

Awards

for Education,
Research and Continuing
Professional Development



Emma Beadle Innovation Award 2017

A cooking group for refugee women was supported by the Innovation Award 2017. It was completed by Emma Beadle, Jessica Oglethorpe and Sharmin Sultana.

Our project was a six session, women only cooking group at a refugee centre in South London with aims to address aspects of identity and mental health in the context of being a refugee in the United Kingdom. This was achieved by using the occupation of cooking as a vehicle for discussion and exploration of culture and identity for the women. Each participant brought a recipe of their own, mostly culturally typical food from their respective country of origin.

Elements were included to promote English language learning, and there were weekly topics to promote discussion on aspects of mental health. The outcomes of the project were positive, particularly in the group's ability to create a safe environment for the women to share both their recipes and their thoughts about their experiences and their mental health.

Addressing mental health needs was a priority for the refugee centre, as they had identified difficulty broaching the subject of mental health due to cultural and social stigma. However, using weekly topics based on the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) to support discussion, we progressed towards dedicating our final session purely to the topic of mental health and the women were responsive and open about their personal experiences.

The use of cooking as an occupation was successful in creating an environment that allowed the women to bond and feel more open in talking about their own experiences, but also had the potential to improve the confidence of the women both in their self-esteem and in their use of English. The MOHOST as an outcome measure assisted us in showing this, and we noted particular improvements in some of the more withdrawn group members. This was useful in evidencing the value of the group to the refugee centre, and considerably promoted the input of occupational therapy for these women.

Overall, the cooking project for refugees was very successful. We had good support from the refugee centre, and in turn were able to benefit the organisation by demonstrating the value of occupation-focused intervention with these women. As external student occupational therapists, it was important to thoroughly involve the centre in the project by integrating the cooking group into their daily work and general ethos. In this way, they are able to continue with the work that we have started, and it was encouraging to have such positive feedback from the refugee centre and the individual women. The staff were able to see and hear how much the women enjoyed and valued the group. A further positive was the way in which the activity facilitated discussion about mental health and also helped the women to grow in confidence. As a six-week project, there was limited time to develop this further. However, our work, supported by feedback and evidence in the MOHOST, showed how this client group can benefit from long-term, client-centred and occupation-focused intervention.