

Podcast transcript

Career conversations: Katie Moffat

Hannah Spencer:

Hi everyone and welcome to this podcast recorded and produced by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists.

This is one of a series of podcasts which really focus on hearing and sharing the career narratives of our diverse workforce and highlight a whole range of possibilities in occupational therapy.

My name is Hannah Spencer and I'm an occupational therapist that's had the absolute pleasure and privilege of facilitating and capturing these conversations with members of our occupational therapy community.

So let's start with some introductions. Do you mind introducing yourself briefly and your current role or roles?

Katie Moffat:

Yes. So I am Katie, Katie Moffat. I currently work with NHS Tayside, so I am newly qualified, so band five within the child health team and I am based in Angus in the community, but the whole team itself is all of Tayside, but my smaller team is within Angus. I graduated last year in 2022 from Glasgow Caledonian University as well, so I relocated to Dundee for this role.

Hannah:

It's good to have you with us today, Katie.

Katie:

Thank you. It's good to be here.

Hannah:

The purpose of our conversation today is kind of around your career journey, your experiences of getting to this point. I've kind of used the Kawa model, that analogy of career journey as river, to kind of guide the questions and hopefully that will come through in some of the questions there.

So let's start right at the beginning. What drew you to occupational therapy? Can you pinpoint the source of your river?

Katie:

From kind of, I suppose, later teen years? I was aware of occupational therapy because my mom works in healthcare as well, so she always commented on how great a job the occupational therapists have within her team. So I was aware of it being a thing I had done a degree before. So

after graduating, I kind of hopped between a couple of different jobs and I always had a thing in the back of my mind that I wanted to do university properly, to have that proper uni experience, but I suppose for a while I didn't know exactly what I wanted that to be in.

So I had gradually, over a couple of years, done a bit more work. I worked in a school for a little while, working a bit more with children. I'd done some volunteering stuff and I kind of just got to a point in the job that I was in. This was the point that I was in the school doing, like, before and after school care, that I knew that I wanted to do more than what I was currently able to do, for seeing some of the things that some of the kids maybe wanted to get better at or work on. And I knew that where I currently was, I didn't have the skills and the knowledge to do that little bit more. So I'd done a little bit of shadowing with the speech and language therapist who came into that school and spoke to one of the occupational therapists as well. And it was kind of at that point I was like, okay, there are ways that I can do that little bit more. And it maybe took me about a year of dabbling in and out of it, of looking at different places to apply for and everything, but ultimately one day I just woke up and decided, today's the day I'm going to submit the application.

So I'd thought about it for a long time, but when it actually came down to it, it was a very quick decision, that was it and applied and got in.

Hannah:

And here you are.

So thinking about kind of skills, experiences, opportunities that have kind of contributed to the flow along the way. Can you tell us a bit more about that journey? What was your previous degree?

Katie:

So my previous degree was musical theatre, so I suppose I've always been involved in musical theatre, so for people who've known me longer, it's stranger that I'm doing occupational therapy and not musical theatre. Kind of being within that world there's like a way of doing things and thinking and you are really involved in things. And I suppose a lot of my experiences have been working with children and that has contributed a lot from the theatre so there was always all of that going on. And then I'd done the degree and graduated from there I worked in the Disney Store. My degree was down in London, so I worked in the Disney Store for about two years and I got really into that of the interaction with everyone, not just the children as well, but that sort of performance aspect of it almost. And really at that point, I then ended up within the management team there, so got really interested in leadership and communication and everything that contributes to that within the role there. There was always a lot, not like a push for it, but always a want to do like volunteer and stuff outside of work and initiatives for us to get involved with other things. So that kind of sparked my interest in volunteering, which kind of is a whole other situation in itself.

Round about that time, I also started learning sign language, so that was always something else that I always wanted to do. And I suppose thinking as I was learning all of that for that access and communication and different cultures, that was always something that was there as an interest. I didn't know how I was going to do something with it just yet, but I knew that I wanted something to do with it.

And then doing sort of the before and after... It was before and after school care that I'd done at the school and I was sort of manager of a small team for that and doing that sort of planning of what's going to be good for the children to be doing, but what is also interesting to them. And it was such an age range that we had as well. So if you had some people come in every single

day, you didn't want them doing the same thing every day, but keeping it somewhat coherent for everyone. So there's a lot of really good challenges within that, but again, sparked me wanting to do just that little bit more.

I suppose all of those things have contributed to it. And then I started volunteering when I moved back to Scotland to start the degree with the Glasgow Children's Hospital charity and also with the National Deaf Children's Society. So I was already involved with an occupational therapy at this point, but I think particularly for the NDCS, that was quite a big thing for me, of starting that and seeing working one to one with different children and the opportunities within all of that. And I think that was one of the things that I was like, okay, I was like doing that for the first time. I was like, oh, I have the OT glasses on, I can see it. That was quite a moment for me, one of the residential trips that we had for that, and a lot of those experiences have really stuck with me for thinking about different situations. And it even came up in one of my interviews of something, and I was just drawn back to four years ago of something that happened, but it's really, really stuck. A big bit of the river, I would say.

Hannah:

I love that in how you explain it as well. You can kind of hear the tributaries just joining the flow, joining the flow, joining the flow.

Katie:

All these little streams have just gradually came into it.

Hannah:

Absolutely.

How has your environment around you enabled or restricted that career journey, would you say?

Katie:

I think in terms of, I suppose, physical environment. Thinking back to leaving school and starting my first degree, I moved from up here, sort of just outside of Glasgow, down to London, so that was a very different environment, sort of getting used to that learning environment plus physical environment at home and within that course, because it is very intensive, you're working with, living with. I suppose other courses are the same, but the theatre bit just seems more intensive sometimes of you're very immersed in all of it, that there isn't really that degree of separation between what you're doing there to what you're doing at home. That it was a very intense three years when I looked and honestly, I've only realised that within the past year or something, of how intense those three years were that you were in it and you didn't realise you were in it until a couple of years later and you look back on it. I think at that time, around all of that, there wasn't that space within yourself or within your environment of yourself to look out for other things or to notice other things, it was just you were at the point that you were and there wasn't all of that branching out.

So I think on leaving that environment, when I graduated and I also left the area, I moved from North London to South London. So another big move there was that sort of sudden, oh, there's this entire world that I have not been aware of for three years. And I suppose the change as well of the environment of that being so immersive to then you're yourself, you're not always within that group of people who are within your year group, and you're working with day in, day out. So that was probably an awareness of how big the environment was around me. And I suppose I became more comfortable in my own personal environment and getting used to that sort of thing. And it probably

took a while to then realise, okay, I can actually branch out a little bit more from this if I need to.

And I think that it's maybe just, I suppose over time, how my environment's changed. It's been me, I suppose, changing some of the time and realising, okay, I need to widen my environment and make it a little bit bigger. And I've always probably not even realising, but I suppose going into studying and the degree for occupational therapy as well, I've always made attempts to expand that environment a little further. So at the point that I was able to and the opportunity was there, I went to different areas for placements. So I was in Dumfries, I was up in the Highlands and I suppose after the first time of relocating, I realised actually, this different environment is much better for me to be able to think differently. Because you're not in the same place all the time. So I think constant changing environments is probably something I've got used to, but in a good way, not necessarily in a negative way.

Hannah:

Is there any way that your environment has kind of restricted your career journey?

Sounds like you've intentionally changed it at the points when it has become quite restrictive.

Katie:

There definitely has been points where it has restricted and I think over time, I've become more attuned to the point that it is becoming restricted, because I think earlier in life, like when I graduated from my first degree, I was 21, I was a baby. I wasn't fully aware, I don't think, until the point that it was difficult, of how restricted environments could become, and the fact that actually you can do something about this Katie. So there has been points along that way that it has been difficult, like, not just physical environment, everything within environment that we obviously know about, of the people you work with and how you're able to access the environment, how you are within it as well, and kind of the change of self. I didn't always notice of how you are being outside of that and how you are being within that and that sort of impact of, I suppose, your home self and your work self. I know that it has restricted at points but I suppose because it has over time I'm aware of what those things look like on sort of graduating this time around. I know that stuff from past experiences.

So put a lot of thought into do you know what? Rather than going into panic of oh my God, I'm graduating, I need to apply for a job, I kind of made myself take that massive step back to think, okay, here we go. What are you actually at your core interested in? On applying for it and going for it, you know, that at your very core, that is where your passion is, that choose the environment that's going to enable that most. That was probably quite a lengthy process for me and lots of lists and lots of pros and cons and quadrant decisions and all of this to kind of pinpoint those places where I knew that that would work for me best.

Hannah:

And how's that transition to practice been for you?

Katie:

I think knowing that I had put that much thought into it has helped my thinking around everything, because the transition to practice is enormous, really. It's better to be realistic to it. And the area that I kind of have ended up going into, as much as I, outside of the occupational therapy degree had done volunteering here and there, jobs here and there, working with children, it was never, at the time, as an occupational therapy student. I was an occupational therapy student for some of that so the thinking was obviously there, but not practicing as that, I suppose. So you can do all the reading

you want when you're doing your degree, but it's different in practice to get to grips with everything. So that is a massive learning curve and will be because I've learned you can't possibly know everything now. As much as you want to, you can't.

I think I was quite lucky at the point that I started that there was also other newish starts within the area who were either similar to me, newly qualified, or within the past couple of years or so that there's always been those sort of one or two other people, sometimes more, who have either been experiencing something maybe only two months ago that you're now experiencing, that there's a similar sort of pool of people to check in with things with. And as a general, the area that I'm sort of in there is that openness to be able to speak to people and ask and ask questions. And I suppose I just gave the pre-emptive I'm going to ask a lot of questions. I'm a person who needs to ask a lot of questions. So that was already out there. So those couple of things that I've been able to say I'm going to do this, so expect it has definitely helped.

There's also within the regional groups of RCOT, at the point I moved up here, I was kind of in temporary accommodation, so I was still kind of within the western region of the Scotland one. So there's kind of a little ongoing group chat within that of just checking in with each other. And we've met up a couple of times just to chat about general things, but obviously that option is there to talk about work things and what it's like being newly qualified. And I've been able to do that with sort of one or two people that I was at Uni with as well just now. And then we've had sort of a little Zoom meet up and just one of the things that I knew that I needed to do was to take that step back on leaving work each day was like, okay. You're going to need to be very strict with yourself here to not get into that norm, because it's not sustainable on the long term. Of course, you have things that spark your interest that you maybe want to look into, but I tried to do a bit of okay, we will bookmark that or we will save the link and send it to your work email to deal with it at work. That that separation was important to, I suppose, anticipate problems that might have come up with that, which so far has been going okay.

Hannah:

Good to hear that.

Katie:

Yeah.

Hannah:

Sounds like so peer support, staying connected with other people and particularly other occupational therapists, so that there's an option of talking OT if you need to or want to and self awareness, isn't it? Self awareness and reflection and keeping your boundaries.

Katie:

Yeah, it's really good.

Hannah:

What role has supervision had in all of that for you in the transition?

Katie:

That was just in my head there. I was like, I've not even mentioned that.

Hannah:

There you go.

Katie:

Supervision I find really helpful as well. I've been able to have quite regular supervision and that's been with my team lead as well. And there's always that and that informal part of if you're out with a different occupational therapist who maybe isn't within your team or you're doing a bit of shadowing, there's always been that opportunity for do you have any questions now? No. You know what? If you have any, let's follow up with the conversation. Time is always made for those conversations which at the time you can sometimes feel, oh my goodness, we're just talking. And maybe it's not the most important thing to be doing, but on thinking back on it, it's so important to have that and it's seen as important. And supervision itself. I found it helpful in place, but I still find it really helpful for just that, I suppose all of the things that are going that are just floating around and you can make all the lists you want and you can write it down, but they're still there just those things to just sort of untangle them with that other person.

Hannah:

What about challenges along the way? What's been difficult?

Katie:

I've done my best to anticipate a lot of challenges. One of the big ones that I knew would be a problem was that work to home separation and I think being aware that that was going to be a problem has helped. It not be a problem that if I am doing things in the evening, I know that it's from an interest perspective and not because I need to do this for X, Y and Z at my job. Separating, I suppose your job from your career in a way has really helped.

General challenges like imposter syndrome is always going to be there. I suppose initially as well, there was that. Oh, my goodness. Yes. I've never officially been an occupational therapist before, but also here I am going out into an area of practice that I have never had a placement with them, but it's just that step back of okay. Yes, you've not had a placement in this area, but you have all of these other things that you've done and all of these things that you have done on placements before are so relevant. The skills that you use in a placement on a hospital ward for orthopaedics or care of the elderly or something, something from that, if not majority of that is transferable to whatever other area that you're in. Might not be the same assessment forms, but you're still the same occupational therapist. So I mean, that is always there. I suppose again, it's that awareness that it's there, so I know that it's there.

So I suppose in the days that that does get more challenging, it's naming it and I think I'm very lucky, the people that I do work with and sort of connections that I have of there will be people to challenge that if you really do feel like that. And there is always a lot of encouragement and pointing out the good things because I think I will point out the things I need to work on and develop anyway, so there's always someone to point out those things that have gone well. And for me that has taken the time to reflect on stuff as well. I know that that's something I need to do. That sometimes that can feel like oh, this isn't work, I'm not typing anything or I'm not doing a phone call. But actually in the longer term, taking that time is more beneficial than not taking that time. So there's been bits and bobs like that, that sometimes the things that you need to do don't necessarily feel that you are working, but you're developing and you're thinking and you're learning, which is contributing to your ability to be working. It's that shift on it which I sound like I'm really good at doing it, I'm not always good at doing it, in the moment which my colleagues could attest to as well.

Hannah:

Do you feel that you've been able to be to bring your authentic and best self to occupational therapy?

Katie:

I think so. I think it's taken its time to get there more from me rather than anyone else, even during the degree as well. Just I sort of started out as the, okay, I am going to be the best student, I am going to get the best grades. The perfectionist really came out to shine when I was in first year but I think letting myself get involved in things that weren't necessarily coursework really helped for me. What was your question? What was your question? No worries. My authentic self. Yes. There you go. That's my authentic self. So that answers that question.

Hannah:

It that's brilliant.

Katie:

Yeah. And I think letting myself explore who that is, that even goes back to, like I said in the musical theatre studying, you aren't yourself as much as you think you are and all of that. You are the version of yourself that you need to be there. And that keeps its hold on you a lot longer than you realise. That I kind of got to the point, I was like, okay, why am I working in this way? Do I need to be sitting writing out things to study? Is this actually helping me learn or do I think this should be helping me learn? And that has been the longest light bulb. But I suppose that initial questioning, it that there's now so many other ways that I do things and that I work and the way that I go about doing things that are very different to what they were two or three years ago. But they might not look like they're the most effective to an outsider looking in. But I know the alternative. And actually, it's much easier if I do it this way. I'm a lot more open to sharing those things now than what I was while I was still figuring it all out. So it's not abnormal to walk into the office and see me with postit notes covering the desk and I'm moving them all about to what areas they need to be or I'll get a big roll of paper and coloured pens and to try and map out where my brain is at that point in time to figure it all out or seeing me spinning in my chair. It is what it is. It's taken a while, but I'd say I'm definitely much more authentic me than what I have been in previous years.

Hannah:

That's awesome to hear. Awesome to hear.

We've talked a bit about what's been most helpful for you kind of in your development progression as an occupational therapist so far. Has there been parts where your kind of career journey as a river, has it changed direction in ways that you'd not really anticipated?

Katie:

I'd say on graduating and thinking what I wanted to do, it was very different to what I thought when I started in first year. Sort of going in in first year, the Katie that I described, I had that. Okay, so I'll graduate, I'll do a rotational post. I'll do that for X amount of years, then I'll do a Master's. And then it was very this is how it will go. So I had that route or I also had the I'm going to finish this degree and go straight into a Master's. That was what I thought were the two alternatives that I was going to do at that point. It never really occurred to me of you could get more involved within your professional body or you could be doing Twitter. All of that for occupational therapy really opened up a lot for me.

In second year, I decided, you know what, I've got an old Twitter account, why not let's go for that? I've seen so many opportunities through just working, getting involved with people and chatting and stuff on there and seeing what other people are getting up to. That was just a world that I had never thought of. I suppose that's maybe one thing. I don't think there was ever from what I thought I would get into and graduating, there was never a drastic, oh, my goodness, no, that's not what it's going to be. It was probably a very slow process of kind of in amongst that, learning a bit more about how I work and what's right for me. I realised that, you know what, the way that you want to work and I'll get an idea or have a discussion that I get super involved very quickly. But I love that. It's just that passionate part of yourself and the enthusiasm that I think for me, how I felt about myself at the time, I think I would have really struggled to go into a rotational post of knowing, oh, yeah, I can throw myself in and get really involved, but actually this isn't the end game. You're changing at some point and I think I would have taken that quite hard.

Hannah:

What do you wish you'd known not as an early career OT, because you still are prior to joining the profession? What would you say now to your younger self?

Katie:

I think one of the things I've said to sort of first 2nd years before I graduated that I kind of wish that I had done at the time was to get involved with things earlier. So when I first started in first year with the Occupational Therapy Society at Uni, in the end, I was highly involved in that and we were doing a lot. And you know what, I loved it and it was so many opportunities, but in first year I was like, oh, couldn't possibly society, no, I'm too focused. That was just where my head was at at that point in first year, and it was part of that. Do you know what you've moved yourself from London to Scotland and you've made the commitment to this and it was a massive commitment. So I was really in that mindset of, no, this is for a reason, so it needs to be focused and driven, but I obviously can't change it now. But I think it would have really helped me in first year to have had that and heeding from people in other year groups as well. That was the great thing of getting involved in that was you were still within your occupational therapy world, but hearing from people in other years, people in other programmes because we had undergraduate and masters and that sort of opportunity for building up connections and I suppose breaking down those barriers and getting involved in all of that stuff ended up being so crucial to then the rest of the years that I was on the course and stuff that I ended up getting involved with that.

If I could tell myself something when I had started the course, I would have said, you know what, just...

Hannah:

Throw yourself into it.

Katie:

Just do one of them, it's okay if you have time. I would try and tell myself to balance slightly better when I was out on placements. That is easier said than done. I probably would have told myself, you are never actually going to get through all of your reading lists, so stop photocopying them and putting them up on the wall in a highlighter because it's not achievable.

Hannah:

Is there anything that you'd add to anything we've discussed today? Anything that we've not

covered? Anything you'd want to share, kind of about your career journey to this date, your experiences to date, your transition to practice?

Katie:

I think the transition to practice is a big jump from being a student, but it's not that you go student to being in practice, it's that being an occupational therapy student is here and being in practice is here. It's not so much that they're stepping stones in the same path, it's almost like your student path is here and you hop over. In a way, I'm very much of the view of, like, you're always going to be a student. There's always going to be something you don't know or something you can learn from someone else, or that need for learning, opportunity for learning, is always going to be there. But in terms of the way that you learn and you need to learn and you need to demonstrate learning as a student is not how, in my experience, is not how it is in practice. There's a jump in what you're doing, but it's just very different and I don't think that was something I was fully aware of. It's not that you go out into practice and everything is as quick-paced from the get go as what it is on placement. You don't need to do this within X amount of weeks... if it takes you this little bit longer to feel more confident in this thing, that's okay. If it takes you longer for this, that's okay. It's not a jump in what you're needing to do. It's just a total mind shift of how things are. I'm not expected to know absolutely everything about being an occupational therapist in this role by next week.

Hannah:

So I guess I've got a quick fire finish the sentence question to end with. Being an occupational therapist is...

Katie:

I want to just fire all the words into this.

Hannah:

Okay, do it.

Katie:

Probably what captures all is being an occupational therapist is filled with opportunities. There's no route that we can't go down... full of opportunities. It's never tiring of. There's so many different ways that you can go with it and there's always an opportunity. There's always something to get involved with that you can use those skills.

The way that I see it is, I suppose that the river, there's all the little rivers coming into it, but then there's all the little ones going out that are, I suppose, going out, finding other little bits and rivers and then coming back eventually. When you look at a diagram of the lungs of bronchioles into the bronchioli and all of that, that's how expansive it is.

Hannah:

Brilliant. It's been really nice talking to you today. Thank you.

Katie:

Thank you for having this conversation.