

## **POSITION STATEMENT**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY, SUSTAINABLE PRACTICE WITHIN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

#### **Introductory statement of the purpose of the paper**

This paper outlines the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) position on environmental sustainability. It is vital that occupational therapists work, in their core role centring on occupation and occupational performance, towards environmental sustainability within the profession and collaboratively with clients and communities.

It is the challenge for occupational therapists to enable human development<sup>1</sup> and individual well-being whilst promoting environmentally sustainable well-being. This provides new opportunities to realign occupational therapy practice with global issues.

#### **Statement of the position being taken**

The impacts of global climate change<sup>2</sup> are deemed the biggest challenge to human well-being.<sup>3</sup> The WFOT recognises the interconnections among climate change, global health and sustainable development. Economic, social and environmental agendas must be addressed in order to meet the world population's present day needs without jeopardising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.<sup>4</sup>

The WFOT recognises that human driven global climate change, overuse of finite natural resources, decreasing biodiversity, over-population and demographic trends such as inequitable wealth distribution have brought about a crisis for environmental sustainability. The WFOT encourages occupational therapists and occupational therapy students to use their expertise and knowledge about occupations and occupational performance to participate in the resolution of these major global problems.

The WFOT agrees with the position<sup>5</sup> that environmental sustainability supports all aspects of human well-being, described as basic material satisfaction, freedom of choice and action, health, security and good social relations.

The WFOT supports<sup>6</sup> adopting a global perspective which acts upon the following global health values<sup>7</sup>:

- Interdependence: that all people are interconnected and of equal value, that we can learn from each other and interact with mutual respect and to mutual benefit
- Independence: that a person can lead a life they value based on their individual identity
- Rights: that health is a human right, incorporating concepts of justice, transparency and accountability.

#### **Statement of the significance of the issue to occupational therapy**

The WFOT requires occupational therapists to work with individuals and communities to create a society in which all people pursue personal occupational objectives in a sustainable manner.

Occupational therapists are encouraged to re-evaluate practice models and expand clinical reasoning about occupational performance to include sustainable practice.

The WFOT Disaster Preparedness and Response project supports occupational therapists in countries experiencing significant negative impact of climate change to focus their practice on the adaptation of environmental needs. Similarly, the WFOT encourages occupational therapists working with clients wishing to live more sustainable lives to promote environmentally sustainable occupational performance and lifestyles.<sup>8</sup>

### **Statement of the significance of the position to society**

Incorporating a perspective on sustainability will enable occupational therapy to play an important role towards a vision of environmentally sustainable, fair and healthy societies.

### **Challenges and Strategies for Occupational Therapy**

- Education has been identified as one of the most powerful means of creating a climate culture change.<sup>9</sup> It is recommended that new educational materials be developed.
- Research is required to develop the emerging evidence base around sustainable occupational performance and occupational therapy practice. New research partnerships are needed between different disciplines and member countries.
- National Associations can support the principles of environmentally sustainable best practice dependent on their country's environmental, social and economic context. National associations are encouraged to share examples of environmentally sustainable best practice.

### **Conclusion**

This position paper describes the WFOT position on how current global challenges provide compelling reasons for occupational therapists to engage in environmental sustainable practice.

**Approved by:** The WFOT Council Meeting, Taiwan, March 2012.

### **References**

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<sup>2</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2007) *Climate change 2007: The physical science basis: Summary for policy makers*. Geneva: IPCC Secretariat.

<sup>3</sup> UCL Lancet Commission. (2009) 'Managing the health effects of climate change', *The Lancet*, 373(9676), p.1693-1733.

<sup>4</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987) *Our Common Future: Brundtland Report*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. (2005) *Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: Current State and Trends: Findings of the Condition and Trends Working Group*. Hassan R, Scholes R and Ash N (Eds). London: Island Press.

<sup>6</sup> World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT). (2006) *Position statement on human rights*. Forrestfield Au: World Federation of Occupational Therapists.

<sup>7</sup> Crisp, N. (2010) *Turning the world upside down: The search for global health in the 21st century*. London: Royal Society of Medicine Press.

<sup>8</sup> Dieterle, C. (2009) Green Lifestyle Redesign®: A wellness program for environmental sustainability. *Poster session presented at the 89th Annual Conference of the American Occupational Therapy Association, Houston, Texas, 23-26 April 2009*.

<sup>9</sup> Orr, D. (2009) *Down to the wire: Confronting climate collapse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.