

## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AUSTRALIA MEDIA RELEASE 15.09.20

### **Innovative practices improve employability for people with a disability**

Delegates to Occupational Therapy Australia's (OTA) 2020 Virtual OT Exchange have been told that innovative programs can help people with a disability (PWD) to achieve their employment goals.

Ms Angela Tincknell and Ms Amanda Manso, Queensland-based occupational therapists with more than 25 and 2 years' experience respectively, trialled employability programs aimed at facilitating the acquisition and maintenance of employment for PWD.

"According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, only 53.4% of PWD are employed, compared to 74% of the general population," Ms Manso said.

"The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has identified increased economic participation as a primary goal, yet since the introduction of the NDIS, rates of economic participation amongst NDIS participants have not changed over time.

"It's clear that more effective services and programs are required to assist PWD to improve their employment capacity," Ms Tincknell concluded.

A Work Readiness Program – attended by 16 participants – was developed and implemented in 2018 and 2019.

In 2019, an employment capacity building program, incorporating volunteer work experience and a peer mentorship program was also trialled. All participants were registered clients of Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus (SBH) Queensland, the non-profit organisation where Ms Tincknell and Ms Manso work.

"The barriers to paid employment for PWD are multiple and complex," acknowledged Ms Tincknell, "but everyone – regardless of age or ability – has a right to engage in meaningful occupations."

Results of the pilot program are promising.

Following the completion of the Work Readiness Program, 80% of participants were engaged in job seeking or vocational training activities. In addition, about 13% were working. Through post-program feedback, 86% of participants stated that they felt more prepared for job searching and employment.

Further development of the program also sought to address the ongoing barriers to employment for PWD, including employer perspectives of PWD and a lack of appropriate training.

Approximately 500 occupational therapists have converged – virtually – on the 2020 OT Exchange, the first of OTA's national conferences to be delivered entirely online.

The conference features 93 scientific presentations and three workshops focussed on four key areas of occupational therapy practice: Driving, Rehabilitation, Paediatrics and Environmental Modifications. It runs from 14 to 15 September.

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