



Colette Hughes

Occupational
Therapist

Community Armagh &
Dungannon Learning
Disability Team

Can you give us a brief work history?

- Since 2004 Community OT Learning Disability Armagh & Dungannon area
- 1993-2001 Sacramento California - various OT positions - elderly and learning disability
- 1990-1993 Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast - Basic Grade Rotation Post and Senior 2
- Graduated 1990 UJJ

What made you decide to be an OT?

To be honest I had limited understanding of OT. I wanted to be involved in work which promoted independence. OT was a developing profession, and the direction of health care was towards rehabilitation, and reducing the view that hospitalisation was the main approach to patient treatment. There was an increased emphasis on community-based care and rehabilitation. I noted that OT was a profession which was in demand in other countries.

Tell us about your qualifications and training

I completed a four year honours degree at Ulster University, Jordanstown in 1990.

What does a typical day involve?

A typical day in Community Learning Disability is challenging and a little bit different than the day before. There is every likelihood that my plans may have to be changed to meet service user needs. A typical day may be in a wide variety of settings – social education centres, respite unit, supported living units or the client's home. It will involve addressing a variety of functional issues- complex challenging behaviour, wheelchair, equipment needs, transportation, self-care and environmental issues which may require applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant to complete adaptations.

What do you like best about your job?

I like the variety in my work. I appreciate the value of the close interprofessional working approach which results in the best outcomes for the service user, their carers, and families. The reality that you never finish your learning, there is always more to understand and consider, which is both the best and the worst about this OT position.

I like that this OT post has prompted me to think outside of the box, while also helping me accept the benefit of various pathways and systems to make me more effective.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of doing your job?

Accept all the help available. OT in learning disability is one of the most diverse, complex, and emotionally challenging area of work in my experience. The knowledge and skills that will be developed when working in a Learning Disability OT role will be so transferable to other service user populations.

Working as an OT in a multidisciplinary team where interprofessional working is well established is affirming and you will aim to develop this approach in other services.

Anything else?

Enjoy but don't forget to breath.