

# O.T. Link



**OT for individuals  
experiencing homelessness**



## City leader

St. Louis City Mayor Tishaura O. Jones (left) appointed alumnus Adam Cisroe Pearson, OTD, OTR/L (center), as the director of the Department of Human Services for the City of St. Louis on April 20. Pearson began his new role on May 30.

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**Associate Dean and Director of Occupational Therapy, Elias Michael**  
**Professor of Occupational Therapy and Professor of Neurology**  
 Lisa Tabor Connor, PhD, MSOT, OTR/L

**Managing Editor and Designer**  
 Michele Berhorst

**Contributors**  
 Michele Berhorst  
 Frank and Lettie Cunetto  
 Megen Devine, MA  
 Jessica Kersey, PhD, OTR/L  
 Monical Perlmutter, OTD, OTR/L, SCLV, FAOTA  
 Ryan Risley, MPM

Stephanie Stemmler  
 Quinn Tyminski, OTD, OTR/L, BCMH

**Photography**  
 Peggy Barco, OTD, OTR/L, SCDCM, CDRS, FAOTA  
 Michele Berhorst  
 Stephen Mack  
 Washington University Student  
 Occupational Therapy Association

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 **Washington University in St. Louis**  
 SCHOOL OF MEDICINE  
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# From the Director



**O**n Aug. 23, we proudly welcomed the MSOT '25 and OTD '26 classes to the Program in Occupational Therapy. The students hail from 20 states and five countries, 24% are from underrepresented backgrounds, and five students are from our 3-2 partner schools. Their first two weeks were full of activities, including our annual Convocation and Pinning Ceremony to recognize the start of their occupational therapy (OT) careers and the Welcome Picnic held at Forest Park's historic World's Fair Pavilion. These traditions celebrate our students and the future of our profession that they will help shape.

Our cover story spotlights faculty member Quinn Tyminski, OTD, OTR/L, BHMC, and her work with people who are experiencing homelessness at St. Patrick Center, a St. Louis nonprofit (page 4). She and the students in her Community Independence Occupational Therapy lab see St. Patrick Center clients who are in the day treatment program for their weekly OT sessions. The students design and lead a series of group-based treatment sessions and activities based on client feedback regarding their learning goals for that semester. Quinn is an emerging leader in the area of mental health OT and an advocate for the role OT has in supporting the homeless and unhoused population.

Researcher Jessica Kersey, PhD, OTR/L (page 8), the director of the new Social Health and Participation Laboratory, wants to give a stronger voice to individuals with traumatic brain injury (TBI). Many people with brain injury often have shrinking social networks and withdraw from social activities. Jessica's research focuses on identifying and developing evidence-based interventions focused on supporting social and community activities. She has brought to St. Louis her ENGAGE-TBI, a community-based intervention model designed to optimize social learning in a group setting to support people with TBI when they are out in the community.

We are honored to have had Monica Perlmutter, OTD, OTR/L, SCLV, FAOTA (page 10), as part of our faculty for the past 32 years. She has helped countless people over the years with age-related vision loss regain independence and participate in meaningful activities again. One of her recent clients, Lettie Cunetto, shares her experiences working with Monica following a series of strokes that impaired her vision. Monica helped Lettie and her husband, Frank, modify their home and daily activities so they could continue their active lifestyle. I know you will be inspired by their story and by Monica's lifelong commitment to her patients, the community and her students in the area of low vision.

Last fall, we opened our Community Experiential Learning Center (CELC), where we actively engage in the health and well-being of community residents in St. Louis. Classes and innovative learning take place in the CELC every day, but in October, it hosted a special art exhibit (page 14) featuring the art of community elders, most of whom are African American. Faculty, staff and students engaged with the artists through the exhibit, a panel presentation and a dance performance.

We relish the opportunity to recognize and celebrate the achievements of our alumni through our Outstanding Alumni Award. Please take part in the process by nominating an accomplished graduate of our Program (page 12) before Jan. 31, 2024. We cannot succeed in our mission without the support and participation of our alumni. I am grateful for all you do to ensure that the OT profession will continue to impact the lives of people in meaningful ways for decades to come.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa J. Connor".

**Lisa Tabor Connor, PhD, MSOT, OTR/L**

*Associate Dean and Director of Occupational Therapy*

*Elias Michael Professor of Occupational Therapy and Professor of Neurology*

[lconnor@wustl.edu](mailto:lconnor@wustl.edu)

## Program in Occupational Therapy receives \$1.1 million grant

The Program in Occupational Therapy was awarded a \$1.1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Special Education – Personnel Development to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities Program. The program provides grants to institutions of higher education and private nonprofit organizations to prepare personnel in early intervention, special education and related services to be successful and skilled in serving children with disabilities.

“The grant will fund the School-Based Scholars Program, designed to improve the recruitment and retention of diverse occupational therapy students while increasing competencies to serve children with high-intensity needs in school-based settings,” says Jessie Bricker, OTD, OTR/L,

principal investigator and project director. “The long-term goal is to build workforce capacity in school-based and mental health practice.”

The program will provide tuition remission to up to five scholars per year, who will take specific courses supporting career development and academic performance while they work with community partner schools serving marginalized K-12 students. Scholars who receive funding agree to work in special education or related services for two years for each year of support they receive. Data will be collected on scholars to measure program success and report outcomes until their service obligations are fulfilled or they are referred for repayment of funding received.



The Program team (left to right): Steve Taff, PhD, OTR/L; Jenny DeBourge, MS, OTR/L; Bricker; and Lenin Grajo, PhD, OTR/L.

## Appointments

**Stephen Lau, PhD,** was appointed assistant professor in occupational therapy and neurology on April 1. His research interests include neurological rehabilitation, sleep medicine and mobile health technology. His mission is to develop accessible, precise and effective rehabilitation in self-management, health promotion and participation enhancement among adults with stroke-related disabilities.



Stephen Lau

**Sarah Cheatham Oberle, OTD, OTR/L,** was appointed instructor in occupational therapy and pediatrics on June 1. Her research interests include occupational performance factors affecting participation of children who are d/Deaf and hard of hearing, cultural awareness and exploration of d/Deaf cultural richness, and underlying neurocognitive skills related to occupational performance and participation struggles for children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.



Sarah Cheatham Oberle

## Awards

**Christine Berg, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA; Lauren Milton, OTD, OTR/L; and Stacy West-Bruce, OTD, MSW, OTR/L,** were honored on May 8 as 2023 Master Interprofessional Educators by the Center for Interprofessional Practice and Education at Washington University's Medical Campus. The center enhances the ability of faculty and learners to function as interprofessional educators, advances interprofessional curricula and conducts research in interprofessional education.

**Peggy Barco, OTD, OTR/L, SCDCM, CDRS, FAOTA,** received the National Association of Driver Rehabilitation Specialists' 2023 Scholar Award for outstanding scholarly achievement in driver evaluation, education, research and engineering on Oct. 2.



Peggy Barco

**Quinn Tyminski, OTD, OTR/L, BCMH,** received the Rising Star Award at the Academy of Educators Education Day on Oct. 10. The award recognizes the outstanding contributions to health and basic science education by faculty members who are within six years of completing their final training program.



Quinn Tyminski and Jessie Bricker

**Jessie Bricker, OTD, OTR/L, and Quinn Tyminski, OTD, OTR/L, BHMC,** were inducted into Washington University's Academy of Educators during Education Day on Oct. 10. The achievement acknowledges their significant contributions to education and their place as central contributors to the education mission of the School of Medicine.

**Lenin Grajo, PhD, OTR/L,** received the University of the Philippines Manila Alumni Association's 2023 Distinguished Alumni Award on Oct. 21. The award recognizes his achievements as an international leader, educator, researcher and pediatric occupational therapist.

## Want more Program news?

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Tyminski (left) engages with one of the clinic's regular clients from St. Patrick Center's Women's Night Program.

# OT for individuals experiencing homelessness

By Michele Berhorst

**A**t St. Patrick Center (SPC), a St. Louis nonprofit organization that assists people experiencing homelessness, the occupational therapy (OT) clinic is held on Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m. The clinic is led by Quinn Tyminski, OTD, OTR/L, BCMH, and the students in her Community Independence Occupational Therapy lab. The students head upstairs to ask SPC clients who are in the day treatment program: “Are you coming to OT?”

Ten clients follow the students downstairs into the OT room, which was previously a child-care center with a bathroom, a small kitchen and a private meeting room. Also present is Kailin Lust, OTD '23, SPC's future staff occupational therapist and Program alumna, to welcome clients to the clinic.

Everyone is dressed casually in jeans and collarless shirts, so there is no delineation between the clients and the students. It's intentional to remove any health-care hierarchy or power dynamics. The clients take their seats as the session begins. Today's focus is health promotion with an emphasis on prevention and management of seasonal illnesses and is led by second-year doctoral students Anna Brondyke and Mia Pearce. The students design and implement a series of group-based treatment sessions and activities based on client feedback regarding what they want to learn about that semester.

The students and clients sit together in small groups and discuss the differences between the flu, COVID, the common cold and allergies. The conversations are guided by a “comfort agreement,” where everyone agrees to be respectful, present and to actively listen to one another without judgment. Toward the session's end, the group talks about the different illnesses and ways to take care of themselves and others when they are sick. Clients give input on what they would like to see on a follow-up resource flier on the day's topic and are invited to the next week's session as they exit the room.

Tyminski and Lust discuss with the students how the session went, client engagement, and possible follow-up

their lived experiences are, and we will never know unless we become homeless.”

### Mental health OT

Before joining the faculty of the Program in Occupational Therapy in 2017, Tyminski worked for five years at Peter & Paul Community Services (PPCS) Labre Center, a transitional housing program for men experiencing severe and persistent mental illness and homelessness. It had been the site of her first week-long fieldwork I (FW1) experience as a master's student in the Program. Jeanenne Dallas, MA, OTR/L, FAOTA, FW coordinator and mental health practitioner, became a mentor. “Jeanenne ran a lab with Catina O'Leary, PhD, focused on community-

**“We are not the experts here; the clients are. We recognize that we know about one thing and that's OT. The clients know everything about being unhoused.” -Quinn Tyminski, OTD, OTR/L, BCMH**

topics. They also discuss the clients themselves – many they have seen week after week – what concerns the clients have and how the students can support them in future OT sessions.

“We are not the experts here; the clients are. We recognize that we know about one thing and that's OT. The clients know everything about being unhoused,” Tyminski explains. “We do not know what

based mental health services. We would visit organizations that were serving various populations in the community to learn about the role of OT and mental health. I also completed a three-month FW2 rotation at an inpatient psychiatric hospital called Sheppard Pratt in Baltimore. I saw acutely ill clients and high-level cases. It helped me understand the prior trauma and the experience of



Emily Andersen, MSOT/S '24 (middle), works with two of the clinic's clients during a group session.

my clients when they are most acutely ill,” Tyminski says.

Sarah Walsh, MOT, OTR/L, the occupational therapist at PPCS, hired Tyminski soon after graduation. Tyminski recalls: “I had been volunteering there throughout OT school. While mental health OT positions can be entry-level, this was not, because I was the only occupational therapist in the entire agency. There was no one to supervise me, so Sarah became my mentor. We met weekly for my entire first year and then monthly. I had so much to learn about my clients and myself.”

Early on, Tyminski acknowledged her privileges and that she did not have the same identities as her clients. She would have to adjust her approach if she wanted to earn their respect. “I had to change my communication style and learn to listen more. These were clients who needed encouragement to do things they didn’t want to do. I used motivational interviewing and other counseling approaches to encourage behavioral change,” she says.

There are specific challenges to working with the unhoused population for the therapist. “It’s not like acute or inpatient care where you know your clients for a short period of time. I have clients I have known for almost a decade. People can have histories of substance abuse, incarceration and chronic disease in addition to mental health conditions,” Tyminski explains. “It can be emotionally taxing when working with a client to stay clean, and then they relapse. There are calls in the middle of the night that a client didn’t come home or that law enforcement is involved. Many of our clients have short life expectancies due to lifestyle or comorbidities. I have been to numerous funerals as well.”

However, having such long-term relationships with clients can also be incredibly rewarding. “I get to see people change their lives, truly change their lives. Behavioral change is so slow, but over the course of several years, I see someone who couldn’t keep a job due to substance abuse live independently, modulating their emotions and caring about others,” Tyminski says.

After three years, Tyminski was promoted to PPCS’ clinic director. She was tasked with implementing a new billing system

and training others on documentation. She hired and supervised two OT assistants and helped increase the organization’s capacity to take FW students. Working in community-based mental health OT in St. Louis is a niche area, and Tyminski was a frequent guest lecturer at several OT programs. She found she enjoyed teaching and mentoring. Walsh encouraged her to pursue a post-professional doctorate from Saint Louis University so she could move into academia.

“I could have stayed in mental health practice forever because I really do love it. However, I felt I would become a complacent practitioner if I stayed full-time in the role. I felt the doctoral degree was a step toward being able to impact the practice and the OT profession in a different way,” Tyminski explains.

The OT clinic was developed as part of her post-professional doctoral capstone project at Biddle Housing Opportunities Shelter, an emergency shelter for single men experiencing homelessness. It was operated through a contract between SPC, PPCS and the City of St. Louis. After a couple of years, agencies decided not to renew their contracts and continued to offer services at their facilities. SPC had a proposition for Tyminski that aligned with her new role as Program faculty.

“They told me that OT had been the most beneficial service they had ever provided for their clients and asked if I would bring the clinic to their main building,” she shares. “I told them I needed a clinic space. Once I saw the vacant child-care center, I knew it was the right place for their clients and my students.”



Left to right: Kailin Lust, OTD '23, with Tyminski.

### Mentoring students

Both master’s and doctoral students have the opportunity to work with Tyminski in the OT clinic starting in the summer semester and running a full year. She wants to take students interested in mental health who aren’t going to get such an opportunity elsewhere. There is a recruitment process in place, but it is the current students who conduct the interviews and help select the next cohort. They know what to look for based on their client and clinic experiences at SPC.

“Being a specialized mental health practitioner actively working in community organizations with individuals who have serious mental illness takes a specific skill set,” Tyminski says. “You have to constantly manage your emotions, expressions, words and body language. Anything that you’re doing could be sending a message to that client. However, the important critical skill students develop is flexibility. Unexpected things happen in the clinic, and the students

have to run with it. We often toss out the prepared session to focus on an immediate client need or concern.”

One of Tyminski’s long-term clients still comes to the clinic even though she is now in stable housing. “She was in the Women’s Night Program when she started coming to OT. She had a lot of emotional dysregulation and would become angry with other clients and leave the room. We worked on her coping and communication skills. Slowly, she started to change behaviors,” Tyminski recalls. “We now call her our peer support OT helper. Recently, a client with several mental health issues was having a crisis. To help him calm down, she gave him the fidget toy she used and encouraged him to come to OT. Later she told us she was really annoyed with him at first but then realized she had been in that situation and wanted to help.”

### Emerging leader

Tyminski is an emerging leader in the area of mental health OT. She is a guest speaker, lecturer and presenter on the

national level at conferences and events. “I found a niche practice area that I am passionate about, so that gives me a conversation space. There is not a lot out there about the role OT has in the homeless and the unhoused population. However, it only does me so much good to tell other occupational therapists about it through publications and presentations,” she says.

So she has taken an innovative approach to reach beyond the profession. Tyminski is a frequent guest on podcasts and presented a TEDx Talk in 2021 on OT for homeless individuals. “These opportunities are a chance to reach the people who are funding these needed services. If the general public is asking ‘If OT is an evidence-based way to address the unhoused crisis, then why are my federal dollars not funding OT services?’ The message needs to be broader, so organizations can receive funding to have an occupational therapist on staff,” Tyminski shares.

To meet that goal and further her career, Tyminski is pursuing a PhD degree

in education. “In medicine, we focus heavily on quantitative research, but I find that, particularly in homelessness, it requires qualitative research to really see people’s perspectives. It’s important to me that I am doing research rigorously enough because the evidence can help organizations like SPC secure funding to hire occupational therapists. I also want to be in an administrative leadership position one day, and the PhD degree opens up more opportunities to create impactful mental health OT outcomes.”

The OT Clinic team (left to right): Lust; Laurel Stugart, MSOT/S ’24; Tyminski; Samuel Kressman, OTD/S ’25; Anna Brondyke, OTD/S ’25; Mia Pearce, OTD/S ’25; Kendall Johnson, MSOT/S ’24; Emily Andersen, MSOT/S ’24; and Hailey Furio, MSOT/S ’23.



# A social health focus for OT interventions

by Stephanie Stemmler

PHOTOS BY MICHELE BERHORST

Kersey works with a client with a brain injury to develop strategies that will help him succeed with a key social role: parenting.



## Jessica Kersey, PhD, OTR/L, clearly remembers a time while she was working in a community-based practice when an incident occurred that impacted the course of her career.

“I was with a client who was in rehabilitation after a traumatic brain injury (TBI), and we went to a coffee shop together,” Kersey recalls. “She placed her own order, but when the worker asked a follow-up question, the worker directed that question to me and not my client. I realized my client didn’t have the ability to really advocate for herself. She wasn’t ‘seen.’”

Kersey, the director of the new Social Health and Participation Laboratory within the Program in Occupational Therapy at Washington University in St. Louis School of Medicine, wants to give a stronger voice to individuals with TBI by identifying and developing evidence-based interventions focused on supporting social and community activities. She’s focused on a key issue — many people with brain injury often have shrinking social networks and withdraw from their social activities, and Kersey wants to change that.

“In the inpatient setting, we are concerned about cognition and movement; in other words, rehabilitation of brain injury symptoms,” she says. “But there is a wide-open gap between motor and cognitive rehabilitation and the skills that are needed to manage social and environmental challenges that come into play when returning to life in the community, such as when a barista doesn’t acknowledge someone’s competence and autonomy. Occupational therapists could maximize those other critical skills during outpatient rehabilitation as a way to make sure people have all the tools they need to do all of their meaningful activities as they wish, but we don’t always do a good job of leveraging that.”

Fully participating in the community, then, means more than just regaining the ability to get out into the community. To address that, Kersey started an innovative research study and program in Pittsburgh while she was completing her doctoral degree. Called ENGAGE-TBI, the program was a community-based intervention model designed to optimize social learning in a group setting so that individuals with TBI could identify social and environmental barriers and then collaborate with an occupational

therapist to problem-solve strategies and implement them during community outings. Kersey continued her research and a similar program when she moved to Chicago and now is bringing the model to St. Louis to further expand her studies. Already, she is finalizing a grant application to fund the project. She also is in the process of assessing people with TBI recently discharged from the hospital to hone in on the right time to intervene with social support strategies. “I want to know when in the full recovery process people with TBI begin to experience changes in their support and relationships,” she says. “Timing and validation of evidence-based interventions are my current goals.”

The critical need for proven social support measurement tools as well as social health and environmental interventions would result in strategies that could benefit a wide swath of individuals. Kersey notes that isolation has fueled loneliness and, in some cases, personality and cognition changes among a broad population during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. She has OTD students in her lab not only helping to assess clients with TBI, but also leading their own projects researching the impacts

of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as spirituality on long-term social support and participation.

“Recovery is not all about just cognition and motor skills rehabilitation,” says Kersey. “In tandem with my research on TBI community-based group participation, I also am looking at how we can build stronger social support through occupational therapy services that involve a TBI client with a family or friend learning the interventions together. That could build a sustainable two-way relationship versus just caregiver to patient. It also should help identify effective communication skills to self-advocate and participate in mutually enjoyable activities.”

She adds, “My hope is that the research will validate the critical significance of social health and why it must be addressed as part of the depth and breadth of occupational therapy services.”



Kersey mentors PhD, OTD and undergraduate students during her weekly lab meeting.

# Living with low vision

by Michele Berhorst

**D**espite having several strokes and resulting challenges, Lettie Cunetto remains positive about life and her future with her husband, Frank. Following the first two strokes, Lettie was able to resume most of her daily activities because only her left eye was impaired. The third stroke, however, resulted in vision loss in her right eye and also impacted her ability to interpret what she was seeing and her memory. “It really knocked me for a loop. It’s been challenging every day, but not as challenging as learning new ways to do the things I used to, like reading, watching television, using my iPad, cooking and self-care,” Lettie shares. “I wake up every morning, and my vision is different. Sometimes it’s good and other times, not so good.”

Before Lettie was discharged from the hospital, her husband, Frank, began modifying their home to make it safer for her return. He removed the throw rugs, gated off doors and stairs, and even modified their walk-in closet. “Some of my ideas like a bed alarm or putting a bar across the upstairs window to prevent falls didn’t fly,” Frank admits. “She wants to do everything she can. An added challenge is short-term memory loss from the stroke. I can show her how to do something, but she doesn’t always remember.”

The Cunettos made progress on several of Lettie’s goals, but she wanted to do more. Her doctor, Leanne Stunkel, MD, who specializes in neuro-ophthalmology, referred the couple to Monica Perlmutter, OTD, OTR/L, SCLV, FAOTA, the lead occupational therapist for the aging and low vision services in Washington University Occupational Therapy’s (WUOT’s) Community Practice.

## Area of practice

Perlmutter, an associate professor of occupational therapy and ophthalmology and visual sciences, has specialized in low vision rehabilitation for nearly half of her 43-year career. Perlmutter earned her bachelor’s degree in occupational therapy from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1981. She then worked in acute neurology, inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation, general medicine, and orthopedics at the Irene Walter Johnson (IWJ) Institute of Rehabilitation at Washington University for 13 years; during this time, she also served as coordinator of clinical education and staff development for IWJ. She earned her master’s degree in higher education from Washington University in 1989 and joined the Program’s faculty as an instructor in occupational therapy in 1992.

Transitioning to low vision rehabilitation required a bit of a leap into the unknown. “I was at a point in my career where I was ready for a new challenge. I had a five-year gap when I was primarily teaching and missed seeing patients. In the early 2000s, Community Practice was starting up at the Program. Community Practice was very innovative at this time due to the community-based focus and the diversity of the practice areas and specialty services that were offered,” Perlmutter recalls. “I told then director Carolyn Baum, PhD, OTR, FAOTA, that I was interested in getting involved in the Community Practice efforts. She encouraged me to start the Low Vision Practice when the Washington University Physicians optometrist Carrie Gaines, OD, reached out and expressed interest in partnering with an occupational therapist. I knew nothing about this area of practice but was intrigued.”

Perlmutter was given the time to market the new service and build a referral network. “I created a presentation for providers with a focus on retina, cornea and glaucoma specialists,” Perlmutter says. “I also formed relationships with community partners such as the St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SLSBVI). I knew I needed to work with a team of providers and the support of these resources and organizations to best serve my clients. Since this was a new area of practice, I also had to educate referral sources, clients and families about the low vision services occupational therapy provided.”

To further her education and expertise, Perlmutter earned her graduate certificate in low vision rehabilitation in 2009 from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, the preeminent low vision rehabilitation program for occupational therapists in the world. She also earned her clinical doctorate in occupational therapy from Washington University School of Medicine in 2012.

For the next 10 years following completion of her OTD, Perlmutter continued her roles as educator, clinician and researcher. She developed two key components of the entry-level curriculum with the case-based learning (CBL) team to improve core clinical competencies: the CBL course series and the standardized patient experiences course. She took on a research role as co-investigator on a National Institutes of Health grant with principal investigator Anjali Bhorade, MD, Peggy

Perlmutter (left) demonstrates the use of bump dots on the microwave button to Lettie Cunetto (right).



Barco, OTD, OTR/L, SCDCM, CDRS, FAOTA, and other team members to study driving errors and compensatory strategies in older adults with glaucoma from 2016-21.

Throughout the years, Perlmutter has shared her passion for working with adults and older adults with vision loss with the students she has mentored in her Low Vision Laboratory. Within the lab, she and her students developed a self-management (SM) program for adults with vision loss to support participation. “We partnered with SLSBVI and other agencies to deliver the SM program. The SLSBVI was generous with helping us recruit participants, allowed us to use their space free of charge, and provided other means of support,” Perlmutter says. “My lab students were very involved in program development and delivery and in collecting program evaluation data. In another project, students helped develop and trial SM toolkits for use in direct care with clients with chronic conditions.”

One of her community partners was the Pepose Vision Institute, whose ophthalmologists implanted an FDA-approved miniature telescope into the eye for a select group of individuals with macular degeneration. “The exciting thing about it was that the FDA protocol included the role of occupational therapy. Post-implant, an occupational therapist worked with patients for 8–10 weeks on how to use their telescope to spot view, read, and guide hand-directed activities, as well as for mobility. Patients often used the miniature telescope in combination with other magnification devices. It took a lot of effort on their part to learn and practice these skills,” Perlmutter shares. “I worked with Jennifer Lauer, OTD, who is with SLSBVI now, to build the rehab program. Unfortunately, the program is no longer being offered in our area currently.”

Today, Perlmutter’s referral base includes renowned Washington University physicians in neuro-ophthalmology, ophthalmology and neurology. “I see people with stroke, brain injury and tumors, vision changes due to Parkinson’s disease, posterior cortical atrophy, macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and other eye conditions.”

Perlmutter was nationally recognized for her work in the area of low vision when she was inducted into the American Occupational Therapy Association’s Roster of Fellows in 2016. Locally, she was honored for her commitment and community involvement with the SLSBVI Community Light Award in 2022.

## Meeting goals

During their first occupational therapy visit, the Cunettos made a list of activities Lettie wanted to work on in collaboration with Perlmutter. “I think the first thing I said was cooking, because the doctors said to stay away from appliances, sharp objects and hot surfaces. Frank was doing all the cooking, but I wanted to do simple, safe cooking myself,” Lettie recalls. “So Monica put bump dots on the microwave buttons so I could feel which one was which.”

“Her depth perception has decreased, so we worked on modifying self-care tasks or adding tactile cues. For example, Lettie was having issues putting the toothpaste on the toothbrush. We solved it by having her squirt toothpaste directly into her mouth,” Perlmutter shares. “Another modification included putting a rubber band around the conditioner bottle so she could distinguish it from the shampoo bottle.”

Perlmutter also made home visits to modify the environment to make it safer for Lettie to move about freely. “Our first priority was fall prevention, so I put blue tape on the first and last stair of the landing transition to increase visibility. I recommended Lettie take a ‘graceful pause’ before descending the stairs and also take her time as she shifted from one handrail to the next.”

Perlmutter referred the Cunettos to the services SLSBVI provides for the visually impaired. “The optometrist on site recommended glasses with FL-41 lenses, a specialty tinted lens designed for people with light sensitivity,” Frank says. “They help her with eye fatigue both indoors and outdoors.” The SLSBVI also provided technology assistance so Lettie could use her iPad again. “I did so many things on my iPad: work, shopping, email. I’m slowly trying to get better at using it because I miss it, and it’s so much fun,” Lettie shares. “I’ll keep working at it.”

The Cunettos worked with Perlmutter over the course of two months. However, they may reconnect with her in the future for more modifications when they move into a new home. “Working with Monica was wonderful. She’s very professional but also so delightful. She helped me regain my independence and confidence,” Lettie says.

## Passing the baton

Perlmutter is set to retire in June 2024 after 32 years in the Program in Occupational Therapy. She will be leaving the Low



Perlmutter (left) with Lettie and Frank Cunetto.

Vision Practice in the capable hands of her daughter, Anna Perlmutter, MSOT, OTR/L, an occupational therapist in WUOT’s Community Practice.

“Anna is a tremendous advocate for her clients. That comes through in every conversation I have with her. She is working on her low vision rehabilitation graduate certificate at the University of Alabama Birmingham. I have every confidence that she will be a tremendous resource for this client population and the program,” Perlmutter shares.

When asked if she has any advice to share with Anna, Perlmutter says, “I want her to say yes to opportunities that will help her grow the practice and continue to build community partnerships. She’s off to a wonderful start.”

For the profession at large, Perlmutter’s hope is for this area of practice to continue to grow. “We have an aging population, and future needs are going to be even greater than they are now. I would love to see general practitioners gain some of the base skills and knowledge to address non-specialized needs of individuals with vision loss and know when to refer to a specialist,” Perlmutter says. “And of course, I’d love to see more low vision specialists in the future as well as continued efforts to build evidence to support this important area of practice.”

## 2024 Outstanding Alumni Award nominations open

The Outstanding Alumni Award recognizes alumni of the Program in Occupational Therapy at Washington University School of Medicine for their individual achievements in or contributions to the field of occupational therapy in research; education; leadership; professional development; community participation; diversity, equity and inclusion; and/or by supporting the Program.

### Eligibility

- The nominee must be a graduate of the Program in Occupational Therapy at Washington University School of Medicine.
- Potential nominees who are associated with Washington University, its governing board, the State government, or State regulatory boards or agencies can be nominated only after they no longer hold their respective positions.
- Self-nominations will be considered.
- The award is to be presented only one time to an individual. Therefore, all previous recipients are ineligible for subsequent consideration.
- All nominees must be living at the time of nomination.
- Nominee must be able to attend OT Scholarship Day on April 26, 2024.

### Selection Criteria

Qualified nominees for the **Outstanding Alumni Award** should possess the following attributes:

- **Professional Achievement:** Nominees have attained prominence in their occupational therapy career through

research, education and/or clinical practice.

- **Community Participation:** Nominees have demonstrated a commitment and dedication to community participation in regard to accessibility, mobility, policy and/or advocacy.
- **Integrity and Character:** Nominees must have the highest standard of personal integrity and character.
- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:** Nominees have demonstrated a commitment and dedication to diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives locally, nationally and/or internationally.
- **Sustained Supporter:** Nominees must have supported the Program financially and/or through service.

### Nomination Materials

Materials to submit with nomination include:

1. A biographical sketch, resume or CV summarizing the nominee's achievements.

If your nominee does not have this available, please include

(i) a summary of positions and employment, leadership roles, accomplishments, previous awards and publications, and (ii) a short narrative about the person and their attributes that make them eligible for the award (see Selection Criteria).

2. Additional supportive documents (i.e., at least one letter of recommendation from a colleague, patient/client, student and/or community member).

### Nomination Process

Nominations will be accepted September 1, 2023 through January 31, 2024 and can be made online at [ot.wustl.edu/OTalumniaward](https://ot.wustl.edu/OTalumniaward).

If the nominee is selected by the committee, he or she must be in attendance at OT Scholarship Day on April 26, 2024, in St. Louis, Mo., to accept the award.

If you have any questions about the nomination or selection process, please contact Michele Berhorst at (314) 286-1606 or [berhorstm@wustl.edu](mailto:berhorstm@wustl.edu).

## 2023 PhD graduates

Our Rehabilitation and Participation Science (RAPS) PhD program aims to develop rehabilitation scientists whose research questions are chosen based explicitly on their potential to generate rehabilitation knowledge that will enhance health, improve quality of life, and reduce illness and disability. We are proud to introduce our newest PhD graduates: Yejin Lee, PhD, Ryan Walsh, PhD, OTR/L, and Rachel Heeb Desai, PhD.



**Dr. Yejin Lee** (center) defended her dissertation, "Self-Regulation Processes of Depressive Symptoms and Participation in Persons with Stroke using Heart Rate Variability as a Real-time Biomarker," on April 10. She was mentored by Lisa Tabor Connor, PhD, MSOT, OTR/L.



**Dr. Ryan Walsh** (center) defended his dissertation, "Developing Tools and Approaches to Evaluate the Implementation and Efficacy of Participatory Workplace Health Promotion Programs," on April 11. He was mentored by Bradley Evanoff, MD, MPH.



**Dr. Rachel Heeb Desai** (front row, left) defended her dissertation, "Community Participation of Adults Aging with Physical Disabilities: The Role of the Built Environment," on April 12. She was mentored by Kerri Morgan, PhD, OTR/L, ATP.

The 2023 honorees of the Program in Occupational Therapy's Outstanding Alumni Award: Meredith Gronski, OTD, OTR/L, CLA, FAOTA (left), and Todd Levy, MSOT, OTR/L, CBIST-AP (right). The awards were presented at the 15th Annual OT Scholarship Day on April 28. Lisa Tabor Connor, PhD, MSOT, OTR/L (center), poses with the awardees.



## 2023 Outstanding Alumni Awardees

### Meredith Gronski, OTD, OTR/L, CLA, FAOTA

Meredith Gronski, Class of 2005, is an associate professor, occupational therapy department chair and founding program director at Methodist University. She is being recognized for her leadership and service to the profession, academic contributions and scholarship, and advocacy for occupational therapy and equity in her community.

Her dedicated leadership both locally and nationally on boards and committees has helped move the profession forward. Gronski was appointed chair of the American Occupational Therapy Association's (AOTA's) Commission on Practice in 2022 and was an appointed member of the Emerging Leaders Development Committee from 2018-20. She has served as the North Carolina Occupational Therapy Association's secretary (2016-18) and president (2019-21) and was the founding co-chair of the North Carolina Council for OT Education Leadership.

Gronski has taught, mentored and inspired students throughout her academic career. Her scholarly research focuses on children who are deaf and hard of hearing, executive functioning skills, self-regulation, food allergies and health promotion. She has presented her research at local, state and national conferences. Gronski is also a well-published scholar, with her work appearing in prestigious peer-reviewed journals.

In her community, Gronski has been a member of or leader in a variety of volunteer roles in local organizations and academic institutions. Notably, she

served as inclusion coordinator of religious education and on the executive committee and as board chair of the Partnership for Children of Cumberland County. In these roles, Gronski advocates for equity, inclusion and justice through the lens of occupational meaning and participation.

For her commitment to leadership, academia, scholarship and community service, we were honored to present the 2023 Outstanding Alumni Award to Meredith Gronski.

### Todd Levy, MSOT, OTR/L, CBIST-AP

Todd Levy, Class of 2002, has served as a clinical specialist at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) for the past 20 years. He is being recognized for his clinical commitment to children who have stroke or brain injury; his dedication to innovative, evidence-based service and dynamic program development; his leadership in national organizations; and his advocacy for occupational therapy.

Levy is also the lead occupational therapist of the Pediatric Stroke Program and CDKL5 Deficiency Disorder Clinic at CHOP. He is a knowledge translator, program developer, innovator and quality improvement champion in addition to his direct service as a pediatric occupational therapist. Levy has developed curricula and tests for the Certified Brain Injury Specialist - Advanced Practice program. He teaches caregiver workshops, provides hands-on training for parent advocacy organizations, and is a trainer and mentor for occupational therapy staff, doctoral candidates, interns and fellows at CHOP.

While his primary role is clinical, Levy has made a significant contribution to

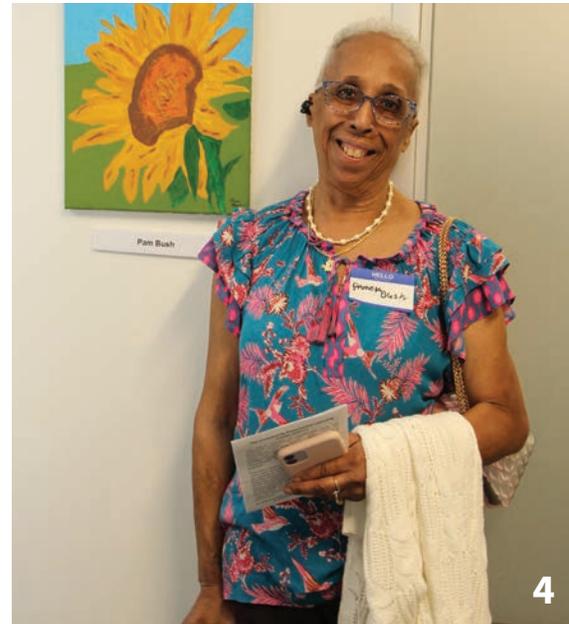
the body of literature on pediatric stroke, childhood hemiparesis, hand and upper extremity transplantation, and brain injury. He presents regularly at conferences, symposiums, webinars and workshops on these subjects to rehabilitation organizations and foundations. Levy has successfully raised \$25,000 for bimanual therapy and hand transplantation programs at CHOP and \$20,000 to develop mobile computer programs for caregivers and survivors of brain injury for the Brain Injury Association of America.

Levy has proudly represented and advocated for occupational therapy in the rehabilitation sciences through his leadership and service. He joined the Academy of Certified Brain Injury Specialists in 2007 and has been on their Board of Governors for the past six years. In 2018, he became the founder and co-chair of the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine's Pediatric Stroke Task Force. Levy has also served as vice chair of the International Pediatric Stroke Organization's Education Committee since 2019. This month, Levy was appointed to a three-year term as an at-large member of the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network Vascularized Composite Allograft Committee. The committee aims to improve access to transplantation, develop evidence-based policies for allocation, and improve the health outcomes of transplant recipients.

For his commitment to clinical practice, pediatric occupational therapy, and rehabilitation science and for his leadership and service, we were honored to present the 2023 Outstanding Alumni Award to Todd Levy.

# The CELC hosts Wisdom art exhibit

On Sept. 27, our Community Experiential Learning Center (CELC) hosted the opening reception of the art exhibit “Wisdom: Celebrating the Creativity of Community Elders.” The exhibit is part of the collaboration between the CELC and Rev. Paulette Sankofa, EdD, with the support of the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis. It featured the art of community elders, most of whom are African American. Faculty, staff and students engaged with the artists through the exhibit, a panel presentation and a dance performance. The exhibit ran through the month of October.



1. Left to right: Duana Russell-Thomas, OTD, OTR/L, CELC director, Rev. Paulette Sankofa, EdD, and Andrea Kharizma Hughes, artist, instructor and exhibit curator; 2. Luisa Otero Prada (center), choreographer and instructor, performing Bullerengue; 3. Artist Christi Griffin; 4. Artist Pamela Bush; 5. Artist William Murphy.

# Future leader

## **Katherine Gladhart-Hayes, MSOT/MPH '24**

Hometown: Eugene, OR

Degrees: BA in science, technology and society with an emphasis in bioethics from the University of Puget Sound

Leadership: LouHealth Intimate Partner Violence Survivor Advocacy Team Lead; WUSOTA MOTA Committee Co-Chair; Center for Human Rights, Gender and Migration Student Advisory Council Member; Clark-Fox Graduate Policy Scholar; Graduate Research Assistant

### **What are your meaningful occupations?**

I enjoy spending time with family and friends, reading, baking, martial arts, and getting outside to hike, swim and garden. I knit, sew and mend a lot, and I love finding creative ways to use scraps and reduce waste. One of my most meaningful occupations is volunteering both in St. Louis and at home to support abortion access through practical support.

### **What is your definition of occupational therapy?**

Occupational therapy (OT) is a holistic field that uses a client-centered approach that considers the physical, social and policy environment in conjunction with mental and physical health to support individuals' participation in the roles, routines and activities that are meaningful and important to them.

### **Why did you choose the MSOT/MPH joint degree?**

I chose the joint degree because I wanted additional training in structural problems and solutions to inform work in bioethics, advocacy and policy. Working in COVID-19 response during my gap year affirmed my interest in public health; I really appreciated how our team combined big-picture goals with support for individuals and families in our community. I wanted to be able to do more work with that kind of an approach.

### **What are your career goals?**

After graduating, I plan to do a mix of clinical practice and community policy work focused on health equity, reproductive justice and environmental justice. I have a range of clinical interests but am particularly interested in perinatal health. In the future, I plan to pursue a PhD in bioethics with a focus on using OT theory, reproductive justice and fat liberation approaches within clinical and public health ethics.

### **What WashU experience so far stands out to you?**

My favorite part of the WashU experience has been the ability to bring different perspectives together in classes, research and fieldwork. I've had the opportunity to work with Dr. Ashley Houston in the Division of Public Health on a review of patient decision aids for abortion care to analyze whether and how they address different social and legal factors. I also completed an independent study with Dr. Wanda Mahoney on the role of the eugenics movement in early OT history. Both of these projects have helped me see the connections between OT, public health, and bioethics and focus my career goals.

### **Anything else you'd like us to know?**

A huge thank-you to my family, friends, mentors and fellow activists for all their support and everything I've learned from them, and I want to thank all the clients I've had the honor to work with as an OT student or as an abortion fund volunteer for the opportunity to learn from them and for their trust in working with me.

AMALIA GLADHART



# Student happenings



On Aug. 25, we held our annual Convocation and Pinning Ceremony to formally welcome our MSOT '25 and OTD '26 students to the profession.



On Aug. 31, students attended the annual Welcome Picnic to celebrate the new academic year.



Left to right: Grace Skinner, OTD/S '25; Sydney Settle, OTD/S '25; Alexis Sunderlage, OTD/S '25; and Moon Young Kim, MSOT, spent time raising awareness about Parkinson's disease at a senior resource health fair hosted by Oak Street Health on Sept. 6



Kayli Antonoff, OTD/S '25 (left), and Sophia Larson, MSOT/S '24 (right), joined Catherine Hoyt, PhD, OTD, OTR/L (center), at the 12th Annual 2023 Sickle Cell Stroll and 5K on Sept. 9.



On Nov. 6, WashU's Coalition of Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity chapter hosted a potluck lunch to support Northside Youth and Senior Service Center.



## Crash course

We hosted a community-based learning event for St. Louis-based SSM Health's outpatient occupational therapists on June 5 in our Community Experiential Learning Center. Peggy Barco, OTD, OTR/L, SCDPM, CDRS, FAOTA, with Gabby Blenden, MSOT, OTR/L, and Alyssa Castro, OTD/S '23, provided training focused on utilizing and performing functional cognitive assessment in their settings.

Washington University School of Medicine  
Program in Occupational Therapy  
MSC 8505-66-1  
4444 Forest Park Ave.  
St. Louis, MO 63108-2212

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**Tweets we love**  
**@WUSTLOT**

PhD student Audrey Keleman did a wonderful job presenting her research on complex daily tasks in preclinical Alzheimer disease to the @WUADRC! Great work, Audrey!  
– Stark Lab @PEPLaboratory • Oct. 18, 2023

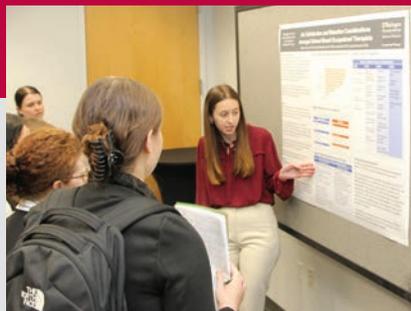
## Upcoming events



**March 22-24, 2024**

**AOTA Inspire 2024**  
Orlando, Florida

Visit [ot.wustl.edu](https://ot.wustl.edu) for the latest updates.



**April 26, 2024**

**OT Scholarship Day**

Graduating students share their work through both oral and poster presentations.



**May 13, 2024**

**Commencement**

Our 2024 Commencement Ceremony will be held in Graham Chapel at 1:30 p.m. CST on May 13, 2024.

*The Program in Occupational Therapy is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), located at 6116 Executive Boulevard, Suite 200, North Bethesda, MD 20852-4929. ACOTE's telephone number, c/o AOTA, is (301) 652-AOTA and its web address is [www.acoteonline.org](http://www.acoteonline.org).*