

"Occupational therapy is an allied health profession that really puts people at the centre of our work."

Rachel's dedication to holistic ^[1] care led her to a career where she can make a real difference to peoples' lives.

Rachel Rule

Lead occupational therapist

Employer or university

Livewell Southwest

Rachel's love for caring for others led her to a degree where she can make a real difference to peoples' lives.



What made you decide to become an occupational therapist?

I was working as a support worker with neurodiverse young adults and started to think about my career prospects. I had always been drawn to the more holistic ^[1] elements of care and was lucky to receive high quality training in person centred care planning in my support role. I had worked with a variety of professionals including Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Mental Health and Learning Disability Nurses and Social Workers but whilst I highly respected them, none of these roles really felt right for me. That was when I landed upon a Plymouth University application for Occupational Therapy.

Describe occupational therapy?

Occupational therapy is an allied health profession that really puts people at the centre of our work. We work with people across their whole life, with a focus on helping people live the lives that they want to live.

We cover the whole breadth of psychological, physical and spiritual aspects of a person. Our aim is to really get to know people, their values, roles and identities, to understand what motivates them and learn what is most meaningful in their lives.

We have a central belief that 'occupation' (the activities that we do in our day to day lives) impact our mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. We can also explore things that we do that can negatively impact our wellbeing but still hold meaning for a person.

Occupational therapists often become involved in a person's care when they are struggling to do the things that they want, need or are expected to do. We would then complete a full assessment with that person and work with them come up with adaptations and try to encourage as much independence as the person wishes for.

What do you do on a day-to-day basis?

Expand / collapse

I work in the community with people who have mental health difficulties.

A typical day includes meeting with our team for a handover, to plan the day and discuss any concerns. I will then usually go out to see people. This may be at home, but I specialise in working with people who have difficulties with problematic substance use and/or are homeless, so part of my time can be spent trying to locate people or meeting them at the homeless or substance use drop ins.

Assessments are tailored to the person and sometimes a formal assessment may not be suitable, and so I get to know people over time at their pace. I might ask questions about their daily lives, how their difficulties are impacting them and work together to set achievable goals that we can review together.

These goals could range from being able to go into a shop, learning coping strategies to manage substance use, assessing for equipment to enable them to have a bath or going sailing. It's a very varied role. The team also runs gardening and art groups, we attend meetings and supervise assistants and students.

What were your placements like?

Expand / collapse

As a student at Plymouth University we were allocated one placement per year; two are typically in physical health settings and one in a psychosocial setting.

My first placement was in Intensive Care [2] where we focused on physical rehabilitation following critical physical illness. We considered how the illness may have impacted the persons activities of daily living and assessed and supported them in mobilising, grading plans to completing their usual daily tasks and completed home visits to consider if they needed any equipment or adaptations to the physical environment in their home.

In my second placement I was based in a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Hospital. This role included completing assessments, running groups such as sensory circuits, breakfast club and crafts, supporting the young people to go out into the local area and develop their skills (for example bus journeys, going to shops, completing hobbies) and linking in with the on-site school.

My final placement was in Adult Social Care and focused on completing home visits, applying for funding to adapt people's homes and providing equipment for people. We also provided reports to advise the most appropriate setting for people to live and moving and handling recommendations (for example, if they needed to go to a care home).

What's the best part?

Expand / collapse

I love to see people achieving their goals that they might have been working towards for a long time. Human beings are very creative and adaptable, and it always interests me to understand how people naturally modify the things that they need to do to make it work for them.

Overall, I love to be able to problem solve with people and advocate with them for a more inclusive world. Seeing the improvements in people's quality of life and really getting to know people and what works for them makes for a really fulfilling career.

What is next?

Expand / collapse

I'm about to start a year long secondment working across Probation, Substance Use and Homelessness pathways using my skills in a slightly different way.

The pilot aims to provide skills and training for frontline practitioners to understand more about trauma informed, psychological and occupational ways of thinking about people.

There is also a more strategic element which focuses on improving equal access to mental health services for people who might be homeless, using substances, having contact with the criminal justice system or experiencing domestic violence.

Top tips for others?

Expand / collapse

Be yourself. I started studying for my degree in my late 20s and had a variety of life experiences behind me at this point. I had not achieved the GCSEs that I needed when I was at school and had to complete an Access to Nursing course and retake some GCSEs to get into university.

I was worried that this might impact my ability to study and doubted myself at times but ended up being the highest graded student for my entire cohort! Your experiences in life, no matter how old you are, or which walk of life you come from, can be really powerful in allowing you to have a deeper level of empathy and build connections with people to really understand what matters to them,

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/roles-allied-health-professions/occupational-therapist/real-life-story-rachel-rule>

Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Holistic> [2]
https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Intensive_care