

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST Job Description

Introduction to VAST:

In 1986, a small group of human rights activists and mental health workers gathered in Vancouver to support the flood of refugees arriving from the armed conflicts in South and Central America. They founded the Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST), and this dedicated group of volunteers built what would become BC's largest center for refugee mental health. Today, VAST works with refugees from over 100 countries in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. Our programs and services are offered in over a dozen languages, including Arabic, Farsi, French, Mandarin, and Spanish. We support the mental health of refugees who arrive in British Columbia with psychological trauma as a result of torture, political violence, and other forms of persecution on the basis of race, religion, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

We facilitate the healing process for 1,000 survivors of torture each year, and their families, by providing accessible and culturally appropriate individual and group counselling and therapeutic services. We also provide psycho-legal documentation and support refugee claimants through the asylum process, and are called in to work with Temporary Foreign Workers in Canada when their particular situation requires our support. Canada is a signatory to the UN's Convention Against Torture (1985), and the Refugee Convention (1951), both of which oblige us to protect the rights of survivors of forced displacement, including the Right to Rehabilitation, and to provide safe haven to those who at risk of persecution. VAST is an active member of the International Rehabilitation Council for Victims of Torture (IRCT), the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), and the Canadian Network for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (CNSTT).

Founded on the conviction that 'healing is an act of resistance', for 35 years VAST has employed a province-leading model of trauma-informed mental health service provision. Our work has created and sustained a resilient, inclusive community amongst newcomers, and over More than half of our team identify as survivors themselves, and their voices are represented at all levels of our organization. We do not believe in working alone, and our mission supports a range of advocacy and capacity building activities to strengthen BC's mental health sector for newcomers, and encourage understanding of our work amongst government institutions. In so doing, we relieve demand on the BC healthcare sector, especially in dense urban and more isolated rural areas of BC. VAST is more than a healthcare provider and is known throughout BC as a convener of voices with lived experience of torture and trauma, and an influential advisor to multiple levels of policy makers and practitioners.

Job summary

The occupational therapist (OT) will support individuals from a refugee or forced displacement background, irrespective of Visa status, who reside in British Columbia. Support will include individual sessions, VAST general groups and programs, and through the new VAST *Belonging through Doing* program. The OT will be responsible for pre-program planning, delivery, and evaluation of the completed program. The program's primary goal is to explore previously identified activities that hold meaning to the individual and facilitate engagement in those activities or support identifying new activities to establish a sense of identity in Canada. The goal of individual sessions is to support trauma recovery processes, and rehabilitation for survivors of torture and war.

Qualifications - Essential

- Masters of Occupational Therapy and professional membership with the College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia (COTBC) or another equivalent provincial accreditation body.
- Minimum of several years of experience as a registered occupational therapist in a cross-cultural setting, preferably with displaced peoples or refugees.
- Thorough knowledge of theoretical, evidence-based, and culturally appropriate principles, approaches and practices of occupational therapy
- Familiarity with the *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS) evaluation tool
- Demonstrated experience in group facilitation
- Demonstrated ability to intervene in crises using professional judgment and ethical practice
- Understanding of the Canadian migration pathways and refugee protection mechanisms
- Understanding of the United Nations Convention Against Torture
- Knowledge and understanding of the social and psychological dimensions of forced migration and resettlement and the refugee claimant experience

Qualifications - Highly Desirable

- Demonstrated experience working with interpreters in a group setting
- Ability to speak multiple languages is an asset

*****For any of the above that the candidate still needs to possess as skills and experience, they are expected to pursue pathways to inform and update.***

Background to the *Belonging through Doing* Program

The *Belonging through Doing* program has been developed to address some of the mental health burden that individuals from a refugee background might experience once residing in a new country. Specifically, the program will correlate with the reduction of depression and an increase in life satisfaction. Research indicates that increased life satisfaction is associated with reduced distress, reduced alcohol and drug use, and reduced risk of suicide (Pavot & Diener, 2008).

The content of the group is rooted in two occupational science theories - the Kawa model (Iwama et al., 2009) and the concepts of "Doing, Being, Becoming, and Belonging" (Wilcock 1999, 2006).

The Kawa (river) model depicts an individual's life journey, with components of a river either enabling or impeding one's ability to engage in activities and roles that promote meaning, purpose, and identity (Iwama, 2006). The use of nature metaphors and the focus on the individual's context in shaping reality is effective in depicting abstract concepts and facilitating the exploration of personal meaning (Iwama et al., 2009).

The concepts of "Doing, Being, Becoming, and Belonging" outline the process of occupational adaptation that would be facilitated in the program. Refugees experience disruption in fulfilling activities during resettlement, with much of the days spent on basic necessity-related activities (e.g. securing housing, accessing settlement services) (Lonn & Dantzler, 2017). Program participants will explore previous meaningful activities and find ways to engage in the same and/or new activities. By regularly "doing" these activities, participants will strengthen their sense of identity ("being"). "Becoming" involves bringing "doing" and "being" into a sense of future, which may involve developing competency and setting personal goals. Finally, through engaging in the first three elements within the group setting and within the larger local community, participants will experience "belonging."

Primary Goals:

- To increase VAST clients' engagement in meaningful activities and overall life satisfaction upon settlement in a new country.
- To support VAST clients' mental health through adapting their occupational identity, thus reducing the impact of depression and other health challenges.
- To facilitate VAST clients' sense of belonging in their local community through engagement in collective occupations.

Primary Objectives:

- After 3 months of program participation, clients will be participating in 1-2 more activities that are meaningful to them (weekly activity schedule), and there will be at least 2 points improvement in SWLS compared to pre-program.
- 1 year post-program participation, clients will have continued to engage in 1-2 activities that are meaningful to them, and/or engaged in 1-2 more activities that are meaningful to them.

- 3 years post-program participation, clients will have continued to engage in 2-4 activities that are meaningful to them, and score at least 25 on the SWLS.
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Duties and Responsibilities

1. *Belonging through Doing* Program

- Support in the creation of the pre-program booklet and be part of the ongoing recruitment campaign.
- Liaise with relevant VAST staff to identify potential clients for the program.
- Plan, develop and facilitate the 3-month *Belonging through Doing* OT program [see detailed description of program].
- Develop and maintain productive partnerships between VAST and other relevant services in the area.
- Gain thorough knowledge of the local community and services therein. Identify gaps in services relevant to individuals from a refugee background through an OT lens.

2. Training

- Provide input to development of training materials relevant to the needs of services working with individuals from a refugee background, focusing on areas in line with the *Belonging through Doing* program.

3. Administration

- Complete client based documentation in CTS as required
- Maintain written and electronic client records in CTS electronic database.

4. Reporting

- Prepare progress reports
- Provide statistical and narrative information on the OT program for funding applications and reports, and research.
- Prepare other reports as required.
- Prepare a final evaluation report at the completion of the program.

5. Personnel

- Participate in VAST Performance Management program and in the development of an annual Work Plan.
- Participate in VAST staff meetings and other relevant meetings.
- Be an active participant in team meetings to maximize contribution to the work of the team and VAST.
- Participate in identifying quality improvement initiatives/strategies.
- Attend and participate in all training opportunities identified for the role.
- Liaise with and seek senior advice as required.

6. As a VAST employee you are expected to:

- Have a commitment to Human Rights.
- Carry out the role and responsibilities in line with VAST Code of Conduct.
- Maintain confidentiality and exercise discretion in relation to VAST matters.
- Actively seek to improve skills and knowledge that will benefit the organization.
- Project a professional image at all times in all situations.
- Undertake any other duties that may be required within the area of work.

Location: VAST Vancouver, VAST Surrey, and remote (hybrid)

Period of Appraisal: Performance will be assessed within 3 months of commencement and a 3 month probationary/qualifying period will apply.

Contact: Part time. 12 month contract.