

Helen Gardner: My Journey



For Occupational Therapist Week 2020, we chat to a member of staff about their journey to becoming an Occupational Therapist (OT).

In this issue, we talk to Helen Gardner, who is a lead occupational therapist at Cognus, and whose journey to become an OT was a natural choice.

It makes complete sense to me now why I chose occupational therapy as a career. During my childhood and teenage years, I remember being at my happiest when I was busy doing activities I really enjoyed, particularly sports and being creative. At the time, I didn't know that a profession based on principles of doing, engagement, function and meaningful occupation even existed.

My interest in sports and the human body helped me gain A levels in sports studies, human biology, and psychology. During the summer, I took up coaching positions at

athletics camps teaching children skills in running, jumping and throwing. I found that connecting with children came naturally to me and I began to develop skills in adapting and grading activities and exercises which allowed children to succeed in the athletic events.

Unsure of what to do after my A levels, I focussed my attention on gaining further experience in working with children. I was lucky to gain my first full time job as a therapy assistant at The Children's Trust and it was during this time that I discovered occupational therapy.

Two years later, I applied to Canterbury Christ Church University College to complete a BSc (Hons) in Occupational Therapy and in 1999 I graduated as an occupational therapist. Following successful student placements in community settings, I began working in adult mental health and learning disabilities. I was able to make positive changes to an individual's mental and physical well-being through promoting independence and engagement in occupations that mattered to them.

Twenty years on, and working with children as a lead OT at Cognus, I'm still able to apply the same core values that led me to the profession many years ago – creating opportunities for success through adapting and grading activities, developing independent skills, preparing for adulthood and engagement in meaningful occupations.

This is why I love being an OT.

This is why I'll always #ChooseOT.

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