

What is an Occupational Therapist?

It's Occupational Therapy week and occupational therapists around the country – and around the world - will be promoting what they do. But what does an occupational therapist do?



Yvonne Hartwell, an occupational therapist from Tauranga says, “we deal with the job of living. Our focus is on the job of occupation, and how we can help people with this. One of my main concerns as an occupational therapist is making sure people feel included in their community and finding ways to address this.”

A good example of this is Yvonne’s Shopmobility™ campaign. Yvonne is working with supermarkets and retailers to make shopping **martcarts** available in their stores so that the elderly or those who are physically challenged and have a mobility issue can do their shopping.

“As an occupational therapist I was in a good position to see why people weren’t accessing these stores. People’s health, the ergonomics of the store, and the lack of available equipment, meant many of my clients were not able to do their shopping. They were dependent on other people doing it for them and were becoming socially isolated.”

Mobility scooters are not effective in stores as they are too fast and accidents happen. Martcarts are designed for the indoors: they are smaller, slower and safer and have a large basket fixed on the back that fits all the shopping.

Peter Anderson, Executive Director of Occupational Therapy New Zealand - Whakaora Ngangahau Aotearoa comments “Yvonne’s work with Shopmobility™ shows how Occupational Therapists translate individual challenges into community responses. OT’s are very resourceful professionals who are good at finding solutions so that their clients can lead the fullest life possible.”

Occupational therapists work in many different **practice** settings including hospitals, day care facilities, nursing homes, schools, universities, community centres and workplaces. Many also work in **private practice** and provide occupational therapy in the client's home or residential setting.

You can find an occupational therapist in all areas of life including: youth work, pain management, vocational rehabilitation, housing adaptations, hand-writing programmes in schools, driving assessments, intellectual disability, alcohol and addiction services, older

persons health care, orthopaedics, rheumatology, ergonomics, mental health, paediatrics, hand therapy, and stroke rehabilitation.

Occupational therapy is “ the art and science of enabling engagement in everyday living, through occupation; of enabling people to perform the occupations that foster health and well-being; and enabling a just and inclusive society so that all people may participate to their potential in the daily occupations of life”

(Townsend & Polatajko, 2007).

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