

# Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Diane Norell, MSW, OTR/L

Caelin Hansen, MOTS; Jessie Zimmer, MOTS

## Introduction

This life history is one of 31 life history interviews which are part of a larger project, *Life Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential In Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) In North Dakota and Wyoming*. The purpose of the project is to gather information about the history and evolution of occupational therapy (OT) practice in North Dakota and Wyoming through life history of individuals who have been influential in developing OT in these two states.

It is anticipated that the life history process will be a powerful way to gather this information. This study is intended to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of the history and how occupational therapy practice has evolved from its inception to current practice in North Dakota and Wyoming.

## Description of Participant

Diane Norell, a registered and licensed occupational therapist, is an academic fieldwork coordinator half time with a focus on Level II fieldwork at Eastern Washington University (EWU).

- Diane has a master's in social work and was employed in the role of a Faculty Field Instructor and adjunct faculty for the School of Social Work at EWU for 16 years.
- She previously worked as a Clinical Research Associate with the Washington Institute for Mental Health Research and Training, WSU-Spokane for 10 years.

Diane received a Bachelor of Science from the University of North Dakota in Occupational Therapy in 1974 and a Masters in Social Work from EWU in 1982.

- She has been a certified psychiatric rehabilitation practitioner with the United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association for 15 years.
- Ms. Norell has worked in the field of mental health and chemical dependency as both a psychiatric social worker and occupational therapist for 40 years with 33 of those years in Washington State.
- Her special interest in the area of family psycho education has afforded opportunities in research, clinical supervision, consultation, and training regionally and nationally.
- She has been the senior clinical supervisor in four research studies funded by the National Institute of Mental Health; the National Institutes of Disability Rehabilitation Research and the United States Department of Defense.
- She has co-authored seven peer-reviewed articles and one book chapter related to family psycho education with families and their members experiencing a chronic condition including mental illness, spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury or post traumatic stress disorder.

## Timeline Literature Review

- 1975 - Vietnam war ended. Diane mentioned how the first patients she saw in practice were Vietnam war veterans that were struggling with alcohol addictions (Carter, 1982).
- 1990 - Year of the Brain. Diane saw a shift in the way people viewed mental health disorders (Connaughton, McKhann, & Walker, 1995).
- 2000s - Growth of clinical doctorate programs (Christiansen & Haertl, 2014). Diane is a professor, so she is seeing the changes first-hand.
- 2010 - Only 3% of practicing occupational therapists are practicing in mental health (Christiansen & Haertl, 2014).

## Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted using a life history approach. The participant was assigned from a list developed by the course instructors through purposive sampling. There were no specific gatekeeper issues.

- Initial contact was made by the course instructors, providing the participant with informed consent.
- The semi-structured interview was guided by an interview schedule prepared by the course instructors.
- The questions on the interview schedule were designed to be used within a larger project.
- The researchers were allowed to modify or add interview questions as needed for each specific interview.
- A one hour and 25 minute interview was audio recorded, transcribed and coded with 13 codes.
- The interview took place in Grand Forks, ND at an interviewers apartment. The environment was quiet and had no distractions.



## Data Analysis

The interview was audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and coded into 13 codes. The researchers coded the data to determine common themes. From the codes, four categories emerged, and themes were created based on these categories.

- One final assertion was made regarding the data taking codes, categories, and themes into account.
- When finalizing the information into codes and themes, the researchers used the Kawa Model as guidance. The researchers looked for major turning points in the participant's career, as well as different aspects of her life, including obstacles and major events that arose (Teah & Iwama, 2017).
- The researchers used multiple data collection sources.
- Through the data analysis process, the researchers established trustworthiness by reflecting on their experiences as researchers and documenting biases throughout the study in order to increase the reliability and validity.

## Findings & Discussion

These are the findings developed based on the data analysis. Four categories emerged, and are supported with quotes from the interview. A final assertion was developed based upon the information shared from the participant.

### Professional Development

"I cannot speak about OT unless I speak about mental health". The value Diane places on mental health has defined her practice. She believes that "even though it's about 3% of OTs in the country who are now working in mental health...the value of using occupations to help people with mental health issues, with mental health conditions, recover is very, very powerful". Although the profession can be challenging, Diane stated "find a good mentor. Have somebody that you find a lot of support from because it will enable you to continue to practice for 45 years instead of burnout...having people around you, having people that care about you and care what happens and having people who you can talk to is going to be so important".

### Personal Life

Diane places a heavy value on family. She stated "but I would say, as Michelle Obama says, my most important role in my life has really been to be a mother". Her value for family has guided her in her research and professional practice.

### Healthcare

Diane has witnessed many changes throughout the profession, one being the advancements in legislation, licensure, and OT certification. She states "community has changed and you know, there's so many more OTs in this community now and that also increases the community's understanding of what OT can bring to healthcare".

### Academia

Diane stated that "one of the highlights of her career was partnering with Dr. Bill McFarland and Donna Downing to research family psychoeducation, which resulted in the publishing of three or four articles related to that". Along with completing her own research, she wanted to give back and teach others. She stated "another strength I would say of my career overall has been to reengage and kind of come-back full cycle to come back to occupational therapy that started in, and then come back and teach".

### Final Assertion

Despite the constant changes and challenges of the field, Diane has become a successful occupational therapy practitioner, researcher, and professor by staying true to her values of mental health, research, and family.

## References

- Carter, J. H. (1982). Alcoholism in black Vietnam veterans: Symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Journal of the National Medical Association, 74*(7), 655-660.
- Christiansen, C.H., & Haertl, K. (2014). A Contextual History of Occupational Therapy. In B.A. Boyt Schell, & G. Gillen, & M. E. Scaffa. (Eds.), *Willard & Spackman's Occupational Therapy* (pp. 9- 34). Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Connaughton, P. N., McKhann, G., & Walker, M. D. (1995). Decade of the brain: A midpoint status report. *Patient Care, 29*, 94+.
- Reed, K. L. & Peters, C. O. (2008, October). Values and beliefs: Part IV: A time of professional identity: 1970-1985—Would the real therapist please stand up?. *OT Practice, 15*-18.
- Teah, J. Y. & Iwama, M. K. (2015). *The Kawa model made easy: A guide to applying the Kawa model in occupational therapy practice* (2nd ed.). Retrieved from [www.kawamodel.com](http://www.kawamodel.com)