalum's life had changed in many ways. The caregivers at her kindergarten said: "Before we always carried her but now she walks when you hold her hand. Also she is really actively crawling around the room, which she never did before. She even goes up and down the stairs by herself and doesn't want to be carried anymore!"

Clearly the simple walker did something more to Ajalum than only making her walk. Through it she realizes her own capacities and uses her physical ability. She went from being an insecure and frightened child into a smiling and very active girl!

This is what Occupational Therapy believes, if people are enabled to use their abilities, this leads to many more positive changes.

Home visits around Almaty

Linda Beadle

My teammate and myself do home visits to people with disabilities who live on the outskirts of Almaty and who often have limited access to health care. We are often the only rehabilitation treatment that a person will get.

As a result we end up having to do OT as well as activities, that in a team setting would be done by a physiotherapist or speech therapist (and sometimes we do some basic nursing too) This is necessary to ensure that the person can make as full a recovery after injury, or live as full a life as possible with a disability.

Sam* is a 20 year old man who dived into a shallow river and sustained a spinal cord injury. The doctors sent him home to die without any sort of rehab or treatment plan. He spends his days lying on a low bed with a makeshift frame over him with ropes to pull himself up. His mom nurses him. When we go and see him, we check his pressure sores and do basic wound treatment, we do passive mobilization of his lower limbs to reduce the swelling and increase blood flow. We work on upper limb mobilization and reducing tone and stretching his hands to prevent contractures. We work on transfers and sitting balance and try to get weight through his lower limbs. After all that we work on functional daily activities like eating and dressing. Treating in these contexts often takes a bit of creativity and improvisation!



The power of Occupational Therapy

Bouwine van Eeden Petersman

As an Occupational Therapist, seeing disabled children in Kazakhstan is seeing the strength of OT. In Kazakhstan, disabled children are not stimulated and empowered to participate in daily activities. One example of this, is a little story from a kindergarten for disabled children. One girl, Aigul* was laying passively, sadly and quietly in the classroom. Aigul has cerebral palsy and is not able to walk without help. Aigul has walked with a walker before already, so when she was asked if she wanted to walk she immediately said: "yes"! After a few minutes of walking, Aigul almost ran through the corridor of the building, together with another girl, who was also training with a walker. Aigul was talking and laughing with the other girl. The girl had changed completely in the few minutes that she was able to move around by herself, instead of laying passively in the classroom. This is one of the many examples which shows that 'enabling people to participate in everyday life' has a huge positive impact on wellbeing as well on the quality of life of people!

Edited by Bouwine van Eeden Petersman

This newsletter will be distributed every three months. Do you have any questions or recommendations? Or do you want to unsubscribe from the newsletter? Please contact info@ergotherapy.kz