

## **POSITION STATEMENT**

### **INCLUSIVE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY EDUCATION**

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

The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, forty-eighth session, resolution 48/96, annex, of 20 December 1993. This document lays out clearly a scope of intention to enable people with disabilities to participate fully in their lives, their communities and their world. One of the target areas for equal participation that is articulated within this document is “Education”. It is clearly stated that individuals living with disabilities should be enabled to participate at all levels of education. Groups identified for particular attention include adults with disabilities, particularly women. The assurance of accessible education programs in occupational therapy is therefore a critical goal to be achieved and one that addresses the importance of the involvement of WFOT to promote understanding and advocate for this objective with member states. This position paper underscores the commitment of the WFOT to promote and uphold the principles of inclusive occupational therapy education in the professional preparation of its member states around the world.

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

WFOT believes that the right to inclusive education is paramount and non-negotiable. Occupational therapy is a profession that strives to enable individuals to realize their potential, developing meaning in life and advocating for ability. Therefore, it is imperative that occupational therapy educational programs are accessible to students with disabilities and that the strategies employed to meet this goal become models for others to emulate.

#### **Substantiating rationale for the position**

This position paper will serve to support the UN position as addressed in Resolution 48/96. It will also exemplify occupational therapy’s professional mandate of promoting enablement and engagement for all citizens through the multiple roles of practitioner, educator, researcher and advocate. The UN states that: “Inclusive quality education is based on the right of all learners to a quality education that meets basic learning needs and enriches lives. Focusing particularly on vulnerable and marginalized groups, it seeks to develop the full potential of every individual. The ultimate goal of inclusive quality education is to end all forms of discrimination and foster social cohesion” (<http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL>)

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

By enabling the inclusion of individuals with disabilities into occupational therapy educational programs, society is confronted with many opportunities: to hire therapists with disabilities; to heighten its awareness of matters pertaining to the fuller integration of people with disabilities; and, enriching practitioners’ commitment to a fully inclusive society.

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

The profession of occupational therapy will thrive from the recognition awarded to it once its openness and accessibility to learners with disabilities is recognized. By the acceptance of individuals living with disability into educational programs in occupational therapy, the very philosophy of the profession is exemplified and such students become models and examples for others to follow. This is truly the embodiment of the profession's mission.

## **Challenges**

Over the past two years, a survey was undertaken of occupational therapy educational programs around the world to gain an understanding of how accessible and inclusive these programs were. Results of this survey are available in an article published in 2008. Despite good intentions and varying degrees of commitment to this ideal, there are key challenges that are commonly faced. Government statutes regarding educational accessibility vary widely from country to country; regional and local governments, in turn, interpret any existing legislation in their own manner; institutions create policies to support laws, but yet are constrained by available resources or priorities of leadership; individual Schools and Programs seek to unravel the complexities of the layers of policy, while being fully committed to the need for graduating safe, informed and competent practitioners.

## **Strategies**

Occupational therapists should be leaders in promoting all aspects of inclusive education including professional preparation. There is a clear need to engender awareness and commitment in occupational therapists world-wide to ensure that our educational programs are welcoming and supportive of learners living with disabilities. An action template will be developed to assist members to sharpen awareness and facilitate understanding. Sharing the application of this template through WFOT will provide a rich forum for mutual support in advocating and making the necessary changes. Advocacy materials will be developed for use by members in their efforts to make an impact on the broader system.

## **Education**

There are needs for education at all levels in order to enable the development and maintenance of an accessible and open educational culture for the preparation of occupational therapy practitioners.

## **Conclusion**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is the century of inclusion. Occupational therapy is expanding its professional vision, actively assuming a leadership role in promoting policies that fully support the inclusion of all citizens with disabilities in all aspects of community life. This position statement strongly reinforces this commitment.

## **Reference**

Bonny Jung, Penny Salvatori, Mary Tremblay, Sue Baptiste & Kit Sinclair (2008) Inclusive Occupational Therapy Education: An international perspective, *World Federation of Occupational Therapists Bulletin*, 57:1, 33-42, DOI: [10.1179/otb.2008.57.1.007](https://doi.org/10.1179/otb.2008.57.1.007)