

THE OT COLLECTIVE

eBook





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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A very big thank you to all the incredible occupational therapists from around the globe who contributed to make this eBook possible. Your work is making an impact - in more ways than you even know!



CONTENTS

Accupressure	p.6
Adult Rehabilitation	p.8
Antenatal	p.10
Aromatherapy	p.12
Art	p.15
Biofeedback and EFT	p.17
BIOPIC & LGBTQIA2S	p.19
Body Image	p.21
Body Work	p.23
Breathing Retraining	p.25
Circus	p.28
Coaching	p.30
Community & Outreach	p.32
Conscious Parenting	p.35
Dementia	p.36
Eco Friendly	p.38
Equipment Prescription	p.40
Ergonomics	p.42
Farm Based	p.43
Holistic Therapy	p.45
Home Modifications	p.48
Hospital	p.50
Interoception	p.52
Lactation	p.54
Lifestyle Optimisation	p.56
Mental Health	p.58
Mindfulness	p.60
Mindfulness School-Based OT.....	p.62
Mobile Practice	p.64
Natural Food Based Solutions for Healing	p.66
Nature	p.68
Nature Based Spirituality	p.71
Neurodivergence	p.73



CONTENTS

Neurology	p.75
Oncology	p.77
Paediatrics	p.79
Polyvagal	p.81
Reflexes	p.83
School	p.85
Sensory Processing	p.87
Sexology	p.89
Soft Tissue	p.91
Spirituality	p.93
Stretch Therapy	p.95
Surfing	p.97
Teaching	p.100
Technology Innovation	p.102
Trauma	p.104
Womb Wisdom	p.106
Yoga	p.108

Hey there!

I'm so excited you have this little eBook of wisdom! The gold in here could seriously be career-changing. Maybe now. Or maybe in the months and years to come, when you revisit it as you ponder the direction in your life and work.

I wanted to create this eBook to remind you of *the possibilities within occupational therapy. They're endless! Seriously.*

I used to feel so uninspired in my work as an OT. And if I'm honest with myself, one of the biggest things keeping me stuck and stagnant in my career was my own thoughts around what I believed was possible.

It wasn't until I started to learn from other OTs, that I realised the true diversity of OT. And you only need to read the stories in this eBook to realise it for yourself!

This eBook is a beautiful collection of stories, wisdom and insight from OTs around the world doing meaningful work. It is isn't categorised by practice area, but rather passion area - whether this be a specific modality, interest or context.

Soak it up.

Stay open.

And seek out *your* meaningful work, #oneoccupationatime



Rhiannon

Founder of The OT Lifestyle Movement
Producer of Finding Me In OT

ACCUPRESSURE

“Acupressure brings a clearer, stronger, more organized flow of energy through our structural body, which activates our body’s innate wisdom for healing.”

~ Paraphrased Dr Fritz Smith and Dr Aminah Raheem Smith



Beanna Waggy

Job title: I am a Holistic OT, Spiritual Director, Consultant, Acupressure Instructor. I am certified in Zero Balancing, Clinical Acupressure, Process Acupressure and Advanced Soul Lightening Acupressure.

What setting do you work in? I own a private wellness practice integrating OT, spirituality and Five Element Acupressure in South Bend, Indiana, USA. I see clients with perplexing health conditions who have not responded to traditional allopathic medicine. I also provide multiple levels of Acupressure training through Zero Balancing and Soul Lightening International Acupressure, assisting practitioners with integrating acupressure into their patient treatment.

Describe your OT role: Acupressure is used to empower clients in reducing pain, anxiety and stress as part of their self-care training. Acupressure complements my other traditional OT treatment including hand therapy, ergonomic instructions, sleep hygiene, stress management, Vagus Nerve education, sensory regulation, spiritual practices and mindfulness training. It helps promote improved occupational performance for work, leisure, sleep and other ADLs. Clients receive acupressure points as a home program and additional resources for their unique situation.

I consult with holistic practitioners who want to integrate acupressure into their integrative health approach to patient treatment. I offer holistic resources for sale on my website including online self-paced mini-courses, eBooks, acupressure protocols and other instructional handouts on my website from a holistic OT perspective. I teach various levels of acupressure classes from laypeople to health professionals. I participate in holistic acupressure research and write acupressure articles in peer-reviewed journals to raise awareness of improved function and occupational performance in addition to the scientific evidence supporting acupressure as best practice for stress, pain and anxiety.

ACUPRESSURE

Why is this work so important to you? Acupressure is a simple, non-invasive and non-pharmacological tool that can have a powerful impact on the client's ability to participate in OT treatment. Acupressure is a holistic best practice for reducing stress, pain and anxiety as a non-pharmacological treatment. When used regularly it helps balance body, mind, emotions and spirit from a 5 Element model and allows for increased participation in daily living skills. Many health care practitioners are unfamiliar with acupressure, so I am passionate about educating health care practitioners on the benefits of acupressure training. Acupressure points can be easily taught to clients both in person and virtually, but responsible OTs should learn acupressure with a strong component of hands-on touch feedback and 5 element theory as part of their acupressure training before using regularly with clients. OTs can empower whole-being health through the use of acupressure as a self-care practice and stress management strategy. OTs also benefit from using acupressure in their own personal self-care program, reducing the potential for stress and burnout.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? I wish I had known the importance of meeting clients where they are at in their healing process. Empowering clients with self-care strategies to reduce the impact of stress, anxiety and pain allows the OT treatments to be more effective and easier. Acupressure is an effective best practice for removing the barriers to a purposeful lifestyle. Acupressure is empowering, improves patient outcomes and complements other treatment approaches. It can be used personally and professionally for overall wellness.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Acupressure is a powerful tool for improving client participation and success in treatment. In addition, it improves your own well-being when you are demonstrating the points on yourself while training your clients how to be independent in using the points on themselves. This is a great strategy to use in work settings when you are feeling overwhelmed and burned out with the demands of your job. If you are interested in acupressure, find a program or mentor who can provide hands-on training and touch feedback.

Connect

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ADULT REHABILITATION

“You can do hard things,
hard doesn’t mean
impossible.”



Nancy Yamoah

Job title: Adult OT.

What setting do you work in? Skilled nursing facility, Assisted living facility, home health

Describe your OT role: My role entails evaluating adult patients admitted from the hospital to find out what deficits may be preventing them from fully engaging in their daily activities and providing interventions to help mitigate those deficits in order to allow them to continue to engage independently and/or to provide the appropriate assistance as needed for safety.

Why is this work so important to you? Working with older adults has taught me how valuable the little things are like our ability to do as we please without restriction. When a person is diagnosed with a disease, or an injury occurs or just normal aging progression occurs it sometimes interrupts patients ability to do for themselves. My role as an OT helps give patients back their lost hope that they may not be able to do things like they used to. I give them hope by teaching them new ways to do old things and/or help them return to doing old things that new diagnosis impeded.

ADULT REHABILITATION

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? A big part of my Role as an OT will also require me to advocate for the OT profession as a whole. I spend a big portion of my time explaining why my services are needed and what I can for patients. I have learned to embrace this as this is an opportunity as this is a chance for me to teach and educate others about OT.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? You do not have to limit yourself to what is already there, think outside the box. Look at your skills and abilities , your passions and interests and see how you can use them to do more for yourself. The opportunities are endless but you will have to take that first step and believe in yourself, surround yourself with people who are going where you want to go and learn from them. If you are in a situation right now that is not conducive to your mental health, leave! Always ask for what you want and do not compromise your health for anything. This is your life , you get to decide what happens to it. Make it the best story ever told. You got this!

Connect

Instagram: @lovely_ot

ANTENATAL



“Everything is figureoutable.”

~ Mario Forleo

Jordan Burrell

Job title: Occupational Therapist & Antenatal Educator.

What setting do you work in? I work online with pregnant and newly postpartum women and people.

Describe your OT role: I offer occupation-focused antenatal education, with the occupations in question being birth and early parenting. I support parents-to-be to prepare for birth and the postpartum period in a holistic and person centred way, supporting them to increase their knowledge of the evidence-based things that they can do to support the occupation of birth, regardless of how they're choosing to birth their baby. This includes how someone can support the biology and physiology of birth, techniques to support relaxation alongside their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, and the impact and influence of the environment. I also offer guidance on the transition to early parenthood, and the things that they, and others around them, can do to facilitate this transition in a way that allows the family to feel held and supported.

A key focus of mine is that the birthing person's wellbeing and autonomous and informed choice remain at the centre of their preparation and care. Alongside working in antenatal education, I work for the NHS in specialist mental health services (and have done since qualifying as an OT in 2013), and so I very much draw on this knowledge and experience to support and influence my antenatal services.

Why is this work so important to you? I find the occupation of birth completely fascinating and following my own experience of birth preparation and birth, I realised that there's so much that can be done to support and facilitate birth that has the power to significantly influence the person's engagement and experience of it. We're not educated in birth as part of mainstream education, which means that there's so much valuable knowledge that we're missing when it comes to giving birth. I believe in the value of being educated and prepared, so that you can not only support your body's physiology during birth (because birth as a biological process really does work!), but also your mental and emotional wellbeing too. As Occupational Therapists, we are actively involved in supporting engagement with other occupations centred around bodily functions (for example, toileting or other personal care occupations), so why aren't we thinking about birth too?

On top of that, seeing the rising rates of birth trauma, alongside the rising rates of medical intervention in birth, I feel passionately about women and birthing people having access to evidence-based, person centred knowledge that supports them with informed decision making and keeping their experience of birth at the forefront. We know that women and birthing people carry their births with them for the rest of their lives and that their experience of birth can have a significant impact on their short, medium and longer term health and wellbeing, which is why I believe birth is an incredibly important occupation to be supporting.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? That's it's very much OK to step outside of the box and follow your own path, rather than the one that's set out in our healthcare system (especially here in the UK, where private practice isn't as mainstream). Although, I think I really needed to have the experiences I've had to help me find where I fit and my own voice when it comes to OT.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Let your passion and enthusiasm shine - the amazing thing about OT (I think) is that we have such an incredible set of transferable skills that can support you in such a wide variety of different practice areas, the possibilities really are endless! Find the area of OT that sets your soul on fire and follow it.



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AROMATHERAPY

“Enjoy the little things in life,
for one day you'll look back and
realize they were big things.”

~ Kurt Vonnegut



Meaghan Gmeraglia

Job title: Occupational Therapist and Certified Clinical Aromatherapist

What setting do you work in? Mental health

Describe your OT role: I have dedicated my OT career to youth and adults seeking mental health support. Often, I teach strategies for self-regulation, self-esteem, and self-care. Along my OT journey, I've seen the value in having a variety of complementary and alternative modalities (CHAIH) in my OT toolbox. Interventions such as breathwork, mindfulness and self-massage are invaluable, as they are simple yet effective.

Most notably, I have witnessed the therapeutic benefits of aromatherapy. I discovered this after working with a teen who had significant psychosis that led her to be highly isolative and minimally engaged in life. I trialed aromatherapy as a last-ditch effort and honestly was shocked at the outcome. She completely came out from within herself, smiling and socializing when we collaborated to create an essential oil lotion. At the time, I had very basic knowledge of aromatherapy and knew I needed more training to have a larger impact. Today, I am a certified clinical aromatherapist, sharing the healing power of aroma with clients in my OT work. Below I share the crash-course 101 of how I use aromatherapy in OT.

Aromatherapy is the science and art of using natural plant extracts for whole person wellness. It can be used to heal the body, mind and spirit in various ways, from managing migraines to distractibility to grief. It blends naturally with many occupations, especially ADLs, health management, spirituality, and student/worker roles. Methods of use may include collaborating with a client to make a hygiene product, linen spray, nasal inhaler, room diffuser blend and much more.

AROMATHERAPY

Combining aromatherapy and OT is seamless. When doing an aromatherapy session, I use my OT lens by: completing an evaluation, creating client-driven occupation-based goals, collaborating to formulate the aromatic product, developing a care plan embedded into their routine, training on how to use, and following up, adjusting as needed.

From a simplified perspective, essential oils are either alerting (e.g. rosemary) or calming (e.g. lavender). When in a session, essential oil selection based on client's smell preferences is paramount. Our sense of smell is one of the least commonly explored senses within OT, yet smell can have a highly significant effect on regulation as it is intimately linked to our central nervous system, emotions and memory.

The healing powers of nature are undeniable and inspiring. My current passion project is developing a training course for clients, caregivers and healing professions on how to use aromatherapy for healing and wellbeing, stay tuned!

Why is this work so important to you? OT help us live fuller, more peaceful and pleasurable lives. Everyone deserves to have the tools necessary to get through life's challenges and enhance their feel-good-factor. Aromatherapy is a holistic, practical and evidence-based healing tool that easily interweaves with occupations and routines to promote health. I've also found aromatherapy to be highly motivating and enjoyable for nearly every client, even those very hard to engage. What's not to love?

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey?

When using aromatherapy, having competency training is essential. Ethically, you want to have solid knowledge of any modality you are using, to ensure safety and to provide optimal benefit. This goes hand in hand with using high-quality essential oils.

Your clients' (and your) interests are your lighthouse! Follow these passions, building knowledge on the interventions that light you up. Take the CE courses that spark joy for you, even if it's against the grain.

As an OT you get to be a lifelong learner, discovering as you go. OT is only one of your roles; allow yourself to be multidimensional and ever-evolving. Expand and pivot in your career.



AROMATHERAPY

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Practice what you preach. OT yourself: Follow a balanced routine, practice daily self-care rituals, prioritize play/leisure, regulate yourself first, cultivate a meditation practice, have your own grounding aromatic lotion nearby... The more you care for yourself and do what lights you up, the better therapist you will be (and happier life you will have!)

Connect

Instagram: @wholebeingOT

ART



Amy Youngsmith

“Man, through the use of his hands, as they are energized by mind and will, can influence the state of his own health.”

~ Mary Reilly, EdD

Job title: Occupational Therapist

What setting do you work in? Private practice

Describe your OT role: The OT role is to support people to live meaningful lives through a holistic, creative, strengths and nature-based approach. Art can be used by the OT as a meaningful modality, exploring and expressing the implicit memory attached to functional barriers in daily life. These processes and experiences are explored further supporting a cognitive integration of these experiences towards an explicit memory. The art experience can be process vs. product focused to enhance engagement.

Why is this work so important to you? Occupational therapy values meaning and purpose. Art has been used throughout the ages explore meaning. It is important for me as therapist to offer art options within therapy, as verbal language may not offer adequate means of communication and meaning making. The sensory qualities that art materials afford, along with the experiential nature of art making and the visual experience can greatly assist the meaning making process supporting recovery.

A driving passion of this service is to honour this magnificent planet we live on, and a desire to explore and rekindle the connection to self, others, and environment to contribute to a healthy future. Cleaning up the pollution on the inside helps to clean up the pollution on the outside. Thus, let's do our bit as OT's supporting the recovery within for our clients, and considering options for the future for 'meaningful engagement in occupation'. Caring for a plant is certainly paramount in terms of meaning, without a habitable planet, where are we?

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? The importance of exploring nature connection intentionally.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Less can be more. Keep it simple.

BIOFEEDBACK & EFT



“Let the beauty of what you love, be what you do.”

~Rumi

Maria Gebus

Job title: Resilience coach and integrated skills clinician

What setting do you work in? I work in my coaching/speaker business as a resilience coach and I also do part time consultant work in a multidisciplinary mental health center as an integrated skills clinician.

Describe your OT role: I enjoy utilizing body based skills as part of my OT skillset to help individuals improve their ability to navigate stress, self regulate, and release energy that's no longer serving them to live fuller more meaningful lives.

I enjoy that my current OT hats that I wear, are in atypical settings for an OT as I can bring my OT lens to a new arena. In my work in the mental health center working with individuals with severe and persistent mental illness, I have found the value of using biofeedback to learn how stress is impacting them and it really helps increase client's motivation to learn and use emotional regulation tools to manage their anxiety, stress or heal from complex trauma. Biofeedback gives them an objectivity into how its impacting their physiology which can help tame the mind that can sometimes run away with the show.

In my work as a coach I also incorporate biofeedback to provide objective information to help high achieving, busy humans also understand how stress impacts their body and motivate them to do something about it before it gets out of control. I also use EFT accupressure to help them move through and release stress, so they can be more effective in their roles as moms, parents, partners, and entrepreneurs or managers.

BIOFEEDBACK & EFT

Why is this work so important to you? There is much focus in the emotional health – mental wellbeing space that focuses on the brain, psychology, and mindset approaches. I really enjoy being able to bring my OT lens, body-based approaches – to support these mindset approaches in the mental health and coaching world. OTs also bring great value as we tend to look at individuals with a holistic picture and keep occupation a main part of the picture which I think helps lead to brighter outcomes for clients. I truly enjoy watching new people find calm and resilience when using body based tools, I'm introducing to them.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? I wish I had started my own healing journey sooner. I didn't realize that a path forward to propel myself in my career into an area I loved, would include also doing more personal development and inner healing work. I wish I had started that journey sooner as that led to this passion area, but I also am just grateful I was connected to mentors who showed me another side of OT. Emmy Vadnais played a large role in showing me how holistic OTs can work in different areas to bring our unique skillset to more people.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Let your passions spark your next step. Don't be limited by a box/parameters that traditional OT may put you in. Understand that we can utilize the OT lens and skillset in a variety of arenas. Find what makes your heart soar, and do that! Hence my favourite quote above.

Connect

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BIPOC & LGBTQIA2S



Elizabeth Martin

“It is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind.”

~ Sankofa meaning

Job title: Occupational Therapist / Owner

What setting do you work in? Mental Health Private Practice

Describe your OT role: My role in working with Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and/or LGBTQIA2S+ individuals on Medicaid is to help these communities to access resources to meet basic needs. Historically, individuals from these communities experience greater barriers to accessing occupations of leisure, home management and maintenance, and rest due to the amount of time and effort it takes to access resources to meet daily needs. I support people to have a place where they can be validated and uplifted in knowing that their experiences are the norm, not the exception.

Why is this work so important to you? I come from both the LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC communities. I have also spent much of my adult life on Medicaid. I know how hard it is to meet basic needs. I once had \$25 to buy food for the month, after all other bills were paid. I went hungry most days to try and stretch my funds for the month. As an OT now, I use my knowledge and experience to cultivate resilience in those who have had or are having similar life experiences. By working within the same community that I come from, I am able to practice Sankofa every day. I believe if we can keep pulling each other forward, we will get to the finish line together and be more whole in the end.

BIPOC & LGBTQIA2S

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? It doesn't matter if you have been in practice 0 years or 30 years, starting a business is a completely different skillset and knowledge base. Being a good clinician is not the same as being a savvy business owner. I wish I would have known that it didn't matter when I started, but just getting started is what would eventually move me forward.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? If you know your why, you will get through the dark nights of transition. You can have the life you desire. Get help, don't do it alone, and find people doing similar things to you.

Connect

Website: holisticcommunitytherapy.com

BODY IMAGE

“If it’s good, it’s great;
if it’s bad, it’s experience”



Emily Roberts

Job title: I work as a full time occupational therapist, and am a Certified Intuitive Eating Counselor and wellness coach on the side!

What setting do you work in? My full time job is in the acute care/hospital setting, but my business is more based in mental health, wellness and health promotion. With my business, I provide most of my services virtually!

Describe your OT role: In the acute care setting, I consider myself one of the only professions in the hospital that looks at the patient holistically, especially when it comes to addressing mental health. I find with an acute injury, surgery, or illness that impacts one’s physical ability or the way their body looks, my patients really struggle with their body image and relationship to their bodies. It’s hard to go from fully able-bodied to struggling to put their pants on, or from two breasts to one after a mastectomy. Unlike other professions, I don’t look past this and instead provide therapeutic listening and coaching through the body grief they are experiencing. I provide compassion-focused therapy, and facilitate cognitive reframing to assist in working through body image as a barrier to occupational participation. I do very similar work in my business, but with a different population of people who struggle with disordered eating, generally poor self esteem and self worth, and want to find a way to be well while ditching the shame dieting often brings. I use the framework of intuitive eating to improve their relationships with food and their body, while embracing a life of wellness with compassion.

BODY IMAGE

Why is this work so important to you? For as long as I can remember, I struggled with my body image, and it took many years for me to see how much it impacted how I showed up and participated in life. I eventually found a way to stop the shame game, and treat myself with the compassion I deserved, and I wanted to help anyone going through something similar.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? You don't have to go the traditional OT route if it's not your purpose. I was told by an OT professor that OTs didn't work with people with eating disorders. I am on a mission to prove her wrong. Don't give up on your calling because others don't see the vision only God has given you.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? When it comes to working with those struggling with their body image, don't ignore it. Remember that mental health barriers are just as big as physical when it comes to participating in life. Don't forget the whole picture.

Connect

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BODYWORK



“We don’t stop playing because we get old, we get old because we stop playing.”

~ George Bernard Shaw

Jess Fee

Job title: Jess Fee, Holistic Occupational Therapist & Reiki + B O D Y W O R K practitioner

What setting do you work in? I work in what would be considered an alternative wellness field focused on preventative services. I own my own business, Inspire Lifestyle, under a bigger umbrella called Inspire Co. I work alongside a Network Spinal Chiropractor, Health Coach & Personal Trainer, Trauma-informed yogi & breathwork facilitator, and a clinical health counselor.

Describe your OT role: My personal slogan is: I am trained and find passion in helping individuals recognize and honor all of the critical elements of physical, mental, and spiritual balance that bring us back to a place of peace & happiness. My role as an OT... I feel like most OTs will relate when they I say, what I do is broad. When it comes down to it and I have to assign it a title it would be Lifestyle expert & EnergyBody healer. With my lifestyle expertise, I work primarily with women between the ages of 25-55 who experience chronic stress and are finding it difficult to balance their needs with the demands of life. Most of the women I work with have diagnoses of anxiety, depression, chronic pain, hormonal imbalances, and other mood disorders. Essentially, I educate them on BodyMind connection and provide interventions for self-regulation so that women are able to respond vs. react in their day-to-day life. I give women back the power in their life, thus, they find healthier versions of themselves... then their families become healthier. AH its all cyclical and really is so exciting to witness. I call this program the Intuitive Lifestyle Program and the results of it gives me shivers and tremendous pride in my clients.

NOW... EnergyBody... where do I begin?

BODYWORK

Let's start at what I tell prospective clients. Energy work has been made to feel unattainable. Not because it is, but because it has been attached to a woo-woo style of wellness. Energy in your body is very real—every movement you make, every thought you have, everything about you is energy. Do me a favor and think about the moment in your life when you have felt most comfortable. Go ahead, close your eyes, spend 10-30 seconds in that memory.

How does your body feel now? If you feel even the slightest bit different, that, my friend, is energy. The problem with working with most clients and energy is that discomfort is distracting. So I thought, why not use my knowledge on relieving joint, muscle, fascia, tendon and ligament tension to help people move, accept and integrate healing energies. My sessions go something like this: I start with clients in anatomical position and run them through ROM, and then utilize classic MMT. During these assessments, I look for imbalances, weaknesses, contractures, subluxations, posturing and other biomechanical indicators of dis-ease. I make note of these so that I know which areas are blocking the flow of energy. During the sessions I use guided imagery, meditation, and muscle relaxation, as well as hands-on approaches. These approaches include palpation, myofascial release, trigger point release, joint compression/retraction, muscle contraction/relaxation/activation, postural positioning, and more.

Why is this work so important to you? No one is going to heal because you tell them to. People are going to heal because they want to. The flexibility of my programming meets people where they are at. Literally. I will go to people house and guide them in reiki work or I will meet them online and coach them through my program. No one is going to heal because we tell them to, but seeing how motivated and committed clients are when they see the how one session affects their mental and physical wellbeing is a driving force in the work I do.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? I wish that I had known more about the system that I would be working in before leaving school. It was a bit of a culture shock of sorts when the individualized nature of OT was placed in a system that values standardization of care. I wish I had not let that discourage and distract me for so long.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? We are called to OT because we are healers, do not lose sight of the individual gifts that you bring to this beautiful profession!

Connect

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BREATHING RETRAINING



“Breathe well, live well.”

Kate Broderick

Job title: Occupational Therapist & Speech Pathologist, Course Presenter & Podcaster.

What setting do you work in? I am the Founder of Spot Therapy Hub, an airway focused, neurodiversity affirming private practice. Spot has beautiful clinics that are inclusive spaces. We support people in contexts here meaningful occupational really happens, which means working in the community every day. Spot was also founding telehealth practice and that remains something I am passionate about.

I hope that screening for symptoms of dysfunctional breathing will one day be a mainstream practice for all occupational therapists and speech pathologists! Presenting professional courses; The Breathing Link and the Oral-Motor Link, is another important part of my work life.

The Spot Therapy Hub Podcast is an expression of my personal and professional values, which celebrate curiosity, life-long learning and connection with other people whose diverse interests and knowledge enhance our own lives.

Describe your OT role: Airway focused practice and breathing retraining sits at the epicentre of my everyday clinical work as an occupational therapist and speech pathologist.

While breathing is an automatic process for us all, so many of us do not breathe well. Dysfunctional breathing patterns that are observable during the day will almost certainly be there as a symptom of sleep disordered breathing at night, affecting development, mood, executive functioning, learning and physical well-being.

BREATHING RETRAINING

Breathing is the most important orofacial function. Those with suboptimal breathing patterns often present with differences in their; whole body posture, balance, coordination and motor development; state regulation and sensory processing (yes, the literature links mouth breathing to sensory processing differences); oral rest posture, which is critically related to craniofacial growth and development of the airway; chewing and swallowing skills, which are not quite as important as breathing but are high up on the list of important survival skills and basic human rights; emotional regulation; and, communication. Communication is a rich process that involves so much more than speech. Facial expression, vocal tone and fluency, all shape the way an individual communicates with others; all are tied to our breath, whether directly or along the route of regulation and the way we experience the world.

I love working with infants and children (especially neurodivergent kids) who have breathing goals, and adults who are committed to improving their well-being through the power of breathing.

Why is this work so important to you? Breathing sits at the nexus of body and mind. When it is not working optimally, musculoskeletal, biochemical and psycho-emotional systems are affected. The utterly brilliant thing to realise is that breathing is both a symptom of imbalance, and a treatment.

We can take control of our breathing habits to effect positive change in our well-being. It's even more exciting when we think about the fact that it's free, and this power sits within all of us. With knowledge, we can identify infants within the first hours of life whose breathing and nervous system would benefit from gentle and intention guidance (think about coregulation, lots of tummy time and optimising early oral sensory-motor experiences). So, it's never too early, or too late, to improve well-being using breathing retraining.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? That stepping away from a medical model of care is okay – in fact – it's wonderful. Being client focused and working unfailingly in a collaborative model will be as fulfilling for you as it is for your clients. Also, I wish I had known to reflect more on identity and actively support my clients to explore their identity, because that is the key to meaningful occupation.

BREATHING RETRAINING

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals?

You truly have joined a wonderful profession, and if you turn to explore your own identity, you will find what is meaningful to you! Lean into that because you will be able to enhance the lives and well-being of others when you're following a vision that you believe in. Don't be scared to believe in yourself!

Connect

Instagram: @spottherapyhub

Facebook: Spot Therapy Hub

Website: www.spottherapyhub.com.au

CIRCUS



“Great minds discuss ideas;
average minds discuss events;
small minds discuss people.”

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

Kieran Broome

Job title: Senior Occupational Therapist (all the occupation-based as well as enabling approaches are wrapped up in the term occupational therapist, so I don't feel the need for any other name for my practice role)

What setting do you work in? I work from my office-grid office on a rural property, with my circus rig about 10 metres from my office.

Describe your OT role: Circus therapy, also known as social circus, is something I incorporate into my rural generalist role. It is an artful process of matching the person's needs to the selected activity. Circus is such a broad occupation, with options like aerials, acrobatics, juggling, and clowning. Through circus, people can facing real and extant physical fears and fears of performing, exploring body issues in how their body looks or moves, build physical capacities, explore actions and consequences, practice approaches like CO-OP in novel activities without social comparison, or just experience something out of the ordinary. What differentiates circus from many other occupations is it is non-competitive. There are no set curricula or progressions, and so many apparatus to choose from (like aerial hammock or contact juggling) that can be matched to either highlight a person's natural strengths or target capacities for improvement. Rather than perfection, success in circus is a combination creativity, practice, and highlighting strengths to produce something of interest or amazement. As an occupational therapist, my role is to skillfully curate my client's experiences, providing success and challenges at the just right times. I also use my enabling skills to adapt activities. For example for people in wheelchairs we can use harnesses to lift them into the air, and allowing them freedom to roll and tumble, or even partially weight-bear without hands-on support. We can even lift their whole wheelchair with them in it.

CIRCUS

For persons facing psychosocial challenges, I can incorporate graded exposure, psychological experimentation and self-actualisation. It demands great bravery to let yourself go into an aerial drop (with appropriate supervision for safety), acknowledging a lack of control and the inevitable manageable pain as you catch on a leg or an arm. And as a performative art, circus has an opportunity to change perceptions. One of our clients who was unable to walk unaided or hold objects with coordination was able to do a full aerial performance for her family and friends at her 16th birthday party, and the reaction from her family and school friends was one of pride and amazement. They commented in surprise how she was able to do things she never thought she could do, but also things they could never do themselves, challenging the ideas of ability and disability. And the performance itself was a thing of beauty.

Why is this work so important to you? For me, the best therapies should push you hard but not feel like hard work. I've never wanted to work in a role where I have to convince people to do things that I wouldn't want to do. Circus isn't for everyone, which is why for others we take them on other therapeutic adventures such as prone paddling, or adaptive skateboarding. However, circus made significant changes in my life with my strength and my outlook. With my combined skills in occupational therapy and circus, I am uniquely positioned to bring this as an offering for clients.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? Usually employers want you to fulfil their vision, but will give you some autonomy. The opposite is true in entrepreneurial practice. You get to realise your vision, but still need to work within the pragmatics constraints of business. It's not one or the other. You can build your own balance.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Occupation-based practice, using occupations themselves as therapy, is incredibly fulfilling. However, it's not always well known. If transitioning to include more occupation-based practice, you can either start gently incorporating it, asking questions like "Did you want to.. [do certain occupation]?" and "Do you need want me involved to make it easier?". If that's not possible, sometimes you need to quarantine the time for that offering. Full-time work is just a habit. Negotiate what you want. Take some financial risk. Start an occupation-based practice.

Connect

Website: www.goodtobetter.com.au

Website: www.maryvalleycircus.com.au

COACHING



Ana Hernandez

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world.”

~ Williamson, M

Job title: As humans we have the need to define and categorize everything. Even in this book, you will find we have been asked what our job title is. I do not have a formal job title, however, when needing to present one, I am Director of Human Performance.

What setting do you work in? I work in paediatrics, specialising in neurodivergent affirming practice, parent occupational performance coaching, play and child lead therapy and sensory processing challenges. I am also an OT supervisor and mentor and very interested in exploring the role of spirituality in occupational therapy practice.

Describe your OT role: I facilitate and help manage all things that enable people to perform at their optimum level. I work in private practice where I provide wellness coaching. I fell into coaching when I was burnt out from working as a director of rehab in a skilled nursing facility and after my pediatric private practice failed. I joined a network marketing company selling wellness products. I found myself educating and coaching the other distributors on the products and how to use them in everyday life. I then noticed that I could offer wellness coaching without being a distributor for a specific company. I was able to make a greater impact for myself and others as a coach through the lens of OT.

COACHING

Why is this work so important to you? OT, to me, is wellness coaching. The core purpose of OT is to help people live meaningful and purposeful lives through the engagement of occupations, where occupations are defined as those activities that occupy one's time. Using the Model of Human Occupation, OTs are fully able to coach people and help them live life more fulfilled. My clients are typically dissatisfied with where they are in their lives and are looking to be more actively engaged in living versus merely existing, but they are unsure of what that looks like and how to even get started. Most of my clients are women that find themselves in a transition. They have either been married for much of their lives and are now divorced, find that their role as mother has changed as her children are now adults, discover that they no longer enjoy the work that they have been doing for many years or a combination of all of that. Together we discover occupations that either have brought them satisfaction in the past or that they are interested in exploring. We identify their volition, habits, beliefs that contribute to or work against them experiencing those joyful occupations. We then create the goals and plan of action. I integrate modalities that help them shift their beliefs and mindset and I hold them accountable to achieving their goals.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? In my journey to this point, I cannot say that I wish I had known something sooner. I feel I have always known OTs are the perfect coach. It took me awhile to let go of the limiting beliefs that working as an OT had to fit in the traditional box. Even still now, people continually want to put me (and OT) in a box. Life does not exist in a box. Life is a continuum. Having the formal education, the intuitive nature, and the variety of experiences we have as occupational therapists make us perfect for coaching.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? I fully believe that people can do so much more but we settle because of what we have been conditioned to believe, our limiting beliefs. Our emotions and experiences make those beliefs even stronger unless we are cognizant and conscious of them and process through them rather than sweep them under the carpet. Working in the coaching realm is so important because we have a kaleidoscope perspective to help people truly live their lives to the fullest! There are many people in the coaching realm that do not have the formal education nor the breadth of awareness that we, OTs, can bring to the table.

COMMUNITY & OUTREACH

“What is it you plan to do with
your one wild and precious
life?”

~ Mary Oliver



Helen Mason

Job title: CEO Rise and Rewild CIC

What setting do you work in? Our CIC is based at Powderham Castle Devon England.

Rise and Rewild CIC supports people to live life their way, to find meaning and purpose personally and as a community. The natural environment assists with healing, promoting self-help and lifestyle adjustments.

We strive to work in a sustainable way and support people to experience an authentic and meaningful connection with the natural environment and with arts and heritage.

Powderham Castle is the Home of our patron The Countess of Devon AJ Courtenay.

Describe your OT role: I provide nature and heritage based creative occupational therapy, Nature based Sensory health workshops (I am an Advanced Sensory Integration Practitioner) EMDR and community outreach work.

Alongside specialist therapies we provide walks in nature, forest bathing, art and craft making and meditation work. We provide group and individual sessions in the Castles walled garden where you can pet giant tortoises and walk the Llamas.

Another area of my work is supporting people to attend the vibrant events put on every year at the Castle. It is a pleasure to support those would not otherwise have been able to attend who have complex needs including oncology, complex bereavement, life limiting illness and trauma. I do this work on a pro bono basis as it fills my cup!

COMMUNITY & OUTREACH

I am currently working with the Castle heritage team and Plymouth university on a project creating a VR tool kit to support people in hospital or who do not usually access heritage sites.

As a previous NESTA awardee and having run a therapeutic animation company for 11 years, I love seeing how new advances in artificial intelligence and VR can compliment therapy.

Why is this work so important to you? Throughout my career I have dedicated my time to really attuning to the needs of the people I am working with and for. It's wonderful to see people rise after illness, injury and or trauma and I really connect with our professional symbol the Phoenix.

During the pandemic and giving birth to my third child, I became very concerned about parents experiencing the loss of a child. We lost our little girl in 2008 and I could not imagine going through the pain alone and isolated from family due to lock downs.

Following the birth of my child I ran 55 miles in Lockdown for Sands charity. Hearing of my attempt the Earl of Devon joined me on some runs to support and offered me the Castle driveway (closed to the public).

I put out a call on social media to connect with others with newborns who may feel isolated due to low mood, anxiety and or first baby. In one hour I had 60 responses. The first pandemic baby walking group was created. Rise and Rewild was born.

This is what occupational therapy is; it is responding and creating space for others from nothing. It is helping those who would otherwise have no support. It is about raising each other up.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey?

I often wonder why OTs given the nature of our work do not access our own personal therapy as part of our training.

We are our own tool as a therapist. In a triadic relationship – therapist, activity, client, it is vitally important we look after ourselves and each other. I feel blessed to be working at a time where trauma informed practice, sensory integration and Neuro-divergent affirmative practice are better understood.

COMMUNITY & OUTREACH

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Find your tribe. There have been times in my career I have felt lonely and isolated. I feel passionate about supporting people with discovering their meaning and purpose.

Don't be afraid to connect with the people who are not in your network, reach out and co-create.

If a job or system is not working for you or your clients move on, reach out for support. You are not alone! Times where you feel like giving up are the very times when I would encourage you to reach for the stars. Change feels difficult but can bring magic with it!

Connect

Twitter: @Animatetherapy

Facebook: Rise and Rewild CIC at The Shed

Website: www.riserewild.co.uk

CONSCIOUS PARENTING



"What we know matters, but who we are matters more"

~ Brene Brown

Maggie Viers

Job title: Occupational Therapist and conscious parent coach

What setting do you work in? Conscious Parenting; Trauma + Relational Healing

Describe your OT role: I help to support the parent-child relationship by helping parents to better understand themselves and their children.

Why is this work so important to you? When I had my own 4 children, I became aware of all of my own trauma and how my early life experiences and insecure attachment had affected not only my parenting, but my entire life. Once I began my own healing and reparenting journey, I knew I had to help other parents to learn what I had learned. Conscious parenting can have a profound effect on healing the collective and for the betterment of humanity.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? That my own inner work would be one of the most fundamental game changers to how I show up in the field and with my clients.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? I worked in the hospital setting for 10 years and was finding myself burnt out and unfulfilled. I didn't know there was a whole world out there of other opportunities. Spend time reflecting on what brings you joy, what you are passionate about. Reach out to that OT who is doing what you want to be doing, small actionable steps.

Connect

Instagram: @theempoweredfamily

Website: www.thrivinglittles.com

DEMENTIA



“Opportunities don’t happen,
you create them!”

Brooke Moore

Job title: Occupational therapist & Director.

What setting do you work in? I work in a private occupational therapy practice and we support clients in the community and residential aged care, and adult disability space. We primarily see clients who access support through the NDIS and Aged Care Home Care Package Program.

Describe your OT role: My area of interest is dementia and so most of the clients I support have a diagnosis of dementia/cognitive impairment. My role as an occupational therapist is primarily to support my clients to remain living at home. We aim to support them to regain/maintain function and provide a high level of support to their care partners to help them support their loved one. We complete home safety assessments, prescribe equipment and assist with home modifications. We also focus on supporting clients who have a change in function or behaviour that impacts their ability to do the things they want or need to do; the Care of People with Dementia in their Environments (COPE) program has provided us with a great framework to do this. COPE is an OT-led evidenced based program that aims to support the person with dementia and their care partner. This is a program that we highly value within our practice and continue to try and promote in our community as we have seen some really positive results.

Why is this work so important to you? When I studied occupational therapy I worked as a personal care worker at a residential aged care facility and saw the mistreatment of people living with dementia. I would also often see residents come in with a very rich “occupational” history and then find themselves sitting for long periods of the day and occupationally deprived. Often this was due to the staff lacking the education and support they required to provide the high level of support people with dementia require. This really affected me as I knew dementia care could be done better. I guess it set me on a journey to develop my own skills in dementia care with the aim to pass on that skill and knowledge to other carers/staff members. For people living with dementia to experience a high quality of life they need to be surrounded by a good physical and social environment and that is what I try to promote/enable through the work that I do.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? How to explain OT to others! Like many OTs it has taken me some time to develop a good response to the common question of “what do you do for work?” I feel like I did OT a disservice for many years not having that down pat!

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Really try to understand your own values and the meaningful work that fills your cup. It can be challenging when working for a larger organisation to focus on seeing a certain group of clients that fall within your passion area, however be open and transparent with your manager about the work that you are passionate about and ask how they can support you to do that work.

Connect

Instagram: @holistic_occupationaltherapy

Facebook: Holistic Occupational Therapy

Website: www.holisticoccupationaltherapy.com.au

ECO FRIENDLY



Lee Maitz

“Curiosity is the
tunnel of joy”
~ Hayley Talbot

Job title: Occupational Therapist

What setting do you work in? I support children and families in a range of settings including clinic, home, school and outdoor/nature. A large portion of my caseload also involves working with First Nations people including outreach to regional and remote areas.

Describe your OT role: My caseload is varied, supporting children with a range of physical, cognitive and emotional challenges, in individual and group settings, indoors and outdoors, from a range of social and cultural backgrounds. I also view, assess and support children through a developmental, “whole child” lens so my role as an OT varies from session to session. I can be consulting on postural support and energy conservation in one session and exploring the wonder and sensory input of rockpools in another session. I am also committed to environmentally sustainable practice and this is reflected in my role as an OT. Most of the equipment and resources in my clinic are upcycled (eg. My ramp, fort, ladders and slide are made from upcycled timber, I use foam off cuts inside doona covers from the op shop for crash mats and I invest in quality tools made in small batches from sustainable materials) and I use minimal tools and toys which encourages me to focus more on showing up authentically, precise clinical reasoning, attunement, sparking curiosity, the power of relationship and therapeutic use of self.

ECO FRIENDLY

Why is this work so important to you? I was so fortunate to grow up in a small town on Yaegl Country on the North Coast of NSW, surrounded by the ocean and National Park with a strong and rich cultural presence. My childhood was filled with surfing, swimming, diving, paddling, exploring, hiking, climbing trees and building cubbies in the bush, and I have always felt deeply connected to nature- our landscapes, flora and fauna. After almost a decade away, I returned home with my own little family and, for the past twelve years, I've shared these same experiences with them. My hope is that my children's children and their children for generations to come will have the gift of these same experiences and connection. I also consider the increase in therapists working in nature-based settings and want to advocate for coming full circle- caring for and respecting our land and environment in return. It requires a conscious effort to take care of the environment starting with a commitment to environmentally sustainable choices and practices.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? Just show up with an open mind and be willing.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Take time to work on your own self-awareness, how experiences and interactions makes you feel from moment to moment. That is your compass for life's journey including your OT journey. Everything else flows from that- clarity, authenticity, alignment, empowerment, self-care, embodiment, joy, boundaries, direction.

Connect

Instagram: @kindred.ots

Instagram: @the.eco.ot

Facebook: Kindred OTs

Website: leemaitzot.com

EQUIPMENT PRESCRIPTION



Lindsay DeLong

“Be so good they can’t ignore you.”

~ Steve Martin

Job title: Occupational Therapist and Founder of EquipMeOT, LLC

What setting do you work in? Equipment Prescription

Describe your OT role: I have focused on adult home health for the past 8 years. I spent most of that time patient facing but have recently transitioned to all remote through educational content creation through my social media platforms. I now focus on sharing equipment, tips and strategies to improve quality of life.

Why is this work so important to you? I am most passionate about increasing access to information that can improve quality of life. As an occupational therapist, I possess years of experience and knowledge about equipment and techniques that can significantly improve access to daily occupations. This access and quality of life is the reason I continue to share and expand awareness through my online platforms. By using large audience platforms versus doing this on a one-on-one strategy, I can significantly increase the reach and scope of this information.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? I wish I had been a louder advocate of the profession. I was too quiet early in my career. Too happy to just be good at what I was doing and not willing to be vocal when occupational therapy was not being given the proper space, resources, or respect it deserved.

EQUIPMENT PRESCRIPTION

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Your expertise is important to everyone. You have a skill set that includes incredible depth of knowledge, problem solving skills, and critical thinking. Sometimes it seems like the what you know is rooted in the simplest activities of life, but never forget that those activities are often the most vital to quality of life! Share your knowledge with the world and I promise you will change lives.

Connect

Instagram: @equipmeot

Youtube: EquipMeOT

Website: www.equipmeot.com

ERGONOMICS



“Follow your bliss”

~ Joseph Campbell

Dave Grover

Job title: David Grover, OTR, Occupational Therapist, Structural bodyworker, Ergonomist

What setting do you work in? Outpatient or onsite at individual's workplace.

Describe your OT role: Person occupation environment and biomechanical.

Why is this work so important to you? With the dependence on technology people lose their way and develop dysfunction with habits and health biomechanics. In my work I hope to guide people to a healthier way of being.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? People can be stubborn changing routines and taking insurance can be confounding.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Every moment is an opportunity to learn when working with others. Each moment is a reflection of our experience. Try to be intentional and use oneself therapeutically to inspire. We are a catalyst to sparking volition by giving meaning to others. Help them see the change they may like to see and that it is possible and another way is achievable and can be a healthier way of being in the world.

Connect

Instagram: @lotnow

Facebook: Lifestyle Occupational Therapy

Website: www.lifestyleot.com/

FARM BASED

‘If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change’

~ Wayne Dyer



Sarah Munn

Job title: CEO at Barefoot Therapists & Gadara Farm – Animal and Equine Assisted Occupational Therapist

What setting do you work in? Child & Family Private Practice including Farm-based and animal assisted therapy

Describe your OT role: Our OT's work in a multi disciplinary team with speech pathologists, psychologist, teacher and dietician. We work in rooms and also at our farm where we include farm work and husbandry (looking after animals) within our sessions. Personally, I work mainly with parents and families and provide training in animal assisted therapy including how to include horses into clinical practice if you are an OT or health professional.

Why is this work so important to you? I can see the difference being outdoors in green spaces, working with our hands and with animals, makes to both children and their parents/carers. Engagement and attendance improve and both the Biophilia effect and the Human Animal Bond serve as powerful partners in the therapy process. I love to train OT's to include these different approaches to support people with a variety of physical and wellbeing challenges from intellectual disability to trauma and neurodiversity. Inspiring and training my team of 15 therapists to be able to include our horses, donkeys, goats, chickens, dogs, rabbits and guinea pigs is a joy. And to be able to ascertain if a clinic program or an outdoor program will be most effective for each individual keeps us accountable and professional. To be able to do this I need to know how to train and maintain wellbeing for the animals, and how to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with all species we work with.

FARM BASED

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey?

That there are so many options to be true to the OT process and be fulfilled. It isn't all about the most prestigious jobs or the best pay, it is actually about doing what fills your cup every day.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Being an OT can be an amazing experience and we don't have to stay in the clinics, schools or offices to provide services. As human beings we should bring our authentic selves to the work. These days there are many options for working with activities which motivate people more than ever. I love that OT can get back to it's roots of woodwork, farm work, gardening and crafting outside in nature - all the things that OT used to be about when we started working with returned veterans of war. While we might giggle about basket weaving, these activities are having a resurgence in everyday life a people once again start to value using our hands and being creative and sustainable. Seek out jobs which you would be happy to do as a volunteer in your older years, and then celebrate that you get paid to do it now. That will be your authentic calling. Having said that, the groundwork and clinical knowledge I learnt in hospitals and schools was crucial to my evidence based practice being successful today. So, it is also important not to skip the early new grad training to get to the fun stuff. To step out into the paddock you need be very professional, and your clinical reasoning needs to be exceptional, or it just turns into playing with horses which is not OT. See those early years in the profession as an investment in your future, but know you are driving where you want to go. The medical model and report writing for funding are the poor relation of our most amazing creative, artistic and scientific profession, so don't get stuck there unless you love it.

Connect

Instagram: @gadara_farm

Instagram: @barefoottherapists

Facebook: Barefoot OT

Facebook: Gadara Therapeutic Farm

Website: www.barefoottherapists.com.au

Website: www.gadarafarm.com.au

HOLISTIC THERAPY

‘Do you have the patience to wait till your mud settles and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving till the right action arises by itself?’

–Lao Tzu, from Tao Te Ching



Emmy Vadnais

Job title: Emmy Vadnais, OTR/L, Intuitive Healer, Health Coach, and CoHost – New Thinking Allowed.

What setting do you work in? Integrative Health, Wellness, and Prevention Media Continuing Education.

Describe your OT role: I am an Occupational Therapist, Intuitive Healer, Health Coach, teacher, consultant, and writer. I provide holistic and integrative healthcare and intuitive development education to healthcare practitioners and organizations. I am author of *Intuitive Development: How to Trust Your Inner Knowing for Guidance with Relationships, Health, and Spirituality*. I provide intuitive development coaching and training. I am the founder and director of the Holistic OT Community at HolisticOT.org that supports OTs interested in or practicing integrative health, wellness, and prevention. I am CoHost of the New Thinking Allowed YouTube Channel with Jeffrey Mishlove, PhD at NewThinkingAllowed.com. I am in private practice in St. Paul, MN. My website is EmmyVadnais.com.

I have a deep understanding of the Mind-Body-Spirit connection. I have provided care as a “conventional” and “alternative” health care provider in hospitals, nursing homes, clinics, and private practice. It is my clinical observation, having worked with thousands of people, that there is often a strong underlying psycho-emotional, energetic, and spiritual component – a.k.a. a person’s consciousness that needs addressing with all illness and staying well.

My background includes a B.A. in occupational therapy & psychology, and am trained in medical qigong energy healing, meditation, relaxation, intuitive development and healing, guided imagery, massage therapy, acupuncture, reflexology, myofascial release, craniosacral therapy, emotional freedom technique (EFT), emotional clearing/interactive mindfulness, aromatherapy, and yoga.

HOLISTIC THERAPY

I have been studying and practicing holistic and integrative health for over 20 years. I teach continuing education and provide coaching to health care professionals about how to incorporate holistic and integrative health approaches into their practice and for self-care.

Receive assistance and develop your intuition, remove barriers to help you to stay well, cope with life changes, recover from an illness, and have a more peaceful and joyful life. Together we will help you with self-discovery, healing, and transformation.

Why is this work so important to you? Over 90% of a person's health is up to them— their health habits, routines, and beliefs.

Occupational therapists can be instrumental in the health, wellness, and prevention area of healthcare.

I wanted to be on the other side of health care—helping people before they become sick and help prevent many diseases and loss of function. It was sad to see so many people suffer from heart disease, diabetes, strokes, amputations, and other serious limitations.

When I became interested in complementary and integrative health, there were few role models to guide me. I learned how to listen to and trust my intuition. The world would be a happier and healthier place if more people listened to their intuition.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey?

- Even though the OT scope can address the mind, body, and spirit, they are rarely simultaneously addressed in most settings. I have been able to create a practice that aligns with the holistic scope of OT and support people with their mind, body, and spirit.
- How much insurance companies can dictate health care, in the U.S. Despite this, I have been able to create a cash-based health, wellness, and prevention practice.
- That not all clients will recover from their illness or disease. We can support people to feel and be well as best they can with their conditions and to live with less stress, anxiety, and pain and experience more joy and peace.
- How much I would have to explain what occupational therapy is over and over. It is a vast profession, where OTs can work in a variety of settings and groups of people that is evolving.

HOLISTIC THERAPY

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Follow your interests and passions. Be true to yourself about who and where you want to serve. Complementary and integrative health approaches are wonderful to bring into your life for self-care and to assist others in all settings across the lifespan. Consider developing a regular meditation, mindfulness, or relaxation practice. There are mountains of research evidence showing how these can lower stress, anxiety, depression, PTSD symptoms, insomnia, prevent disease, and increase a sense of peace, joy, and well-being. These also help you access your intuition—your inner knowing that will guide you well in all areas of your life.

Connect

Instagram: @emmyvadnais

Instagram: @holisticot

Facebook: Emmy Vadnais Holistic Healing

Facebook: Holistic Occupational Therapy

Website: emmyvadnais.com

Website: holisticot.org

HOME MODIFICATIONS



“You are the life you accept
for yourself”

~ Moira Rose

Dawn Heiderscheidt

Job title: Founder of Aurora Independence, Occupational Therapist, Home accessibility, and Home Safety Expert

What setting do you work in? Home Modifications/ Aging in Place

Describe your OT role: My role as an Occupational Therapist (OT) in the home modification space is to help bridge the gap between our client's desire to age in place and the realities of the housing/health market.

Often times the desires of our clients cannot be achieved because the housing market is not set up for them, homes are aging themselves, were not built with accessibility in mind originally, and new builds are following the same trends. Paired with a healthcare system that does not focus on prevention, we are potentially heading to a situation where those looking to stay in their homes with support, may have difficulty doing so in the way in which they imagined.

I assist people with realising the potential of their spaces, of themselves, and the equipment/ technology that can help them achieve their personal goals.

HOME MODIFICATIONS

Why is this work so important to you? This is incredibly important because most people I work with don't even realise they have, or society has, a biased view of aging that is self-limiting. With 22% of the population projected to be over 65 by 2050, and multigenerational housing on the rise since the 70s, the needs of the people are deviating greater and greater from the capabilities of our housing and healthcare systems to support them adequately. Aging in place doesn't mean it's for the old and decrepit.

It means allowing people of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds to stay in their current/preferred setting for as long as they wish to do so. It means individuals can maintain their dignity and a safe level of independence, that is culturally relevant to them, using innovation supported by experts.

The beauty of OT is that it is client-centered, we meet the client where, when, and however they are ready. Everyone's goals will be different, and every home modification is different. As a result, we need more experts in the field educating clients, and working outside of traditional healthcare systems to help clients access resources and knowledge.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? While in school I knew intimately the benefits of occupational therapy and the gaps we filled. What I wish I had known sooner, was that we don't need to practice our craft within the traditional healthcare system. There are so many ways for us to do what OTs are trained to do, and often times the traditional setting, under traditional health insurance, doesn't give our clients access to us.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Be sure to look around the blinders every once in a while. If we keep ourselves in settings that are focused on treatment and not prevention, we may lose the profession, and the reason we all joined it in the first place. While intimidating, looking/working outside the box is where you will find the passion of OT.

Connect

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HOSPITAL



Alexis Joelle

“Can’t couldn’t if it didn’t try.”

~ Inspired by a former patient

Job title: Occupational Therapist, department supervisor in an acute care hospital and consultant for the occupational therapy provider

What setting do you work in? Acute care (hospital)

Describe your OT role: When a client comes to the hospital, whether due to planned or unplanned factors, my role is to evaluate how their current level of function compares to their prior level of function and environmental circumstances. Their current level of function may be impacted by the medical reason they were admitted to the hospital. While patients may discharge the hospital medically stable, they also need the resources from occupational therapists like me to be “functionally stable.” However, it is more than that; while we only get to be a part of our client’s life for a short while (from days to hours), my role is to determine if they can return to their life again. Providing an accurate and comprehensive evaluation of my client can make a difference in what supports them. Determining what discharge recommendations will be most impactful in their ability to access daily occupations (despite the barriers that come with those admission reasons) can be life changing.

Why is this work so important to you? This is typically my client’s first stop in the healthcare system. Wherever that health trajectory may lead, I want to be able to give them the tools they need to embark on their functional, emotional, social, cognitive and overall occupational recovery ahead. I want to give them the tools they need to be able to advocate for themselves in this healthcare climate. I hope to give them the resources and strategies they need to support their journey of working back toward their participation in their most meaningful and purposeful life activities.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? A client's independence is not a reflection of their readiness to return to their daily occupations. Each one of our clients have a definition of what is meaningful in their daily lives. We cannot define that for them and we most certainly cannot go into their hospital rooms projecting independence as their main priority. I wish in the first third of my career that I had learned to dig deeper on what matters to them; so I can help them achieve that during their medical recovery. Also, knowing how important it is for clients (and their caregivers) to have the skills to be their own occupational therapist. When they leave the hospital, whether making a stop at another facility for rehab services to home without support, my clients go back to their life. It is up to OT providers like me to ensure they know how to access their meaningful activities, especially without me being around.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Having been in practice since 2011 across multiple settings and as an employee, leader and entrepreneur, the biggest words of wisdom I can pass along to you is to not settle for what you think you know about occupational therapy. Instead, be open and curious to what occupational therapy can be because of your life experiences.

Just because occupational therapy is the way you see it in front of you, does not mean that is the only way. OT practice can evolve if you want it to, if you advocate for it, and if you remain active in it throughout your career. If you are burning out, you are attempting to fulfill someone else's definition and expectations of the profession; stop. Determine how you define occupational therapy, pursue it in the way it feels deeply right in your heart and seek out the resources or mentorship you need to achieve that.

Our potential is endless; we can fill the gaps that others around us do not see. Why let others dim that light just because they do not see what you see. It is never too late to add a new tool to your toolbox, venture to a new setting, not impossible to change a culture, or even explore becoming a entrepreneur. The only way to feel fulfilled in this profession is to live the life we advocate for everyday for our clients.

Connect

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INTEROCEPTION

“You need to feel at home in your body in order to feel at home in the world.”



Kelly Mahler

Job title: Occupational Therapist & Interoception Groupie.

What setting do you work in? This is a hard question to answer and speaks to the beauty of OT! I see clients in the school, community and zoom land as well as have an academic/research side of my job.

Describe your OT role: Coach, Educator, Researcher, Interoception Groupie. My role is a work in progress. When I am no longer progressing in a professional way, it will be time to retire. No matter the role, studying and implementing interoception-based supports is one of my biggest areas of focus. The science of interoception has changed me personally as well as how I carry out my role as an OT. It has challenged me to continually update myself both how I operate personally as well as professionally. We still have a lot to learn about interoception, but it is clear that interoception has an impact on much of our daily functioning, so it is definitely something that all OTs (and just people in general) should understand.

Why is this work so important to you? Let's face it...OT is the best profession that exists! Okay, okay. I'm only slightly biased. Ha! But what a gift we are given—to have the chance to get to know clients on a deeply personal level and offer meaningful supports that can change their lives for the better. I'm not sure how it can get better than that! In terms of interoception, this science has encouraged me to go even deeper with my clients and has provided a framework for gaining insights that I might have missed in the past. We still have a lot to learn about interoception, but it is clear that interoception has an impact on much of our daily functioning, so it is definitely something that all OTs (and just people in general) should understand.

INTEROCEPTION

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? To trust my training as an OT. At the start of my career, I had a major professional crisis. With zero pediatric experience to guide me, I entered into school-based practice and 100% of the client goals I inherited were all based on improving handwriting or shoe tying. I took a look around me and noticed that most other pediatric OTs were acting as glorified handwriting or shoe tying teachers. I was disheartened to say the least. My OT schooling taught me to provide meaningful and holistic supports that would help my clients achieve their life goals. The complete opposite of what I saw around me. I didn't even want to be an OT if it meant showing up to work each day to teach a child how to properly form the letter A or to repeatedly make bunny ears with shoelaces. Thankfully, in year two of my career I was assigned to support a classroom that served autistic students with very complex mental health and trauma needs. Because the students all had such complex profiles, we were forced to think differently on a daily basis, to figure out how to successfully support the students and eventually help them thrive in their educational environment. There was no room for handwriting or shoe tying! Far more pressing issues were there and too impossible to ignore. I found my place. I was able to use my OT training and really make a difference in the students' lives. No handwriting or shoe tying included. But lots of interoception!

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? If you feel lost, burned out, doubtful in yourself or in what you are doing, just know that you are not alone (despite the 'perfect worlds' falsely advertised on many social media profiles) . Sometimes it is these uncomfortable interoceptive feelings that help catapult us into the next opportunity. We spend so much time running from interoceptive discomfort, numbing it, ignoring it. If you feel safe enough to do so, embrace that internal discomfort and try to discover what your body is telling you that you need. There were many points in my career where I felt unseen, anxious, overwhelmed, doubtful, even downright furious! I still go through these periods! But in hindsight it is the difficult periods that motivate me to stay open to new opportunities.

Connect

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LACTATION



Remember, if you ever need a helping hand, it's at the end of your arm. As you get older, remember you have another hand: The first is to help yourself, the second is to help others.

~ Audrey Hepburn

Mollie Sherman

Job title: My name is Mollie Sherman. I am an Occupational Therapist, a Certified Hand Therapist and a Certified Lactation Counselor

What setting do you work in? I work primarily in a mobile clinic setting and part time in an outpatient hand therapy clinic

Describe your OT role: My area of expertise has always been hand therapy. Throughout my years of clinical experience I had frequently encountered pregnant women or new mothers with consistent symptoms -mostly De Quervain's and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome – among other repetitive stress injuries. The role of “Mother” and all that goes along with it, can be extremely taxing on the body. Mothers are selfless in nature and we often do not realize the strain we place on our bodies as we are focused on caring for our children and forget to care for ourselves. Breastfeeding in particular is an ADL in which women may often assume poor core or wrist postures multiple times a day for weeks to months on end. These women need a therapist who is skilled in lactation as well as ergonomics to best guide them on their journey and offer education and activity modification.

Why is this work so important to you? Becoming a mother truly gave rise to a passion I would have never otherwise known. I struggled quite a bit with breastfeeding, but I was determined to do my utmost in order to make it happen. I realized that lactation was an area in which there is an unfortunate LACK of information and support. After my own experience, I wanted to be that support person I wished that I had. After becoming certified as a Lactation Counselor, I realized that my skill went beyond typical breastfeeding support. As an OT and CHT I had so many more tools in my toolbox to offer and am so grateful to offer my skills to those who are in need of it.

LACTATION

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? I wish I would have known that there are way more options and settings for an OT to work in aside from sub acute, inpatient, outpatient, peds etc. Entrepreneurship is on the rise and I wish I would have been doing this years ago.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? If you feel like you have no idea where to start, that's normal. I feel like that every day but it is important to have faith in yourself and what you can offer.

Connect

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LIFESTYLE OPTIMISATION



Rhiannon Crispe

'Go to the intersection in the road where your passion meets the people'

~Rhiannon Crispe

Job title: Occupational Therapist, Business owner, Podcaster, Film Maker and Mentor.

What setting do you work in? As it relates to my OT role, I provide in-person and telehealth occupational therapy services. I predominantly work with children and their families. My in-person sessions are always situated in the real-life context of the client's everyday life - home, school or community. I immerse myself in their world and get proximate to the problem.

Describe your OT role: My role as an OT is to help people to *do* what matters most to them. I help individuals and families *optimise their lifestyle* to achieve an occupation-based goal - whatever that may be. I help them to craft rituals and habits that facilitate healing, health and vitality. Sessions may involve building sandcastles at the beach, swimming in the hot springs, dancing in the living room, cooking in the kitchen, conscious shopping at the supermarket or skating down the street at sunset. Sessions are where my clients are.

I focus on what is most meaningful to an individual at any given point in time, knowing that 'what's most important' is likely to change session to session; as life is fluid, dynamic and unpredictable. I blend traditional therapy, lifestyle optimisation education, and coaching. I have a deep desire to empower my clients to overcome their own challenges.

I believe in six lifestyle optimisation pillars that guide my work: connection, healthy eating, meaningful movement, nature, restoration and purpose.

LIFESTYLE OPTIMISATION

Why is this work so important to you? It's important because I can see the impact. I can measure the impact. And most importantly, I can feel the impact.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? I wish I had have known that I didn't need to know *ev-ery-thing!* I used to rock-up to an initial interview with a pre-prepared intervention list based on an individual's diagnosis before I had even met them! Seriously. What was I thinking? Well, to be honest I felt like I needed to know all the answers or I wouldn't be a competent OT. The thing is there is no cookie cutter approach to OT. There's not a one-size-fits all model or a blueprint, *even* if clients share the same diagnosis. I don't like categorising clients based on the medical term we have given them or placing them into our algorithm to help our minds simplify of the complexities of a persons life. When we do this we miss the beauty. We miss the intricacies. We miss the things that makes a person's life *theirs*.

I wish I had have taken more time with my clients without rushing the therapy process. I wish I had have just sat there, without an agenda and listened to their life story. I've learnt that so much of the medicine we offer is in simply listening to the narrative of the human being sitting in front of us.

I wish I had have known that evidence-based practice isn't always best practice. Sometimes best means suspending our evidence for how it 'should be' and instead looking through the lens of another human soul and understanding how it 'could be'.

I wish I had have known to be more inquisitive, and less prescriptive.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Unravel the thread of your own curiosity. And follow it. And in the letting go, know that with every stitch of your being, your greater purpose is intertwined in your moment-to-moment occupations.

Connect

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MENTAL HEALTH



“Be the change you wish to see in the world”

~ Mahatma Gandhi.

Jess Leggatt

Job title: Mental health Occupational Therapist / Private Practitioner

What setting do you work in? Youth Mental Health

Describe your OT role: My role involves supporting and empowering young people to look after their mental and emotional wellbeing in a healthy balanced way so they may proactively navigate the tricky challenges of life, effectively manage symptoms and engage in the roles, occupations and activities that are important and meaningful to them. As a Private Practitioner working in a youth mental health centre, this involves one to one therapy sessions utilising focused psychological strategies to support mental wellness, including but not limited to trauma informed practises and processes, positive activity scheduling and psychoeducation.

Why is this work so important to you? I love supporting young people to take care of their minds and emotional wellbeing in a healthy, positive and balanced way. Helping them to learn these skills from a young age means that a strong foundational base is created, and that not only will they have the tools and strategies to help them navigate the challenges that life can bring in those early years, but they will also be able take these positive lifestyle approaches into the rest of their lives as well.

Creating a strong foundational base supports a healthy connection to self and others, and prepares the individual for a strong positive future, where they can feel supported and inspired to live a life that is meaningful and aligned to their inner most dreams and values, and truest selves.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? I wish I had known that it is completely okay to not know what field of practise you want to specialise in (even if your several years into your career). That it's okay to change your mind, change professional paths or move in a different direction along the way, and that this is actually a sign of positive growth and progression helping you discover the most meaningful alignment with the work that you do. And lastly, to recognise that 'getting lost' is sometimes a necessary part of the journey to finding your Truest Path, both personally and professionally. Don't be afraid to go off the well-trodden track as this is often where we discover what truly matters in life.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? To stay true to bringing your own unique 'signature approach' to your work and your professional role, no matter what field of practice you enter into, or choose to specialise in.

To recognise that life is fluid and in a constant state of flux, and so too is your professional path. Diversifying, changing direction and expanding one's skills, awareness and mindsets beyond limiting beliefs or perceptions is all part of the journey of being, becoming and evolving into the OT that you always wanted to be (or perhaps didn't even realise you could be).

And lastly, to not be afraid to think outside the box when it comes to creating solutions to complex problems, on both a systemic level, a community level and an individual level. OT's are exceptional solution finders, but sometimes we get caught up in linear approaches and constrained frameworks that stifle innovative progression. I believe if we can remain open and curious, move beyond current limiting constructs and think outside the box, ANYTHING is possible. Through opening our minds and hearts to what's possible, we get to truly acknowledge, celebrate and expand the beautiful potential of occupational therapy as a vessel for transformation and positive change in the lives of others, both individually and collectively.

Connect

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MINDFULNESS



Sarah Good

“If we strengthen our backs, metaphorically speaking, and develop a spine that’s flexible but sturdy, then we can risk having a front that’s soft and open, representing choiceless compassion. The place in your body where these two meet — strong back and soft front — is the brave, tender ground in which to root our caring deeply”

~ Zen Buddhist Roshi Joan Halifax

Job title: Occupational therapist and mindfulness meditation teacher

What setting do you work in? I have a hybrid practice, offering virtual care and community care. That means that I get to travel to people’s homes, workplaces, local parks, or other community settings when I’m not doing virtual appointments from my home office. I also have the privilege of working online with OTs globally!

Describe your OT role: I help adults living with overwhelm, fatigue or pain to develop strategies so they can live fulfilling lives. To do this, I work with people to find ways to deregulate their own nervous systems such as using mindfulness-based techniques (including meditation, movement, time in nature and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy). Many of clients are living with post-traumatic stress disorder in addition to physical injuries. Most of my clients are first responders (particularly health care providers and military veterans). I also support occupational therapists from around the world to integrate mindfulness into their personal and professional lives.

Why is this work so important to you? Learning to incorporate mindfulness into my life has been the most valuable lesson I have learnt as an OT. It has helped me manage significant challenges in my personal life while continuing to work as an OT during a pandemic. It has given me a wide range of flexible tools I can use with clients to meet them where they are at, even if meditation is not for them. I love getting to witness people making changes to their lives over time.

MINDFULNESS

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? I wish that I known earlier in my career the importance of putting strategies in place to support my well-being as an OT. For me, that has been developing a supportive network of like-minded OTs and practicing mindfulness.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Explore the huge variety in this profession is you aren't happy with your job or area of practice. We have an amazing ability to work with any humans without needing to retrain!

Build a network of other amazing OTs you can reach out to and bounce ideas off

Find practices that can reset you at the end of the day or throughout the day. I started practicing mindfulness meditation from a hospital chapel when I worked in palliative care.

Connect

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MINDFULNESS SCHOOL-BASED OT



Deirdre Azzopardi

“We don’t stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing.”

~ George Bernard Shaw

Job title: School Based Occupational Therapist/ Business Owner of The Mindful School OT

What setting do you work in? My primary role is within the schools. I incorporate mindfulness into all aspects of my work and also work on helping OTs to see our role as bigger. I believe we need to own our mental health roots in the schools and remember that we are the experts in the mind body connection.

Describe your OT role: I work with primarily preschoolers and as part of my school based role I teach yoga and mindfulness to all of the children in the preschool. I also provide professional development to teachers and school staff on incorporating mindful awareness and movement into their work.

Why is this work so important to you? Children do not do as we say they do as we do. They are antennas for our energy and this is especially true for children with disabilities. I think we have enormous power over children and we should take that very seriously so we remember that we are responsible for our own energy and how we show up at work. We should also remember our own child-like nature so that we can connect with children. Joy is always at hand when you work with children. We can cultivate that by remembering to breathe and move WITH the kids. That is a big shift-not doing for but with builds connections and helps to fill our own cups. A total win-win for everyone involved!!

I am also heavily involved in the inclusion movement for children with disabilities. There is so much ableism in schools and we need to look at our own internalized ableism and how that shows up in our work. I live in a state that has the lowest inclusion rates in the United States. That is appalling to me and I want to be part of the movement to change that.

MINDFULNESS SCHOOL-BASED OT

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? That “fixing” children is not my role. That the medical model of OT is not appropriate in the schools. I also wished I knew how important the schools actually are and that we can do more and be more in the schools with some imagination.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? That you are one hundred percent responsible for your own journey as a therapist. You have to be the change because all systems are broken (medicine, schools, insurance) but that doesn't mean that we have to be broken too. Make sure to have fun and prioritize joy every day.

Connect

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MOBILE PRACTICE



Emma Carter

“Be fearless in the pursuit of what sets your soul on fire”

Job title: Occupational Therapist and Director of Sensational Minds Therapy

What setting do you work in? Pediatrics – mobile therapy practitioner and OT for a mobile therapy team.

Describe your OT role: I am an OT with my own case load as well as managing a team of OT's and therapy assistants. Our staff are located around various parts of Australia, we have a mobile therapy team (OT and Therapy assistants), that live around; and service the Northern Rivers , NSW regions, and some staff live and work remotely (yes, telehealth), so we may not see each other face to face but are always talking online and by phone. Clinical education truly is a passion of mine, I really love team building and supervision. I am a nurturer by nature and really encompass that value in my role as director and leadership style. My staff have undertaken therapy assistant traineeships or OT internships under my direct supervision.

Clinically – My role is similar to most clinicians, I provide a high-quality service, aimed at supporting children and empowering parents to achieve their children's therapy goals. I provide a professional standard and conduct comprehensive assessment and deliver appropriate therapy treatment including, parent coaching and parent training. I provide mobile and telehealth therapy provision.

Why is this work so important to you? Being a mobile service means that we can work with children in their natural environments, such as in the home, preschool or school and in the community. I can make recommendations based on the child's existing surroundings, resources, supports and space available. I love that therapy does not need to be conducted in four walls it can be done in nature and in the outdoors. An additional benefit with mobile therapy is that it is convenient and comfortable for the child when they are within their natural space.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? Burnout is real and new grads can feel burnout too! It is okay to not know it all yet, that will come in time and with experience, keep asking lots of questions. Remember self-care, look after yourself first, we can't give from an empty cup. Most of all remember to have fun and remember why you became an OT in the first place.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? This is for New Grads in working in the NDIS space, if you feel like your workplace is not providing supervision that is sufficient for you, it is okay to seek extra external supervision. You can have supervision from senior staff at your employment, and an external supervisor. Reach out to your university lecturers and ask for guidance of who and how to access supervision, invest in an OT Australia membership and utilize the CPD and OT supervisor mentors on the OT Australia website. First 2 years out of uni can be overwhelming and challenging – You are not alone.

Connect

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NATURAL FOOD BASED SOLUTIONS FOR HEALING



Crystel Poggioli

"A joyful heart is good medicine."

Proverbs 17:22

Job title: Occupational Therapist, Certified GAPS (Gut and Psychology Syndrome) Practitioner, Certified Sandplay and Symbol Work Practitioner

What setting do you work in? I'm the Director of The Whole Child, a private practice focusing on providing true holistic, down to earth, natural services (including play based occupational therapy) for children and families. We have small team of excellent, passionate, playful, fun loving OTs working together in a therapy centre and also provide services in the community (Atherton Tablelands, Far North Queensland), as well as telehealth services. I also provide GAPS consultations and protocols to improve and heal gut health as a foundation to the other challenges clients are facing.

Describe your OT role: Well if you ask my clients, they say things like "Crystel doesn't have a job, she just plays all day"... My role looks really different depending on the clients' needs and desires. My dream clients are the ones who want to combine all approaches, including consultations and protocols related to GAPS and gut healing, sandplay and symbol work, and lots of play therapy in amongst that.

Why is this work so important to you? This definitely feels as though it's my calling, my purpose, my destiny. I can't describe my work journey without describing the foundation – which is my faith in and relationship with Jesus. His life was and is about saving and healing and loving others and walking together with him gives me inspiration and peace every day.

I continue to grow and learn as an OT and consider a person more and more holistically. The whole person – body, soul and spirit. I love to see others overcome challenges and recover from difficulties. The more time goes on though the more I have faith in simpler things bringing healing and recovery... for example, most ailments in the family can be treated with things you'll find in your pantry – like coconut oil, apple cider vinegar and honey, or very earthy things like clay and charcoal. For me, these things are foundational because they strengthen the body while healing.

I'm also always trying things out with my own family. We have 6 children, and to give you an example, we've just set our home up without wifi/mobile reception. I enjoy seeing the impact efforts like that have on the whole person.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? I wish I had known that OT is so broad and there is so much potential for it to mould and shape into your dream career. I wish I had known that when I felt uncomfortable in a job it was okay, it wouldn't be forever, and that these demanding situations and challenging interactions would build my compassion and confidence. I almost walked away from my career, and I'm so grateful I didn't as it's really evolved into my dream job.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals?

- Don't rush.
- Don't feel OT has to be your dream job straight up. Even if you don't feel settled where you are, what positive you can take from it. What can you learn there?
- It's okay if you don't know what to do in a particular session with a client. It's okay to acknowledge that to yourself, them and/or your colleagues, and to seek more learning.
- The more time goes on the more I see that the relationship and time we have with our clients is a big part of the healing, rather than knowing exactly what to do. Just being WITH them and FOR them is huge.
- Those challenging people – can you challenge yourself to be loving and kind and gracious to them? Maybe not many other people have and maybe that's why they are a bit rough around the edges. You have an opportunity to make the world a better place by responding gently.
- And take the time to dream and envisage the things that you love and love to do... who knows... one day you might be able to incorporate that into your OT life as OT really is that broad.



Connect

Facebook: Whole Child Whole Family
Website: www.thewholechild.com.au

NATURE

“The evidence is clear. One of the most important things that any of us can do for ourselves, those we love, people throughout the world, and the living systems that support all is to connect with nature”

Home to us all, Children & Nature Network 2018



Bronwyn Paynter

Job title: Occupational Therapist.

What setting do you work in? My own business – Nature OT Pty Ltd.

Describe your OT role: A blend of occupational therapy, forest bathing and permaculture. I connect people with nature – using evidence informed, nature-based occupations.

I provide Forest Bathing experiences for community and workplace wellbeing. Forest Bathing is a slow, gentle wander in nature where I invite people to connect with and notice nature with all of our senses. The experience follows a standard protocol to support a state of embodied flow, where participants are immersed in the experience & often lose sense of time in the ultimate disconnection from busy-ness and technology. I provide group experiences and am engaged by our National Parks & Wildlife Department to provide Forest Bathing in National Parks, and for special events including to support access to parks for people with disabilities. I provide Forest Bathing in our city zoo and safari park, including with a particular focus on access for people of all ability.

I provide community workshops including planting parties, making compostable Christmas wreaths or flower crowns. Helping people connect and create with nature in community.

My family tend our private National Park Sanctuary south of Adelaide and offer nature connection experiences there including wildflower walks, forest bathing, ‘weed & feed’, blackberry gathering and nature retreat experiences.

NATURE

My focus is on wellbeing – how to support people to flourish, with nature connection being a key determinant for wellbeing. I am passionate about taking OT out of the health and disability system and am pursuing (and creating) opportunities in wellness tourism.

I am a bridge between ‘the mainstream and the magical’ – as a safe, evidence informed health professional with ability to support nature based experiences where nature itself is the therapist and I guide the experience that people have.

I also support occupational therapists internationally in ways to include more nature in our work (in all areas of practice) – through my coaching program, cOnnecT with nature, and my free facebook group for nature loving OTs.

Why is this work so important to you? Nature matters – it matters for the wellbeing of people, and for the wellbeing of the planet. Nature connection is a form of radical environmental activism.

The work I do in, with and for nature matters to me because I deeply feel that my personal connection with nature has been and continues to be life-saving and life-affirming for my physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. I've lived a long time accompanied by self-doubt and focus on external validation to confirm that I was, in fact, OK. For me, validation, success, love came through ‘doing’ – through achieving, being busy, being visibly productive.

After an experience with high risk breast cancer when I was 28, the deaths of my parents within 14 months of each other (both from lung cancer), and the life threatening illness of our younger son with liver failure I finally realized something needed to ‘give’. On my second gifted chance at life I really seriously questioned my ability to keep going, and what I was working so hard for. I was desperate to get outside and to move my body and my pathway to creating a way of working with nature as OT has been transformational. This is the most joyful work I have done and I feel so happy to be embracing the true potential of OT in supporting all people to experience a higher level of wellbeing.

I talk to many OTs who are burnt out by ‘the system’, and I KNOW there are other ways of being an OT and LOVE my work supporting other OTs to start to weave nature into their work, or to ‘take the leap’ and create fully nature-based ways of working.

I am deeply respectful that I have much to learn, that my understanding of nature connection for spiritual and physical wellbeing is shallow in comparison to the deep knowing and wisdom of our indigenous community – and I am constantly an open and willing student.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? The importance of connection. If you can't find 'your people' then create the community you desire.

The power of vulnerability for connection. The permission to be 'me'.

That the premise of occupational therapy is relevant for all people – health and wellbeing through purposeful, meaningful occupation – and the critical importance of the natural environment in supporting engagement and meaning.

That OT is as much about 'being' as 'doing'. The being is what creates meaning for the doing.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Occupational therapy is relevant to all people, can operate at a bigger scale than 1:1 work and doesn't just exist within the health/illness, disability or care systems. OT can be wherever people are – supporting wellbeing.

Connect

Facebook: Bronwyn Paynter Nature OT
Facebook Group: Nature OTs connect and grow
Website: www.natureot.com.au

NATURE-BASED SPIRITUALITY



Fiona Joy Hill

"It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society".
~ J. Krishnamurti

What's your job title: I don't have a formal 'job title' as such, but I call myself an occupational therapist and shamanic practitioner.

What setting do you work in? I work independently, with a mental health and wellbeing perspective.

Describe your OT role: In my OT work I provide independent supervision to occupational therapists in the UK. My focus is on personal wellbeing for professional practice and I take a spiritual, nature-guided approach which stems from my own personal practice of shamanism and nature connection. I have a background in Higher Education so I also do some adhoc student supervision and academic work for a couple of UK Universities, which I love – more mainstream, perhaps but I enjoy it.

Why is this work so important to you? My spiritual path and connection to the natural world is at the heart of my own life. I have learned so much about myself as a human from spending time connecting with horses, birds, plants and all aspects of the natural world. Shamanism and spiritual connection to ancient healing wisdom has been a huge part of this. I believe that as humans, we need to get back to seeing ourselves as deeply connected with the rest of nature before it's too late. I feel that occupational therapists are uniquely qualified to enable humans to live a life that's right for them, yes, AND that we also have a responsibility to be advocates for the broader context in which people live, too. This means an awareness of how human occupation impacts the world. We need to move beyond our individualist, human perspective, but we absolutely have to start with ourselves as therapists, knowing ourselves first - so that we can be of genuine service to others.

NATURE-BASED SPIRITUALITY

I am passionate about teaching, learning, personal and professional development, healing past trauma and about living authentically. I love supporting therapists to follow their own passions and to reflect deeply on what matters to them.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey?

I hear a lot of people saying they don't know what OTs do. I used to spend a lot of energy trying to explain my role to others and being terribly frustrated when they didn't get it. But 25 years on, I celebrate being part of a profession that is so difficult to pin down to an easy 'three-word slogan'! The complexity of our work - that looks so simple on the surface – is what makes us who we are. We should be proud of that and not try to change it.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? I would never encourage people to stay in the profession if they don't believe in it any more, however as a way of offering hope, I would say that I feel that our profession has been increasingly squeezed into boxes of other people's making. As healthcare in general has changed, so have we. And I believe that, in order to keep up and be accepted, we have collectively given away our power and become something different from that which we were meant to be. Whilst change is of course inevitable, if we move too far from our true nature, we will feel it as pain. This is of course a metaphor for life. It is what is happening in the world at large. Ultimately, this disconnection from nature will cause us to feel lost, depleted or unwell. How could it not? I believe that if we want to truly help the people who use our services, we must 'do the work' necessary to reconnect, personally and professionally. This has to start with ourselves.

Connect

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NEURODIVERGENCE



Stephanie Robertson

“Man, through the use of his hands, as they are energized by mind and will, can influence the state of his own health”

~ Mary Reilly

Job title: Paediatric Occupational therapist, Occupational therapy mentor and supervisor Reiki Practitioner

What setting do you work in? I work in paediatrics, specialising in neurodivergent affirming practice, parent occupational performance coaching, play and child lead therapy and sensory processing challenges. I am also an OT supervisor and mentor and very interested in exploring the role of spirituality in occupational therapy practice.

Describe your OT role: I have a true passion for assisting parents and carers to navigate the journey of raising and teaching neurodivergent children. This includes supporting the diagnostic process, connecting families with most appropriate services, and using a family centred practice model to best meet the needs of the whole family. I provide strategies and tools to assist parents and carers to be their child's best support within their daily activities and routines. This also includes working with teachers and educators to allow for positive and affirming strategies to be consistent across a child's environments.

I believe in an organic relationships-based approach and creating meaningful connections within families and communities in a way that honours a child's unique presentation and needs.

I also really love my role as a mentor to other OT's working in the paediatric space, assisting other professionals to shift into a neurodivergent way of practicing.

NEURODIVERGENCE

Why is this work so important to you? Having an autistic daughter myself, I feel neurodivergent affirming practice is so important! Autistic children experience the world around them differently. It is not our role to make neurodivergent children neurotypical but to allow these wonderful minds to function in the world around them to their fullest capacity as their true authentic selves!

By sharing my own experiences, I feel I can help families and other OT's to assist their children in the most organic and meaningful ways

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? That I do not have to know it all! We are not robots but humans who are also experiencing life and learning as we go. I wish I had felt secure to stand in my own authenticity sooner and been able to share my experience with neurodivergence. I feel that creating relationships with people as OTs is how we can create the best change! By showing up as my authentic self and holding space for another person I have been able to create meaningful and healing relationships. I also wish I had known that alternative and complementary healing methods are acceptable in OT, I personally offer Reiki, mindfulness techniques and meditation within my practice. Remember, spirituality is part of occupational therapy!

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Following on from what I said above, Intuition! It is a wonderful tool we all possess that we are not traditionally taught to explore! We as therapists use our own emotional state to help others, we hold space, we listen in a way others may not, and when we tap into our intuition during this process, we allow ourselves to explore avenues we may otherwise have missed. We also need to ensure we look after ourselves. I believe it is important that we are true to our own beliefs and experiences, and look after ourselves on all levels, mind, body and spirit. We are not selfish for taking time for self-care, for our families, for our health. When we do so we are fueling ourselves to be even better when we show up for others! And lastly, you are good enough and worthy of being an occupational therapist!

Connect

Instagram: @sgroccupationaltherapy

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Website: www.sgroccupationaltherapy.com

NEUROLOGY



"You treat a disease you win, you lose. You treat a person, I guarantee you'll win, no matter what the outcome."

~ Patch Adams

Geonaid Mackie

What is your job title? Stroke Specialist Occupational Therapist.

What setting do you work in? Community Stroke Team (adults).

Describe your OT role: I work as part of a multidisciplinary team offering at home rehabilitation following discharge from hospital following a stroke. We also take referrals from stroke clinics and general practitioners. My role as a Stroke Occupational Therapist is to carry out initial neurological assessments which comprises of assessing limb weakness, vision, cognition, perception, communication and functional ability. We also carry out environmental assessments and provide equipment where required. If individuals require major adaptations or re-housing we refer onto the appropriate services. Following our initial assessments, we form a treatment plan with the patient and identify patient goals. We take our lead from the patient in what their goals are in order to be patient centred. We work towards these goals throughout our period of input which is usually around 8-12 weeks. As well as working with patients, we make sure to involve their family/carers so that everyone is involved in the rehab process. Vocational Rehabilitation and return to driving can be two major goals for stroke patients so we can be greatly involved in this area. As well as patient focused rehabilitation we also work with external agencies on any housing issues that may have arisen due to stroke, social work issues and financial issues. We have bi monthly MDT meetings where we discuss patient progress with colleagues. We will also liaise with stroke consultants if this is required.

Why is this work so important to you? This area of work is very important to me because our brains are who make us who we are. The ability for the brain to re-wire after neurological damage fascinates me. When an injury occurs or there is a disruption in the functioning of our brain it can greatly alter a person's sense of being. Just as we are all individual, each stroke is individual. It can change an individual's whole life in an instance and in most cases without any warning.

Every meaningful occupation will be affected in some way by a stroke. To be involved in helping people and their loved ones navigate this sudden change is an extremely rewarding area to work in. The hidden effects of stroke such as the psychological effects are an area of particular interest to me. Our role as Occupational Therapists in stroke is fundamental. It allows me to use all my Occupational Therapy skills to offer a truly holistic service.

What do you wish you had known earlier in your OT journey? I wish I had known earlier that I can't fix everything. As a new graduate, you can jump in and try to 'fix' and try and tell someone what they should be doing. As Occupational Therapists we want to problem solve however now I know that I give the tools to the individual and they can work to solve problems themselves which in turn leads to higher self-efficacy for individuals and self-management of their condition.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Look after yourself and also practice what we preach. Sometimes we can get lost in our goal of 'serving others' that we can forget to prioritise our own self-care. If we look after ourselves both physically and mentally then we put ourselves in a greater position to both work with and hopefully inspire our patients/clients to reach their goals. Also on the days where you question yourself and question if you are 'making a difference' know that you absolutely are. I've found that the smallest acts/smallest changes can have bigger impacts on a person's life than we may realise.

Connect

Twitter: OT Seonaid

ONCOLOGY

"People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

~ Maya Angelou



Vanessa Yancy

What is your job title? Co-Founder and Executive Director at Bravo Therapy & Independent Living Center, a private practice in San Antonio, Texas

What setting do you work in? I work as an oncology occupational therapist in the outpatient, home health, and telehealth settings.

Describe your OT role: I collaborate with cancer survivors who are living in the community. We work together to identify what is important in their lives and facilitate participation, which can positively influence their identity and adaptation. I feel honored when cancer survivors open the door to occupational therapy because what we do can change the rest of their lives.

Why is this work so important to you? Cancer can have a shock wave and devastating effects to the person diagnosed with cancer and those around them. The physical, cognitive, and psychosocial impact of cancer treatment can permeate into a person's life, disrupting their identity, roles, routines, skills, and daily functioning, even after completing treatment. It can be difficult to live a "normal" life with cancer or after completing treatment, leaving many with the uncertainty of how to move forward. What discipline specializes in helping people return to a meaningful life? If you said OT, you are right! Occupational therapy has the heart, soul, and skills to help individuals thrive, not just survive, after a cancer diagnosis. As a cancer survivor, my mission is to spread awareness of occupational therapy in oncology and demystify the OT process from cancer prevention to survivorship.

What do you wish you had known earlier in your OT journey? Therapy can be hard, messy, and imperfect. That's OK! I've learned to embrace it with compassion and humor. At the end of the day, my patients want a real and authentic therapist, a person who genuinely cares, listens, and is willing to figure things out with them.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals?

- 1) Be kind to yourself. You are doing your best. Sometimes we can be our worst critics but pay attention to the kind voice within you.
- 2) It may take time to find yourself as a therapist. Be open to learning and exploring other areas in occupational therapy. You are in this profession because OT found you, so you are here for a reason. It's only a matter of time.
- 3) Remember your why. Reflect on what brought you to OT. Write it in a post-it and read each time you feel lost or frustrated as a therapist.

Connect

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Instagram: @bravotherapycenter

Facebook: Bravo Therapy & Independent Living Center, LLC

Website: www.bravocenter.org

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PAEDIATRICS

“The meaning of play is to lead with curiosity, delight in what you discover and learn from both.”



Tia Gamelin

Job title: Pediatric Occupational Therapist, Entrepreneur, Business Owner, all around Mischief Maker

What setting do you work in? University of Denver in Colorado Ricks Center for Gifted Children, I work in the online sector producing content, providing coaching and professional development for parents, educators and professionals; I provide nature based therapy services in an inclusive early childhood startup in Littleton, Colorado and I consult with a Loose Parts play company on inclusive play principles located in Boulder, Colorado.

Describe your OT role: I am a play advocate for all children; I provide therapy services in various environments; I am a consultant for universal design for learning and neurodiversity; I'm a professional development presenter, I am a developmental specialist tasked with designing environments, curriculum and materials to create inclusive spaces and learning environments that promote justice, equity, curiosity and joy for diverse learners.

Why is this work so important to you? Every child has the right to play and someone needs to speak out and speak up in their defense on how essential play is.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? That nature provides the best sensory gym for therapy and families will feel more comfortable and capable to carry over therapies when the environment and materials you use are familiar to them.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Always focus on function. Your first question should always be “How is the client functioning?”. Function is dependent upon factors in the Environment, the Activities presented and the Responses you see. When we focus on function using this process, we become the changemakers, the ones who take the messes and help families turn them into miracles.

Connect

Instagram: @korplaywithpurpose

Facebook: Blackbird Therapy Group

Website: www.korplay.com

Website: www.blackbirdtherapygroup.com

POLYVAGAL



“She went out on a limb, had it break off behind her and discovered she could fly!”

~Kobi Yamada

Kelly Beins

Job title: Clinical Practice Manager (Unyte-iLs), Speaker, Mentor (The Sensory Collective).

What setting do you work in? Pediatric Private Practice.

Describe your OT role: Unyte-iLs produces & manages the Safe and Sound Protocol which was developed by Dr. Stephen Porges as a therapeutic product and application of Polyvagal Theory. I work with Unyte-iLs to support development of clinical content, clinical use guidelines, provider insights & engagement, and to inform product development. Outside of my role at Unyte, I am growing a global mentorship program to refine and make evidence-informed practices more accessible for other sensory OT's in private practice.

Why is this work so important to you? I get frustrated when things don't work “as they should” and I've always had an interest in neurobiology and figuring out the how and the “why”. As a mental health OT I saw lot's that wasn't working in the mental health system and specifically in regards to intervention for children with social-emotional/behavioral challenges. Yet I also felt so much hope when working with children. There was so much more to come in their lives! So when I found the field of sensory integration and then discovered Polyvagal Theory it was like big light bulbs turned on! We finally had two theories we could use to guide us in doing things differently (and better) to make our services work for so many children and families. I am also a sensory parent and I know first-hand the daily struggles that can come when nervous systems are out of sync.

All of this led to building a private practice, burning out, and realizing that out of my experience I have much to offer others (clients, families, and providers). The SSP is a tool that filled in gaps I had in my own OT practice and the company had gaps they needed a clinician to fill. I am passionate about my work with Unyte because I feel I can make a global impact in this role and I don't want others to struggle in ways I did!

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? 1) Not to take things so personally when a client was struggling or when things didn't go as planned. 2) How to set boundaries both clinically and in life (work took over but then I wasn't doing my best work) 3) There often isn't one right answer 4) It's often through our work with clients we find "an answer" or the "best" answer for them. 5) How to work better with families 6) The impact of trauma 7) Trust myself.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Keep learning. Stay curious. Remember there is always more than one way to see and to solve problems. Respect yourself and your health always. Trust your instincts. Just take the next best step. You don't have to know the answers or what will happen in order to start. Ask for help. You can always make a different decision. Don't keep doing what isn't already working.

Connect

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REFLEXES



Tilby Blanch

“As you start to walk on the way, the way appears.”

~ Rumi

Job title: Paediatric Occupational Therapist

What setting do you work in? I work in my own private online Occupational Therapy practice.

Describe your OT role: In my private practice, I provide online/telehealth consultations with parents and their child (typically between the ages of 3-15 years old). I focus on supporting children to integrate their primitive reflexes, to help mature the brain and nervous system. A child's primitive reflexes can remain active (unintegrated) when they miss developmental milestones (such as crawling or other milestones). When reflexes are not integrated in the first 2.5 years of their life, this impacts a child's developmental progression as they grow older. I work with children who experience challenges with gross motor & movement skills, sensory processing and learning difficulties, emotional challenges, and cognitive difficulties.

I work with paediatric clients by identifying & assessing for the presence of 'active' primitive reflexes and prescribing movements to integrate the reflex. The reflex exercises replicate the natural, spontaneous movements which infants and babies typically make during early development as they learn to control their movement and develop postural reflexes.

As my clients practice motor-training through the reflex integration exercises, over time they can strengthen their brain-body connection and nervous system, including the cerebellum and brainstem. These exercises also strengthen their coordination, balance, fine motor skills, speech & communication skills, cognitive & learning skills, sensory processing, attention, and emotional regulation.

REFLEXES

Within my online occupational therapy consultations, I use a blended approach of parent-coaching, parent-education, and I create customised home programs for every client I work with, to address active primitive reflexes. The parents I work with have online access to their child's home program (containing their specialised exercises) through an app and can access an online OT activity library relevant to their child's goals. I aim to give parents the tools they need to support their child at home, through occupational therapy-based activities, and to offer parents a pair of 'OT glasses' to see the world through an occupational therapy lens.

Why is this work so important to you? This work is so important because it changed my whole OT career. Learning about primitive reflexes was the missing link that I had been searching for as an early-career OT, when at the time, I felt the skills I possessed weren't effective enough to help my clients achieve long-lasting outcomes. When I studied primitive reflex integration and applied this within my work, I noticed that many of my clients' skills were improving across the board, not just in the areas I was focussing on in therapy sessions. This was so incredibly profound, I then decided to focus on primitive reflex integration in my own private OT practice. Through my experience, I have found that using reflex integration approaches lays the essential foundations in the nervous system, for all other skills to be built upon. This is an area I feel deeply passionate about, and I am incredibly fascinated by working with clients in this way. I continue to be astonished at how profound using primitive reflex integration is for client outcomes.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? As a new-grad occupational therapist, I almost decided to leave the profession because I had burnt out and I felt like I couldn't create a bigger impact in my clients' journey using traditional OT skills. I wish I knew about the many opportunities available for occupational therapists to work holistically through integrated, root-cause approaches. I also wish I had been given the permission to be the OT I dreamed to be, earlier on, and the permission to work in a way that felt truly aligned for me. I wish I knew that becoming an OT would be an invitation to become the best version of myself and realise my purpose in life.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? If you're feeling stuck on your OT journey or you're not sure what you want to do, your gut feelings and intuition are your compass to guide you. Follow your intuitive feeling, because you always end up where you're supposed to be.



Connect

Instagram: @connectedbrainbody

Website: www.connectedmindbody.com.au

SCHOOL

"It's kind of fun to do the impossible."

~ Walt Disney



Jayson Davies

Job title: Occupational therapist and CEO of OT Schoolhouse

What setting do you work in? School-Based

Describe your OT role: As an OT in the public education system, I support students and school staff in ensuring all students have access to their educational curriculum. I do that through individual, group, and collaborative services for students with special needs. I also use collaborative and preventative interventions to support students in their classrooms before they need direct OT services.

Why is this work so important to you? All students deserve a positive and purposeful educational experience. Some students (and their families) would like to focus on academics, while others would prefer to focus on lifelong independence. As part of a student's Individualized Education Team, OT practitioners play an impactful role in helping students to create meaningful goals, participate in their education curriculum, and have a meaningful educational experience that leads to lifelong learning.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? I wish I knew how few people understood, or even knew of, OT. It is not uncommon for my colleagues and supervisors to not understand our role. I have spent a lot of time explaining the value of OT to others. I hope is that one day, that will not be necessary. As a profession, we need to be more proactive in stepping outside of the OT world and spending more time sharing our profession with others in the fields of education, medicine, well-being, mental health, and others.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? You know more than you think you do. I was recently reminded about the curse of knowledge. Once you know a subject matter very well, you forget what it felt like not having said knowledge. Likewise, you may mistakenly believe that others have the same understanding of that topic as you do. So remember, you are a trained professional with an essential set of skills. You have a background in both the physical and mental systems of human beings, and you can tap into that knowledge as you break down and analyze an activity. That is a powerful tool!

Connect

Instagram: @otschoolhouse

Website: www.otschoolhouse.com

SENSORY PROCESSING



Laura Petix

“Sensory is behavior”

Job title: Pediatric Occupational Therapist, CEO The OT Butterfly, Parent coach

What setting do you work in? Technically "pediatric" is my specialty, but I work with the parents mostly.

Describe your OT role: I help parents understand how sensory processing impacts their child's learning and behavior. I consult and coach them through the behaviors that are impacting their family/their child at school, in the community or in the home. Most of my time is spent educating parents on why behaviors happen, using a sensory lens so that parents can have more realistic expectations of their child, which allows them to approach parenting with a little more compassion even in the toughest moments. I use my own personal experience (therapeutic use of self) as a mom to a neurodivergent daughter to relate to my clients.

Why is this work so important to you? I feel that children and their behaviors are so misunderstood, especially by other adults. When they can better understand how neurodivergent brains work when it comes to processing sensory information, it can change the way adults interact with their child and in turn, improve their relationship and strengthen skills in the child at the same time. Additionally, this specific online work I'm doing is so important because I myself have witnessed how difficult it can be to get sensory support for my own child. Information and support isn't so accessible to parents and I wanted to be able to fill that gap by making this information easier to understand and easier to obtain through social media, podcasts and my website and courses.

SENSORY PROCESSING

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? I wish I knew that our patient's and client's lived experience will always trump anything we learn out of a textbook or from a lab. No matter how much I think I know about someone's situation based on their diagnosis or skills they have/don't have, I am still not the expert on that client. They are the expert and it has informed my intervention style in a more effective way than any textbook ever could.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? When you're feeling burnt out or stuck, focus on one particular client you may have now or one you've had in the past that you felt the most connected to, successful with or made the most progress with. Remember that not every patient/client will give you that same feeling, but that you can hold that experience near and dear and use that to fuel you through your daily caseload even when you're burnt out.

Connect

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Website: www.theotbutterfly.com

SEXOLOGY



Sakshi Tiwari

“Every day you learn something new, and all of us have something to offer. We are and will be the most promising therapy materials.”

Job title: Occupational Therapist, Sexuality Counselor

What setting do you work in? Telehealth.

Describe your OT role: I primarily work in the clinical areas of sexuality, relationships, and mental health. Currently, I offer my services in three different structures, which not only help laypersons but also include healthcare professionals.

These services include:

- Clinical tele consulting across the lifespan for all genders & sexualities
- Coaching and educational services for parents, partner(s), and caregivers who wish to support their children and partners
- Peer/academic sessions or lectures/workshops for healthcare professionals to feel confident in assessing, evaluating, and delivering sexuality-affirming care.

Why is this work so important to you? Growing up as a South Asian queer with multiple chronic illnesses, I first-hand got to experience the lack of care and importance placed on the occupations of sexuality. These experiences continued even after I was studying in the Occupational Therapy school curriculum lacked focus on sexuality-inclusive care that is trauma-informed and culturally relevant. Thus, my work focuses dissecting the shame and stigma associated with human sexuality and broadening our perspectives and approaches towards sexuality and mental health so that South Asians in the world do not have to feel shameful and helpless about their bodies, families, and choices.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? I wish I knew how diverse this profession is and the opportunities students and professionals can employ to advance this profession. The world of healthcare has a lot to offer, and we OTs can utilise this pre-existing body of work to incorporate it into our education and practice.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Do what you truly love, and know that it will take work. OT is a fascinating body of work and rehabilitation, so if you want to study or work in specialised areas, know that it will require your originality and curiosity as much as your perseverance and courage to work in adversities and face failures. So when you decide to pursue anything, base this decision on why this work matters to you and not because it seems trendy.

Connect

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Facebook: Sex Love and OT

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Twitter: @sexloveandot

SOFT TISSUE



Jordan Van Der Westhuizen

“You can fail at doing something you don’t like, so why not try doing something you do like.”

Job title: Soft Tissue Occupational Therapist and ASCA Certified Strength & Conditioning Coach

What setting do you work in? Private Practice – Co-founder and Managing Director.

Describe your OT role: Soft Tissue OT is focused on the diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of primarily musculoskeletal issues. We utilise a broad range of treatment modalities, including hands-on manual therapy, dry needling and exercise rehabilitation to assist our patients to achieve their goals and improve their functional capacity.

We treat a broad range of musculoskeletal issues including, shoulder issues, neck pain, knee injuries, tendon pathologies, hip issues and more. But my personal area of passion is low back pain. This includes disc bulges, sciatic pain, spondylolisthesis, facet joint dysfunction, sacro-iliac pain etc.

Why is this work so important to you? I have always been passionate with the body and how it works. This includes the interplay between the physiological, psychological and other factors that impact on a person’s functioning. Empowering a person to firstly understand their injury or dysfunction is one of the important parts for me as a clinician. Empowerment through knowing and through education is such a vital part of recovery/treatment in my opinion. Then working with them to achieve their individual goals and playing an integral role (however big or small) is a very gratifying experience.

SOFT TISSUE

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? Being an underdog is a positive thing. Try not listen to the 'noise' of others out there – other allied health, doctors or even OTs. Be patient and don't waste time trying to convince others, do your thing, execute and they will take notice.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? I think for me, as I work in private practice, is to be accountable. Being accountable for pretty much everything is not scary – it's liberating! It means you have the control and ability to do something about the situation. If I'm running late due to traffic – my fault, I could have left earlier. If one of my employees is 'lazy' – my fault, I hired them and maybe I'm not giving them the opportunities to engage in things that they are passionate about. My boss is an assh*** - my fault, I can quit or work somewhere else. If a patient doesn't perform their home exercise program – my fault, maybe I didn't choose a suitable one for them or maybe I didn't explain why it is important to do the exercises, I didn't get them to 'buy in'. When you have that perspective, things become a lot less daunting as you can do something about it.

Connect

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SPIRITUALITY



Claire Moller

“The division of life into past, present and future is mind-made and ultimately illusory. Past and future are thought forms, mental abstractions. The past can only be remembered Now. What you remember is an event that took place in the Now, and you remember it Now. The future, when it comes, is the Now. So, the only thing that is real, the only thing there ever is, is the Now.”

~Eckhart Tolle

Job title: Occupational Therapist

What setting do you work in? Private Sector

Describe your OT role: As an Occupational Therapist currently working in the private sector, I work with adults from various cultures that have experienced trauma and I use their understanding of spirituality to facilitate their shift and healing through their traumatic experience. This trauma may have incurred from physical/sexual abuse or physical injury from an accident, which has resulted in a mental health breakdown, PTSD or persistent pain. As Occupational Therapists, our early training is based on the concept of holistic health; being able to see the ability in what others, and often the clients themselves, may perceive as a disability. In many well-known models of practice, spirituality is at the core. Spirituality is not defined by barriers, rules or boundaries and therefore is not bound by someone's religious views, making this space holistic, free and boundless. Rather, spirituality is guided by a person's individual and unique belief system, a belief system that too often I witness or have been led to see as 'broken' as a result of trauma. Part of my role as an Occupational Therapist working spiritually is being able to explore and understand what drives a person's will to exist in this human world. What is at the center of their heart space. What creates joy, flow and provides them with a sense of purpose and an essence of who they are. When this essence is re-discovered, individuals are provided with the opportunity to define themselves by something other than the trauma they have experienced. Trauma often results in individuals 'becoming' their emotions, their thoughts, their beliefs and their behaviours that they are no longer defined by anything other than these perceptions of themselves, engrossed in the trauma that binds them.

SPIRITUALITY

Working spiritually, my role is to open conversation around a clients 'personal power system' and to provide each person with a safe space to use this personal power system to become observers of their trauma.

By tapping into their unique spiritual essence through activities that are appropriate to their cultural practices, clients develop a safe space to understand that they are only experiencing emotions, thoughts and beliefs and that their behaviours are as a result of their experience of trauma and not the core essence of who they are. This is often the first time they are able to define themselves by something other than their trauma. Working spiritually allows me to explore unique, individualized and client-centred strategies that anchor the client into the 'now' and 'present' moment. Strategies that they recognize as appropriate and meaningful tools for them to anchor to something bigger than themselves. The active use of these strategies whilst engaging in meaningful occupations allow individuals to become observers to their journey, providing clients with unique opportunities to safely take control over their now-moment, something which many who have experienced trauma, perceive to have had taken from them. This enhances their self-acceptance and self-worth and often gives them meaning.

Why is this work so important to you? I may have a 'lovers' view of the world, but I have always believed in the power of the 'ability' of any disability, physical or mental and that no-one is destined to live in the shadows of their trauma. Having experienced personal trauma, my sanctuary fell in spirituality. I gained this understanding through brave conversations, guidance and support that explored my own spirituality and my core essence – what gave me purpose and what my belief and value system were. Being able to have this and the various strategies guided by this as an anchoring point in my recovery journey, I began to understand why spirituality is at the core of occupational therapy practice and why I view spirituality as an essence to any recovery journey. Spirituality, often considered quite abstract, is not a topic that many Occupational Therapists feel comfortable exploring with their clients and yet, may be the lighthouse in the stormy waters.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? Find that core spark of an individual through brave, gentle and heart-felt conversations. Though adaption may be required, use that spark to guide their recovery. You don't have to be of any specific religion/culture or have a specific belief to have an open conversation with a client about what they find and believe to be their lighthouse. When you understand this, you can use this to enhance and facilitate their journey to recovery.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Tap into your core essence and use this to guide your clients through their recovery by getting them to tap into theirs.

STRETCH THERAPY



“Mental health is not a destination but a process; it’s about how you drive, not where you’re going”.

Karlye Williamson

Job title: Occupational Therapist, Stretch Therapist, and owner of Wellness OT in Byron Bay. I service the Northern Rivers area.

What setting do you work in? I work with NDIS participants within the Northern Rivers area in New South Wales.

Describe your OT role: I work primarily in mental health (PTSD, Schizophrenia, Neurodiverse, pain management and MS). My focus area is Stretch Therapy, which incorporates the principles of sensory (proprioception), neuromodulation and the polyvagal theory. Stretch Therapy is similar to proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation PNF using a contract and release approach C+R. This process works by fooling the nervous system into relaxing the myotatic or stretch reflex, which is the unconscious contraction that happens when we go into a stretch. The stretch reflex is a protective mechanism designed to prevent straining and tearing muscles and tendons by exciting the muscle spindle to contract the muscle and protect it from being stretched beyond a normal range of motion. Once the body can contract in a full ROM, the brain releases its stretch reflex to increase extension. We do this in conjunction with the out-breath, allowing the body to move deeper and further than it has before. By doing this, we are talking to the body’s nervous system and the connective tissue (Fascia) by activating one’s parasympathetic nervous system and inhibiting the activation of the sympathetic nervous system. The interrelated fascia release on all the connecting organs, immune and endocrine systems plays a significant part in vagal tone.

STRETCH THERAPY

The response from my PTSD clients is an instant response to their sympathetic nervous system with statements such as “I feel my body stop trembling and my heart rate slow down”. One client states the head talk stops for that day, and I get relief by being able to participate in my daily activities instead of being immobilized.

Another client who suffers from chronic pain states the relief in pain and an enabling of a full breath instead of a held half breath in fight and flight response.

Another client with MS states her ability to write again has improved, and her depression has lifted.

The participants I perform stretch therapy with all have had positive outcomes both physically and mentally, which has played an effect on their abilities to engage in meaningful occupations. They have also stated that the stretch practice has become a meaningful occupation in itself and gained them a newfound interest and a deeper connection to their bodies.

Why is this work so important to you? I love the benefits it has provided for me, and to be able to share that with others and have them experience this relaxed sensation and improve their quality of life has been so rewarding.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? Feeling that OT had to be rigid in therapy and letting go of having to fix everyone and instead support them on their own journey of independence and enjoyment in life.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Follow your gut instinct of what feels right for you. Then, seek the space in OT that you feel passionate about and aligns with you.

Connect

Instagram: @wellness_ot

SURFING



Aimee Blacker

“There’s absolutely no excuse for making our passionate love for our world dependent on what we think of its degree of health, or whether we think it’s going to go on forever. In this moment, you’re alive, being asked to stretch a little bit more, and this is what we are made for... So you can just dial up the magic of that at any time.”

~ Joanna Macy

Job title: Paediatric Occupational Therapist Director and Co-founder of Surfing the Spectrum.

What setting do you work in? Surfing the Spectrum is a charity organisation I set up with Co-Founder Tahlia Anderson, which I suppose puts me in the not-for profit setting. Surfing the Spectrum is a surf therapy charity working to provide access to the ocean for autistic member of the community. It is a volunteer led and community-based organisation, with a focus on capacity building for both the participants involved, and the wider surf community.

Describe your OT role: As the Founder and Director of the charity, my role within this setting is not that of a typical OT and is quite varied. In saying that, I would not have the position if it wasn’t for those foundational OT skills.

There are two focus areas I oversee. Firstly, ensuring that we are following a strong evidence-based practice and working to promote inclusion in the community to address occupational marginalisation faced by the autism community. This is in the face-to-face interactions with community members at events, ensuring volunteers are trained in autism informed practices to support the youth in the water and in finding ways to work in with the community and collaborate between the autism and surf communities.

I have now also taken on a capacity building role, as we understand the value in upskilling local community members to continue to support the autism community. I have co-authored a training program with a young autistic adult, an autistic speech pathologist and surf coaches, to support surf schools to work one on one with autistic youth on an everyday basis within their local communities.

Why is this work so important to you? This work fulfills in me a need to utilize my occupational therapy skills with a wider, community-oriented lens. I love working one on one with clients, but I also see how huge social change can come from imparting my knowledge of occupation, and occupational science within a much broader context. This work is how I, as an occupational therapist, can be an activist, and advocate and a changemaker.

In the words of Efran Daliri, we need to consider the social justice issues of gender and disability inequality, climate change, economic injustice not as isolated problems but as interconnected symptoms of disconnect, and the cure being the unification of humanity. In understanding that all these human injustices stem from humans themselves, it is therefore the human (aka us!) that we need to understand in order to address these injustices. And I believe we as occupational therapists are perfectly placed to be able to do so.

In my opinion there is no other profession advancing the human condition as deeply and holistically as occupational therapy, addressing not just an individual but a community- spiritually, physically, and environmentally. It is a blend of science, humanism, intellectual rigour and compassion. Simply trying to find a way to meaning, balance and justice. We are rainbow chasers- weathering the storms with our clients but also rejoicing all wins and every gain. Choosing this profession has been one of the best decisions I've ever made and I am grateful every day for the fulfilment it has provided me.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? It is ok to tread down a path not ventured. It is ok to think big. To dream big. Yes, you will learn those foundational skills, but don't be fooled in thinking there is only one path within a health profession which has such broad roots. And maybe this is why the other allied health degrees don't really know what we do- not because we are not good at explaining OT (as we are so often taught in Uni), but perhaps their perspectives remain fixed and limited with our own human potential.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? I respect that an idea of social and occupational justice is hard to see in the neo-liberalist society we live in here- where the health sector is characterised by, privatisation, individualisation, and the shift away from state welfare provision. The scarcity model of the economy which sees that 'more for you is less for me' ... it's a lot to go up against day after day. It can feel overwhelming and tiring, particularly when you're working in it, with no money for resources, training , staff and no focus on health promotion. When you come home exhausted unsure how you've made a difference, unsure of your impact.

But I want you to maintain your faith through your passion for the everyday. And don't get too stuck on this notion of the search for that one single thing that drives you. Passion is not one 'thing' that's just going to pop up out of nowhere, this belief only limits possibilities and will leave you waiting a very long time. Passion is a feeling, for me it's when I walk through the bush, cook someone I love a meal or when I see someone light up on their first ever wave. Passion is each and every moment that you're alive, so don't give in to the societal expectation that it is somewhere outside of yourself. Passion is a feeling, and feelings change. Each day be useful, solve problems, connect with people, connect with nature, find ease...this is where you will see motion and you will start to see your passion arise where your energy and effort reaches someone's need. If all you can do in a day is make someone feel safe, know you have been able to breach the first and biggest step towards ongoing and sustainable change.

Connect

Instagram: @surfingthespectrum

Facebook: Surfing the Spectrum

Website: www.surfingthespectrum.org

TEACHING



Brook Cook

“You are never dealt anything you can’t handle. You already have the tools in you.”

Job title: Lecturer – Occupational Therapy

What setting do you work in? Now I work in academia, however, Mental Health is my area of passion.

Describe your OT role: Currently I'm teaching MH practice to the next generation of Occupational Therapists at university. My role in MH practice was to support people to build the lives they wanted to lead. A life where they were able to overcome any difficulties that may be caused by their social situations or symptoms.

Why is this work so important to you? People with Mental Illness are incredibly misunderstood right off the rip. The perception the general population has of mental illness based on Hollywood depictions and negative press immediately compounds the negative experience of Mental Health difficulties as soon as they receive a medical label. The reality is the vast majority of people with a MH diagnosis are amazing people who have the same passions, dreams and wishes as everyone else but have to overcome more difficulties than most. Being able to help someone overcome those difficulties and take control of their life is incredibly powerful and a privilege to partake in.

In my current teaching role I have the privilege of doing everything in my power to transfer this passion onto the next generation of OT's.

TEACHING

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? I was lucky that I was almost always incredibly supported during my career. I learned the lessons I did relatively quick. But with that came a lot of pressure that I put on myself to “change the world” and “improve the profession”. Now don’t get me wrong, this mindset led me to some incredible opportunities and met some absolutely amazing people, however, it also led to burnout after a few years. So, I guess what I wish I knew is to not neglect yourself in pursuit of your passions. Slow down, enjoy the journey, make it sustainable.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Question the status quo. We are a growing, evolving profession. Part of that growth has often led to us exploring an area of practice, publishing some evidence and then that evidence being cemented in lore. Everything evolves, even the core assumptions of the profession. If you find yourself doing something in your practice, ask yourself “why?”. If you can’t give an occupation based, client centered answer to that, question if it’s something you should or need to be doing.

Connect

Instagram: @occupiedpodcast

Facebook: Occupied Podcast

Website: www.occupiedpodcast.com

TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION

“Everything will be ok in the end. If it’s not ok, it’s not the end.”



Laura Gimmons

Job title: I am the CEO and Founder of Theratrak. This technology company supports allied health professionals with software that enables them to create and track custom therapy programs for people living with disabilities. I am also the principal occupational therapist at Live Be Explore, a mobile private occupational therapy company.

What setting do you work in? With Theratrak, I work in the technology sector. Building and creating a platform for OTs and other allied health professionals to use across the healthcare ecosystem. We have a remote team scattered around Australia and the globe, so most of my time is spent online, at conferences or visiting amazing clinics around Australia.

As the principal OT for Live Be Explore, I work in the community with children between the ages of 2-18, supporting them to reach their independence and participation goals.

Describe your OT role: My OT role with Theratrak is anything but traditional. I spend my days working with digital designers and engineers to develop features for the platform to help therapists do their job better. My experience working in the private health sector has helped me translate many of the challenges that therapists face. It also helps me speak to new users or our research partners, as I can leverage my industry experience to talk and walk the walk.

One of the fascinating parallels I have found between building tech and OT is the similarities in how we set up projects. With Theratrak, we are always focused on the problem and setting goals to solve that problem with solutions. I think my skills in task analysis, observation and communication have come in handy many times when we have been running through feature design sprints.

As a private paediatric therapist, my role is a little more “traditional”. I work with a variety of children in the community, supporting them with any number of goals with our core values that the children live their lives, be uniquely them and explore everything. Some days we might be bush walking, cooking in the kitchen, or I've even worked with a sailing instructor to help one of my clients achieve his goal of independently sailing a boat.

Why is this work so important to you? I genuinely believe that we can leverage technology to not only elevate the profession but have a more significant impact on all of our participants. Technology can significantly assist healthcare, decreasing costs and increasing access to services. There are not enough OTs in the world to do our fantastic work, and I believe technology is a must to help us bridge that gap (without burning out!).

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? Oh, so many things! I think we are forever learning in this job. One thing I would've loved to have known early on was business skills. Understanding the back end of a practice, how it works and how they grow really interests me. I think I'm still early in my OT journey, so I'm happy to be learning the skills now.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? There is an occupation in everything we do. Find the thing you love doing and bring OT to that. It's ok to change what you love over the years and where you work in OT. That's the magic and, I think, the most underrated part of our profession.

Connect

Instagram: @theratrak

Facebook: Theratrak

Website: www.theratrak.co

TRAUMA

"I will not rescue you, For you are not powerless. I will not fix you, For you are not broken. I will not heal you, For I see you, in your wholeness. I will walk with you through your darkness As you remember your light."



Kaya Lyons

Job title: Director / Paediatric Occupational Therapist

What setting do you work in? Paediatric Private Practice

Describe your OT role: We support children presenting with trauma to rediscover their joy, belonging and access their skills for life through play. As trauma-responsive therapist's we are detectives, discovering what is going on for each child, to support them to unlock and integrate their body, mind & spirit so that they can feel happy, healthy and well. Each child has parents/carers alongside them, each with their own stories and journey. Our role is to also see and support parents and carers to feel empowered and engaged in their parenting role. By empathetically seeing, listening to and sharing with each individual you can understand what it might be like to live in the world for that individual, through their perception. To support each individual with their health and wellness we join the individual on their journey and share with them through connection with themselves, each other, nature and culture.

Why is this work so important to you? On reflection, my journey in life, with its many twists and turns, weaved together to guide and shape my role as an OT. Trauma, subconsciously (for many) and consciously (for a lot) impacts health and one's ability to empathetically connect and thrive. For me, by supporting individual's on their own journey of healing, I am in one small way, supporting each individual with rediscovering their relationship with the world within and the world around them (A little piece of Healing the World).

TRAUMA

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? Like life, it is an ever evolving journey, be kind to yourself with your expectations.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? We learn when we feel safe and secure, opening a window for curiosity in all that we love and are passionate about. What helps you feel safe and secure (physically, emotionally, spiritually, cognitively, environmentally)? Value this feeling as it will guide not only your, passion and OT journey, but your journey in life.

Connect

Instagram: @activeot4kids

Facebook: Active OT for Kids

Website: www.activespot.com.au

WOMB WISDOM

“At her first bleeding, a woman meets her power. During her bleeding years she practices it. At menopause she becomes it.”

(Traditional Native American saying)



Janelle Gullan

Job title: I am the owner and occupational therapist at The Wild Orange Tree.

What setting do you work in? I am in private practice as a solo practitioner. My work focuses on the perinatal population and the challenges mother can encounter with pelvic health, mental health and menstrual cycles getting in the way of everyday life. I also support people outside of the mothering space to explore internal connection and the stories that live in their body.

I mostly work in the online space, while also seeing people face-to-face in Melbourne (Victoria) and Wollongong (New South Wales).

Describe your OT role: I help people to get out of their head and come home to their body as a grounded place from which to interact with everyday life and mothering roles. There are so many reasons why people can feel disconnected from their body, particularly their belly, pelvic bowl or womb space. However, this disconnection can get in the way during pregnancy, birth and postpartum recovery. This is because menarche (our first period), mothering and menopause are all a continuum of blood rite of passage. The menstrual rhythm plays out on a monthly basis, but it also guides the mother transition and gives us valuable inner knowledge for how we can be supporting ourselves through this season and beyond.

We are so quick to pathologise mothers and the physical or emotional challenges they experience; yet we often fail to critique the environments we are forced to birth and mother in. I love how an occupational therapy lens gives an environmental perspective that helps mothers not to feel personally broken. We can also look more broadly than just mental health or just physical health, and see the complex and subtle interconnections between these aspects and the principles that come from womb wisdom.

I also do a lot of work with menstrual cycles and helping people listen to the messages from symptoms and cycle challenges. This can be the way that birth and early mothering experiences imprint into the post-partum menstrual cycle, or the cyclical ways that health and wellbeing can be experienced.

In practice my work can look like education to contextualise a person's rite of passage experience so they can bring compassion into their journey. I adapt traditional mental health techniques to honour the body and brain-based changes that come with pregnancy and birth. I also provide hands on and hand in body work to support the nervous system, organs, bones, ligaments and muscles for birth preparation, birth recovery and menstrual wellbeing.

Why is this work so important to you? This work is personal because my own journey into mothering had the body connection piece missing. When more mainstream offerings for birth recovery didn't work for me, I encountered a whole world of embodied pelvic health, body connection and womb wisdom that has completely changed my relationship with myself and the tools I have available to use in everyday life. From early on I knew that I wanted to be able to offer this to other women and mothers.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? That occupational therapists are able to work with mothers and wombs in so many creative ways! While maternal health and pelvic health are still often referred to as emerging areas of practice, we have incidentally been supporting mothers, women and those with wombs throughout our profession's history. It isn't that much of a step to acknowledge the unique body, environment and occupational impacts that come from feminine transitions and rite of passage.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Find your passion and there will be a way that occupational therapy is relevant to supporting people in this space. And, just as you are, you have so much to gift to the world.

Connect

Instagram: @thewildorangetree

Facebook: The Wild Orange Tree

Website: www.thewildorangetree.com.au

YOGA



"Step into the fire of self discovery.
This fire will not burn you, it will
only burn what you are not."

~ Mooji

Laura Kagan

Job title: Occupational Therapist (Mental Health) & Yoga Teacher.

What setting do you work in? Private Practice, Luna Therapy.

Describe your OT role: Luna Therapy is a nomadic integrative mental health and wellbeing service. Our service has deeply evolved since its inception in 2016 from a somewhat typical community outreach medical-model OT service to an awakened and embodied mental health and wellbeing service that blends OT, spirituality, psychology, yoga, and nature. Our beautiful team are all multi-modality trained therapists who are dedicated to personal growth and supporting a healthier evolution of humanity. Our service draws on a balance between eastern wisdom, western approaches, and integrative practices. We are nomadic and provide our services via telehealth and in-person when needed, with our core business value of true aligned living allowing our team to live, love and travel as they desire whilst still engaging in meaningful work as integrative OT's. Luna Therapy birthed a team culture that supports our therapists to be dedicated to their own healing and joy as a priority, fully knowing that when we as therapists are embodying our own unique true wellbeing, then the work we do is of high vibration and quality, benefiting ourselves, our clients, and our communities.

I founded and currently manage Luna Therapy, and I also provide supervision, mentoring and wellbeing workshops to other allied health practitioners who are seeking greater meaning, fulfillment, and joy in their lives. I completed further training in somatic based approaches including Yoga and Trauma-Sensitive Yoga, and deeply support the combination of OT and Yoga in the mental health and wellbeing space. The blend of OT and Yoga informs my work of supporting others with self-discovery, meaningful living and sustainable wellbeing through a multi-modality trauma- informed approach honouring the mind-body connection, western science, and eastern wisdom. It's a constantly evolving role, as it rightly should be, because life, my growth, research, and wisdom are constantly evolving.

Why is this work so important to you? As I grow and evolve in this lifetime, I continue to expand my worldview, so naturally the way I view, and practice OT continues to change. As humans we have big questions about ourselves and about life that are often so hard to answer. Why do we do what we do? Why are we here? Who are we? Who am I? These lines of enquiry started showing up in my life and when I birthed as a mother, they got louder and louder, so I started seeking answers to them. The sacred rite of passage into motherhood directed me on my path of self-discovery and getting to know who I am and what truly mattered to me. The more aligned I became the more empowered I felt to make change, so I began to create the life I wanted and that involved creating new clear boundaries and balance within all my life roles, especially my work role. As time progressed, other OT's started reaching out to me for support and guidance, and a new wave of clients reaching out to me who needed support with navigating spiritual awakenings amidst mental health and wellbeing challenges; this all contributed to Luna Therapy becoming what it is today. Yoga means union, and I see this as union as connection to our true self, to nature and to each other. We are all in this lifetime together, we are all meant to be here, and we are all helping to walk each other home. I do this work because I know that an embodied and aligned person, living from a state of wellbeing and joy whilst navigating life in all its beauty and pain, has a ripple effect on everyone they engage with, and we cannot underestimate the power this has on healing humanity and healing the earth.

What do you wish you had known earlier on your OT journey? The absolute importance of aligned living through getting to know and accept our true self on our capacity to engage fully and meaningfully in life, and that wellbeing looks so different for every single person so as therapists we need to be deeply curious and genuinely meet our clients with where they are at.

What words of wisdom do you have for other OT professionals? Get to know yourself deeply and practice as an OT in a way that aligns with who you truly are. Slow down, listen more, soften, be open, embrace change and only teach what you embody.

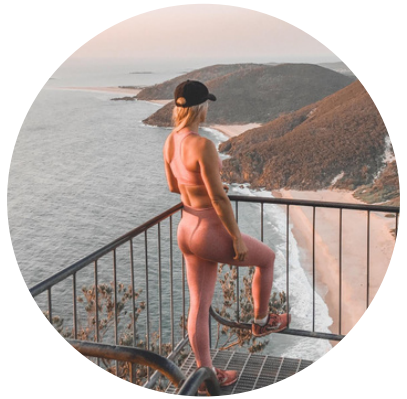
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