



# VERMONT OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION

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## An Update from your President

Dear VOTA Members,

It finally looks like fall has arrived! For those who do school-based practice, I hope you had a good start to the 2023-2024 school year. The VOTA board met on Saturday September 30<sup>th</sup> to do our annual strategic planning session and start the process of setting goals for 2024. We are looking forward to doing more work particularly in the areas of advocacy and outreach in the coming year; we want to make sure that healthcare and education organizations, community nonprofits, and policy makers all understand the unique value that occupational therapy provides to Vermont residents. We are also gearing up for the 2024 legislative session and will be tracking the progress of our compact bill as it makes its way through the legislative process. If there are other areas where state or federal policy impacts your work and you want VOTA's help with advocacy, please reach out! We always enjoy hearing from members about what we can do to support occupational therapy practice in the state.

We are working on a fall continuing education opportunity, so stay tuned for more information on that in the coming weeks! Thank you for all that you do!

Lindsay Thrall, MOT, OTR/L  
President, Vermont Occupational Therapy Association



## How Two Pencils Saved My Forearms and My Career

**Kenya Briggs**



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.

(continued on next page)

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](https://FitChucks.com).)



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

## Research

If you meet the inclusion criteria and are interested in participating, please take the initial brief survey linked here: [https://qualtrics.uvm.edu/jfe/form/SV\\_clJAahim0JxOOzQ](https://qualtrics.uvm.edu/jfe/form/SV_clJAahim0JxOOzQ).

Please pass this survey link along to any fieldwork educators who may be interested in participating!

## Seeking Research Participants: Occupational Therapy Fieldwork Educators in Rural or Small Town Settings

We are recruiting OT fieldwork educators who have supervised at least one student in the past 5 years and who work in a rural or small town setting. Many rural OTs balance several roles, including fieldwork educator. This study aims to uncover the experience of rural fieldwork educators in order to learn how to best support them in this complex balance and facilitate optimal student encounters.

Participants will be asked to complete:  
 1 brief initial questionnaire (approx. 2-4 minutes)  
 1 interview in person or over Zoom (approx. 30-60 minutes)

**If interested, please complete the initial questionnaire found here:**

[https://qualtrics.uvm.edu/jfe/form/SV\\_clJAahim0JxOOzQ](https://qualtrics.uvm.edu/jfe/form/SV_clJAahim0JxOOzQ)

For more information, please contact Dr. Kimberly Krebs: [Kimberly.krebs@med.uvm.edu](mailto:Kimberly.krebs@med.uvm.edu)

Thank you  
for  
considering!

Research institution:  
University of Vermont

Principal investigator:

Kimberly Krebs,  
OTD, OTR/L, BCP, CLC, CTP

Assistant Clinical  
Professor, Academic  
Fieldwork Coordinator

This study has been approved by the University of Vermont Institutional Review Board

# How's the Business Going?

**OT in Private Practice: Dena Wilkie**



Hello colleagues! My name is Dena Wilkie and I am the owner of Home and Able, LLC. Home and Able, LLC offers home modification and aging in place consulting. I was asked to write about my business and the first thing that came to mind, is how hard it is. Surprise! It turns out starting and running your own business is difficult.

There were many stages of starting this business, from dreaming it into reality over the course of many years, taking additional courses and certifications, designing my logo and building a website. As an OT, the tangible checklist was no problem. Complete Executive Certificate in Home Mods, Check. Obtain Certified Aging in Place, Check. Micro business grant, check. Website, check. However, I've reached the end of the checklist and entered the uncharted territory of 'selling' Home and Able, and subsequently myself. This is not something that necessarily comes easily to many occupational therapists.

I feel confident in my skills as an OT, with home modifications, my assessments and observations, my recommendations and rapport with clients. Our skills as OT's in problem solving and finding creative solutions have helped me to seek out different opportunities for Home and Able. However, I struggle with how to be a business woman. I thought surely I'd have a lot of practice from selling "OT" over the years, cajoling a cantankerous senior from their warm bed or getting a first year resident to understand why it is important to order OT for the client s/p CVA. I was even taught and made to practice my elevator pitch for 'what OT is' in graduate school in an effort to promote our profession. But what of marketing? Or Social media, (a necessary evil), for staying in front of your audience? Taxes? Feeling confident enough to ask for what your knowledge and skills are worth without apologizing!

My partner has previously said to me, "OT yourself!" And so I do.. I find new opportunities for learning these skills. A recent conference for 'solopreneurs' showed me many amazing supports available for small business owners in VT. I've created relationships with business mentors. I create my own checklists and practice gentleness with myself when those lists remain marginally untouched. I write down the supportive conversations from people 'in the know' about what a good and needed service I am providing, so I can revisit it when I am uncertain. I 'OT' myself.

And so I plow on, thwarted at every corner by my lovely but constantly ill young children, my multiple other jobs, life! And there are serious highs and lows, often within the same day. Amazing opportunities come my way and fizzle out, and then surprising events happen that boost me up and give me faith again. Resilience is a word that enters my mind often. Trust, too. Trust that my business will unfold as it is meant to, as I am able to give it the attention it needs. And knowledge that I hold in my heart like a flame, that what I'm offering is meaningful, important and necessary. I know it, and the rest of the world will too.

To learn more about Home and Able, please use the following link <https://homeandablevt.com/>



## Falls Prevention

The first day of fall kicked off the Falls Prevention Awareness week. Each year, Falls Free Vermont uses this week to increase awareness around falls risk and prevention, including educating policy makers and spreading the word among Vermonters. To learn more about Falls Prevention Awareness Week, please use the following links:



Falls Free Vermont Coalition: <https://m.facebook.com/FallsFreeVT/> or <https://www.fallsfreevt.com/>

National Coalition on Aging: <https://www.ncoa.org/professionals/health/center-for-healthy-aging/national-falls-prevention-resource-center/falls-prevention-awareness-week>

Last September, the CDC and NCOA launched a new screening tool for falls prevention. The Falls Free CheckUp asks 13 simple questions to get your falls risk score and resources to prevent falls. This only takes a few minutes to complete. It can be completed by either the individual or by a family member on their behalf. Use the following links to learn more or to access the screening tool:

<https://www.cdcfoundation.org/pr/2022/new-fall-prevention-screening-tool>

<https://www.ncoa.org/age-well-planner/assessment/falls-free-checkup>



## Everyday Advocacy through AOTA



### Take Action with Policy Makers

Advocacy issues currently in focus include facilitating the OT licensure compact, increasing access to OT services in behavioral health, improving the diversity of the OT workforce, and fighting against Medicare cuts to therapy services.

For more information and/or to contact policy makers, use the following link:

[aota.org/advocacy/issues](https://aota.org/advocacy/issues)

## Continence Consulting

New this year, the Vermont Continence Project has expanded their continence consultation and training resources!

In addition to their regular consulting services, the Continence Project are leading online parent groups, and have published an all-new toilet-teaching video series for parents, caregivers, and healthcare professionals.

Use the following links for more information:

[Vermont Continence Project Services](#)

[Continence Project Online Resource Library](#)



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT  
CENTER ON DISABILITY &  
COMMUNITY INCLUSION

# VOTA Board Member Retreat

September 30th at White River Craft Center in Randolph, Vermont



Top Row, left to right: Chelsea Vaillancourt,  
Hannah Bloom, Ela Dupont

Thomas Hartigan, Aimil Parmelee, Sarah  
James

Lindsay Thrall and Karen Downey

Bottom Row, left to right: Kristen Jackson,  
Nicole DeVoid, Amy Maxwell Johanne  
Champigny

## Meet our Members

**Johanne Champigny, OTR/L, CHT and VOTA secretary**

I have been an OT for 28 years!

I am an OT at North Country Hospital working part time 32 hours a week, as an OT and CHT. I am also the OT supervisor as I was the first OT at NCH in 1995!

Special interests include any topic related to an orthopedic condition!



**Kristen Jackson, MOT, OTR/L, ATP**  
VOTA Public Relations Chair

16 years as an Occupational Therapist at North Country Hospital in  
Newport, Vermont

I work full time providing school-based services, as well as PRN SNF OT  
services



# Upcoming Events



**FALL FOOD FEST**

WITH  **KIDS' RehabGYM**  
Physical & Occupational Therapy

 **Inner Path**  
NUTRITION

 **EMPOWER**

**OCT 28**  
9:00am-12:00pm  
373 BLAIR PARK RD., SUITE 204  
WILLISTON, VT



 **SIGN UP HERE**



**Primary Care Sports  
Medicine and  
Wilderness Medicine  
Conference**

**October 15 - 17, 2023**

**Delta Hotel by Marriott - South  
Burlington, Vermont**



**ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE**

**"Bringing Home the Best of  
Occupational Therapy"**

**November 3, 2023**

 **MAOT**  
Massachusetts Association for Occupational Therapy

 **RIOTA**  
Moving forward — Making a difference



**UVM SOTA  
Social Event!**

**BLANKET  
MAKING**

**Apple Cider. Fall Treats. Music. OT!**

**6pm** **OT LAB Space** **18**  
Living & Learning C113 **October**

For more info | Email: emma.severn@uvm.edu | Social Activities Chair

Massachusetts OT Association is offering member rate for all VOTA members to attend their November Annual Conference.

<https://mafot.wildapricot.org/MAOT-Annual-Conference>

## VOTA Membership

### Applications

Encourage co-workers and friends who are Occupational Therapists and Occupational Therapy Assistants to consider becoming a member of our organization. Please apply on our website or request an application form from our membership chair, Nicole Devoid at

[votamembership@gmail.com](mailto:votamembership@gmail.com). Rates are as follows:

3 year subscription: \$140 OTR, \$95 OTA

1 year subscription: \$50 OTR, \$35 OTA, \$15 for inactive practitioners and students

1 year subscription for a team of up to 5 members: \$200

### Advertise open occupational therapy positions on our website

For \$150.00, VOTA will post your open positions and include space for a logo, for 90 days. This includes our website, newsletter and social media (instagram, twitter and Facebook). To have your advertisement included in our newsletter you must submit within 15 days of the following deadlines:

December 22nd (For Jan 2024) or March 22nd (For April 2024)

Payment can be done by Purchase Order and Check sent to:

Vermont Occupational Therapy Association, PO Box 925, Richmond, Vermont 05477

Please contact [informationvota@gmail.com](mailto:informationvota@gmail.com) for more information.

## Be sure to follow VOTA on your Social Media Accounts

Facebook: Vermont Occupational Therapy Association

Instagram: [vermontoccupationaltherapy](https://www.instagram.com/vermontoccupationaltherapy)

Twitter: @802OT

LinkedIn: VermontOT802



## AOTA Vision 2025

As an inclusive profession, occupational therapy maximizes health, well-being, and quality of life for all people, populations, and communities through effective solutions that facilitate participation in everyday living.

## VOTA Mission Statement

The mission of the Vermont Occupational Therapy Association is to promote and advance occupational therapy practice, research, legislation, education and to support occupational therapy practitioners in Vermont. The association serves its membership by providing support services, acting as a public advocate of occupational therapy and participating in cooperative interaction to meet the needs of the professional and the public.

## VOTA Inclusive Statement

We are an all-inclusive non-profit organization who accepts individuals of all abilities without bias toward race, ethnicity, gender or beliefs.