This dissertation explores the relationship between productive occupation, mental wellbeing, and mental illness for young people. Occupational therapy arises from the belief that occupations have the ability to sustain, restore, and transform people’s lives. In particular, one type of occupation, productive occupation, has been used extensively within occupational therapy practice to maintain and enhance health. However, despite a firm commitment from the profession that the use of occupation can promote health and wellbeing, little evidence has been generated to support its use. Notably absent from the literature are youths perspectives of productive occupation, and its relationship with mental wellbeing and mental illness.

This study employed a phenomenological approach to gain a deeper understanding of individuals’ experiences with productive occupation, and how engaging in productive occupation influenced mental wellbeing and mental illness. Interviews were utilised to explore this phenomenon from the perspective of four young mental health consumers. The findings suggest that productive occupations have health-maintaining and health-enhancing qualities. In particular, productive occupations were found to encourage participants to regularly engage in their productive role, to provide participants with the opportunity to uphold important responsibilities, to help improve participants’ self-worth, and to provide participants with hope for a better future. These findings highlight the importance of productive occupation and accentuate that meaningful productive occupations can be a valuable aspect of mental health practice and mental health promotion strategies.