

Creating Adaptable and Accessible Environments for Aging in Place

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Abstract


A self-employed 60-year-old occupational therapist wanted to optimize her quality of life as she faced health issues associated with aging, by creating a home/workplace environment that could provide an appropriate balance between both her personal and professional lives, and allow her to continue her career as long as possible. Years of experience assisting persons with disabilities adapt their home, school, and community environments gave her confidence to design her own accessible dream house, not only for herself as an independent "well elderly person", but also for her clients, family, and friends. Despite decreasing strength, endurance, and balance, as well as a variety of ongoing medical conditions, she has been able to live independently for 25 years.

Professional and Personal Goals

To address clients' functional needs within their daily routines

To facilitate participation as fully as possible in life activities

To apply lessons learned as an occupational therapist to her own journey through lifestyle changes


 This battery-operated bath chair seat lift can be raised, lowered, and reclined to 50° inside the tub with an accessible button control.

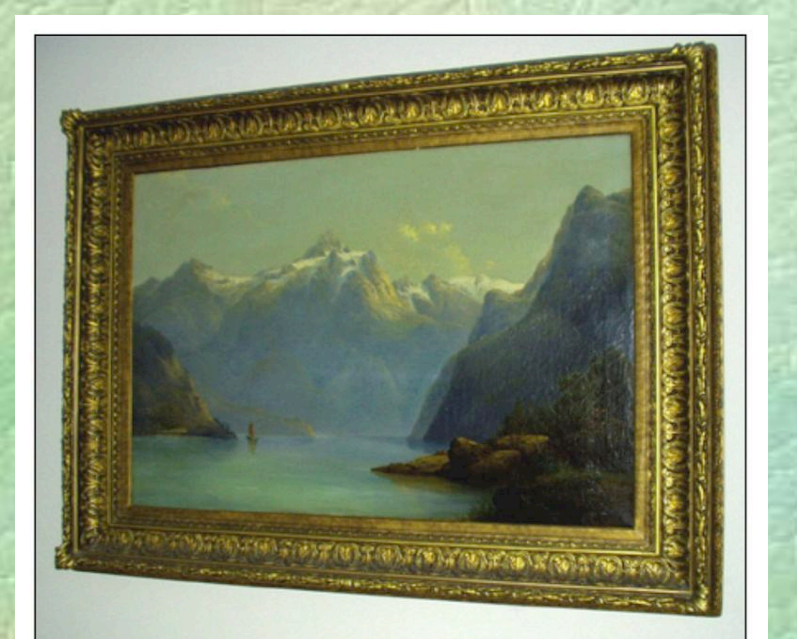
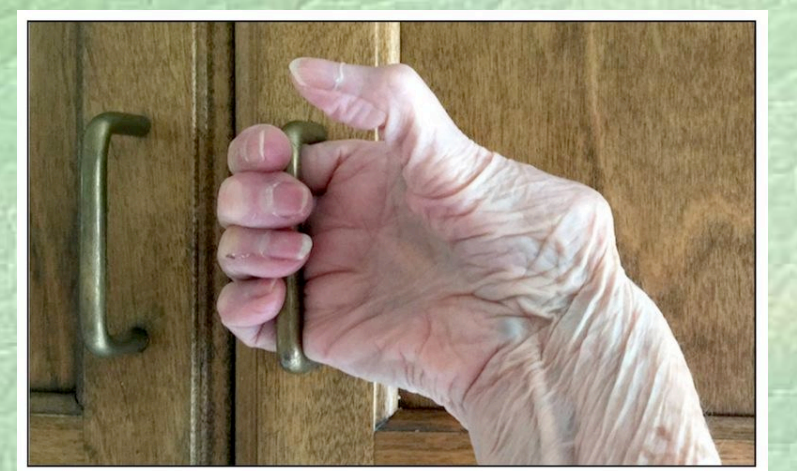
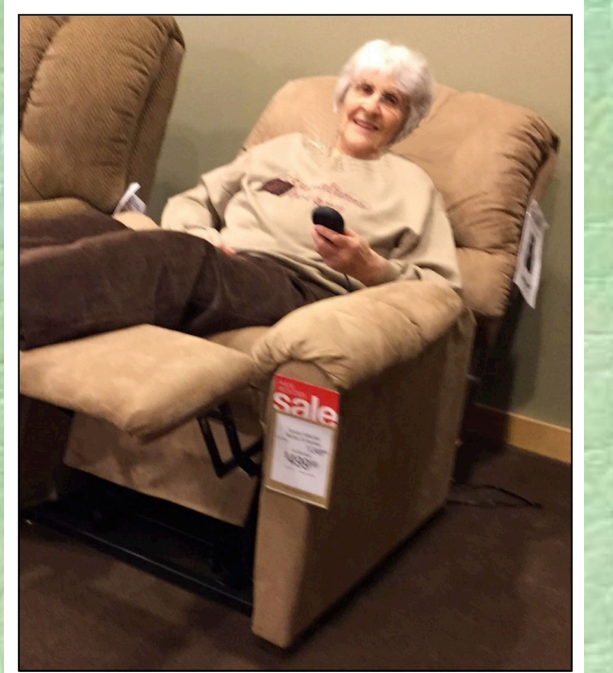


Examples of Achieving Quality of Life

Efficiency: Architectural Design
Concept of Form Follows Function
 Powered recliner lift chair saves energy by making standing up easier.

Accessibility: Universal Design Codes
 Cupboard handles sized to fit arthritic fingers for effective grasp.

Harmony: Feng Shui Principles of Chinese Philosophy to increase ch'i
 Painting in "great room" reflects colors of home furnishings that represent trees, grass, water, and sky.



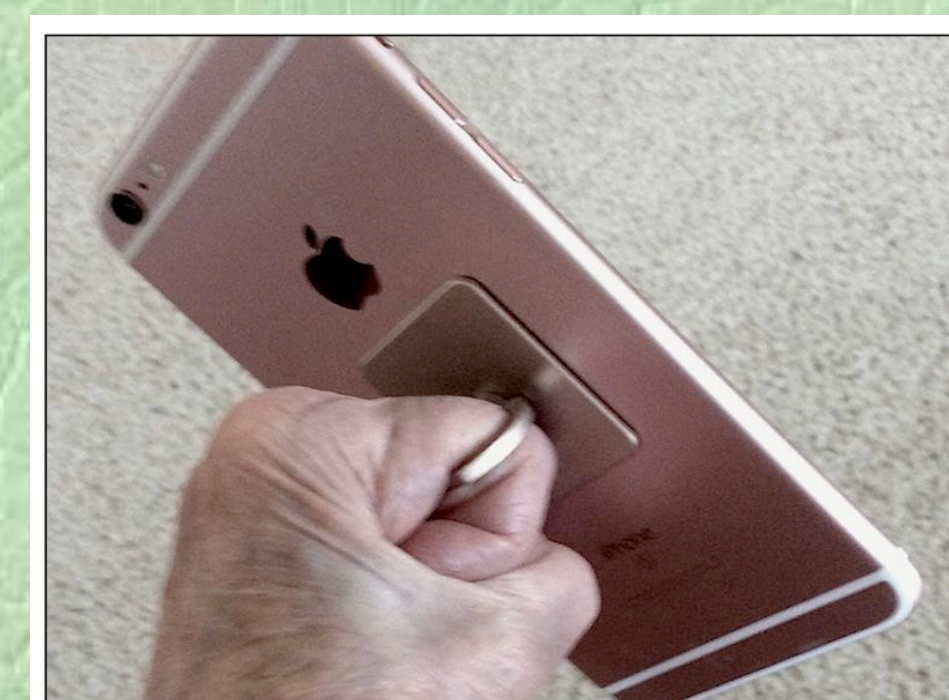
Theoretical Foundations


The **Occupational Therapy Practice Framework** is a structural model containing specific methodology for collaboration of therapists with clients to identify priorities and select meaningful goals with positive outcomes of engagement in occupations that support optimal participation in life.

Occupational Performance Patterns:
Habits, Roles, Routines

Domains: Education, Work
Leisure, Social Participation

Contexts:
Cultural: Beliefs, family
Temporal: Aging process
Physical: House, furniture
Social: Significant people, groups
Spiritual: Religious practices, Feng Shui
Personal: Age, gender, educational status
Virtual: Computers/other technology




 This cell phone ring holder/kickstand offers weak fingers a secure painless grasp.




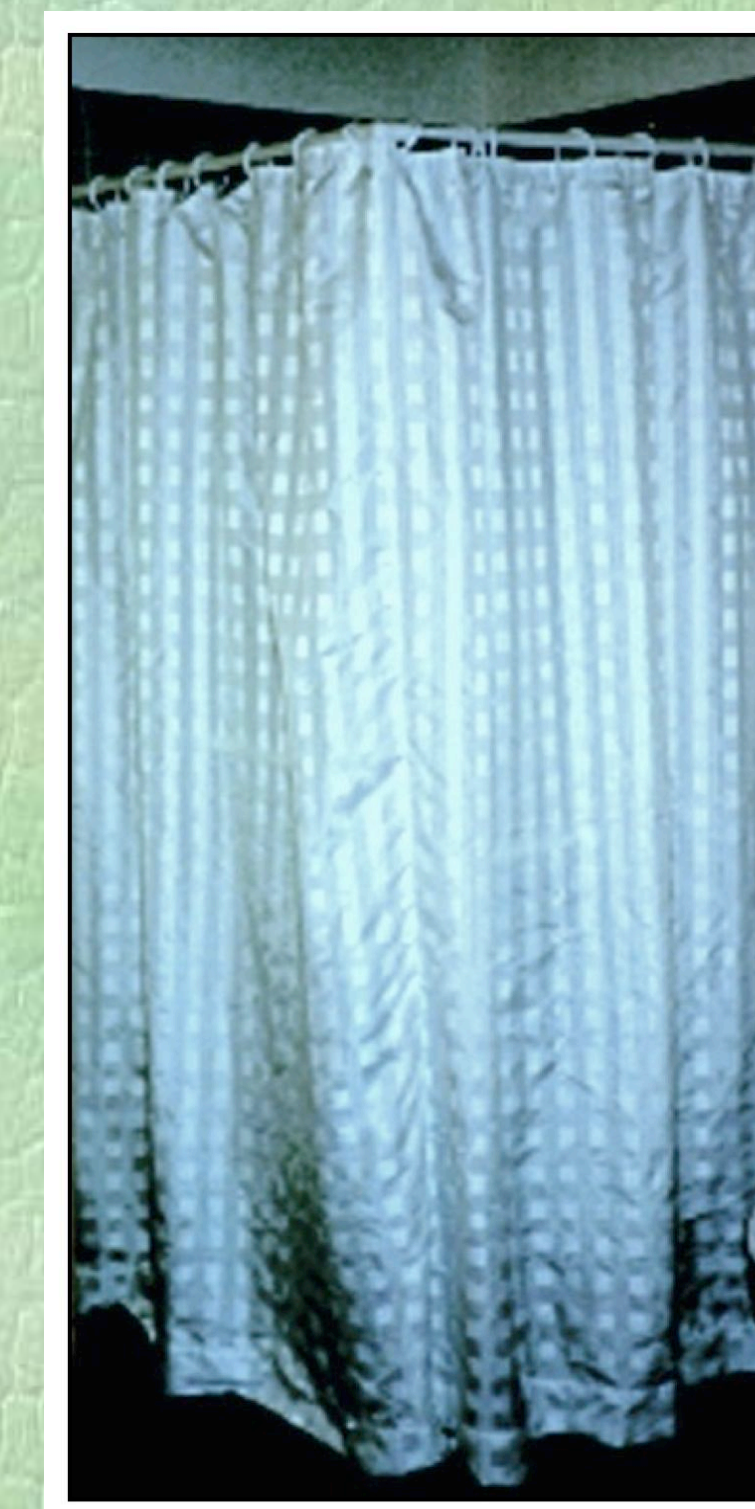
Example of Structures and Processes

Adapting Structural Designs

 The unique bathroom shower was designed for versatility and wheelchair accessibility. The 3' square tile floor space slopes inward toward the drain, and the curtain is hung on a 2-sided wheeled frame, custom-made from PVC pipe. The flexible handheld shower head has adjustable heights for standing or sitting, as well as cleansing after toileting.

Adjusting Functional Processes

 Reversal of the frame against the corner walls allows space for transfers by a wheelchair user to and from the adjacent toilet. Grab bars on 2 walls add safety.



Outcomes

At age 85, the author describes two key processes that have led to positive outcomes: 1. Adaptation to the environment by acquiring new assistive devices, or altering existing equipment, and 2. Adaptation to the environment by modifying ways to perform daily activities. These strategies have facilitated her ongoing adjustments to each physical change caused by natural aging, such as decreasing strength, endurance, and balance, as well as medical issues, such as osteoarthritis, vision loss, fractures, and surgeries. Goals she has achieved are: 1. To enjoy the best possible quality of her personal life, and 2. To maintain her meaningful professional life as an author, consultant, and owner of a small business. This evolving Aging in Place model reflects her profession's current brand, "Occupational Therapy: Living Life To Its Fullest®". The model has been shared with persons in the health professions, through lectures to university students, published articles in related fields, and presentations at local and national conferences.