

THE BOOK OF blogs

POCKET GUIDE

7

ELIZABETH CASSON TRUST





Year 1: Thriving Not Surviving is a project looking to support the well-being of Occupational Therapists in their first year of practice. Our aim was to develop a series of free self-coaching resources to help navigate the first year of work. The project is funded by the Elizabeth Casson Trust.

As part of the development, we created a series of blogs that to our surprise, were soon read all over the world, way beyond our target market. The subject of, "transitioning from student to practitioner" seems to have struck a chord, or rather, lit a touch-paper. Many people joined in to share their experience of this exciting but anxious time, that happens year upon year.

To celebrate the success of the project, we have collated some of our favourite blogs into one downloadable publication. To us, they perfectly capture the experience of being "a fledgling OT" - a plucky ex-student who dives into the deep-end of front-line practice and soon learns to swim - a pivotal moment in their career.

The blogs are written by a truly diverse group of people. All have many experiences to share and it has been an absolute privilege to hear such personal stories. Before this project, most had never written a blog in their life, which is why their voice is so fresh. Some of the blogs were written during the early months of the COVID pandemic when everyone was having to make significant changes to their working practice, the effects of which are still relevant today.

This is an informal collection that you can 'dip in and out of'. Think of it as a book of short stories, friendly in tone but also profound, each one worthy of our respect. We hope that you enjoy them as much as we did.

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1 Year, 3 Words

ROB YOUNG

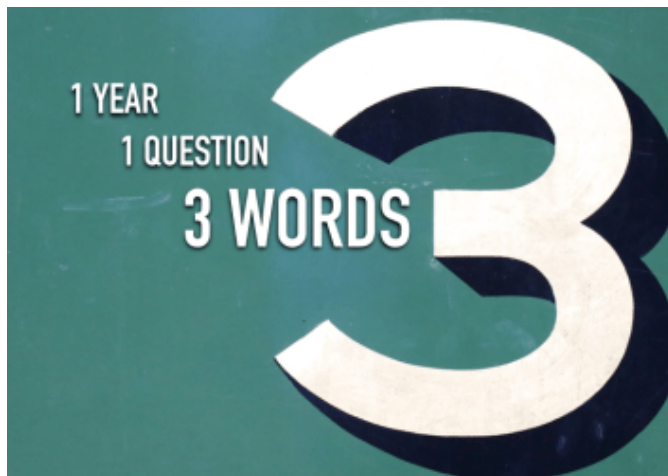


Image by Rob Young

It sounds impossible, to sum up a year in three words, especially when it's your first year of practice. The move from education to employment is an emotional roller coaster ride, as the upward swoop of hope contorts into the downward swoop of reality. It is only when we glide back up, with hard-earned resilience, that we can begin to assess the journey. Even then, there is little time to contemplate the curved and complex route, the conundrum of emotions and our own holistic wellbeing.

To ask a first year Occupational Therapist to sum all this up in three little words is a bold provocation so that's what we did! We dispensed with the usual (excellent) forms of self-analysis, reflective journals and the like, replacing them with a short, sharp shock: 1 year, 1 question, 3 words.

From Day One, the experiment worked. Our touch paper question ignited a firework of conversation, a myriad of colourful emotions, exploding into the digisphere. Some of the responses were funny, while others heart-breaking. All read like poetry and share one thing in common, they capture what it's like to be a First Year Occupational Therapist.

Bewilderment is a common theme, as the newly qualified struggle to navigate a complex workload and the heavy weight of responsibility. Here are some three-word responses that illustrate this view:

"So many questions!!"

"Going too fast"

"What's going on?"

Even in this concise form of language, the sense of urgency comes across clear as day. For others, the stakes are raised even higher. In stark revelation, these former students beautifully capture their raw emotional state:

"Terrifying, inspiring, (I'm) crying"

"Sink or swim"

"This is hard"

"Nobody warned me"

"Abort mission now"

It is a privilege to read such honest outpourings. The sentiments speak of strength and a fabulous sense of self-awareness, essential for our profession. They are emotionally articulate and profound.

We can almost feel the wriggle, as the former students readjust and reconfigure, acclimatising themselves to this Brave New World. In phrases like, Doubter, Dreamer, Doer, the protagonist literally reinvents herself as three distinct identities, as craft and confidence grow.

We see this theme of professional bloom again and again:

"Challenging, rewarding, growth"

"Rollercoaster, perseverance, reconfigure"

"Challenging, empowering, rewarding"

"Apprehension, excitement, rewarding"

One response that I found particularly intriguing was the three-word phrase, Show clinical reasoning. It reminds us that the face we present to the public is one of calm, rational wisdom and the choices we make on their behalf, have safe, reassuring boundaries - but we are also human and need to nurture our own wellbeing as much as those we serve.

The reason why we are harvesting this content is so that we can create a wellbeing resource, to help newly qualified Occupational Therapists in their first year of work. The echoes we receive will help us enormously and we are grateful to all who respond.

A witty summary of a first year's journey comes from this cheeky (four-word) response:

“Growth, freaking-challenging, exhilarating”

Even in this casual tone, the sense of triumph shines through. What it shares with all of its peers, is that the sense of triumph has been earned.

There are many positive responses, along the lines of Believe in yourself but I shall end with my favourite, three words that are an inspiration to us all:

“The right path”

Rob Young is an award-winning writer and artist who helps NHS leaders to communicate. He is co-lead on the Year 1 Project, along with Dr Lynne Goodacre.

Practice What you Preach

ANDREW BATES



Photo Nick Casele at Unsplash

It's 18:48 on a Thursday evening. I'm sitting at my kitchen table, sipping a green tea and trying to digest the last 11 hours. I've recently arrived home, wet from being caught in the rain, from yet another hectic day at work. I've been qualified for nearly a year now, and within that time I've not only started my first job as an Occupational Therapist, but I've had to learn how to work amidst a global pandemic. This has presented challenges that I never thought I'd ever have to overcome, but instead of feeling down about this, I can't help but feel an overwhelming sense of clarity.

As an Occupational Therapist, I spend my life helping others to participate in the occupations that matter to them. Yet, one year ago, I rarely engaged in the occupations that mattered to me. But during this crisis, I've reflected upon my own engagement with various interests, hobbies, and activities of daily living. Without cooking, knitting, running or reading, my emotional well-being would be depleted right now. But thankfully, because of these occupations, I've been able to survive. Let's learn from this lesson. It shouldn't take a lockdown to make us engage in the occupations that matter to us. We are who we are because of the things that we do, and it will be these things that will carry you

through your first year of practice. It may feel impossible to do anything additional to your new 9-5, Monday to Friday routine. But the one thing that has made the biggest difference to my well-being is being able to participate in the things that I love. No matter how well (or not so well) I can actually cook, knit, run or read.

Andrew works in London with children and young people who have a broad range of disabilities.

If I had one thing to say to a newly qualified OT it would be:

"Don't be shy and remember to ask questions. You may not know everything but you definitely know a lot".

Every day's a school day

KATY WILLIAMS



Photo by 'Hello I'm Nik' at Unsplash

As I sit here contemplating what to write, after much thought and reflection, I realise the power of receiving great advice as a practitioner about to enter the newly qualified world. You see, I am writing this not only in my first year of practice, but in a year in which the world has faced one of the biggest pandemics. Taking the time to reflect on advice given has been essential in readjusting my mind-set and remaining calm. I have been fortunate to receive brilliant advice that has helped me compose myself during any 'newly qualified wobbles' and changed my perception on situations.

A couple of months in to starting my first post as an Occupational Therapist, where imposter syndrome was still a thing and I had constant waves

of feeling overwhelmed, I was told of a quote that still resonates strongly with me now. The quote was from Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr,

"A mind that is stretched by new experiences can never go back to its old dimensions".

This particular piece of advice came from a doctor on the ward, who probably sensed my nerves and that I was feeling a bit lost initially in the transition to qualified.

It really struck me that the rollercoaster ride of being newly qualified will bring a font of knowledge every day, and whilst it can feel overwhelming, it signifies the learning process that accompanies your first year in practice.

I think it's wonderful that many pieces of advice given haven't been solely from Occupational Therapists, but the wider MDT also. It is great to receive advice from those that have been in my shoes and can relate, but for other professionals to contribute too really highlights the power of a strong MDT and how our role is valued amongst that. That boosts confidence in itself. Every day brings something new to learn and helps to shape clinical practice and clinical reasoning, providing learning that will stick with me and guide my practice over the years.

When working in a multi-disciplinary team that brings so much knowledge and individuals with years of experience, it is easy to feel out of your depth. If you put that into the mix with being newly qualified it can really impact confidence. The advice given clarified for me that I don't need to run before I can walk, and to use the first year of practice to cement my learning. There's a fine balance to achieve with being newly qualified and wanting to step up and share the newfound passion and eager enthusiasm for being a qualified practitioner, whilst also allowing the learning to take place and being kind to yourself throughout the process whilst you learn.

Most importantly, I was reminded not to be afraid to ask questions and to channel what I have learnt into effective clinical practice and to continue to build on the experiences and knowledge gained - as Julius Caesar said, 'experience is the teacher of all things'.

Katy works at Gloucestershire Royal Hospital on a rotation post.

If I had one thing to say to a newly qualified OT it would be:

"Remember how hard you have worked to get to this moment. Now is your time to enjoy it"

Weebles Wobble

JOANNE HUNT AND ROB YOUNG



Illustration by Rob Young

If we don't share our failure, is that a success?

We are creating a well-being resource to help Occupational Therapists in their first year of practice. It's a two-stage process: find out where our help is needed, then offer some support. So how do we do that?

We begin by asking questions,

*Hi, how's it going?
How was it for you?*

We're paraphrasing, obviously, but you get the idea. Then slowly, gradually, the questions grow teeth.

*What felt wrong?
What could be better?
What didn't work for you?*

We have to ask these questions, or we won't know the gaps, where people need support. If our work is sanitised and corporate, it won't benefit anyone. But being honest raises another, deeper question, how we do we share our frustrations and failures without fear of professional consequence?

It's a tough ask, for a new recruit, to share of their struggles, to reveal their own fragile failures to a world that can feel all powerful, when you small in comparison. As one rookie told us, he knows the theory but there's a vast chasm between theory and reality,

We all studied wellbeing! We all stared at a large projection of the stress bucket, sought support networks, peers, platforms, it's not like we haven't got the knowledge! What stops us reaching in and doing what we need, in terms of well-being, is the fact that we must always hold our tongue for fear the eyes and ears of our superiors are upon us. It is a very small fishpond where we swim.

We replied that every voice in our project was anonymous and while that partially reassured him, his frustration was evident.

Year One is a place where your worth feels very much on the table.

Which brings us back to the central question, What gets in the way of well-being? How do we speak our truth as we experience it, so the voices can be heard, shared and hopefully learnt from? Supportive of the wider community too?

We start by asking how he feels.

Tongue tied. Head down. Earning my stripes and then, and only then, is it safe to voice my wobbles. It's heavy sometimes. As a student you were encouraged to moan, protected and nurtured by your University. But as a Year One OT, it's a completely different ball game. You can write well-being into guidelines all you like, long troves about using reflections and speaking up, but truth be told, there often always pebbles on your tongue.

While that sounds disheartening, it gave us strength as this is exactly what this project seeks to address: finding new ways to help fledgling Occupational Therapists like this young man, who need our support. And he is not alone. His words serve to help us figure out what really does get in the way. What sits in this gap between knowledge and action where well-being should flourish?

All my mates shout loudly in threads that they know won't be judged, but they wouldn't dream of sharing with a wider audience. Within our own private space, we engage, reply and offer gems, but when we do communicate with the outside world, our voices become smoother, more considered. The 'risky' parts ironed out now, edited... fit for practice!

So, is that it? Is the only true reflective journal a chat in Costa Coffee? A moan with your mates in the pub? How do we, starting where we are, bring honesty into the fold, without fear of consequence? That is what this project is all about and the wonderful thing is, the young man before us agrees.

I still think my fears are worth voicing. From speaking to colleagues across the NHS, the fact that the raw end of well-being is never discussed is widespread across our profession. What is great about the ethos of this project in particular, is that it aims to find creative ways that allow people to be totally, wholeheartedly and unashamedly honest! From that base, one hell of a resource could come.

Let's hope so and with voices like this, we can indeed break new ground. For a specialism populated by people who practice well-being, our own well-being needs nurturing, especially in those who are just starting out.

As Year One practitioners, we are the entry level. The 'do as your told' level. The 'don't shout too loudly cause you ain't earned your stripes (yet) level.

Could that call-to-action be stated any more clearly? I doubt it. It's a wake-up-call.

In order for this resource to succeed, we need more than just academic words covering the same old toolkit ideas that we learnt on training. It needs to touch on the notion that tongues feel tied and personal well-being often comes second to earning our stripes.

But there is hope. To the credit of the Elizabeth Casson Trust who are supporting this project, this is not some top-down initiative doling out the same old advice. The vast majority of the team who are creating this resource are in their first year of work. There is no benefit of hindsight or softening of the memory, this team live the raw experience, with all content created on the hoof.

Given the additional (phenomenal) pressures of a worldwide pandemic, they have no time for whimsy or waffle. We are attacking this issue head on.

It is not our voice that we wish to hear, it's yours and the more rough edges the better. Sure, all voices are anonymous but that doesn't dilute their strength.

Our profession is a fine one, full of passionate people who give their all to help their fellow human. It is natural that such passion spills out in the form of emotions but to dampen them would be a crime. Of course, the face we present to the public must be reassuringly confident and

professional, but we must also accept that our own well-being is just as important as the patients we serve" and some of that ain't pretty.

We shall end this blog with the words of the charming young man who spoke to us with grace and wisdom.

"A clever, subtle, funny 'giggle at it all' way of expressing our frustration would be so powerful. It would be the elephant that sits in any room where wellbeing is not respected."

We'll do our best. Stay tuned!

A Balanced Imbalance

STEPHANIE EXLEY



Photo by Stephanie Exley

Throughout our OT training at University, we used occupational science to underpin the context in which we work: improving the health and well-being of those around us through engagement in meaningful occupations. I know I've written that sentence in at least 3 essays before.

We learn to pull down the occupational lens over our eyes and explore the world, its structure, its balance. This lens is something we pack up and keep with us when we take those first qualified steps towards our first patient where we feel like we hold all the responsibility.

As is our nature, we are quick to jump in and help those around us, sometimes to the detriment of our own well-being. We are happy to put on the occupational lens to improve others, yet are we so keen, or even able, to turn this lens around and have a look at the perspective from our own outsider point of view?

It may feel selfish, or maybe not now that the global pandemic has given us the opportunity, to take a few moments and reflect on what is meaningful to us. Seize the opportunity regardless. Advocate for your inner self and find that balance.

The balance is dynamic and will change and adapt, just as we do, across our first year of qualified working. My self-care practices were non-existent when I entered my first year: to confirm, I still showered.

The balance had become imbalanced, leaning heavily towards working when I wasn't at work. My mind would still be on the ward worrying whilst my body was stood in my kitchen at home. Now? I have learnt to switch off when I walk through the front door, tuck myself in with Netflix and a de-caff cuppa. It seems I have found more balance to the imbalance a first year brings.

At the end of my first year, I have learnt what works for me. It was not what worked for me at the

beginning, and it may not be what works for me in another years time, but it'll do for now.

Steph is an Occupational Therapist who spent last year on a physical rotation and also, playing rugby.

If I had one thing to say to a newly qualified OT it would be: "Hold on to the drive and 'passion to learn' that is embedded in you during your training"

What Secret Thing Did You Find Most Challenging?

BETHANY MORGAN-DAVIS



Photo by Valeriia Bugaiova at Unsplash

There are lots of things we know will be a challenge in our first year, a new working environment, meeting new people, the responsibility of being a clinician the list goes on! Many of these things we can talk about and get support from others in similar positions or who have been through the same process; a problem shared is a problem halved!

However, in addition to these general challenges, which we can be very open about, many of us will be taking on our own private challenges which we might be more hesitant to share.

Personally, I love a challenge, and year one has been full of them! I've enjoyed sharing these challenges with my new colleagues and peers from uni; discussions as a team have always helped me work

things through. The secret thing that I found most challenging about year one however was being worried about how my own mental health and well-being would be affected in my new role.

Having my own mental health conditions isn't something I tend to disclose. I worry it will impact people's opinion about how capable I am to do my job. But this defensiveness means it's a challenge I face alone. Working in mental health I am the first person to say it is so important to be open and honest about what you're experiencing in order to make sure you have access to any support you may need. But I'm not the best at taking my own advice! Eventually, due to how lovely my new team were, I felt comfortable enough to talk about it. I was so impressed with how many resources I learned were available to support me! It also opened a door for me to be a part of a new 'lived experience' strategy put in place by my Trust, finding out about the experience of staff members with lived experience of mental health conditions. I was so worried walking into the first meeting, but everyone was so welcoming and friendly.

At first this challenge felt like it had to be a secret to me, but in sharing it I found it was the secret challenge for many others too! Now rather than feeling alone with this challenge, I'm part of another team. I hope the resource created from this project can be like a team too, all working together to protect each others wellbeing.

Beth's first degree, before training as an Occupational Therapist, was in Fine Art. She now works for the North London Forensic Service.

If I had one thing to say to a newly qualified OT it would be:

"Don't compare yourself. There is no need to put pressure on yourself and unrealistic expectations. When you start practice it's an opportunity for you to explore, grow into your professional role, learn from others and have fun!"

I Can't to I Can

PAUL WILKINSON



Photo by Delaney Boyd at Unsplash

One week after receiving my registration and there I am, sat on a busy acute hospital ward at the nurse's station with staff buzzing around me like bees. It only seems like yesterday I was sat in the lecture theatre at University. But now here I am sat with my mentor watching her write a list of jobs to be completed. The list continually getting longer just like an overdue shopping list. As I stared down, I could feel my thoughts and feelings swirling round inside me like a tropical thunder storm, thoughts including 'this is not for me' and 'what have I done?'

I suddenly felt so overwhelmed by the sheer mass of jobs to be completed. It was like a fire of worry had ignited inside me. Well, that fire soon turned into a wild fire, igniting all these different feeling such as worry, anxiety and self-doubt.

I turned to my mentor and sheepishly uttered the words 'I don't think I can do this'. As the fire of feelings grew and I muttered the words, I could feel tears run down my face, like rain drops running down the windowpane. My mentor provided reassurance, and we broke everything down together.

We found the solution to minimising that spark from igniting in the future, was to engage in regular clinical supervision on a one to one basis, peer discussions with other OTs in the office and, most importantly, to work on prioritisation skills. All these solutions were like having a shield in battle, which would protect me from the anxiety and stress. Outside of work, I drew on my own expertise as an OT and used the power of occupation to structure my day. I found that as an OT, I didn't practice what I preached,

I struggled at first to switch off from work and find that occupational balance. Using occupations that I enjoyed was like using a shield in battle outside of work. Reading, running, walks and socialising with family and friends were all used as self-prescribed occupations and my very own treatment plan.

The Stress Bucket.

I also found using the stress bucket analogy to visualise my thoughts, feelings and coping strategies helpful. The stress bucket is an analogy which helps to explain stress. The bucket fills up with stress and thoughts over time (water). If the bucket becomes full and begins to overflow, we can begin to feel overwhelmed.

In order to avoid the bucket becoming full, we need to create holes to allow the water to escape (intervention/occupations). For more information on the stress bucket please visit <https://mentalhealth-uk.org/blog/the-stress-bucket/>

The stress bucket was something I was made aware of in University and then reminded of in practice by my clinical lead. We found with the right tools and armour, we changed the 'I can't' into 'I can'. It is with thanks to my previous mentor and peers I am now able to manage

my stress and prioritise and manage my own caseload. But most importantly I understand the power of self-belief.

Paul works in North East England. His first post was in Orthopaedics and Surgery.

If I had one thing to say to a newly qualified OT it would be, "Enjoy making a difference".

How Do I Know Which Piece of My Jigsaw is Missing?

DEBORAH MAY



Photo by Ben Stern at Unsplash

Everybody coming into practice as a newly qualified OT comes with experience. It is not just the 1000 hours of placement experience and a degree certificate but it is all of the experiences over a lifetime which make us unique. It may be perspectives and skills from previous careers; it may be bags of enthusiasm; it may be lived experience of ill health or caring for someone who is ill; it may be amazing IT skills.

I was discussing this with a friend recently. He has always lived with his parents so many of the day-to-day domestic admin tasks are things he's never had to deal with but he comes with a wealth of skills and experiences I shall never have! In comparison, I am a late entrant to OT with a previous life as a project manager and therefore I have a set of skills not usually required by a B5 OT! Throw me a risk assessment or ask me to facilitate a service review

and I can hit the ground running. However I'm new to the healthcare environment and my fledgling clinical skills lag way behind.

One of my big questions is "which pieces of my jigsaw are missing?" Knowing which pieces of the jigsaw are present can highlight and reinforce your strengths and offer real value to your teams. Some days, being able to do a job which is well within your comfort zone really helps to banish some of the nervousness gremlins which jump out and borrow your confidence for a while.

The other thing which really helped me was having an alternative perspective from somebody working in a different setting. One of my big issues when I was uncomfortable with a situation was knowing whether it was me or the situation which was unreasonable.

I have a running buddy who is a very experienced physio. Our paths are unlikely to cross professionally; she has mentored many newly qualified physios and I trust her judgement. Whilst running I can reflect on a situation and she will advise me whether I need to actually change the situation or just change my attitude to it.

She will also help me rephrase my ideas into analogies which convey my concerns in a way which is acceptable at work. I can't give every NQOT their own personal Rachel, but wouldn't it be great

if every NQOT had someone safe they could talk to? Maybe the time is here for online or virtual peer or mentor support for OTs as they develop their skills.

What resource would most help you as a newly qualified OT? What have you had that you wish you could share with everyone and what would you have liked but didn't have to support your first year of practice?

Debs was lucky enough to get her dream job as a Paediatric Occupational Therapist at Powys Teaching Health Board.

If I had one thing to say to a newly qualified OT it would it be:

"Being an OT is wonderful. It's not always easy; there will be hard times but hang in there. Keep asking questions, find safe people you can talk to and don't lose sight of the things that make you unique. You can do this"

Why a Well-Being Resource?

BECKY POWER

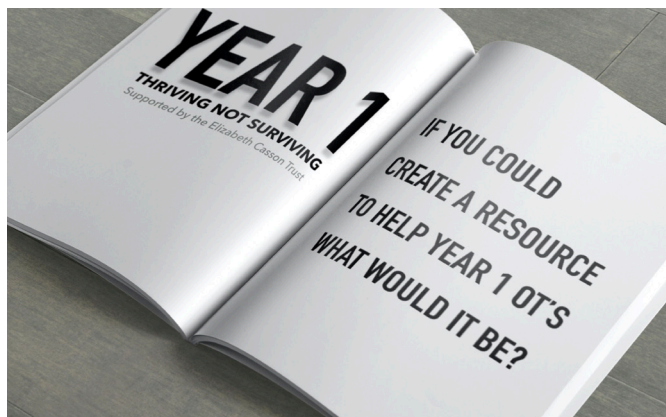


Image by Rob Young

So here we are, the newly qualified Occupational Therapists. We have had years of training, countless assignments, presentations, lectures, group work and placement experience. Why would a newly qualified Occupational Therapist need a well-being resource? Surely the point of passing our training is that we are deemed able and ready to practice as autonomous professionals?

WellYes and No.

A friend of mine, @HellomynameisVictoria, once described the difference between being a student OT and being a professional as "Feeling like I've gone from learning how to ride a bike to learning how to drive a car. The same principles are there (i.e. getting from A to B) but there's a completely different level complexity. Sometimes it might feel like the skill set you learnt at University is very different from the skills that you need now you're in practice.

I think when we are completing our Occupational Therapy training we work towards each small goal, such as passing an assignment or placement. We don't often think about what life will be like when we are actually out working. How we will do it every day. I think the secret to being able to do it comes down to two things, resilience and building knowledge and skills.

You might have had a couple of lectures on it, but building resilience and working on your own personal set of skills in your tool box through gaining knowledge is such a personal journey; it can't be taught. I know I need to continuously work on both. I have found working as an autonomous professional is very different from being a student. When I was a student I felt like I always had an invisible protective coat of my university tutors and peers to support, protect and build me up. It was warm, comforting and protected me if the weather ever got too bad. Having a network behind me made me feel supported and challenged me professionally, it was a large part of the reason why I felt capable. When I qualified I felt it slowly fall away. Suddenly, my coat was gone I was in a t-shirt and it was cold. When I realised this was happening I decided. I needed a new coat.

I decided to start with what I had left of my old coat, by keeping in touch with friends from my course and reaching out if I needed support, but also offering support when they needed it. I then began to make sure I got the best out of supervision by engaging with my manager and lead and really working on building good working relationships within both the OT team and MDT. I then began to work on building

my knowledge tool kit. Whenever there was an opportunity to take part in relevant training or CPD opportunities, I took it.

I also took a long hard look at what my job lacked. I love my role and I'm part of a great team. However, our Occupational Therapy team is small, I knew I needed to widen my network of Occupational Therapists who work in my field (learning disabilities). I spoke to my lead about this and she pointed me in the direction of the Royal College of Occupational Therapist Specialist Section for People with Learning Disabilities, of which she was a member.

Through that group I have a role on the committee and I have started co-hosting a podcast with my old manager. It's been a great way to make professional connections and to learn about how other services work.

Slowly, as I have kept working on it, I felt like I have a pretty good protective coat again. So, in closing if I could create a resource for newly qualified OT's it would be a coat. But it's up to you all to make your own. So quick get going.

Becky works with a community team in East Surrey, for adults with learning disabilities.

If I had one thing to say to a newly qualified OT it would it be:

"Enjoy it, and remember you are still learning"

What Helps?

JO HUNT, INTERVIEWED BY ROB YOUNG



Illustration by Jo Hunt

I was talking to Jo Hunt, an Occupational Therapist in her first year of work. For any new recruit, it's an exhilarating time but also a stressful one, so I asked Jo a question, 'What helps?' Her reply surprised me, a single word that I didn't see coming. That word was, 'Penguins'. I'm going to say that again, just in case you didn't catch it the first time, 'Penguins'.

Jo explained that in the wild, penguins huddle together for warmth, to protect themselves against the bleak Arctic weather. The heat generated from the group spirals upwards, creating more warmth than any lone penguin could create. However, this causes a problem: while the penguins at the centre of the huddle feel cosy, the ones at the edge get a bum deal, battered, buffered and bitten by the ice-cold wind.

To combat this, the huddle rotates, so that every penguin has its time at the core, feeling fully nurtured before returning to the cold outer wall. It is a wonderful system that puts the good of the team before hierarchy, ego or individual agenda.

Jo speaks from her YR1 one experiences, "In my mind, the analogy of the penguins illustrates that it's not as individual as it might feel; that any one of us may need to take a turn in the middle of the huddle. It somehow offers permission to speak up; it becomes a shared thing, not yours or mine, not all the time, but a turn of the wheel for us all."

That according to Jo, is what helps. It was such an articulate description of well-being that I found myself lost for words; a rare moment some would say.

Jo was right, we can learn a lot from penguins.

What Now?

RYAN MCCLURE



Photo by Ricardo Esquiv at Pexels

There I had it, I had completed the degree. Having spent years of my life working towards this moment, I found myself suddenly with nothing to do to fill the bulk of my time. Without university I had lost my main purpose. I was asking “what now?”.

An obvious choice of activity is to start looking and applying for jobs but this created a lot more questions:

- What setting would I like to start in?
- How far away am I willing to travel?
- How do I complete an effective personal statement?

Simply put, during this time I was practically made of questions! I wanted to have some time off as well, but switching off from the drive I had to get a

job was not easy. I had also put pressure on myself to be working before my graduation in November 2019, which on reflection was not helpful and was unnecessary. However, I did find that I was able to calm down once I had seen and applied for most of the jobs in the setting and distance range I had chosen.

I looked for inspiration for the setting from my practice placements, looking at what I enjoyed most and what I did best in, this was mental health. Choosing one setting to focus on in applications helped because I was able to improve my personal statement with feedback from each application, then apply it directly to my next as there were more similarities than differences. I was also able to prepare for questions that were likely to be asked and were the same for most interviews, which was handy!

It took a while to be offered my first band 5 post and to begin with I received very negative feedback from interviews. I was sat at home unable to happily occupy myself with much outside of applying for jobs, this pressure was not good for my mental wellbeing. I began to wonder where and when my first post would come, if at all.

At the same time, I was also hearing the news of many of my peers from university being offered OT posts. Although delighted for them, a feeling of envy was ever present prior to my own successful

interview. I found it difficult to stay positive during this time.

Then, after my third interview, my outlook changed. The feedback indicated I’d done really well but narrowly missed out. My thought process became: “I’m one interview closer to being offered a job.”

I think this new viewpoint helped me to be much more positive when I didn’t get an offer in my subsequent interview. On my fifth attempt I was successful in being offered my first OT job!

My advice for those starting out and applying for OT posts? It’s important to put a productive amount of pressure on yourself, not so much that you become overly anxious about your next interview but enough to keep you improving with each interview and application you complete. Good luck out there!

Ryan graduated from Coventry University and now works in inpatient mental health.

If I had one thing to say to a newly qualified OT it would it be:

“It’s going to be tough and there will be times you feel lost but the important thing is to work hard and to make the most of the support. Your confidence will improve with time”

OT Rocks

ANN O'NYMOUS

Rivers and Rocks? Blocking your flow? Happy memories of the KAWA model flood back! A quick recap of Google refreshes my recollection of this Japanese conceptual framework in occupational therapy practice. Nature, in the form of a river, represents life's journey. Rocks are the challenges, interrupting the flow.

Year 1: My type of river?

The thing is, I am not a fan of water, a significant mistrust of rivers (think lifebelts in shallow water) approached with caution, overthinking and avoidance!

Contrast this, to the HUGE anticipation of starting out on my first years OT journey. Desire, expectation, the long-awaited opportunity to invest in a new career. Cue a sunny image of the empty river cruiser, relaxing on the calm, gentle Norfolk Broads.

Rudely interrupting this short-lived tranquillity (and delusional thought) was the nightmare image of a swirling, swollen torrent of fast, powerful and surging mountain water, with empty raft, bouncing over the rocks. OT overboard!

These extremes invade the daily thoughts of my early OT practice. A tale of 2 rivers!

What blocked my river flow?

The source of my river, a community setting, offered incredible potential, a great team of colleagues and inspiring clients. Unanticipated, (yet now glaringly obvious) was that buried beneath the surface was a HUGE boulder, I interpret as 'Expectation overload'. Full of enthusiasm, I had jumped in the river feet first with my OT backpack overflowing with personal and professional SMART goals, training ideas, strategies for adapting to working life etc etc. Very quickly I felt disillusioned, increasingly aware of my naive, idealistic and unattainable goals.

Hurtling downstream, other rocks disrupted my flow. I ricocheted off 'disappointment', 'stress' and 'frustration' all taking their toll on my ability, even with enormous effort, to stay above the waterline. This haphazard, rapid and uncontrolled river journey with its cultural and hierarchical 'undercurrent' disrupted me, threatening to take me out to 'sea', another significant water aversion!

Fortunately, some timely driftwood in the form of 'courage', 'determination' and a 'new job opportunity', floated by, steering me to the riverbank, to pause, reflect, take a breath, and reconfigure my OT journey. Another surreal change of direction, and all in within 3 months.

I remain cautiously optimistic and grateful for this turbulent river journey. That 'expectation overload' was always 'gonna get me', no matter where I

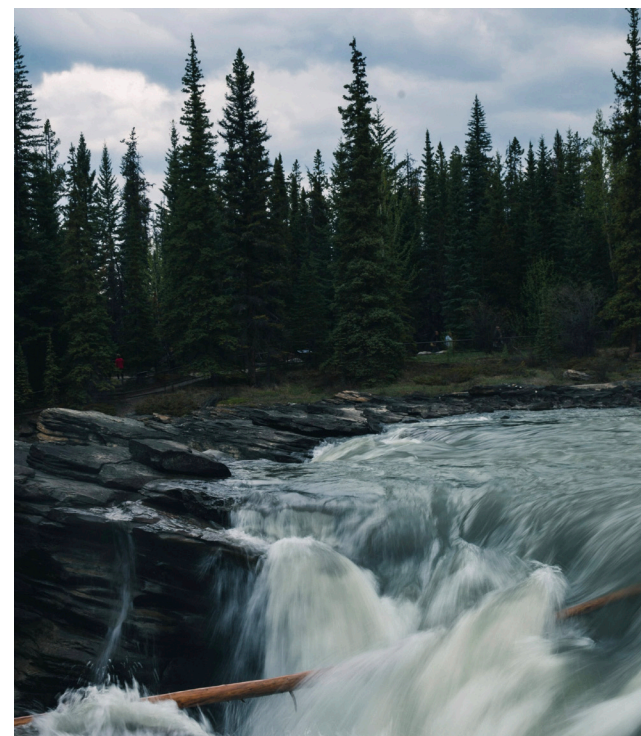


Photo by Max Larochelle at Unsplash

started work. For those that encouraged me from the riverbank, your support was immense. For my team, their 'learned' tuition and support, I am forever grateful. Thank you.

These rocks and rapids are behind me for now, but will inform my future flow, as I prepare to push off from the riverbank, in a new role very soon. More rocks lie ahead, but I have emptied my OT backpack for the start of this journey, and am planning to fill this en route, in the next phase of this incredible OT river journey.

Ann O'Nymous is an occupational therapist who prefers to remain anonymous.

Supervision in Key

PAUL WILKINSON

Is supervision really the golden key to unlocking the door to a more confident and reassured newly qualified occupational therapist? Is it the foundation to an effective first year of practice? After all, it is highlighted in the Standards of Proficiency for Occupational Therapists that occupational therapist should/must 'understand the importance of participation in training, supervision and mentoring' (Health and Care Professions Council, 2015).

Supervision, for me, really was that golden key which opened the doors to becoming a confident Occupational Therapist and provided me with reassurance around my clinical skills and decision making. Supervision felt like the foundation and pillars keeping me upright, like the bricks to a house.

After I had graduated from University, like many other graduates, I was lucky to be offered my first band 5 rotational post. This all happened very fast, one minute I'm sat in a lecture theatre worrying about assignment deadlines and then next I'm walking the corridors of a busy acute hospital rushing to see my next patient.

It was very much like being in the hurricane from the Wizard of Oz, and suddenly that is it I'm qualified. I lacked confidence and constantly doubted myself and my decisions making. Like many newly qualified occupational therapists,

my rotation began in a speciality I had not had a placement in during University. I really struggled with this to begin with, as I did not know the conditions, or procedure within this area. As a result, my confidence was always low to start with and I would always second guess myself. As a newly qualified, I felt I was exposed to more 'complex' situations, as I had not seen a certain situation prior. So, I would panic and worry a lot as in my mind everything seemed like a 'complex' situation.

So how did I use supervision? Well, I used it as a tool to my advantage, I asked my mentor if we could meet as regularly as possible. I would ensure I came with set questions, and themes as this allowed me to maximise my allocated time. Supervision allowed me to talk through my caseload and ask, as a band 6, what my mentor would do differently. It allowed me to talk through my plan which offered me great reassurance. For me, I enjoyed a 1 to 1 supervision as I was able to have my mentor's full attention, but I also used peer supervision and would ask my peers questions in the office. As a team this provided a range of perspectives.

At the beginning I did not know what to expect from supervision. At first, I would always rush to find things to bring to the session. However, as time went on it became more fluent and I would gradually want to talk about different things. I also think, over time, supervision with your mentor

changes, it changes from a formal conversation to a relaxed atmosphere where the conversation flows with ease.

So, was supervision key? For me, yes. Was supervision the foundation to an effective first year of practice? Definitely. As without supervision I would not be as confident as I am now. And yes, I continue to use supervision to my advantage on my new rotation.

Below are just a handful of aspects that supervision can assist with:

For more information on what supervision is please refer to Supervision Guidance for occupational therapists and their managers (2015). Accessible through: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/files/supervision-guidance-occupational-therapists-and-their-managers-2015>

For occupational therapist who do not have a supervisor or are looking to offer supervisor please visit the consultancy service through the Royal College of Occupational Therapists: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/promoting-occupational-therapy/consultancy-services>.

The River

CATHERINE MCNULTY



Photo by Vaiva Deksnysyte at Unsplash

The River had a fountain
Of sparkling water
Gushing at speed
Glistening in the bright sunlight
Brilliant
I could hardly believe it
Going from an occupational therapy helper
to a finally qualified therapist
With a Degree
It was a spurt of energy never experienced before

There were rocks
The hidden ones were the worst
Sad to say
some of the senior occupational therapists
It was a really strange experience
I felt unconnected
Adrift
in the maelstrom of uncertain times

I had returned to my original place of work
where I had been a support worker
I had changed
The relationships were strained
I felt alienated
The old psychiatric hospital was closing
I read that going back to your old place of work
may not work out....
but I had signed
a contract
I had no choice
Leaving the hospital as it closed gave me driftwood
to clamber aboard
A new half time post

Working in the community
where my half time role was valued
there was a brilliant manager
who quietly & robustly supported me

Carefully negotiating new streams
Finding different modes of swimming
Occasionally gasping for breath
I had worked with many people in the old hospital
but this was new

The rocks were sharp and painful at times
leaving deep sadness for a long time.....
but the driftwood picked me up
the rehabilitation unit was a brilliant slow stream
service

Patient to Practitioner

RYAN MCCLURE



Illustration by Rob Young

During my first year of practice I've been trying to make the transition from student to practitioner, as well as making the transition from care receiver to care giver. Doing both at once is not easy. Part of the problem I've had is that throughout my life, the majority of people say things like "Really? I wouldn't have noticed" when my disability comes up in conversation. I've grown up, apart from a hand full of exceptions, being told that my disability isn't obvious.

However, in my first year of practice it's been nailed home that it's the complete opposite. I've had a lot of questions, I've had a patient copy the way I move

and some have even physically grabbed my hand/arm to get a closer look.

The change in approach between people in my personal and work life is one that I mentally prepared for while at University, or so I thought. I knew it would be different but the frequency of comments about my disability compared to that in my personal life caught me out.

So would I say my disability, or rather how people have responded to it, has had a negative effect on my well-being? Yes and no.

There have been times that my disability has been good for my well-being and helped me achieve some of what I've set out to do in my OT role. What I call "little wins". I've heard "you've been through hardship, just like me". This patient related to me and we had found a common ground. Although I wouldn't consider myself to have had any "hardships" and actually this comment could have been damaging to my sense of wellbeing, I decided to take it at face value as a way of building a therapeutic rapport. This was at a time when confidence in my own abilities as an OT were probably at their lowest being newly qualified so I'd have taken almost any opportunity to build effective relationships with those on my caseload.

On the flip side, I have had a share of negative

experiences. I expect to be treated as a member of staff, first and foremost. It's what I'm there for after all. Once however, after receiving a mouthful of verbal abuse, I received an apology from the patient: "I shouldn't have done that because you are disabled". This served as a reminder that I cannot hide my disability even if I wanted to and sometimes I might be treated differently because of it. It's certainly impacted my wellbeing negatively, I wasn't being apologised to because I am a member of staff (or just a human being), I was being apologised to because I was seen to be different.

I do think it's important to remember also that we all make mistakes when it comes to making comments towards one another. I guarantee I've unintentionally made comments in the past that have negatively impacted on the wellbeing of others. What's important is that where we are informed of our mistakes, we learn from it. I think this point of view is helpful when receiving comments that negatively affect your wellbeing. In my case it certainly 'lessens the blow' of some comments directed at me.

The need to balance the transition from student to practitioner and care receiver to care giver has given me a lot to reflect on and learn from and I believe that I am a much better practitioner and person than I otherwise would've been as a result.

How do you know if you have found “the one”?

STEPHANIE EXLEY



Photo by Jiroe at Unsplash

To clarify, I’m not talking about romance, although I guess it is possible to fall in love with your job. My life as an OT so far has been two 6 month rotations on medicals and neuro, and I have now entered my third rotation: Burns Therapy.

I feel like I knew where I wanted to end up when I was mid-training, it was very easy back then to imagine getting that dream job and specialising. However, I found getting out into the real world of working you spend so much time learning and doing as a new band 5, that taking time to consider what to specialise in, when to specialise is hard. I would ask myself the question “what if I choose wrong and I’m stuck in a speciality I dislike?”, “what

if I never get to try it and realise it’s actually the one I want to specialise in?”, and even “when am I meant to decide and start to specialise?”. Mind-boggling... and there is no right or wrong answer.

I chose an OT rotation to give myself a chance to explore different areas, however it can sometimes be difficult on 6 month rotations to get into the nitty-gritty of each speciality - it really is a taster of each. So, now I’m here contemplating, at what point am I meant to specialise? What if I choose wrong? How do I know what is the right one? Panic!

Not realising until it was pointed out to me, I am happy and settled in this new rotation. Other OT’s pointed out they could hear the excitement in my voice when I spoke about my role in the burn’s unit. I sat and thought about this and realised that I want to go home and talk about my day. I realised that I don’t get that Sunday dread as Monday rears it’s not so pretty head, and between the hours of 8am and 4pm, time really does fly when I’m having fun.

So why, what have I found in this rotation I haven’t in others? Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a psychologist, posed the concept of “flow” which rings true with me here. Flow or that experience of “time flying by” comes from when the occupation you’re engaging in challenges you enough to match your skill level.

Too little challenge can be almost boring, whereas too much of a challenge - where you feel your skills don’t match - can provoke anxiety. The burns rotation is giving me the opportunity to work with adults and children, both inpatient and outpatient, in an OT role that I have never experienced before. I feel challenged but that only motivates me to learn more - and I am given the time to do that learning, maybe that is the difference to my previous rotation experiences. I feel confident, creative, happy and settled, enough so, that I plucked up the courage to ask for a double rotation. This will give me the opportunity to really get into the nitty-gritty of burns therapy, and who knows, maybe this is the place for me.

It is completely subjective, how we each experience different specialities. Some may enjoy the challenge a variety of medical conditions presents them with, whereas some may prefer to develop their role in a niche area like hand therapy, or a specialist area like paediatrics. Regardless of the area or speciality, it’s the meaning the role gives you. Maybe, if you have a moment now, have a think about where, as an OT, you have felt that “flow”.

Occupational Therapy: the doorway to opportunities

KATY WILLIAMS

Job Applications, do they make you feel...

- a) Anxious
- b) Excited
- c) Like an imposter
- d) All of the above?

More importantly, should I be looking at applying for a new role a year into practice? Well the opportunity to apply for a Chief Nurse Fellowship programme advertised in my Trust answered that question for me, yes. The role consists of a 12-month programme combining clinical work alongside undertaking a quality improvement programme and the opportunity to take either a research or leadership module. So, what made me want to apply?

Well, the answer to that is to explore and create a 'newly qualified buddy system' within the trust amongst newly qualified therapists and other newly qualified professionals too. I have received brilliant support from my supervisors which has helped shape my practice, provide a safe environment to ask questions and to learn from my seniors. However, I never had the opportunity to link up with another newly qualified Occupational Therapist. Someone in the same boat as me (particularly when that boat felt like it was sinking), who could relate to how I'm feeling, whether it's those "I've got this" moments or "I'm not sure I can do this" or simply "I found this really useful resource

today, it might be useful for you too".

Becoming a part of the "Year One: Thriving Not Surviving" project provided the opportunity to talk with members of the team about their experiences of peer support and how the newly qualified world can sometimes be an isolating place if not linked up with others who share the experience.

Reflecting on my first year in practice I felt strongly that linking up with other newly qualified colleagues could help cement the multi-disciplinary team approach. During my second rotation on a surgical ward, there was a strong multidisciplinary team present which really contributed towards my learning. I suddenly needed to understand the roles of many different team members to ensure appropriate assessments, discharge planning and communication was taking place. I often thought, "how amazing would it be if the newly qualified from other professions were linked up?". The power of sharing knowledge, mini teaching sessions and talking about our roles. It was then that the idea of a newly qualified buddy system really struck me.

It was suggested by a senior colleague that I apply for the fellowship which was both encouraging and scary. It's great that others see potential in you. However, sat at the computer completing my application, I constantly asked myself: "Am I good enough?", "What could I possibly contribute?"

I silenced my inner critic, took the plunge and submitted my application.

To my surprise, I was shortlisted for interview. I haven't had much interview experience and the thought of sitting across from a panel I might know was scary. I began prepping and found myself enjoying the process. My passion and vision carried me through the interview. I found I had a voice. I walked out of the interview feeling proud and knowing that regardless of the outcome, I had gained so much by pushing myself.

Although I didn't get the fellowship, I have been offered the opportunity for further development in the form of coaching and leadership development with the view to reapplying next year. Do I regret applying? Not at all. It has provided valuable experiences reinforced that I have a voice and that I can do anything I put my mind to if I believe in myself enough. An idea might get you through the door, but motivation and passion keep you in the room.

The Elizabeth Casson Trust

What is the Elizabeth Casson Trust?; we hear you ask. Some of you may be familiar with the name of Dr Elizabeth Casson - the founder of occupational therapy in the UK - through word of mouth; others of you may have never heard the name until the Year1 Thriving not surviving project started. Either way, we are excited to be able to fund this project and would like to thank all of those who have participated in its development.

You may also be wondering why the Elizabeth Casson Trust would commission this project? If you knew that our Charitable Purpose is the 'furtherance of occupational therapy', it would probably become clear.

Dr Casson (1881-1954) was a doctor who also earned a diploma in psychological medicine. She recognised the value of occupation for the recovery of individuals from ill health and made it her life's work to embed this ethos in practice. Dr Casson funded the first school of occupational therapy in 1930 and established the Trust that holds her name in 1949. What a lady - and what drive and determination!

As custodians of the funds the Trust now holds, we aim to continue Dr Casson's work to advance the profession and support the development of occupational therapists. Take a look at our trustees-

it's quite possible you'll recognise one or two names from the world of OT - practice, education and research.

It is easy to think that 'advancing' might just mean stretching or reaching higher - so research and PhDs - but for the trustees this is only part of what we hope to achieve. Developing is a continuum and we want to start at the very beginning - hence our interest in the first year of an occupational therapist's professional life.

Thriving is the goal: cementing your professional identity and growing the confidence to have a voice. Leaders may emerge even at this stage of a career and we want to foster this.

As you find your feet and are ready for further growth, mentoring may help you along, or you may find you'd like to acquire new skills or knowledge. The Trust can be here to help you with this through our funding.

Others may prefer a more formal development route and want to return to study for a masters or even doctorate; again, the Trust offers funding to support this. Still others may be keen to adventure and take learning to other countries and bring learning back ours - our international scholarship is for them.

And for the times when you just want to surround yourself with other occupational therapists for the opportunity to refocus on occupation and why we value this, then perhaps attending an occupational therapy conference is for you. Whatever your route for development, the Trust can be here for you; take a look at all support and development opportunities here.

So, let's continue the trend of word-of-mouth for letting people know about the Trust and its work for occupational therapists, but this time let's shout it loudly so others can benefit and, ultimately, so too can our profession.



End Note

The Year One: Thriving Not Surviving pocket guides have been funded by the Elizabeth Casson Trust. We would like to extend our thanks to the Trust and to everyone who has contributed to the project. Without the insights that have been shared by the occupational therapy community, with honesty and compassion, this resource would not have been possible.

The Project was led by Dr Lynne Goodacre (an occupational therapist and personal coach) and Rob Young (a writer and artist who helps NHS leaders to communicate).

The project team comprised: Andrew Bates, Stephanie Exley, Joanna Hunt, Bethany Morgan-Davis, Deborah May, Ryan McClure, Rebecca Power, Siobhan Scanlon, Paul Wilkinson, Katy Williams. All of whom were in their first year of practice as occupational therapists.

We would like to also thank Jessica Salmon for her support in editing the resources and Paul Baker for his design work.

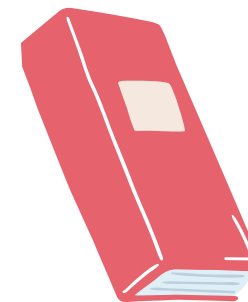
The Elizabeth Casson Trust is excited to have commissioned this work by Dr Lynne Goodacre and Rob Young and is proud of, and grateful to, the first-year occupational therapists who committed their time and energy for the success of the project. The Trust aims to further the profession of occupational therapy and offers a range of support and development opportunities.

Please visit our website (elizabethcasson.org.uk) and follow us on Twitter (@elizabethcasso1) for more information.

This is one of a series of pocket guides which includes:

- **Becoming Your Own Cheerleader**
- **Building Your Network of Support**
- **The Book of Blogs**
- **Finding Perspective in Tough Situations**
- **Finding Balance**
- **Questioning Your Inner Critic**
- **Treating Yourself with Compassion**

All are available freely from the Elizabeth Casson website.



THE BOOK OF blogs