Background:
During the twentieth century, occupational therapists were based mainly in hospitals and other institutions. When people were treated away from their usual environments, conceptualisations of occupation did not take full account of the embeddedness of people’s activities within specific social structures and practices. With changing patterns of disease and disability, and new modes of health service delivery, occupational therapists are seeking to develop theories that better support a community-based practice.

Method:
Two European occupational therapy scholars are using practice theory to construct a more socially embedded understanding of occupation (Reckwitz 2002, Schatzki 2001). Practice theory shows us how individuals and social structures develop and evolve together through ongoing interactions. Within this framework, the occupational therapy client can be an individual, a group or a community. The theory is applied to a case example to illustrate how it can offer new ways of thinking and working.

Results:
Reconceptualising occupations as social practices indicates how occupational therapists might assist people to reproduce their chosen or necessary occupations and bring about beneficial social change through participation, thus creating a better fit between the individual and the social context.

Conclusion:
Practice theory has the potential to contribute to the development of new ways of theorising occupational therapy that are socially relevant and can support a community-based and community-focused practice.

Application to Practice:
As demonstrated in the case example, practice theory can make an important contribution to occupational therapy practice in community settings.

References