



## Service Learning in Occupational Therapy

A range of service learning modules are available at NUI Galway whereby students undertake accredited activity of specific relevance to their chosen subject for the benefit of the community

### Teaching Context

<b>Subject</b>	Occupational Therapy
<b>Department</b>	Occupational Therapy Department
<b>Participants</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> year Occupational Therapy students
<b>Pedagogy</b>	Service learning / community based learning
<b>Method</b>	Preparation workshops followed by work with local organisations. Throughout the semester regular workshops are held to facilitate reflective practice.
<b>Participants</b>	18 - 25 students
<b>Hours</b>	Community Visits 12 hours Workshops 14 hours Independent Study 108 hours
<b>Credits</b>	6 ECTS
<b>Materials</b>	Needs Assessment Workbook
<b>Assessment</b>	3,000 word report Poster presentation
<b>Length</b>	12 weeks
<b>Community Partners</b>	Partners change on a yearly basis & have included: MS Society, Galway Simon Community, Galway Hospice Foundation, RehabCare, COPE Services, The Alzheimer Society of Ireland, AIDS West etc.
<b>Optional/Mandatory</b>	Mandatory
<b>First Piloted</b>	2005/2006

### Introduction

Service learning seeks to reinvigorate the civic mission of higher education and instil in students a sense of social responsibility and civic awareness. It is a pedagogical tool that encourages students to learn and explore issues vital to society inside and outside the classroom. Students learn from engaging with communities by active participation.

#### Service Learning in Occupational Therapy

Service learning in Occupational Therapy enables students to explore how Occupational Therapists can collaborate with community organizations to enhance health and wellbeing. Working with the community partners students explore the occupational profiles of a community group and identify the potential role for occupational therapists to maximise their participation in society.

#### Academic Basis

The service learning is a mandatory module which receives 6 ECTS. It runs in semester 2 of the third year. Preparatory workshops focus on introducing students to service learning and providing a framework to complete a needs assessment.

Working in small groups students complete visits to their community partners. Using a combination of environmental assessment and participant observation students generate a descriptive account of the community organisation, its programmes and the people it serves. In partnership with the community organisation students devise a statement of need to support future planning/developing of occupational therapy services.

#### Assessment.

Using the information gathered during their visits, students prepare a detailed report documenting the occupational therapy needs of the organisation.

Students also prepare a poster presentation of their work and present this at an annual joint Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy Student Conference which is attended by staff from the university, representatives from our community partners and Occupational Therapy clinicians

## Student Benefit

Service learning provides students with the opportunity to apply their knowledge of occupation to address the needs of the local community. This module also provides students with the opportunity to learn about and reflect on the social political and economic factors which influence occupational performance. Students have the opportunity to work collaboratively with the community partner to generate a statement of need which can be used to plan and develop occupational therapy services.

Comments from students include,

*“enjoy the chance to visit and learn about client groups that wouldn’t normally get to study”*;

*“liked investigating real life situations”*; *“saw how OT can offer so much more than people expect”*;

*“very time consuming with a huge workload”*.

## Community Benefit

The service learning module allows local community partners to explore the potential role for Occupational Therapy within their service. Currently access to occupational therapy services for these organizations is extremely limited due long waiting lists lack of resources etc. Students work with the community organisations to devise a statement of need which the organisation can then use in order to plan and develop future occupational therapy services for their clients.

On completion of the programme community organisations are provided with a copy of the students’ report and poster presentations. Community partners are also invited to attend the joint Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy Student Conference.

Feedback from community partners has been overwhelmingly positive and a number of the community organisations have begun the process of implementing the students’ recommendations regarding occupational therapy input in their organisation.

*“it has been a very worthwhile exercise and the level of work carried out by the students has been extremely impressive and helpful”*;

*“the presentations [ at student conference] showed the result of collaboration in action”*;

*“a worthwhile collaboration and one well worth continuing in the future”*.

## Academic Comment

Service learning provides students with the opportunity to critically reflect on broader context of occupational health and well being. Through engagement with the community students learn first hand about the impact of occupational injustice, occupational deprivation occupational imbalance etc. and consider how they as health care professionals of the future can work in partnership with the community to address these issues. Feedback from the community partners, clinicians, professional body and students themselves highlights the extent of student learning and development and provides strong support for the continuation of this type of community based learning.