

# Occupational Therapy Association of Oregon

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## Viewpoint

Fall 2023 Newsletter



### OTAO

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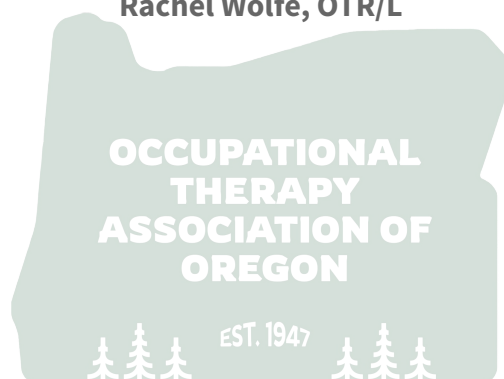
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## Message From the President



Katie O'Day, OTA President

The Occupational Therapy Association of Oregon hosted the first live conference since 2019 at Pacific University this past October. We had a wonderful opportunity where the American Occupational Therapy Association brought its executive board to Oregon to join our conference! They also helped host World OT Day on October 27th including a volunteer event at the Blanchet House in Portland. AOTA and OTA board members volunteered to create self-care kits that were distributed to those in need that evening! We also celebrated with an event they hosted at the Benson Hotel, giving OTPs in Oregon a chance to meet and interact with the AOTA executive board and leadership.

We had a very successful conference with exciting and mentally stimulating continuing education opportunities including a keynote speaker, Mandy Davis, PhD, LCSW. She inspired OTs to lead the way in trauma-informed care at both the institutional level and with the clients, patients, and students we serve daily. She influenced hope that we as key health and education providers to serve in a huge capacity with the impacts trauma can have. She also said, "I am lobbying in Salem for more OTs in schools" as we can play a pivotal part



with how trauma affects the nervous system and our knowledge of sensory processing.. AOTA's executive board also hosted a 2-hour listening session to hear about the concerns and triumphs in the OT profession in Oregon. For the closing keynote, Stacey Viera-Braendle shared about the importance of advocacy at various levels. We also had our OTA lobbyist, Niki Terzieff present with our OTA legislative team about all of the updates that have occurred over the last year including the passage of HB2618 which requires the Oregon Department of Education to do a work-study to look into workloads of OTs, PTs and SLPs serving in schools. At the conference, we had over 130 participants, 30+ speakers, who helped raise money for our ongoing advocacy efforts!

We had an amazing conference and would like to thank our conference chair, Connie Liu for her leadership! She is taking a step back after supporting our conference for 5 of the last 7 years but would love to help train a new conference chair. We are also fortunate to welcome many new OTPs to our board in the last year! We are actively looking for individuals to support our regional efforts including the coast, the gorge as well and central and eastern Oregon. We also have openings on the following committees: membership engagement, conference/continuing education, and advocacy/diversity-equity-inclusion task force.

Please contact me if you are interested at [\*\*otaopresident@gmail.com\*\*](mailto:otaopresident@gmail.com) and I would be happy to connect you to the leaders of these groups! Additionally, we have a lot of momentum in Oregon with our two existing OTP programs at Pacific University and Linn-Benton Community College. Additionally, the development of two additional OTD programs at Western Oregon University & George Fox University are looking to admit their first cohort of students in the fall of 2024!

Keep up the great OT work you are all doing daily! You are making positive changes individually and at the community level every day. Please let us know how it is going in your practice; we would love to hear about it.



## 2023 OTAO Conference Roundup!

Thank you to all the participants, organizers, university staff, and speakers that were involved with our conference at Pacific University.

Listed below are some fun facts from conference weekend:

1. Attendance Number: 130 (approximately)
2. First “in-person” Conference since 2019
3. First time in history AOTA has been present for OTAO conference
4. AOTA sponsored a volunteer event at Blanchet House for World OT Day on 10/27/2023
5. Approximately \$1,300 in self-care kits were donated to the houseless population in Portland, Oregon
6. Highest grossing fundraising event for OTAO student scholarships
7. Multiple speakers discussing importance of emerging practice



## 2023 OTAO Conference Award Winners & Scholarships



The Grace Black Award of Honor: **Jan Cuciti**

The Sybil Hedrick Park Service Award: **Kristy Fleming**

The President's Award: **Halley Reed**

The Award of Appreciation: **Pacific University**

Student Scholarship #1: **Victoria Hermes**, Pacific University

Student Scholarship #2: **Chelsea Susemeihl**, Linn Benton Community College

Student Scholarship #3: **Amy Bolhuis**, Pacific University



## Emerging Practice: Zipporah Brown, OTD, MS, OTR/L, DipACLM



condition management using the 6 pillars of lifestyle medicine. Lifestyle medicine is a medical specialty that uses therapeutic approaches as a primary modality to treat chronic conditions; intervention is delivered by applying the 6 pillars- a whole-food, plant-predominant eating pattern, physical activity, restorative sleep, stress management, avoidance of risky substances and positive social connections... So OT right?!

### **Challenges to the work:**

Although occupational therapists are designated as qualified mental health providers (QMHP) in the state of Oregon, many mental health agencies are still learning about the role and benefits of occupational therapy (OT) in mental health settings. However, some of the folks that I work with are somewhat familiar with OT and others are very open to learning more about OT's role.

### **Description of the population you work with:**

I am the inaugural occupational therapist at Linn County Mental Health, specifically I work with Community Support Services in support of folks living with persistent serious mental illness (PSMI). My evolving role focuses on addressing chronic



### **Professional triumphs with the work:**

I am passionate about increasing access to equitable healthcare. Personally, I have witnessed far too many loved ones grapple with inadequately addressed health issues. Being able to practice in an underserved community and empower folks that are often counted out is a triumph in itself for me! Additionally, I developed two OT groups that have reached clients that previously were not engaging in group therapy. One group focuses on skills training, specifically preparing plant-predominant meals. The basis of the second group is health management education in which we explore a different pillar of lifestyle medicine each week, develop short term SMART goals, and problem solve ways to implement healthier behaviors. To be able to center food as medicine while also empowering clients to engage in healthy and meaningful occupations has been absolutely gratifying!

### **Interesting facts or statistics about the work:**

6 in 10 adults in America have at least one chronic condition; and 4 in 10 adults have at least 2 or more lifestyle related chronic conditions. People living with PSMI are at an increased risk for developing physical chronic conditions secondary to their

PSMI. I am currently 1 of 2 OT's in the entire state of Oregon board certified in lifestyle medicine. This advanced practice certification coupled with my OT training has equipped me to develop unique whole person group interventions that address both mental and physical health chronic conditions in a behavioral health setting. I feel immense gratitude and hope that more OT's pursue board certification in lifestyle medicine, as the therapeutic approach is in great alignment with our profession. I am happy to answer any questions about certification or even do an OTA info session in the future. Also, two colleagues and I co-developed an AOTA Lifestyle Management Community of Practice in which we meet monthly to explore best practices.

### **How fantastic OT is:**

Ultimately, I hope through my clinical practice, in behavioral health settings, to contribute to transformative healing and meaningful change. As an OT I believe we are expert problem solvers; we are well equipped to address the MONSTROUS chronic disease epidemic that is not only plaguing our nation, but disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations. It is my intention to show how fantastic OT is so that we can continue expanding our reach. Cheers to being the change!





## House Bill 2618: Shruti Gadkari, OTD, OTR/L, BCP

House Bill 2618 aimed at regulating caseloads for school therapists and a shift to workload model, was approved and signed by the governor on July 31, 2023! This was a joint effort led by OTs, PTs and SLPs and was also supported by therapy educational programs in the state. The passing of this bill is a testament to what advocacy and particularly collaborative advocacy can achieve!

The bill proposed that “the Department of Education shall conduct a study to identify the best methodology for determining the appropriate number of students on a workload for a school-based health practitioner who is a speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist or physical therapist”. School therapists in addition to conducting evaluations and treatment sessions, are also engaged in a myriad of other tasks like attending IEPs, traveling from one school to the other, conducting consultations with teachers, documentation etc. A workload model accounts for all these tasks that need to be a part of the equation, when determining the appropriate number of children that the school therapist can realistically service.

In accordance with this bill, the Department of Education has now begun implementing the data collection process for determining appropriate workload levels. In September of 2023, officials from the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) met with representatives from all 3 professions. Also, in attendance was Abe Saffer, AOTA’s congressional representative focusing on K-12 and higher education.

Following this meeting, ODE composed and sent out a survey to school therapy professionals and school administrators, collecting information about current workload approaches used in school districts. ODE plans on disseminating the results of the survey by December 2023, with submission to the legislative assembly by January 5, 2024.

We are enthused by ODE’s quick timeline for this process and are hopeful that the results will bring about some much needed changes to workloads for school therapists. Thank you to everyone who gave verbal and written testimony as well as our wonderful lobbyist, Niki Terzieff for her tireless work on this issue. Keep watching this space for updates on this process!

If you would like to be further involved in school therapy advocacy as well as learning about the entire scope of OT in school-based practice, please consider joining the ESSA Advocacy Network led by Susan Bazyk, Amy Coopersmith and Pam Stephenson. (Website: <https://everymomentcounts.org/about/about-occupational-therapy/>).



## OTAO Board Member Highlight

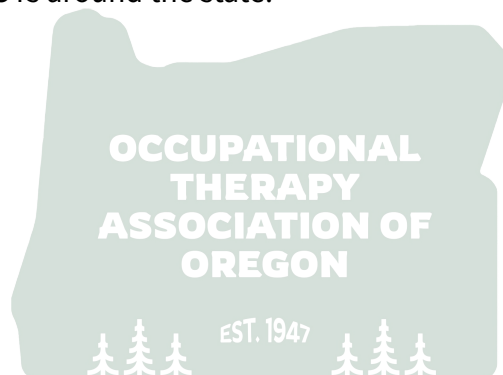
### Victoria Hermes - Pacific University OT Student Representative



Hi, my name is Victoria and I am a second year student at Pacific University's doctoral occupational therapy program. I currently live in the Hillsboro area. One thing that I love about this area is how close I am to either the ocean, mountains, or the city. My weekends are filled with so many adventures because of it. I have a small dog, Olive, and we go on many hikes around the area. Another meaningful leisure occupation that I like to participate in is hanging out with friends and our dogs.

I am interested in practicing in the pediatrics field, maybe even early intervention. My favorite thing about this profession is how client-focused it is. Occupational therapists don't solely focus on a person's disability. Instead we focus on the entire person and other factors that may be impacted by their disability. We find ways so that they can still participate in the activities they want/need to do. I think the biggest challenge in this work is constantly having to advocate for our clients and their basic needs. This profession is special in that we see everyone's ability in being able to do what they want, but there are policies and attitudes that fight against this.

Being involved with OTAO has opened my eyes to how much legislative work goes into advocating. One of my favorite things about volunteering with OTAO is being able to make connections with so many OTs around the state.



## OTAO Board Member Highlight

### Keely Burkey - Linn-Benton Community College OTA Student Representative



*Keely (left) pictured with her adventure buddy, Pepper.*

**Short Bio:** Keely is a second-year occupational therapy assistant student at Linn-Benton Community College. This is her third higher education degree, with a previous BA in English Literature from Reed College and an MA in Writing from Portland State University.

#### **1. Where do you live?**

I'm a first-time homeowner in Southeast Portland, in the Creston-Kenilworth neighborhood. Transitioning from an apartment to a house has been fantastic, and I particularly enjoy being able to dig into gardening (pun intended).

#### **2. What do you love about the area you live in?**

I enjoy the sense of entrepreneurship in Portland. It's easy to support locally owned businesses in the area for most things I use day-to-day. I'll also never get tired of being able to easily drive to the Columbia Gorge when I have time to hike.



### **3. What is your practice area of interest?**

At the moment I work at a non-profit helping pet owners under the federal poverty line with free or low-cost veterinary care and pet supplies. I'd like to continue working with this population, ideally in an inpatient or outpatient rehabilitation setting.

### **4. What is your favorite thing about this profession?**

From what I've experienced so far, I've enjoyed the collaborative nature of occupational therapy, both with other OTPs as well as other disciplines. I was initially drawn to the profession after learning about the combination of patient-centered care and scientifically grounded modalities.

### **5. What do you think is a major challenge in this work?**

From my perspective, the uniqueness of occupational therapy, and patient-centered care in general, is both a gift and a challenge. Since every intervention will be tailored to each patient, learning didactically has its limitations. Now that I'm starting my fieldwork rotations, all the theories are beginning to develop into clinical reasoning.

### **6. What meaningful leisure occupations do you enjoy?**

I enjoy running, hiking, and doing both with my two dogs. My partner and I also travel when we can – we most recently finished the Great Highland Way trek in the Scottish Highlands. We're hoping to sneak away again after my classes are done in June.

### **7. Are you a member of OTA O?**

I've just renewed my membership! Working with OTA O has been a blast, and I can't wait to join the board on a more permanent basis once I've found my footing professionally. The spirit of teamwork, advocacy, and energy has confirmed that I've found the right career.



## Client Success Story: Kenya Briggs

### How Two Pencils Saved My Forearms and My Career

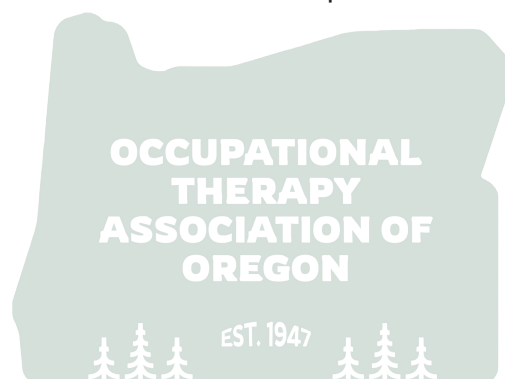
There's a feeling you get in the pit of your stomach — a combination of fear and dread — when it dawns on you that an injury could spell the end of your working life. The revelation might sneak up on you after dismissing the first pangs of discomfort as a fluke. “What the heck is that?” you think, and then you remember that you're young and invincible, or ambitious and busy, or too sexy for frailty, and you go about your business.

In my case, the business was typing and the fluke was a small, dull ache in my forearms. I was a project coordinator for a union of freelance writers in the late 1990's. Writing was my bread and butter, and typing the unsung hero of my trade. But I was in trouble; in just a few weeks the aching had grown more intense and, like a monster, it was following me home — my arms began to hurt while engaged in the mundane, like turning a door knob or lifting a pot of water.

And that's when the second shoe dropped. If I can't type, then I can't keep this job or any job in my skill set. How am I going to pay the bills? That sobered me right up and one by one, I began checking off the list of things I was supposed to do: I went to see my doctor, switched around my workstation to meet ergonomic ideals, and had the union buy me supportive equipment, like a wave keyboard and ergonomically sound chair. But the pain persisted — and I had a lot of typing to do.

So, in a moment of inspired desperation, I picked up two pencils, turned them upside down, and began pecking the keys of the wave keyboard with them. Friends, please don't fall off of your chairs when reading this... tapping the keyboard with those pencils was the only solution that worked! The moment I began typing with them my forearm pain vanished, and it immediately reappeared whenever I typed without them — ergonomic aids and physical therapy notwithstanding. My doctor suggested I patent the process, which underscored for me how difficult it was to resolve forearm pain for active typists. Without realizing it, I'd stumbled on a keyboard interface that shifted repetitive movements from my hands to my upper body and kept my arms in neutral position. And it totally saved my bacon (I mean this in a loving, vegan way).

My work life became more competitive about ten years later when I landed a job as a communications professional for The City and County of San Francisco. I was easily able to keep pace with my peers with my typing tool, which I'd improved with foam hand grips (typing all day with my hands clenched around thin pencils was a little hard on my thumbs) and a neck cord.

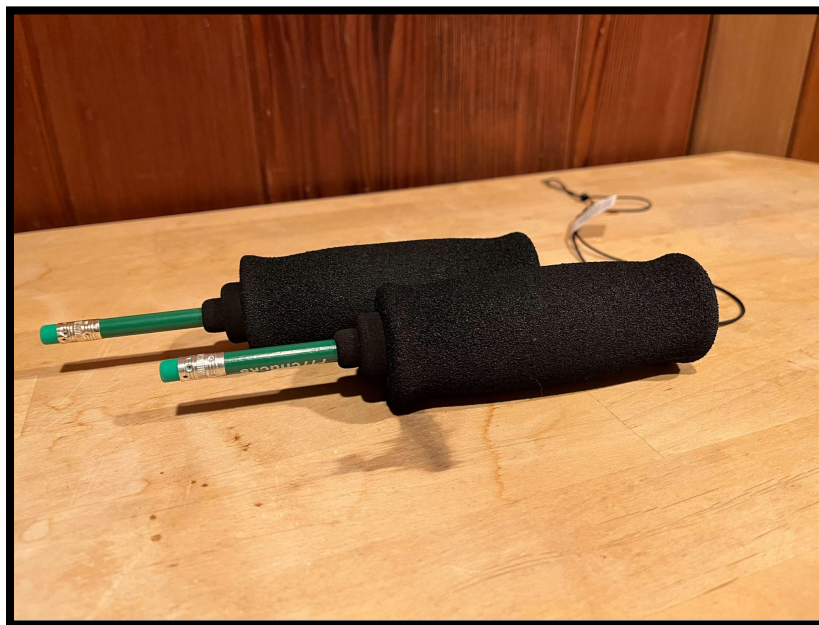


When I was promoted to the sole Public Relations Officer slot at the San Francisco Sheriff's Department, I used the tool to write about 40 press releases. This was only ten fewer than were written that same time period by the entire thirty-person communications team I'd just left. I was typing up a storm with zero arm pain, friends. Zero! And that was awesome-cakes.

The lessons I've learned from the development of my FiTchucks™ typing tool have informed my approach to other of life's "lemony" events. If something in my house breaks I'm much more likely to jury-rig a fix than to call a professional. For better or worse, that's my way — and its origins lie in cobbling together an alternative keyboard interface while organizing freelance writers some 25 years ago.

Sometimes self-sufficiency means the difference between doing it your way, or not at all. That's how I see it, anyway. (And yes, I typed this article with FiTchucks! Learn more about them or buy them at: [FiTchucks.com](http://FiTchucks.com).)

\*\*Kenya Briggs is semi-retired and lives with her daughter in a righteous, renovated old barn Western Massachusetts.



\*If you are interested in submitting a similar client success story, please email the newsletter committee at: [otaosis.historian@gmail.com](mailto:otaosis.historian@gmail.com)

