



Kerry Lawler

**Occupational
Therapist**

Introduce yourself. Where do you work? What is your job role?

Hi, my name is Kerry and I currently work in the Reablement Service for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) in the community. I am a Band 6 Occupational Therapist (OT) and have been working in the service for the last three and half years. I started as a locum having moved over from England to see what Northern Ireland had in store.

What does your job entail?

Reablement is an OT led service which is part of the intermediate care services in the BHSCT and we work solely with older adults in the Belfast area to improve our client's independence managing their activities of daily living at home. As an OT we conduct a number of assessments focused on personal care tasks, meal preparation, medication management as well as reviewing their mobility and transfers and meeting their equipment needs at home. Our aim is to return the clients to their baseline function. If same is not possible we make a recommendation to social care for longer term support. I work 8-4pm and will spend at least half of the day out and about reviewing clients in their homes and the rest of the day in the office completing client notes, care plans, MDT discussions etc.

How did you get into this line of work?

I found out about OT after witnessing my granny get a condition called Guillain-Barré syndrome where your immune system attacks your nerves. My granny ended up paralysed and had to relearn everything again from swallowing to talking to walking. I spent a lot of time with her in hospital and watched a few of her rehab sessions. I found the OT's input with my granny invaluable getting her to relearn the basic tasks required for everyday function, brushing her hair, dressing, feeding herself, making meals, which enabled her to return home to live a very independent life again. I looked up the entry requirements after that and enrolled into an OT degree the very next year.

Outline your career to date

After qualifying from Oxford Brookes in 2017 I wasn't sure what area of practice I wanted to work in/specialise in and got a Band 5 job in Oxford in one of the acute mental health hospitals. I worked here for a year and was considering moving back to Zimbabwe after nine years in the UK when a good friend from university told me about Belfast and suggested I give it a try. I moved to Northern Ireland in 2018 where I was offered a locum Band 5 job in the Reablement Service. And I am still here today, as a permanent Band 6.

Tell us about your qualifications and training

OT is a three year degree during which you are offered a range of practice placements alongside working OTs in a range of different areas so you are able to get a feel for what is on offer when you graduate. It is a specialist degree which means you are likely guaranteed a job after qualifying which made going to university worth all the time and money.

What qualities are required for your job – personal and professional?

Compassion and patience is essential in working with older adults as well as having good interpersonal and communication skills. Working in the community as a keyworker for clients can mean there is a degree of stress felt when clients have limited social networks/family input however the job is very rewarding in itself so I feel there is a good balance. Personally, I find that separating work life from home life has also been key in ensuring when you are away from the desk/office you really switch off and enjoy the days off.

What is the best advice you have ever received?

Never walk past a rose without smelling it, life is too short to miss out on the small things.

What do you like to do in your spare time

I am an active person and like being out and about when I can. I enjoy going for long walks with my dog, Daisy, doing CrossFit classes and playing hockey, all keep me active and are a good release to get the endorphins going. I also love doing nothing sometimes and just relaxing at home.

Tell us an interesting fact about yourself

I was born and raised in Zimbabwe and moved to the UK when I was 18 for a gap year. I have now been living in the UK for 11 years!

Who has inspired you most in your life?

My grandparents both were from Ireland and moved to Zimbabwe when it was Rhodesia where they stayed until they died last year. I am in awe of their bravery moving across the world and starting a life there. Because of them I was lucky enough to be born and raised in Zimbabwe and could not have asked for a better childhood.

What advice would you give your 16-year-old self?

Not to rush the process of figuring out what you want to do in life career wise. Things fall into place and it is SO HARD to decide on a career at 18.