This past summer 2nd year student Tara Hymes took the trip of a lifetime. Starting in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Hymes rode her bike across the country—through 13 states and over 3,800 miles—as part of a team of riders for the organization Bike & Build (www.bikeandbuild.org). Her powerful journey challenged her physically—she rode across mountain passes in Montana and Washington—and emotionally as she met homeless people and did community service work along the way.

Bike & Build is a non-profit organization focused on affordable housing and civic engagement. Through its service-oriented cycling trips, Bike & Build funds affordable housing projects and fosters leadership and lifelong philanthropic service in the young people who go on its trips.

When Hymes learned about Bike & Build from a friend, she knew the experience would be the perfect way to combine her two passions: cycling and occupational therapy. What she didn't realize was the impact the trip would have on her. “This was the most empowering thing I've ever done. I was able to change so many lives by helping people with some very common-sense activities,” she explains. For example, at one stop along her route—in Deloitte, Wisconsin—Hymes worked at a community garden, sprucing up the land, installing benches, and meeting residents. “I saw how the sense of pride in the community increased when the people involved in this garden decided what they wanted to plant and to eat. They started living better and caring for each other,” she says.

At another stop—in Surrey, British Columbia—she worked in a mission for homeless people. There she learned a great deal about people's sense of dignity. “Everyone deserves dignity—to feel valued and have control over their lives—regardless of what's happened to them. There is more to people than just ‘being homeless.’”

An experience with one homeless man in particular underscored for her the importance of the “whole person”—the hallmark of occupational therapy. “Sometimes home is a place, but it can also be a feeling. This man had trouble finding and keeping a home because he didn't feel connected; now he has the emotional support he needs and is doing well,” she says. “For some people, having friends is more important than having a home. It's all about quality of life—helping people achieve what’s important to them.”

Hymes not only had an immersive “OT” experience; she also raised a great deal of money. With the 34 other cyclists on her team, she helped raise $171,000; she alone raised more than $4500. During the trip, the team accepted grants from various affordable housing organizations; at the end of the tour, they held a gala for all the groups that applied and donated funds to a total of nine organizations.

On Hymes’ blog—http://helptarabikeandbuild.weebly.com/blog—there's a picture of her team dipping their wheels in the ocean in Vancouver. But, she contends, “that picture doesn't do the trip justice.” While she had a remarkable adventure—raising money for affordable housing, cycling through spectacular countryside, and making lifelong friends—she says that “some of the most profound moments were not about the trip itself. They were about the journey.” As Hymes has learned through her OT training and her profound summer experience, “It's not about where you are going, but who you are.”
Although Tufts was certainly quieter over the summer, there was no shortage of excitement at the Department of Occupational Therapy since my last letter to you. Our biggest news is that in summer, 2015, the Department will be moving to a brand new space at 574 Boston Avenue. Built in the 1920s as an industrial warehouse, the building is currently undergoing extensive renovations and will house departments and programs from disciplines across the university. The finished building will provide us with updated, innovative classrooms, advanced technology, large meeting rooms, teaching and research labs, office space, informal student learning spaces, and even a café. Although we will miss our cozy home at 26 Winthrop Street, we are thrilled to be moving to this collaborative, interdisciplinary, state-of-the-art space, which demonstrates Tufts’ investment in the Department of Occupational Therapy.

We have also been engaged in the re-accreditation process through the Accreditation Commission of Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE). With oversight by Michael Roberts, OTD, OTR/L, who coordinated the process, we underwent an extensive self-study and submitted our report this past summer. ACOTE performed its site visit this fall. During that time, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and Tufts administration demonstrated the department’s focus on interdisciplinary and innovative research, education, and service that have had a positive impact on the health, activity, and participation of individuals, communities, and populations.

As we move forward with re-accreditation, and the department’s and the University’s ten-year (T10) strategic plans, we will focus on other key goals as well: increasing diversity among students, faculty, and staff; ensuring a rich education for our students from admissions to alumni status; and enhancing the infrastructure and resources needed to support excellence in occupational therapy education.

With all of these exciting changes in the works—and much to report throughout this coming academic year—we have decided to publish an abbreviated News & Notes now, with a comprehensive issue to come out next summer. Here, you will read about just a few of the exciting activities our students and faculty have been involved with over the spring and summer of 2014; stay tuned for a full academic year’s worth of “news and notes” in 2015. In the meantime, be sure to check out our new website at http://ase.tufts.edu/occupationalTherapy.

Gary Bedell, PhD, OTR, FAOTA
Chair

SOTA Teams with Medford Boys and Girls Club

By Kaitlyn Kirkaldy

Every day after school, more than 100 children go to the Boys and Girls Club (BGC) of Medford, where they play sports and games, and have a “power hour” to do homework or math and writing exercises.

Over the past three years, nearly 100 first year masters students from Tufts’ Department of Occupational Therapy have volunteered at the Medford BGC as part of their first-semester service learning component of their course on Child and Adolescent Occupation and Adaptation. The BGC of Medford is a popular venue for students’ learning about school-aged children’s current occupations because “it is a great place to learn about clients’ needs and apply our OT knowledge,” says second-year student Lauren Burke.

This year, students felt motivated to continue their involvement beyond that first semester in the fall of 2013. According to Burke, who is co-president of the Tufts Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) chapter, “the SOTA board members enjoyed volunteering at BGC so much that we wanted to continue to support the organization.”

SOTA organized two fundraisers to support BGC. This summer the group, along with department Fieldwork Coordinator Mary Barnes, also volunteered additional time at the Medford BGC. The group talked with Lisa Gozbekian, Acting Director of the Medford BGC, who suggested that the volunteers help clean out the sports closet. When Gozbekian met with the SOTA members, she realized that the students brought expertise in the use of space. “The gym closet was a poorly used space and I couldn’t wrap my head around doing it,” Gozbekian says. “They had an idea and a vision, and I trusted their knowledge. They brought an eye that I don’t really have.”

Burke says students try to bring a client-centered approach to their tasks at BGC. In cleaning and organizing the sports equipment in the closet, the volunteers not only completed a task that benefited the organization but also applied their knowledge of
Tufts Students Collaborate on Adaptive Clothing Initiative

This summer, three Tufts students—Derrick Huang, Emileigh Mercer, and Sara Tian—participated in MIT’s Open Style Lab (OSL), a program that designs apparel for people with disabilities. The 10-week summer “lab” brings together engineering, design, and occupational therapy students who create clothing that is functional and aesthetically pleasing. Each team is assigned a client who has a physical disability; their task is to design clothing that is both fashionable and comfortable, while fitting each client’s needs.

For example, Sara worked with Dennis, a public health professional who travels for work. As an individual with a high spinal cord injury, Dennis faces challenges with temperature regulation, especially when transitioning between environments of different temperatures (such as from a cool airplane to a warm airport). Dennis’ team created a thermoregulation system integrated within a men’s shirt; the shirt’s material absorbs and stores excess heat when skin temperature is warm and releases heat when cold. The team also incorporated a concealed front zipper to make the shirt easier for Dennis to get on and off.

According to Sara, being part of the OSL team “was a great learning experience for everyone,” she says. “Although OTs are not strangers to interdisciplinary teams, OSL presents a unique opportunity for OT students to be part of a creative process in designing solutions for individuals with disabilities.”

Derrick Huang agrees. His summer experience working with students from different disciplines has helped him appreciate “how I can draw upon diverse resources to find the most effective and client-centered solutions,” he says. His client suffered from Raynaud’s phenomenon, which results in the loss of blood flow to the extremities; the team was charged with designing a heated open-toed shoe. While a cobbler is still constructing a final prototype, the client found the preliminary prototype to be very helpful and comfortable. “OSL gave me a great overview of some of the emerging technologies out there for clients with disabilities. It really expanded my view of what I can do as an OT.”

Emileigh feels that working with her client was “the most meaningful part of (her) OSL experience.” Emileigh worked with Mike, a world champion, one-armed golfer who uses a high-tech upper extremity hand prosthetic. Emileigh’s team developed three products for Mike: the first, called a Socket Sock, helped solve the time-consuming aspect of putting on his prosthetic; another, the Fan Bracelet, helped alleviate moisture buildup around the prosthetic; the last, called the SleeveAide (which is patent pending) helped Mike to don and doff a business jacket in a meeting or a rain jacket on the golf course. Before the SleeveAide, Mike was using a garbage bag to get his arm in and out of his outerwear.

Emileigh says she is “extraordinarily fortunate to have been a part of OSL” and she feels the “OT perspective” that she, Derrick and Sara brought to their teams contributed significantly to finding successful outcomes for their clients. “When we interviewed our clients about their daily challenges, we used our clinical reasoning, observation, and interpretation skills. As we designed the products, our OT understanding of medical conditions was extremely helpful. And when it came time to share our process and finished products, our client-centered practice and narrative capabilities came into play. Finally, working with an interdisciplinary team was so fruitful! We each came at the client’s challenge from a different angle, but were able to problem solve holistically and make a more aesthetic product because of our teamwork,” she says.

Client Mike Benning is fitted with an early prototype of the team’s “Sleeve-Aid” to help him don and doff clothing. The final model was 3-D printed for a more refined look!

Occupational therapy—making the environment fit the tasks (safe, shared storage with quick, easy access to supplies, as well as a clearer understanding of what the club has and needs).

According to Burke, students value their service learning experiences and bring a hands-on perspective to their volunteer work. At the BGC, the focus of the service learning was “very intentional”—empowering the club staff to be able to meaningfully engage with the children and fulfill its mission. “Occupational therapy is very much right there ‘in the trenches’ with people working towards actual goals,” Burke says.

For her part, Gozbekian has been impressed with how focused the Tufts volunteers are. “It’s just what we need in volunteers—that boost of energy,” she says. She is excited to continue the volunteer relationship between the Medford BGC and Tufts, as is Burke. “It has been, and I think will continue to be, a very fruitful relationship between the Boys and Girls Club and our department,” Burke says.
Publications


Refereed presentations:


Law, M., Coster, W., Bedell, G., Anaby, D., & Khetani, M. Fostering Knowledge about Participation in Occupations for Children and Youth: Processes and Outcomes of a Knowledge Translation Project. (Guided Scientific poster), 16th International Congress of the World Federation of Occupational Therapy, Yokohama, Japan (June, 2014).


Gary Bedell also did a series of invited presentations from June 12–15, 2014 at Chang Gung University and Taiwan Medical University in Taiwan. These presentations focused on the measurement and promotion of participation of children with disabilities.