

# **"Occupational therapy is about finding what is meaningful to a person and putting that at the centre of your practice."**

Read about Rachel's studies in occupational therapy to find out what her course is really like.

## **Rachel Rule**

### **Student occupational therapist**

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?**

All of the jobs I've previously had involved caring for others so I knew that I wanted a career that gave me the opportunity to engage with people in my community and beyond.

I started out as a dog handler and assessor for the RSPCA, working with animals and their owners in rescue centres. I often met people who had a range of conditions, which meant that they couldn't care for their pets adequately at that time – their quality of life was suffering, as well as their animals. From this experience, I knew that I wanted a role where I could help and support people.

This led to working as a healthcare support worker in residential care for vulnerable young adults with

autism, learning disabilities or mental health conditions. I really developed my passion for providing care for people which aided both their mental and physical health and recognised the importance of choice, valued social roles and activities. I knew that I wanted to continue to provide this kind of holistic [1] care, so a career in occupational therapy really stood out to me.

## Describe occupational therapy?

As an occupational therapist, you really have to think outside of the box to provide the best care for people. You have to become an all-round healthcare professional as you provide holistic [1] care and rehabilitation to a variety of patients with a range of needs.

It combines the biological, social and psychological aspects of medicine which makes for a career that is very diverse and challenging.

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

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As an occupational therapy student, you do a wide range of placements in various different settings. This is where you get to hone your skills, develop as a professional and learn on the job. Along with the placements, there are interactive and engaging lectures and workshops at university. These lectures include problem-based learning which proves super helpful on placements when you need to apply your knowledge in a practical setting.

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**What have your  
placements  
been like?**

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My first year and second year placements have been very different.

My first placement was in intensive care [2] where I had the opportunity to help patients at the most

vulnerable time in their lives. It was an incredible experience to be a part of a team that enables patients to regain their quality of life – from entering the intensive care [2] unit through to planning their discharge and follow-up support.

On this placement, I worked with doctors, surgeons, nurses, physiotherapists and health care assistants. I even had the opportunity to observe surgery so I could gain a deeper understanding of our anatomy and how this would affect our practice.

My second year placement was with a Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) inpatient unit where I worked with adolescents. This was a completely different experience and our work focused on supporting young people to develop coping strategies and skills for life outside our unit - this included things like cooking and social activities.

My educator was incredibly supportive and guided me in setting up a creative arts and a sensory circuits group. I was able to run this independently and I learned a lot about risk assessment, working creatively and delivering group work – which is a big part of an occupational therapy practice.

- **What's the best part?**

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I love that I get to work with a lot of different people and collaborate to find the best solution for a patient. Occupational therapy is definitely challenging, but I see this as a massive positive! You have to use creative problem solving across all of the work and it makes it really worthwhile.

There's also such a wide variety of career paths you can take – you can work with children or adults, but you always incorporate every aspect of their mental and physical health, as well as their personality.

Occupational therapy is about finding what is meaningful to a person and putting that at the centre of your practice. At the end of the day, you're improving someone's quality of life which is the most rewarding thing you can do.

- **What is next?**

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At the moment, I'm looking forward to my next placement. I'm also working on a group dissertation

researching the experiences of shared activities between support workers and people with learning disabilities who live in residential homes. We hope to learn more about how we can improve the lives of these individuals and highlight the importance of support staff.

I'm also really passionate about helping people from more isolated areas and that will definitely be something that I want to incorporate into my career moving forward.

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**Top tips for  
others?**

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As a student occupational therapist, there are so many opportunities to develop your CV and gain experience. You can make your role whatever you want it to be because there are so many options.

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**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](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Intensive_care)