

Using assessment models and growing in confidence



Occupational therapy assistant **Gemma Harley** has been recognised for improving service user engagement and experience through the application of an occupational therapy model. Here she talks to OTnews about her work

For occupational therapy assistant Gemma Harley, receiving the Vona du Toit Model of Creative Ability Foundation (UK) Award for Occupational Therapy Support Workers, has been 'a surprise and a great pleasure'.

She says: 'I first heard of the Vona du Toit Model of Creative Ability (VdTMoCA) when I started as an occupational therapy assistant for Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust in September 2017.'

'I work at Southfield, which is a 28-bed low secure forensic mental health inpatient service, that provides care and treatment for men and women with serious mental illness, aged 18 to 65.'

Southfield provides a range of services focusing on recovery and rehabilitation. 'When I started, I was given tutorials about the model from Becky Harding, the occupational therapist specialist practitioner,' Gemma explains.

'I then received support from the occupational therapists to deliver a VdTMoCA-informed programme of sessions, tailored to the needs of the service users.'

Gemma also attended a three-day VdTMoCA course, where she continued to improve her knowledge of assessment and treatment.

'Prior to my post as an occupational therapy assistant, I worked as a support worker. In that role I had to assist in many activities and found it difficult to choose the right activities to match each service user's abilities. However, since working with this model I find it easier to understand a person's abilities, using the model's levels of creative ability and clear recommendations for occupational therapy treatment/intervention.'

'The model has helped me to better understand service users and to provide the just right challenge.'

Explaining how she uses the model to run her sessions Gemma says: 'I enjoy being creative, using the model to plan sessions that are innovative and fresh.'

There are three phases within each level of creative ability, indicating a person's degree of ability within that level and therefore how much support that person requires.

'I have found the model particularly useful for planning and running groups according to a person's phase, not just the level. Most of the service users in our service are on a level called "self-presentation". I have taken a lead in creating and running a self-presentation level "Interesting Group", aimed at building service users' understanding of particular concepts, tasks and activities and social norms.'

'This group was developed specifically for service users at the third phase of self-presentation (transitional phase). The group mainly ran as a PowerPoint presentation about a random topic.'

'During the sessions there were interesting facts to spark conversation and turn-taking, stimulated by our use of music, video clips, quizzes and games.'

Gemma adds: 'This worked well and our team decided to run this group again, this time for service users on the self-presentation level, but with less abilities; that is, those in the first phase of the level (therapist-directed phase).'

'After the first session, I realised I needed to make some big changes to my original session plans in order to provide activity more suited to the therapist-directed phase.'

'Subsequently I shortened the session time and adapted information by using simpler language with less information on each slide. I also created more visual and hands-on games to make it more interactive.'

'Other changes made included adding multiple choice answers for the quiz questions, which helped with reducing anxiety and

pressure to generate ideas. After running the new sessions, the team received lots of positive feedback from service users, staff and visitors who came to observe.'

'Service users were more comfortable as they were all working on similar aims, not feeling left behind, felt less judged by their peers and their abilities were not being underestimated.'

When it comes to spreading the word, Gemma reflects that she has grown in confidence using the model and has had opportunities to share her knowledge and enthusiasm with others.

'Using what I know about the levels and phases of the model, I have seen an increase in attendance and an improvement in levels of functioning, which has really given me job satisfaction,' she concludes.

Looking to the future, Gemma wants to take her career a step further, with help from the award. 'I will use the £100 award to buy some books to assist me in acquiring my level two functional skills in Maths and English, as this is a requirement in order to be accepted onto an occupational therapy degree course,' she says excitedly.

'In undertaking an occupational therapy degree, I hope to further improve my knowledge and experiences of how the model relates to people in comparison with other models.'

Gemma Harley, occupational therapy support worker, Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust, email: Gemma.Harley@southernhealth.nhs.uk

Want to help shape RCOT's Annual Conference Programme?

Join the Royal College of Occupational Therapists' Conference Development Team (CDT)

We are looking to recruit members to join this small, dedicated group of volunteer members who work collaboratively with Royal College of Occupational Therapists' (RCOT) officers to co-design and develop RCOT's Annual Conference programme.

To maintain the diversity of experience within the Team, we particularly welcome applications from **practitioners** – including newly qualified (HCPC registered for 3 years or less).

We are looking to recruit 2 members to serve a 3 year term commencing 19 June 2019.

"Membership of the Conference Development Team provides an invaluable career development opportunity. The committee role enables you to develop your knowledge and experience across all four pillars of the RCOT Career Development Framework – Leadership; Professional Practice; Evidence, Research and Development; and Facilitation of Learning. If you think you could contribute to the CDT's activities and help shape the Annual Conference, then please do find out more. The CDT look forward to receiving your application."

Ken Levins, Chair, Conference Development Team; Investigation and Learning Specialist, Nursing and Quality Directorate, Lancashire Care Foundation Trust



CPD@RCOT

For further information and an application pack please contact
Caz Dunn, Corporate Events Manager, Royal College of Occupational Therapists at
caz.dunn@rcot.co.uk. Deadline for completed applications: 8 March 2019

Royal College of
Occupational
Therapists

