Circus arts & occupational therapy: Gaining great performance
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Introduction
With a circus intervention, each person, in accordance with their abilities, is able to realize their potential through a wide range of activities that circus offers: juggling, trapeze, acrobatics, contortionism, clowning, & balancing acts. A person who does not have flexibility can participate in balancing acts; a person who does not have ability to do trapeze can be a clown.

Intervention
• Name Games
• Ice Breakers
• Partner Acrobatics
• Juggling
• Tight Wire Walking
• Trapeze
• Aerial fabric
• Clowning
• Cool Down Stretches
  “See you down the road”
  (All above activities are OT groups, working on articulating emotions, balance, bi-manual coordination, gross & fine motor, social skills, graded goal attainment, positive risk taking).

Illustrative quotes
“Juggling. Something I’d never think I’d be able to do, though I still can only juggle scarves, it’s a start.”

“Rediscover your body. Your beauty, your strength while having a really fun time.”

Frames of Reference
Flow - people are happiest in a state of concentrations or complete absorption with activity at hand (Csíkszentmihályi 1997).


Self-determination theory (SDT) - macro theory of human motivation concerning intrinsic growth tendencies, inherent psychological needs, & motivation behind choices (Dedi & Ryan 2000).

Observations
• Alternative identity through circus
  • Motor planning & bimanual hand coordination
  • Outlet for play & social experimentation
  • Performance at end gave focus & meaning to skills learned

• Positive affect by end of group
  • Consistent member participation
  • Unit team saw circus as beneficial

Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries, Boston, MA
• Day habilitation program
• Adults 22+ with intellectual disability
• Closed group - 4 participants
• Frequency - 60’ per week

Butler Hospital Providence, RI
• Psychiatric hospital
• Ages 12-17 (DX: Mood D/O, Bipolar, Depression)
• Open group - 1-6 participants
• Frequency - 45’ 2x/wk

Circus for Survivors Brattleboro, VT
• Community group
• Cancer survivors ages 33-82
• Open group 6-12 participants
• Frequency - 120” per month

Beverly School for the Deaf, Beverly, MA
• Day school
• Children ages 3-22 (Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or other communication d/o, & additional co-morbidities)
• Open - 68 students + staff
• Frequency - one workshop for 75”

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