

Satisfied client is back at work*



I am writing in reference to my participation in a **work hardening program** provided by Adeena Wisenthal, registered occupational therapist and founder of **ERGO-Wise** in Ottawa. Prior to my participating in Adeena's program, I had been off work for 9 months due to exhaustion that progressed into a chronic depression. I had been working as a full-time Information Centre Representative at the time.

I had attempted a progressive return to work but it failed. Following this, my disability case manager recommended Adeena's work hardening program in order to build up my concentration, strengthen my skills and allow a successful progressive return to my employment.

Initially, I was rather apprehensive to participate but I immediately began to understand and appreciate the recommendation. I participated in a four-week program that included diverse work tasks that related directly and indirectly to my present employment.

The program helped me increase my work stamina and concentration. I developed skills and gained awareness into such things as time management. My self-confidence grew and I then had the motivation and enthusiasm I required to go back to work.

This time my return to work has been successful. I no longer receive benefits from my long-term disability plan and my employer is pleased and satisfied with my efforts and contributions.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in the work hardening program at ERGO-Wise. I strongly believe that all businesses, companies, and organizations should offer and involve their personnel in this return-to-work program. Whether it is a physical or mental disability or a laid off situation, I trust the program to be a very beneficial, valuable and advantageous tool to help and facilitate any worker to return productively to his/her workplace.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Adeena for this wonderful program and more importantly for helping me through this rough period with courage and strength.

* Photo is not real client

“Occupational therapy made my life worth living again.”

I'd always been a high achiever and succeeded at whatever I put my mind to ... life was wonderful in every way: I had a job I enjoyed, a stable family life and a strong social network.

But this all changed when a new supervisor entered my workplace. Her abusive nature and constant criticism undermined my self-confidence, and my job became a source of anxiety. I felt that I was truly losing myself and a host of symptoms appeared, seemingly from nowhere, leaving me physically and emotionally paralysed. Along with joint and back pain, I developed severe depression. I felt emotionally fragile, cried constantly and couldn't bring myself to get out of bed in the morning, much less take care of my family or spend time with friends. Forced to take time off work, I sought to restore my health.

When a year of traditional medical treatment left me no better off, I was referred to an occupational therapist who made a tremendous difference in my life. She listened to what I had to say, provided counselling and suggested strategies for handling both professional and family-related issues. Her support enabled me to get my confidence back and to lift myself out of the deep emotional hole I'd been in for so long. As I became more grounded, I slowly felt ready to tackle the "big picture" and return to work. My occupational therapy then involved a series of "work hardening" sessions, which included progressively complicated tasks that simulated what I would do on the job. These activities allowed me to rebuild my stamina and skills, and they prepared me to re-enter the workplace while making me feel productive again.

Thanks to occupational therapy, I now feel ready to tackle anything that comes my way. I'm proud to say that I've returned to work full time, and my physical and emotional pain are long gone. My occupational therapist allowed me to become the healthy, vibrant woman I am today. I feel like myself again, only better!

Case study provided by ERGO-Wise, Ottawa, Ontario



Occupational Therapy – Skills for the job of living!

For more information on occupational therapy or to find an occupational therapist near you, please visit www.otworks.ca

Occupational therapy and mental health

Not only can occupational therapists prevent and address physical disabilities, they also play an important role in promoting and maintaining mental health. Occupational therapists can assist employees in returning to work faster and more easily following a mental health leave, and they can work with managers to create healthy work environments that promote optimal performance.

Case study: Tom*

Tom, a 30-year-old software designer for a Canadian high-tech company, was suffering from depression and had been off work for a year following the untimely death of his parents. He lacked initiative and drive, felt tired all the time, and had even lost interest in daily activities. Tom was afraid to return to work because of his difficulty concentrating and completing tasks. Moreover, his confidence was shaken because he felt his computer skills were out of date. Despite these issues, Tom's psychiatrist felt he was ready to return to work in some capacity and suggested he consult an occupational therapist to provide him with a goal-oriented program that would help address these occupational performance issues and help prepare Tom to get back on the job.

Tom's occupational therapist designed a structured return-to-work plan that included:

- A cognitive work hardening program that involved simulated work tasks. Initial assignments were relatively simple. Tasks were gradually made more complex and more demanding as Tom's stamina, concentration and work tolerance improved.
- On-line tutorials to help Tom update his computer programming skills, as well as small projects that allowed Tom to apply his newly acquired technical skills.
- Coaching and skill development in communication styles and stress management as well as strategies for work pacing.

Value for all...

The Client

After working with his occupational therapist, Tom's ability to focus improved, his stamina increased and he became more confident in his abilities. After two weeks in the work hardening program, Tom felt well prepared to return to his job: "I had been off work for so long that I didn't believe in myself anymore. Occupational therapy gave me confidence, strength and skills to return to work."

As a result of his occupational therapy program, Tom re-adjusted well to the demands of a full-time job and made a successful transition back to the workplace. His responsibilities were increased a year after his return and he has reported no further medical problems. He's even survived some company layoffs.

The Employer

Tom's employer regained an experienced, productive worker and avoided the cost of recruiting, hiring and training a new employee.

The Insurer

The insurer saved paying out costly long-term disability benefits after Tom returned to work.

**** not real name***