



Exploring “Real Times, Real Life” in Occupational Therapy

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At the Dr. Everett Chalmers Regional Hospital in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Occupational Therapist Nancy Morin has introduced a new vocational group into Day Therapy, an outpatient psychiatry program. *Real Times, Real Life* [1] is a component of the *Real Game Series*, designed to engage people of all ages in understanding the changing world of work and in making choices that lead to satisfying work and balanced lifestyles.

The *Real Game Series* and its underlying framework, *Blueprint for Life/Work Designs* [3], were created through a partnership between the National Life/Work Centre, Human Resources Development Canada, the Canadian Career Information Partnership, and the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee/State Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC/SOICC) network in the United States. *Blueprint* consists of competencies that Canadians must master from childhood to adulthood in order to function effectively in life and work. These competencies are organized into three major areas: Personal Management, Learning and Work Exploration, and Life/Work Building. *Real Times, Real Life* was developed for adults and incorporates all of the competencies appropriate to this age level.

Participants in Day Therapy are 18 years old and over and are referred by a psychiatrist. Many clients in the program are on leave from work or are seeking a change due to workplace stressors or dissatisfaction.

With today's work world causing stresses and strains for most people due to biological, personal, social and environmental factors, depression has become the fastest growing health problem causing disability costs to employers [2,4]. As well, 70–90% of people with serious mental illness are unemployed, with 80% of those people wanting to work [4]. *Real Times, Real Life* was introduced into Day Therapy as a group intervention to address illness-triggering factors related to work and enable clients to resume this valued occupation.

During the spring of 2008, a group of eight clients 19 to 57 years old were the first in Day Therapy to participate in *Real Times, Real Life*. Assuming various worker roles from the 1930s and coached by the occupational therapist, group members navigated through time encountering major events of the 20th century. Discussions focused on the impact of these events on their jobs, lay-offs, terminations, work searches, and finally retirement. Engaged in their worker roles, clients developed budgets, created lifestyles, planned leisure activities, explored gender equity, identified transferable skills, learned job hunting strategies, and coped with transitions all within the positive, supportive milieu of the group setting. Leaving their assumed roles behind, clients then looked to their futures to develop Life/Work Action Plans. Assessment of values, desires, basic work skills and hidden skills, interests, and learning styles was completed by each individual. From the assessment results, clients created realizable

plans describing their life, education, and work goals along with potential barriers to the plans and possible solutions to the obstacles. Armed with tools and knowledge for pursuing their life/work goals, clients finished the group with enthusiasm for the process and the recommendation that the occupational therapist offer *Real Times, Real Life* again in Day Therapy. Those clients who needed coaching to implement their plans continued their work in individualized sessions with the Occupational Therapist.

For more information on *Real Times, Real Life* or *Blueprint for Life/Work Designs*, visit their websites at <http://www.realgame.ca/en/index.html> and <http://www.blueprint4life.ca/blueprint/home.cfm>.

References

- [1] B. Barry, *Real Times, Real Life*, The Real Game Inc., St. John's, NL, 1997.
- [2] Canadian Psychiatric Association, Public education work brochure, Retrieved on July 14, 2008, from <http://publications.cpa-apc.org/browse/documents/22>.
- [3] L. Haché, D. Redekopp and P. Jarvis, *Blueprint for Life/Work Designs*, The National Life/Work Centre, Memramcook, NB, 2000.
- [4] Mood Disorders Society of Canada, Quick facts on mental illness and addictions in Canada, Retrieved on July 14, 2008, from <http://www.mooddis-orderscanada.ca/quickfacts/workplace.htm>.