

Displaced people: OT role amidst uprooted lives?

At the end of 2010, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) counted **43.7 million forcibly displaced people of concern**. By comparison, the World Health Organisation (WHO) states cardiovascular disease, number one global cause of death, will claim almost 23.6 million people in 2030, approximately 20 million less than the number of people displaced *today*.



World OT Day 2011 theme *Pay it Forward* invites us to **re-consider our ambivalence of the “other”**. Occupational therapy is situated geographically, historically, socially such that some people and some occupational problems are privileged. We seem to be particularly avoidant of those people who experience **occupational problems enmeshed in problematic politics**.

Whilst politics and policy hinges on causal categories of displacement and associated legal instruments (e.g. natural disaster, war, political persecution, climate change etc. and international conventions on human rights, refugees, statelessness etc.) practitioners and even public dialogue acknowledge that people uprooted from their homes typically face significant occupational **adaptation to their every day “doing and being”** whether temporary or prolonged.

Simultaneously, occupational adaptation and opportunities for **“becoming and belonging” are often further undermined** by lack of basic occupational opportunities necessary, resulting in “disabling” consequences for individuals, and arguably “security” consequences for regions. Despite this, displaced people can **teach OTs with stories of tenacious hope**, courage, resilience, agency, adaptation as they mitigate their circumstances. And we will celebrate this - along with the **emerging “green shoots” of OT engagement** sprout throughout the profession. Some possibilities and implications of “paying it forward” will be suggested, along with practical opportunities to **get involved** ☺



Clarissa Adriel practices occupational therapy in mental health and is president of OOFRAS Inc. She feels weird reducing years worth of stories, friendships, and adventures to a pompous bio. She considers her main accomplishment is caring enough to do something, and persisting enough to - well, persist! She’s indebted to Costa, Paul & Saba whose generous and courageous lives “paid it forward” in humble “every day ways”.

Our name Occupational Opportunities for Refugees & Asylum Seekers is a statement of our vision that people with refugee experiences can:

- participate in daily occupations, life roles, and community
- access occupational therapy services as needed
- build occupationally just communities

