

# Unleashing the Power of OT: Why your voice matters

Are you ready to raise your voice and shine a light on the Power of OT? If you are, we've talked to some influential OTs who are already acting and here they share some valuable advice.

Imagine a world where everyone truly understands the impact of occupational therapy – where the profession gets the recognition it deserves for transforming lives every single day.

Our vision is to make that a reality and our 'Power of OT' campaign is designed to highlight the incredible work you do and help us to elevate the profession in the public eye. But for it to succeed, it needs people like you to step up, share your experiences, and raise the profession's profile.

Despite the life-changing work that occupational therapists do every day, the profession often remains underappreciated.

Our campaign is designed to change that by encouraging OTs, learners, and advocates, to showcase their work, engage with their communities, and educate the public about the incredible value of occupational therapy. Sharing your story and putting yourself out there can make all the difference.

Every conversation helps shape a future where occupational therapy is not just valued, but celebrated. Whether it's sharing a success story on social media, speaking at an event, influencing key decision makers, talking to other health and social care professionals, becoming a media spokesperson, or simply talking to friends and family about what you do, every effort helps.

The more people hear about occupational therapy, the more they'll understand its importance.

And somebody who's recently had fantastic success with local media exposure is Graham Duerden, Occupational Therapy Lead – Mental Health Manager, in adult community services in the States of Guernsey.

'When we designed and built a new specialist mental health service building, we knew it would be helpful to incorporate a café to provide refreshments for people,' he explains. 'The management of this café fell under the Recovery and Wellbeing Service, which is currently managed by an OT.'

'As the café didn't come with a budget to employ people, the hope was that it would be staffed by volunteers and those with lived mental health experience. The challenge was taken up and Beacons Café was brought into existence. We knew it could be a valuable resource for people to gain skills as part of their recovery care planning.'

He adds: 'Over the years, it's seen many volunteers come, learn employment skills, and move on to paid employment. For others, it's been a valuable setting to maintain wellness through connections with people and providing a supportive and structured routine in their life.'





'Beacons was able to create a part-time paid position and continues to develop and grow, however, recently we noticed a need for wider recruitment of volunteers. We approached local media to help promote the café and highlight the mental health benefits of volunteering.

'We wrote a short promotional piece and asked for it to be featured on our government-wide blog, social media, the local newspaper and radio. The local BBC invited us in to talk about it and that helped us reach more people than we would have done just through internal communications.

'The café continues to thrive and is a valuable asset to help people with occupational goals and skills for life.'

He concludes: 'I would encourage anyone to reach out to media agencies and talk about the valuable work we do. By talking on the radio, we had many people ask about occupational therapy and it generated helpful suggestions and practical help.'

Jill Martin is an independent OT working in mental health, who is also passionate about profile raising.

'Angry' at the public's – and some of her own colleagues' – lack of awareness around occupational therapy in mental health, she used this emotion positively to deliver a TEDx on 'The hidden magic of occupational therapy'.

Her advice is not to be afraid to offer your opinion and perspective as an OT. 'I've spoken on the radio just by phoning in!' she exclaims.

'Don't be afraid to speak up for occupational therapy anywhere you get the chance. When a health issue is capturing national interest, for example neurodivergence, mental health in schools, or anywhere in the media where mental health is discussed, we will have a role to play, and we have proven case studies of how we can be effective.

'We should use social media and the broadcast media to be included in these national conversations. There are so many "experts" on television, radio, and news platforms, but we

rarely see OTs who have a unique and interesting perspective on these issues.'

Keir Harding, CEO and Clinical Lead at Beam Consulting, who delivered our 2023 Elizabeth Casson Memorial Lecture, says that while there can be challenges when it comes to connecting with the media or changemakers in different professional fields, they can be overcome.

'In some ways, the trick is to turn your passion into something a journalist can report on. That will generally involve more people being affected than just you, and ideally a lived experience story to illustrate the issue,' he says.

'My most recent experience was with an open letter about not diagnosing children with personality disorder. I wrote a press release and bombarded individual journalists with invitations to cover the story, launching it in Mental Health Week for impact.

'The story was going to be on television news and an exclusive in a national paper, then it all faded away.'

But the message from Keir is to keep pushing and not to give up: 'I did another two press releases about it, again hitting every media contact I had, and eventually it was picked up by a journalist and ended up being a story in three national newspapers.

'In a way, that letter is the most successful thing I've done in getting media coverage out of a story that no-one was talking about.'

Liz Fletcher, OT and National Lead at Sport for Confidence CIC says: 'Linking our work as OTs to national issues is not just a professional priority, it's a personal passion of mine. I firmly believe that population and preventative health are at the very core of our practice, and these areas are increasingly central to national policy debates.

'At Sport for Confidence, I see every day how our strengths-based approach can make a real difference... through robust research, compelling data, and real-life case studies, we can show how

## How you can raise the profile of OT

We've produced guides and a toolkit that will help you promote occupational therapy to colleagues, influential decision-makers and others.

Once you've got your story and you've found your local media, it's time to pitch your story to them. Start by sending a journalist a short email summarising your story with your key messages. We've produced a sample email to help get you started. And if you are planning on writing a press release, our template will help you.

Visit [www.rcot.co.uk/profile](https://www.rcot.co.uk/profile). And if you have any questions and your communications team can't help, or you don't have a communications team, get in touch with us at [pressoffice@rcot.co.uk](mailto:pressoffice@rcot.co.uk).

integrating physical activity with occupational therapy not only supports individual wellbeing, but also addresses broader public health challenges.

'By sharing these insights through public speaking, media engagement, and collaborative campaigns, we can elevate our message and influence national conversations.'

Keir adds: 'We can't be part of conversations if we have nothing to say, so say it. There are multiple different platforms for doing this and we can use all of them.'

'It might be we write letters to a newspaper; we might contact a journalist who wrote a story, on something we're passionate about; we might take our issue to our MP for questions to be asked, or introductions made.'

'I think that traditionally we've been quite poor at shouting about when an OT is doing a big thing, and I'd love us to normalise OTs being front and centre of national issues. If we wait for others to take up the things we care about, we will be waiting a lifetime. For something to change, we have to act.'

In addition to helping you prepare your story, get social, and be a media spokesperson, the 'Power of OT' campaign has resources – including our Profile Raising Cafés and a toolkit – to support you to influence decision makers, because showing your work to someone in local or national government can lead to real change for the profession.

Liz says: 'In my experience, working with [others] is absolutely essential, but we need to be clear about our offer. OT is as diverse as the settings in which we work, yet each of us holds a unique lens that shapes our practice.'

'For me, that lens is sport and physical activity, a perspective that enables me to highlight the innovative, transformative approach OT offers compared with other disciplines. I would urge all

OTs to embrace your distinct viewpoint with pride and confidence.'

She says: 'Being vocal about our successes and perspectives can help shift the conversation and drive meaningful change. In my experience, forging strong partnerships is the cornerstone of elevating our profession.'

'A powerful way to do this is by clearly demonstrating the tangible impact of our work, sharing compelling data, case studies, and real-life success stories that showcase how our interventions make a real difference.'

'Ultimately, it's about being vocal and proud of what makes OT unique. Our work is inherently political because it directly impacts population health. We have the skills and the evidence to support people in moving more and living better, and it's time to make that connection clear to policymakers, partners, and the wider public.'

Samantha Bandak, RCOT Press and Media Lead, is the first to shout about the value of media coverage in helping to raise the profile of OT, but that's not the only way, she says.

'Our toolkit highlights lots of different things you can do to shine a light on your amazing work as OTs and the impact it has. However, if you are interested in trying your luck with the media, the toolkit takes you through the process step-by-step and includes a template email you can send to journalists, as well as a press release template.'

'We are also on-hand to offer support or have a look at your draft press release, so do get in touch.'

The last word goes to Lisa Westhorpe, also an OT with Sport for Confidence, who says: 'Connection is key, along with being brave and speaking up on issues that you're passionate about. We need to find ways to connect with likeminded colleagues through channels such as RCOT's Communities platform' (coming this Spring).

'This doesn't have to cost much in terms of money or your time, and can positively contribute to your CPD and HCPC audit evidence.'

'We shouldn't limit ourselves to engaging only with OT-focused opportunities; we can expand our reach and influence through joining multidisciplinary, collaborative groups. As a profession, we're great advocates for equity and justice, using our unique occupational perspective. If you want things to change, find a way to make your voice heard.' ●

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Words **TRACEY SAMUELS**, OTnews Editor,  
[editorial@rcot.co.uk](mailto:editorial@rcot.co.uk)