One in three children in South Africa will be orphaned by 2015, according to Tremendous Hearts, a Boston non-profit organization established in 2008. Through Tremendous Hearts, volunteers from many professions, including occupational therapy, work in South Africa’s Cape Town and surrounding areas serving in children’s homes and other agencies that care for orphaned and vulnerable children, especially those suffering from the effects of HIV/AIDS, abuse, and poverty. Prevalent cultural beliefs in South Africa lead some to think that children with physical disabilities are a curse on the family and many of these children are left to die. In addition, many of the dedicated South African caregivers working with these children are often victims of abuse and have limited education, themselves.

According to Tremendous Hearts board member and Tufts alumna Charlotte Heim, MA, OTR/L, ('03), occupational therapists have the unique training to assess needs, work within the cultural context, and teach caregivers the skills needed to support vulnerable children today and in the future. Unlike some “volun-tourism” organizations—which send volunteers to countries in need for a few weeks or a month—Tremendous Hearts is based on a long-term model, engaging volunteers for at least 11 months. “Our model is quickly becoming the ‘gold standard’ in the Cape Town area because our volunteers provide sustainable change and do not drain organizations’ resources,” Heim says. Skilled volunteers work for several months with a partnering South African agency to put systems in place that will help improve children’s lives. Volunteers may receive scholarships, fundraise, or contribute some of their own costs.

One such volunteer, alumna Katrina Luthy-Kaplan, MS, OTR/L (’09), spent six months in Africa working in Sibongile, a care center for children with cerebral palsy, and Nonceba, a pediatric rape crisis center. From March to August, 2013, she worked in Khayelitsha, a township near Cape Town, and provided services such as creating standard preventative health measures, assisting with wound care, manual therapy, and training staff on engaging children in developmentally appropriate activities. “Although six months initially seemed like an extensive commitment, while I was in South Africa, I repeatedly saw why sustainable change in a foreign country takes so much time,” Luthy-Kaplan says.

Her daily work routines changed constantly—and in a typically African style. “I had to learn to slow down to ‘Africa Time’ and collaborate with my co-workers to be sure that the plans I was implementing would be feasible long-term.”

For example, during her time at Sibongile, Luthy-Kaplan hoped to improve the center’s technique for tube-feeding the children. She quickly realized, however, that due to cultural perspectives around the use of medical equipment, the supervisors at Sibongile did not agree with her ideas. “I deferred to them (my supervisors),” she says. “I learned that such ingrained cultural perceptions could not be changed in just a few training sessions with me. We were far more successful when making little changes within the cultural construct, rather than try for a medical overhaul to fit Western ‘best practice.’”

According to Heim, the biggest challenge for volunteers is spending enough time in South Africa to work effectively with the people there. A full-time occupational therapist who has also been a guest speaker and fieldwork supervisor for Tufts, Heim says that in order for volunteers to be of service to African children, they must be skilled, mature, possess depth of knowledge, and be willing to commit to at least 11 months in the country. That’s why occupational therapists are such a good fit for Tremendous Hearts. “Someone coming from another culture must be immersed in South Africa long enough to be able to understand the cultural context,” she says. “‘Working in context’ is a
I am pleased to be writing to you as the new chair of the Department of Occupational Therapy. As I settle into this new position, I am continually impressed with the level of engagement and scholarship seen in both our students and faculty. Tufts remains a top occupational therapy program that graduates occupational therapists who are current on the latest professional and inter-professional trends and research, have a deep understanding of evidence-based practice and clinical reasoning, and are committed to innovation in the field. Our many students and alumni who are performing global service work—a few of whom are featured in this issue—offer testament to the Tufts mission of active citizenship and engagement.

Our faculty, too, are focused on solving complex, real-world problems and helping people to participate in meaningful activities and achieve a better quality of life across the lifespan. For instance, new professors Keren Ladin and Jennifer Harney specialize in pressing issues such as health disparities and how social networks may play a role (Dr. Ladin) and concussion awareness (Dr. Harney). Their important work is described later.

Long-time faculty member and former chair Linda Tickle-Degnen recently received multi-year grants from the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation for her interdisciplinary studies of social self-management and communication in patients with Parkinson’s disease. I also recently received a multi-year interdisciplinary grant focused on social participation of teens with traumatic brain injury from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. These and many other studies and collaborative projects illustrate the interdisciplinary nature of our work and the strength of occupational therapy to truly make an important difference in people’s lives. Our work is clearly at the heart of the University’s T-10 (10-year) strategic plan (http://strategicplan.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/Tufts-Strategic-Plan-Full-Report-web.pdf).

This year, we will be looking even more closely at our strength as a program to create impact and drive innovation. As part of our comprehensive Accreditation Commission of Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) self-study review, we are now fully engaged in examining our curriculum, programs, and strategic initiatives and will be soliciting feedback from students, faculty, staff, fieldwork educators, and alumni. This is an exciting time—and we welcome your input as we continually strive to graduate students who are on the cutting edge in their field.

In the months ahead, I look forward to hearing from you—our alumni, colleagues, and friends—and to putting forth some long-term goals for the department. For now, I’d like to thank outgoing chair Linda Tickle-Degnen for her outstanding service; I am honored to follow in her footsteps.

Gary Bedell, PhD, OTR, FAOTA
Chair

Newtown Native Jennifer Iassogna Goes Home to Help

Master’s student Jennifer Iassogna (’14, A ’11) always knew she had a passion for helping children; yet it wasn’t until she worked at a camp for those on the autism spectrum that she discovered occupational therapy. At Aspire summer camp, Jennifer observed an occupational therapist working with these children with special needs. A child development major at Tufts, Jennifer knew she didn’t want to be a teacher. Occupational therapy offered an alternative. “I realized there are different ways to teach kids, not just academically, but in other ways that help them be successful,” she says.

Her interest in children with special needs has been the guiding force behind Jennifer’s most fulfilling masters research. A group project with Dr. Gary Bedell studying 600 children participating in home, school, and community living activities revealed that all the children had greater participation in their home and school environments than in their communities, regardless of their diagnosis. Jennifer says this research raises the question: “As therapists, where do we go next? Do we put more support into the community or are the laws being mandated for home and school-based services really working?”

This group project helped inspire Jennifer’s masters thesis entitled Children’s Social Participation in an Inclusive Classroom. Through observations and psychometrics, she developed a tool for use in schools called the Social Participation Observation Tool, or SPOT. This tool considers both children’s behavior and the environment to determine what supports and/or barriers might influence a child’s participation in the classroom.

This past fall, Jennifer completed her Level II fieldwork in the Cambridge public school system, working with both typically
developing children and those with special needs. Jennifer says she loves being in the field and working side by side with professionals who “truly celebrate diversity and focus on inclusion.”

Jennifer’s work in schools has been heartbreaking as well as rewarding. After the Newtown, Connecticut, shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School last December, Jennifer, a native of Newtown, knew she wanted to help. After completing her finals at Tufts, she went back to her hometown to work with local occupational therapists who were moving into a new elementary school. Jennifer assisted with setting up equipment, cleaning, and organizing materials to help the children feel as comfortable as possible after the shooting. “It was a crazy experience being there when the kids got to see their new school,” Jennifer says. “On a selfish level, I felt that I was actually doing something to help my community. It was good to be a part of that.”

Throughout her work in Newtown, Jennifer was buoyed by the many opportunities she had to “work with professional occupational therapists and to see everyone come together as a community.”

When Jennifer completes her Level II fieldwork at the Koomar Center and receives her masters in May, she hopes to continue working in schools and, down the road, in a sensory integration clinic. Ever since Aspire, however, Jennifer’s first love has been with kids with autism. “If I could work in only one population, it would be with those ‘on the spectrum.’ They’re so lovable and so kind. The work is hard, and challenging, but it’s always worth it,” she says.

Alumna Samantha Evans Moore (’13) agrees. In 2010, Moore spent six weeks working in a Tanzanian pre-school through an organization called International Volunteer Headquarters. Having visited Tanzania before, Moore had fallen in love with the African people and culture and wanted to put her interest in occupational therapy and community service to work. One of her volunteer placements was at Positive Steps in Arumeru (POSA), a group for children ages two through seven who are orphaned or have families affected by HIV/AIDS. Moore has since been back to Tanzania twice, as recently as spring 2013. With her current training as an OT, she feels she brings a unique perspective to a country that needs help caring for those with disabilities. “There are very few special needs programs in Africa, and there are only four occupational therapists in Tanzania among a population of 10 million,” she says.

Moore believes that this dearth of services is probably due in part to a pervasive view in Africa that those with disabilities can not be active, participating members of society. Like at Tremendous Hearts, Moore emphasizes the importance of encouraging African citizens to sustainably care for those with special needs.

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MEET OUR NEW FACULTY

Jessica Harney, DPT, OT, offers the unique perspective of being both a healthcare management professional and a clinician in her clinical reasoning, health conditions, and health and community systems courses at Tufts. With experience in both acute inpatient and outpatient settings, as well as extensive work in hospital and rehabilitation administration, Harney “brings a fresh mind to the issues of not just patient care but also healthcare systems in the United States,” she says.

A full-time lecturer, Harney holds a BS in occupational therapy from Boston University and a doctorate of physical therapy from MGH Institute of Health Professions.

Harney believes her experience in both occupational and physical therapy has given her a more holistic understanding of patients and made her a better teacher. “Coming into the classroom, I don’t separate the two professions. I’m a healthcare provider, and both PT and OT are within my ‘walls.’ When I take the holistic framework of occupational therapy and add it to the medical model of physical therapy, it makes my ability to work with patients that much stronger,” she says.

Harney has worked in occupational and physical therapy as both a clinician and educator at New England Baptist Hospital, MGH Institute of Health Professions, and North Shore Children’s Hospital. Her areas of interest include orthopedics and sports medicine for young athletes, as well as health promotion programs for children, adolescents, and adults. As director of rehabilitation services at Hallmark Health Systems, Harney helped create a concussion awareness program for athletes, parents, trainers, teachers, and medical staff. With support from Hallmark’s official partner, the Boston Bruins, the hospital was able to purchase a widely used and scientifically validated computerized concussion testing system called ImPACT for its ambulatory sites. ImPACT will help these satellite sites more accurately diagnose and treat concussions. “This program is an example of how OTs can take something within a medical model and bring it back into the community,” she says.

Harney is also especially proud of her volunteer involvement with the International Paralympics and Disabled Sports USA, which focuses on improving the lives of people with disabilities through physical fitness. As a medical classifier, Harney uses her background in the healthcare professions to assess athletes’ physical disabilities. “The goal is to help ensure that everyone is playing on an equal playing field,” she says.

Whether it’s helping disabled skiers navigate the slopes or post-concussion patients rehabilitate safely at home, Harney sees the focus on function and health in the community as a growing trend in today’s healthcare system. “More and more, we have to look beyond acute treatment and instead look at what we deliver to people as a community. We must tie this information into health promotion and community systems. I believe this is going to be a huge area of growth for occupational therapy,” she says.

Although she’s not an occupational therapist by training, Professor Keren Ladin, PhD, MSc, appreciates the interdisciplinary nature of occupational therapy and health policy. She has centered her work on the health care needs and behaviors of susceptible populations, with a specific focus on socioeconomic and racial disparities in transplantation, mental health treatment, aging, and immigrant health.

At Tufts, Ladin teaches courses in health policy, research methods, public health ethics, health disparities, and medical ethics; she also directs Tufts’ Research on Ethics, Aging, and Community Health (REACH) Lab. She holds an AB from the University of Chicago, an MSc from the Harvard School of Public Health, and a PhD in Health Policy and Ethics from Harvard University. In 2011, she was elected to the Ethics Committee for the United Network on Organ Sharing.

Before coming to Tufts, Ladin was a senior research associate at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, where she developed a study to differentiate ethnic and racial disparities in renal transplants. “This research incorporated my interests in ethics, social science, and health,” Ladin says. “It’s social science research but the questions are very normative, such as ‘what’s fair in transplantation?’ ‘Should severe cases get priority?’”

Ladin’s other studies have examined the mobility of social networks in gathering support for organ donation; the influence...
Stephanie Foster Finds Balance in Occupational Therapy

Stephanie Foster, MS, OTR/L, PhD (BSOT ’88) views her career as an occupational therapist as providing the perfect balance of work and play. In her private pediatric practice, Kid’s Work Pediatric Occupational Therapy (http://www.kidswork.biz), Foster helps children improve their cognitive, sensory motor, fine motor, and gross motor skills. She works with a broad range of children, including those with attention deficit disorders, sensory processing disorders, autism spectrum disorders, prematurity, developmental delays, and prenatal drug exposure.

Based out of her home in Santa Maria, California, Kid’s Work offers individualized occupational therapy, an intensive sensory-based summer handwriting camp, and family counseling. “Working privately allows me to ask hard questions and get reconnected to parents,” Foster says. “You can’t do that as easily in the classroom.”

As a former ROTC and wife of Jim Foster (E ’88), a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force Guard, Foster has worked as an occupational therapist all over the world. Her first Army OT position was in an inpatient psychiatric unit in Aurora, Colorado. Her second duty assignment was in Stuttgart, Germany, where she worked with American children in the Department of Defense School’s Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) and provided diagnostic and treatment services. While her husband was stationed at the Misawa Air Force base in Japan, Foster continued working in EFMP and provided rehabilitative services to active duty soldiers and their families. Foster enjoyed working overseas, noting “occupational therapists internationally have a lot of respect for what we do in the U.S.”

In between her world-wide travel and work as an occupational therapist, Foster continued her education in the field. She earned an MS in occupational therapy from Boston University in 1994, and a PhD in prenatal and perinatal psychology from the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute in 2011. She is the author of numerous publications on a range of topics related to child development and special needs and has received numerous awards. In 2012, she was honored with the Tri-County GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) Council Award for Dedication to Gifted Education in Ventura, California.

Although Foster has worked in a range of jobs, she likes the feeling of closeness that Kid’s Work provides her and the families with whom she works. She feels that in a clinical setting run out of her home, she can accomplish more and better targeted therapies to meet individual needs.

Foster believes “we must refocus the debate of blame and responsibility when it comes to addressing patients’ health and surgical needs.” In the classroom, she encourages her students to think this way also—to look beyond individual patients and consider how each one influences the general population. “We look at a range of cases, debate them, and think collectively about how theory informs our judgments and allows us to make fair policies. My goal is to teach students to think critically about these issues and the normative frameworks that govern them, and then to identify better interventions and policies,” she says.
We are pleased to announce that Linda Tickle-Degnen, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA, recently received two significant five-year grants related to her work in Parkinson’s disease. Parkinson’s disease (PD) affects 1% to 2% of the U.S. population over age 60, and its prevalence is increasing as the population ages. The first grant, from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is entitled Emergence and Evolution of Social Self-Management of Parkinson’s Disease. The study explores how those with PD manage their social lives in relation to their medical symptoms over a three-year period and how an inability to be emotionally expressive can affect social connections, and physical and mental health. Tickle-Degnen says the study “hopes to inform the development of new interventions aimed at supporting social integration and preventing isolation and loneliness in people living with PD.” Investigators on the project include: Tickle-Degnen; Elena Naumova, Tufts School of Engineering; Linda Sprague-Martinez, Tufts Public Health and Community Medicine; Marie Saint-Hilaire, Neurology, Boston University; Cathi Thomas, Neurology, Boston University; and Nalini Ambady (in memoriam), Psychology, Stanford University.


Tickle-Degnen is the co-investigator with computer scientist Matthias Scheutz (Principal Investigator), of Tufts School of Engineering, on a grant from the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) National Robotics Initiative (NRI). NRI is part of the Obama Administration’s efforts to support research into the development and use of robots that cooperatively work with people to enhance individual human capabilities, performance, and safety. The long-term goal of the study, Don’t Read My Face: Tackling the Challenges of Facial Masking in Parkinson’s Disease Rehabilitation through Co-Robot Mediators, is to develop co-robot mediators for people with facial masking, a symptom of PD that results in a reduced ability to signal emotion, pain, personality, and intentions. According to Tickle-Degnen, co-robot mediators are designed to facilitate social interaction and can “help reduce the stigmatization of people with PD. By modeling emotions and communications, these mediators can enrich the relationships between those with PD and their caregivers.” Investigators on the project include: Scheutz; Tickle-Degnen; and Ron Arkin, Georgia Tech Department of Computer Science. http://www.nsf.gov/news/news_summ.jsp?cntn_id=129284andWT.mc_id=USNSF_51andWT.mc_entity=click

Congratulations also go to Gary Bedell, Ph.D., OTR/L, FAOTA, for his grant from the U.S. Department of Education-National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. This three-year award will fund Bedell’s study, Social Participation and Navigation (SPAN): Intervention for Teens with TBI using Peer Coaching and Phone and Web Technology. The purpose of this interdisciplinary research is to develop and conduct preliminary testing of an intervention (SPAN) for teens with traumatic brain injury (TBI). SPAN is designed to use smart phone and web technology, as well as the training and supervision of college student peer coaches/mentors. The coaches/mentors will support teens in setting social participation goals and in implementing strategies to achieve these goals. Dr. Bedell is co-principal investigator on this project with Shari Wade, PhD, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center and Lyn Turkstra, University of Wisconsin – Madison.

A patient treated by alumna Gayle Severance (‘00), MS, OTR/L, CHT, was featured in the July, 2013, issue of Advance, a journal for occupational therapy practitioners (http://occupational-therapy.advanceweb.com/ebook/magazine.aspx?EBK=OT080513#page=14). Lindsay Ess suffered an infection that led to the amputation of both hands and feet; she then underwent a rare, double-extremity hand transplant. Severance was a vital part of the occupational therapy team that helped Ess regain function after her surgery. Severance and her colleagues worked extensively with Ess for weeks and helped her prepare to return home. Just two years post surgery, Ess is now doing well living at home, and Severance feels fortunate to have had the opportunity to treat her. “It’s very rare that you get to treat a condition for the first time,” Severance says in the article. OTD student Suzanne Rappaport, MS, OTR/L is using her skills as a professional circus performer to help cancer survivors. This past summer, she ran a workshop called “Circus for Survivors” through the New England Center for Circus Arts in Brattleboro, Vermont. The workshop incorporated circus activities, such as juggling, trapeze, and tight-rope walking, to help cancer patients regain mobility, balance, and muscle strength. The program was featured on Vermont’s NPR station. http://digital.vpr.net/post/circusarts-workshop-helps-cancer-survivors-thrive

Presentations

Presentations at the Massachusetts Association of Occupational Therapy (MAOT), November, 2013.

Barnes, M.A. Group leader training and assessment: Interdisciplinary best practices.

Brown, T. and Bedell, G. Promoting social participation: Children with acquired brain injuries (Scientific poster).

LeFavre, M., Wakeham, K., Courtemanche, S., Kamath, P., Iassogna, J., and Bedell, G. Preliminary analysis of the social participation observation tool (SPOT) for first and second graders (Scientific poster).

Schwartzberg, S., Casey, E., Daniels, A., Erwin, R., and Westnedge, C. Group therapists’ perceptions of working with elders.
Shaw, K., Davis, K., Foster, H., Suarez, K., Wong, V., Iassogna, J. and Bedell, G. Preliminary analysis of the social participation observation tool (SPOT) for kindergartners (Scientific poster).

Trudeau, S., Bansil, S., and Donahue, C. Reading to veterans with dementia: Service-learning opportunities.

Presentations at the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), April, 2013

Bedell, G., McDougall, J., and Wright, V. Youth report version of the Child and Adolescent Scale of Participation (CASP): Psychometric properties and comparisons with the parent report version (Scientific poster).


Khetani, M., Teplicky, R., Bedell, G., and Coster, W. Foster knowledge about participation in occupations for children and youth: Processes and outcomes of a knowledge translation project (Research panel presentation).

Frater, T., Iassogna, J., and Bedell, G. The effects of disability, age, and gender on participation of children and youth. (Scientific poster).


Interdisciplinary and International Presentations


Publications


