

Delivering an Occupation-focused Cognitive Remediation Therapy (CRT) Programme within an Aotearoa New Zealand Mental Health Service: Occupational Therapists and Service Leaders' Experiences

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Background and Rationale

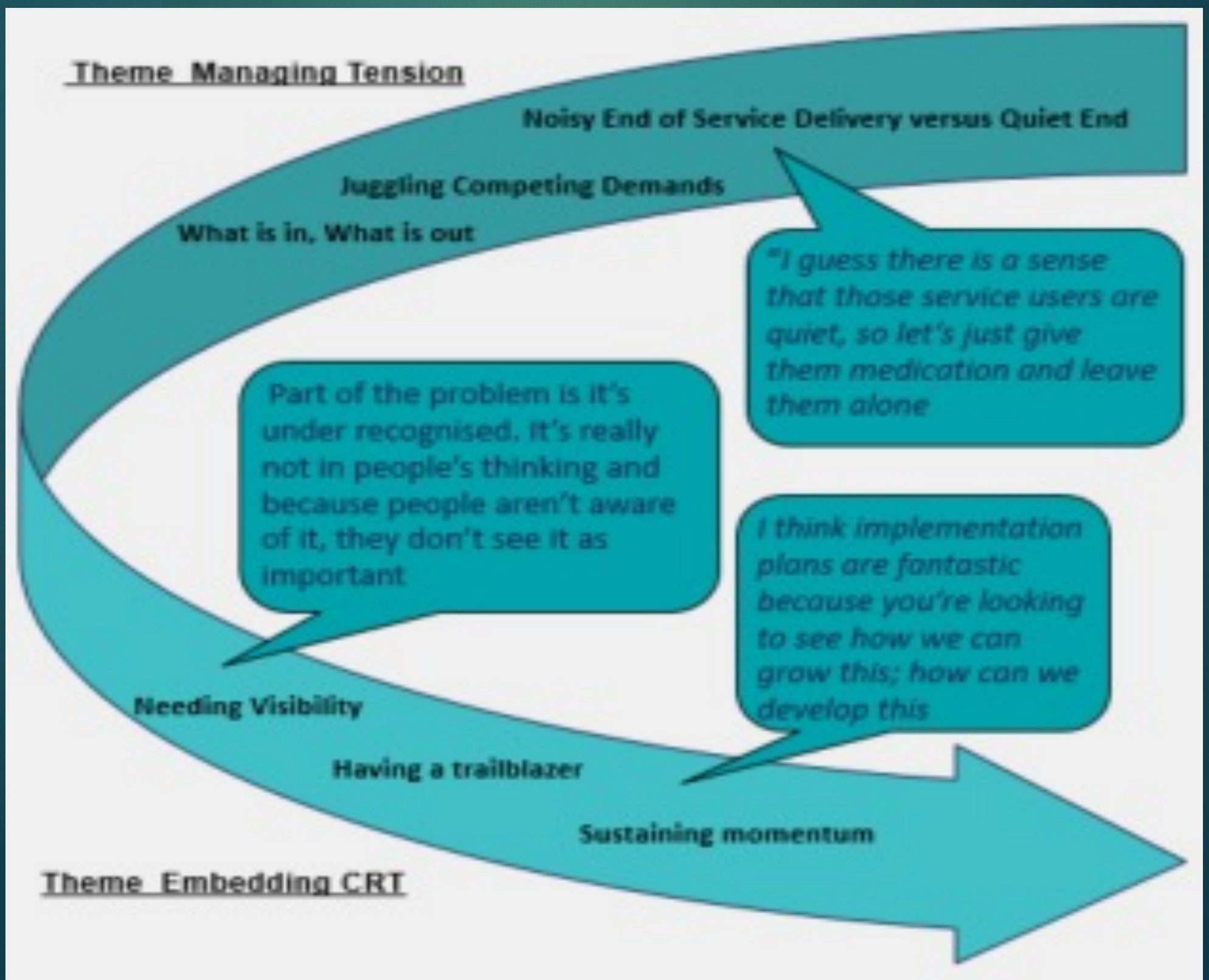
People with enduring psychotic illness (EPI) face cognitive difficulties which impact their social and occupational functioning. Cognitive remediation therapy (CRT) is an intervention that targets cognitive difficulties through structured activities and exercises to strengthen impaired cognitive skills (1). Mental health services in New Zealand have started delivering a CRT programme that specifically supports service users to embed cognitive gains from CRT into their daily occupations. Little is known about how to effectively deliver this intervention

Aim And Methods

This study explored how an occupation-focused CRT programme was delivered in a public mental health setting with the aim to understand key factors that will support nation wide uptake of the programme. A qualitative constructivist case study was conducted including interviews with organisational leaders who decide on service delivery options, occupational therapists who delivered the programme and service users who received the programme, alongside document analysis. This presentation focuses on leaders' and therapists' experiences.

Findings

Leaders: Leaders experienced tensions balancing limited resources between acute care and EPI based support. They faced uncertainty over who should deliver CRT. They valued the programme and emphasized need for improved visibility, a dedicated trailblazer, clear communication, and an implementation plan

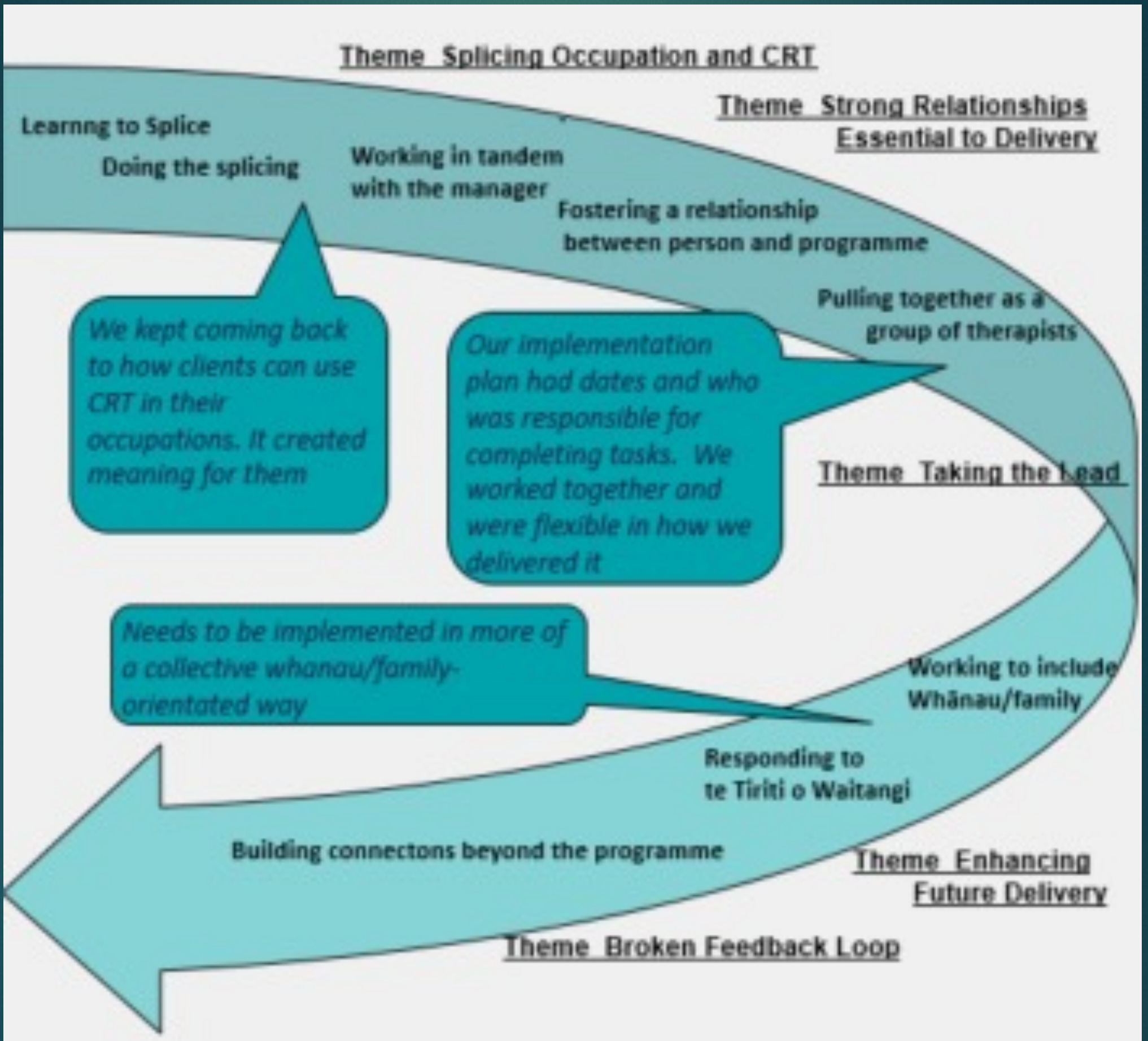


Findings Continued

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Occupational Therapists: Occupational therapists experiences of CRT knowledge was woven with occupational therapy knowledge to support delivery. They emphasised leadership and good relationships as essential, and shared considerations for enhancing future delivery. Communication gaps between staff, leaders, non-government organisations (NGOs) and therapists caused broken feedback loops that hampered ongoing delivery.



Discussion

Without effective implementation, benefits and sustainability of occupation focused CRT are constrained. This study identified challenges hindering programme delivery, such as lack of clear direction and barriers to communication. It highlighted the need for leadership, training, and cultural responsiveness. The study provides valuable insights to guide effective CRT delivery and adds to the limited evidence base of occupation-focused CRT implementation in real world settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DELIVERING AN OCCUPATION-FOCUSED CRT PROGRAMME FROM LEADERS' AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS' PERSPECTIVES

- Prioritise nationwide delivery of culturally informed, occupation-focused CRT programmes that ensure equitable access
- Support flexibility in programme delivery with dedicated leadership, clear implementation plans and managers' support
- Develop CRT programmes by Māori for Māori, prioritising Māori/Pasifika clinicians for training and funding
- Develop clear feedback mechanisms capturing outcomes to inform all stakeholders
- Work in partnership with NGOs to deliver the programme and support skill acquisition in everyday life

Conclusion

Without effective implementation, benefits and sustainability of occupation-focused CRT are constrained. This study identified challenges hindering programme delivery, such as lack of clear direction and barriers to communication, highlighting the need for leadership, training, and cultural responsiveness. Having an evidence-based intervention to address cognitive thinking skills is essential. But if CRT programmes are not embedded into real-world practice context, then it remains of little benefit to those who need it. The study provides valuable insights to guide effective programme delivery and adds to the limited evidence base of CRT implementation in real world settings. Cognitive difficulties have gone unaddressed for too long in mental health services and the time for change is now. It is our role as occupational therapists: to bring evidence to life through meaningful occupation and real-world change.

References

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