Faculty of Health Sciences
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY CAREERS GRADUATE PROFILE BOOK
Thank you for considering a degree in either occupational therapy (OT) or social work (SW) from Curtin University. These courses have been taught at Curtin for many years and during this time we have graduated hundreds of occupational therapists and social workers who are now employed in a range of workplaces and communities in Australia and globally.

In my job as the Head of School, I am often asked what an occupational therapist or social worker does and where do they work. So we decided to put together this book to give you a taste of where a degree in OT or SW might take you.

In this graduate profile book, we have also included some thoughts from employers on the valuable skills, competencies and attributes that our Curtin graduates of occupational therapy or social work bring to their workplaces. The book also highlights the impact our graduates are making in these workplaces and our community – both locally and internationally. You will note that many of the people we have highlighted have not stayed working as either occupational therapists or social workers, but have used their degrees to move to other areas of work as politicians, managers, community rehabilitation leaders and educators to name a few.

Enjoy the stories and all the best for your future studies and careers.

Professor Lorna Rosenwax
Head, School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work

For further information about our range of courses please contact:

The Faculty of Health Sciences
School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work

Email: futurestudents@health.curtin.edu.au
Phone: +61 8 9266 3600
Fax: +61 8 9266 3636
www.ot.curtin.edu.au
Occupational therapists are well placed to make a huge impact on the world – are you up for the challenge? As an occupational therapist you will have a range of skills and knowledge that can be applied in many settings. Many occupational therapists work with the health, disability and education sectors but more work with industry and charitable organisations.

As an occupational therapist you could be working with individuals who have experienced a stroke or have depression, or a child with autism and his/her family. You could also work with a person who is homeless, a refugee or asylum seeker.

When you graduate you will be working with individuals, families, groups of people or perhaps whole communities. You could even work in government or large organisations, influencing policy. Opportunities are limitless, which is what makes occupational therapy such a great profession.

Wherever you work and whoever you work with you will be finding ways to support people to achieve and maintain health by helping them engage in the everyday activities of their life – showering, working in a mine, or even skydiving. To enable people to participate in their chosen activities you will consider their abilities, the physical, social and legal environments, and the type of activities they want to perform. You will work with the person to find a solution that meets their needs and make it happen.

This course will give you a broad introduction to occupational therapy theory and practice through coursework, practical experience and a whole year of placements in the field with occupational therapists. You will also study a range of units in topics such as health science communication, human biology, psychology, disability, clinical medicine, gerontology, psychiatry, mental health, environmental and cultural determinants of health, and counselling.
Fremantle Hospital is a 450 bed tertiary teaching hospital. The occupational therapy service employs approximately 35 staff including occupational therapists, therapy assistants and support staff. Occupational therapists are involved in the treatment of patients in the emergency department, acute medical, surgical and orthopaedics, neurology, general rehabilitation, hand therapy, aged care, outpatient and community services.

The Fremantle Hospital occupational therapy service takes approximately 20 fourth year and 120 first year Curtin University School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work students each year and is committed to the training and development of the future occupational therapy workforce. Competition for jobs with our service is keen and over the last six months we have employed six new graduates from the 2009 Curtin University graduating year.

Services are provided as a part of a multidisciplinary team including input from medical, nursing and other allied health professionals. There are considerable opportunities for formal education and training plus informal learning from both occupational therapy colleagues and from other health professionals.

Ongoing professional development is encouraged and therapists are provided with the opportunity to move into different areas within the service to develop skills and knowledge across a number of clinical areas. Working in a large occupational therapy service based in a major teaching hospital provides opportunities for career progression, as well as movement into generic posts in areas such as service coordination and project work.

The Fremantle Hospital occupational therapy service prides itself in providing a friendly collegial working environment with a philosophy of mutual respect and quality service provision. We make it a priority to look after each other to ensure that we can all provide the best possible service to our patients.

If you’re not afraid of hard work in a fast paced dynamic environment, consider a position with the Fremantle Hospital Occupational Therapy Service.
As one of the 210 full-time, part-time and casual staff employed by Alzheimer’s Australia WA you would experience a dynamic and flexible working environment where a person-centred philosophy is adopted for both staff and clients.

As Australia’s oldest and largest dementia organisation, Alzheimer’s Australia WA is at the forefront of dementia care services, with world-class research, risk reduction and education and training programs designed to meet the challenge of what has been described by Access Economics as “a national dementia epidemic”.

We currently employ four occupational therapists in the organisation, all of whom were trained at Curtin. One of them was employed after she graduated, after she had a placement with us, and also worked in our day centre whilst she was studying. For many years we have been offering placement opportunities to occupational therapists and other health sciences, media and PR students from Curtin and other universities. We also provide job opportunities, both paid and volunteering for students during their studies.

Alzheimer’s Australia WA believes in the value of its people and is committed to investing in its staff to develop their skills and talents to ensure its programs and services are of the highest quality.
Graduate Destinations – Occupational Therapy

The career options available to graduates are diverse and wide-ranging. The list below provides a snapshot of some of the job destinations and job titles of graduates that have entered the workforce. Have a read through this graduate profile book to find out about some of the wonderful career pathways and opportunities that our graduates have followed.

Employers
Ability Plus
Advanced Personnel Management
Aegis
Alzheimer’s Australia
Argyle Diamonds
Armadale Health Services
Autism Association of WA
Bentley Hospital
Centrelink
Curtin University
Department of Health
Department of the Attorney General (Office of the Public Advocate)
Disability Services Commission
Eastern Wheatbelt Primary Health
Edge Employment Solutions
Fremantle Hospital
Hand & Upper Limb Centre
Health Central Occupational Therapy International
Health Corporate Network (Government)
Joondalup Health Campus
Kununurra Hospital
Life Live It! Occupational Therapy
Maximum Independence Occupational Therapy
Osborne Park Older Adult Mental Health Service
PeopleSense Pty Ltd
Princess Margaret Hospital
Rio Tinto
Rockingham General Hospital
Rocky Bay Inc
Royal Perth Hospital
Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital
South Metropolitan Health Services
State Child Development Centre
Therapy Focus
WA Country Health Service
Workfocus Australia

Job Titles
Health & Safety Officer
Intervention Assistant
Job Coordinator
Injury Management Consultant
Lecturer
Local Area Coordinator
Manager
Mental Health Rehabilitation Practitioner
Occupational Therapist
Occupational Health & Safety Advisor
Rehabilitation Consultant
Research Assistant
After finishing my OT degree at Curtin University I started working at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital as an occupational therapist on the orthopaedics ward. This experience was invaluable as it helped to consolidate all the clinical skills I had learnt whilst studying. The environment at the hospital was very supportive and helped me transition to full-time work.

I was given the opportunity to work in the energy sector, and currently work as a health coordinator for an underwater oil and gas services company. My role is very diverse and I get the opportunity to put into practise many of the skills I have learnt.

My primary role is injury management which involves assisting employees who are hurt at work return to their pre-injury jobs. Monitoring the trends and statistics from our workforce allows me to develop and promote health programs, ensuring the workplace is more proactive in its approach to preventing injuries.

My role is very diverse, involving liaising with doctors, injured workers, clients and colleagues. My workplace is very flexible and dynamic and allows me time for professional as well as personal development.

The biggest thing that I took away from my occupational therapy studies was the skill in providing effective and meaningful solutions to complex health problems. Enabling people to participate in activities that are important to them and achieving real and tangible results is a highly sought after skill in the workplace.

My best piece of advice to potential occupational therapy students is to work hard so that you understand the material, but of equal importance is to invest time in people – listen and engage people and develop a professional network. The skills you gain will be able to take you into any industry.
I graduated with an occupational therapy degree from Curtin University, having previously completed a four year degree in fine arts. I have specialised in hand therapy for ten years now, and am a full member of the Australian Hand Therapy Association.

I have always had a strong interest in teaching and have tutored hand and upper limb splinting and am a guest lecturer in the occupational therapy course at Curtin University.

I began my hand therapy career working under Mr Jeff Eckers of Western Orthopaedics for seven years, becoming manager of that practice before spending two years in a partnership with two plastic surgeons. Both of these practices specialise in the treatment of hand and upper limb trauma.

Additionally I have been employed part-time at Princess Margaret Hospital from 2007-2009 treating primarily upper limb tone and juvenile arthritis.

I started my own practice, Inhand Occupational Therapy, in Claremont a year ago, and now employ two other part-time therapists. This has given me the opportunity to consider restarting my arts career.
After completing my occupational therapy (OT) degree at Curtin University, I worked in Perth for a short time before heading to work in the United Kingdom. After spending time as a community occupational therapist in the isolated and beautiful Isle of Man I moved to London to work at Great Ormond Street Children’s Hospital. It was whilst working there that I was fortunate enough to meet the late Princess Diana and work with some of the best health professionals in Europe.

Later my career led me to the community in the east end of London where I completed daily home visits aboard double decker buses carrying an array of OT equipment including bath boards and shower stools. During this time I also managed to spend three very memorable months travelling through Europe with OT friends from university in an old campervan. I later returned to spend a year working as a sole practitioner in Scotland on the Isle of Bute in 2005, where I completed home visits in the snow and sleet, tried eating haggis and spent time exploring the highlands.

Back home in Perth, I have had a variety of jobs including working with the Disability Services Commission flying to rural and remote Western Australia, and supporting country therapists working with people with complex needs. I have also been fortunate enough to work in the area of advocacy at the Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre where I co-facilitated the Vicinity Film project supporting film makers with disabilities.

More recently I have returned to Curtin University to the School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work to teach. I have also begun my Masters which I am sure will keep me busy for the next few years.

My OT qualification has allowed me to quite literally travel the world working in culturally diverse and rewarding environments with some truly amazing people.
Two years after graduating from occupational therapy (OT) in 1984 I found my real passion for working in Paediatrics. Until then I was learning a lot about working in a hospital and in teams, but when I commenced work at Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) in the burns unit, I found my “home”. Working for ten years at PMH, both on the burns unit and later with the babies in early intervention, has offered a challenge in the myriad of skills I needed to develop to manage a very varied and ever evolving case load.

No chance to get bored or complacent in the job. There has always been a need and desire to keep developing expertise and I like that my search for new techniques and strategies has not diminished over the years. OT has been a perfect match as I don’t like to get bored and hate the feeling that everything is the same. The challenge and variety is the best part of being an occupational therapist.

I changed direction in 1998 and helped develop the Talkabout program for children with speech and language difficulties at the Telethon Speech and Hearing Centre. The program now has four playgroups, three kindergartens and three pre-primary streams.

For the last ten years I have run a successful private practice “Gymworks” and this has required a completely different set of skills and is a new direction in my career. My colleague Helen and I now employ six occupational therapists and see over 100 children in a practice that is dedicated to improving their performance in all aspects of their lives. We have an amazing purpose-built gym and I spend part of my working day on a flying fox with the most rewarding clients – children. No sedentary office chair life for me.

At 18 I wasn’t always sure of what I wanted to do but now after 25 years of work I have to pinch myself, to truly believe I chose the best career ever – OT.
After graduating from the occupational therapy program at the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT), now known as Curtin University, I worked as an occupational therapist (OT) in mental health and pioneered private practice occupational therapy in mental health in Western Australia.

My career took me into senior executive positions in the West Australian Health Service including: Regional Director of Central Wheatbelt, Midwest and Gascoyne Health Services; Director of South Metropolitan Health Authority; General Manager Finance and Resources, Health Department of Western Australia; General Manager Armadale Health Service and Chief Executive Officer of Kalamunda Community Care.

Mental Health has been my passion and has seen me play an instrumental role in designing, building and managing the full spectrum of public mental health services across country and metropolitan areas before embarking on a political career.

As the upper house Member for the East Metropolitan Region, I have continued to dedicate my time to reforming mental health services in WA – originally as the Shadow Minister for Mental Health and now as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Mental Health.

I am proud to be the driving force behind the new Mental Health Commission here in WA. At the end of the day, I want to make sure that people with a mental illness are given a fair go.

As a Member of the Legislative Council, I am responsible for reviewing and amending Bills that become Western Australian law. As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, Treasurer; Minister for State Development, as well as to the Minister for Water; Mental Health, I am responsible for handling the Government’s legislation in these portfolios in the upper house, along with relevant questions, motions and committee hearings.

This role also sees me representing the Premier and Minister at a wide range of events. I have recently been in the Netherlands leading the Western Australian delegation bid for the world’s multi-billion radioastronomy facility - the Square Kilometre Array.

The issues brought to my attention by constituents in my large constituency (stretching from West Swan to Pinjarra) are many and varied.

I truly believe that the same personal qualities that motivated me to become an OT are precisely the same qualities that have driven my political career; I honestly want to see individuals and communities have better outcomes and opportunities.
I graduated as an occupational therapist in 1985 from Curtin University. Over the past 20 years I have worked in a variety of practice settings including the public hospital system, Department of Veterans Affairs and private clinics before starting my own private practice in 1995, specialising in the rehabilitation of hand and upper limb injuries. When Liz Saleeba joined me in partnership in 1998, Thomas and Saleeba Occupational Therapy Specialised Hand Therapy Services was established.

I have a Postgraduate Diploma in Hand and Upper Limb Rehabilitation (1994) and have been a member of the Australian Hand Therapy Association (AHTA) for over 15 years. I have been the recipient of the Jill Chapman Award for the best Clinical Paper at AHTA National Conferences on two occasions and have published in the American Journal of Hand Therapy. I also took the opportunity to lecture and tutor in Hand and Upper Limb Rehabilitation, Biomechanics and Kinesiology at Curtin University, and I am frequently asked to give talks and lectures in my field of expertise. I am also an active committee member for the professional association, OT Australia WA.
After graduating I worked in the area of hand therapy for 15 years. I worked in a variety of hand clinics in both Perth and Sydney before forming a partnership with Cathy Thomas in 1998 and establishing Thomas and Saleeba Occupational Therapy Specialised Hand Therapy Services.

I have also tutored students at Curtin University and have completed my Masters of Medical Science (2010) research at the University of Western Australia on Patient Compliance and Spontaneous Movement following Flexor Tendon Repair. I presented this study at the AHTA conference held in Perth where my presentation received the Australian Hand Surgery Society Award. I have published an article in the American Journal of Hand Therapy, which also won the Jill Chapman award at the AHTA conference held in New Zealand. I have been a full member of the Australian Hand Therapy Association (AHTA) for over ten years.
Upon completion of my occupational therapy undergraduate studies at Curtin University in 2005, I was offered a six week contract to cover annual leave in the Hand & Upper Limb Clinic at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital (SCGH). This contract was extended over a number of years, allowing me to experience many clinical areas across both in and outpatient services at SCGH.

The experience I gained across these clinical areas provided the foundation for me to be involved in a number of service improvement projects, aimed at improving the way a patient’s care was planned and managed through the hospital. I now lead a project that is increasing the safety, timeliness and quality of care delivered to each of the 56,000 patients that present to the SCGH Emergency Department (ED) every year.

As well as ensuring compliance with a suite of quality and safety measures, the program is aimed at ensuring that every patient can either be discharged from the ED, or admitted to a bed within four hours of presentation. The role requires working with representatives from across the 3,500 strong workforce to identify ways that work processes can be redesigned to improve the journey experienced by patients.

An occupational therapy background is ideally suited for leading process redesign, as the foundation skills in assessment, activity analysis and group facilitation, are easily transferable from assessing the needs of an individual patient, to looking at needs and potential improvements of a system.
There haven’t been many days that go by where I haven’t been exceedingly grateful that I chose to study occupational therapy at Curtin University. It has taken me all around Australia, from working in hospitals, to establishing videoconferencing programs for health professionals, to visiting rural and remote communities, to speaking at conferences. The opportunities have been amazing. When your backyard is the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu National Park, the Margaret River Wine Region or the Daintree National Park, there is always plenty to explore and discover.

Occupational therapy has even taken me to rural Africa, where I spent two years establishing a program for people with disabilities in remote villages. The training I received from studying OT enabled me to successfully utilise my Australian experiences and skills in an African context with amazing results. I made splints over gas hotplates, fixed wheelchairs with my pocket knife, and used plastic buckets for just about every use you can imagine. I rode horses along Lake Malawi, made pottery at a local village and learned how to shop at the markets without having to use English. All in all, a truly life changing two years.

Now that I am back in Australia, I am lecturing in OT to undergraduate students at Edith Cowan University, in the areas of professional practice and ‘Occupation and Equity’. It is such a privilege to be involved with educating our up and coming OTs in a field that I am so passionate about and view with such regard. The best part is that I get to talk about all of the amazing experiences that being an OT has afforded me. The skills you develop as an OT really do give you a passport to the world. They give you fresh eyes with which to view the world, and they enable you to be relevant and useful in many different contexts.

Since becoming an OT, I’ve met the most amazing, inspiring and fascinating people. I’ve been challenged to continue to grow and develop as a person and as a professional. And I can’t wait for the rest of this fantastic journey to reveal itself.
HEATHER FREEGARD
Coordinator, WA Dementia Training Study Centre
Curtin Centre for Research on Ageing

My sixth ‘career’ as coordinator WA Dementia Training Study Centre at Curtin Centre for Research on Ageing has just begun and requires all the experience, expertise and wisdom I developed during the previous five; clinical skills working with adults and children with disability; working with elders, especially people with dementia, living in the community and residential care; conducting professional development programs in dementia care; and the fostering of undergraduate and postgraduate students at the Curtin School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work in the areas of gerontology and ethics.

Along the way I have had opportunities to develop recognised expertise as a Churchill Fellow, and serve my profession as a member of the WA Occupational Therapists Registration Board and as author/editor of a textbook on professional ethical practice.

My newest adventure requires me to work with all health professionals by providing and brokering training opportunities that encourage a career path for people passionate about advocating for and working with people with dementia. Doctoral studies combining my interests of ethics and dementia are progressing well.

My occupational therapy qualification has created many opportunities for continued challenge and growth while balancing the varying demands of child care and parent care. Age is no barrier.
Following my graduation from Curtin University I worked as an occupational therapist in mental health. This experience provided me with a very solid foundation for all my future career opportunities, as it assisted me to develop a more in depth understanding of people, dynamics and the power of communication.

After three years working in mental health, I took up a completely different position in home visiting at Royal Perth Hospital (RPH). My next clinical challenge was in spinal rehabilitation, an area that is still my primary clinical interest. Then, after a period of maternity leave, I took up a part-time position with the RPH Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT). While in this position, I began exploring the option of a private practice in home visiting, and in 2002 formed Maximum Independence Occupational Therapy (MIOT).

In 2003, I left the ACAT team to have my second child, and so I employed MIOT’s first staff member. MIOT now employs several OTs covering clinical areas of home visiting, acute hospital and complex community rehabilitation for severely injured clients. MIOT also employs a social worker, and administrative support staff.

In 2008, I purchased Independent Occupational Therapy Services (IOTS), which means we now offer medico-legal assessments and report writing as another client service, and clinical option for our more experienced OTs.

I continue to work part-time at both practices, although my role now is mostly managerial and clinical consultation. The last 17 years of practice has provided me with enormously varied opportunities for clinical learning, and a huge amount of challenges. I believe my training in OT (particularly task and activity analysis) has assisted me greatly in the management of the businesses and with planning for growth and expansion.

I feel very fortunate to have had the greatly varied opportunities that the OT profession has provided me, and I look forward to whatever the future holds. I now volunteer for the OT Australia WA in an effort to ensure the profession remains strong for future OTs.

OT is a great career for anyone wanting to work with people, in a profession that offers a huge variety of clinical and managerial opportunities. Best of luck to anyone considering this career path.
Since graduating with my degree in occupational therapy, I have specialised in mental health, working at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and now at Perth Clinic.

My current job involves various roles that have me working clinically, as well as directing all the information technology services. I am also the Chair of the Clinical Improvement Team. This mixed role is very rewarding and allows me to implement world-leading clinical strategies that utilise IT concepts, and assists in the training of students.

As a team we have just instituted a program that sees Perth Clinic monitoring the progress of inpatient care utilising a daily questionnaire. These are reviewed at least weekly, in group settings and in collaboration with treatment plans, using a real time electronic data system that features touch screen entry. The patients are provided with feedback against expected treatment outcomes in graphical form. This live system provides the capacity to show individual patients responses from the point of care. These are available around the hospital for nurses and other treatment team members to refer to as required.

My OT degree has allowed me to have an enjoyable career that has involved me making international and national presentations, and authoring over ten peer-reviewed publications in professional journals.

It is wonderful to be contributing to the development of new strategies that progress and promote the field of mental health and occupational therapy.
I have worked as an occupational therapist with adults with neurological dysfunctions for more than 12 years since I got my Bachelor’s degree in 1994. I have also lectured at the Department of Occupational Therapy in the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran. When I finished my Masters degree in occupational therapy, I had the privilege to supervise students and continue teaching in the university. I have presented at more than 15 national and international conferences during my academic career in Iran. I was promoted to a senior lecturer position before I moved to Australia in 2005 to commence a PhD. In coming to Australia, I experienced a different and interesting academic life and learned much from the Australian culture.

My PhD thesis gave me the experience of how to deal with different research problems. I was awarded a grant by the Multiple Sclerosis Society of WA to work on my PhD, which was awarded on February 2009. So far, I have had two articles published in high peer-reviewed journals and several presentations in Australian and international conferences based on my PhD project.

From the time I graduated from my PhD, I have become more and more adept at keeping lots of balls in the air! Working as a Senior Research Fellow within the School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work at Curtin University pushed me even harder to learn important academic skills: managing staff on different projects, meeting deadlines for different projects, writing grant applications and journal articles and working with different people with different working styles were all interesting challenges for me.

The hardest part of my job is and has always been the language. Using English as the second language sometimes makes it difficult to move forward, but on the bright side, I always get ample support from the other staff members in the school. My plan is to continue working as an academic especially as a researcher. I love doing research in the area of occupational therapy which provides me the opportunity to use both my clinical and research skills.
The journey into life as an occupational therapist, for me, first began when my middle child fractured his wrist; he fell off the top of a wheelie bin and landed rather awkwardly on a broom. He was in year one and was just learning to master the art of handwriting. Six weeks in plaster had a negative effect on the strength of his developing muscles, leaving his wrist weak. As such, handwriting took a back seat. We were referred to occupational therapy (OT). Those next ten weeks changed my life.

At the time I had almost completed a teaching degree as a mature age student and was working as a teacher’s assistant for children with learning difficulties. I was looking forward to completing my degree, but before I knew it I had applied for another degree, a Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy at Curtin University. For me the opportunity to work closely with people of all ages with varying levels of function, physically and mentally meant much greater opportunity, knowledge and work satisfaction.

Over the next four years I began to understand OT to be amazingly diverse. OT is about assisting people achieve and maintain their independence, skill and ability in their day to day activities. Therapists work to encourage and understand others, provide opportunities, promote health and development, support other services, support and educate clients and their families and carers and we are a key member of health care teams.

As an occupational therapist you will have a range of skills and knowledge that can be applied in many settings. Occupational therapists are found in the health, disability and education sectors, industry and not-for-profit organisations. I now have a much greater understanding of the underpinning factors that determine health and development and know how I can directly influence these or assist with change. There is nothing more rewarding than to see a person reach their greatest potential; this has a ripple effect.
Upon graduation from Curtin University in 2002, I commenced a position with Therapy Focus and Disability Service Commission (School Age Therapy Services) providing therapy services to school aged children who have a disability. After 18 months I began looking for my next challenge and assisted in establishing an occupational therapy service with a private multi-disciplinary paediatric therapy practice.

Further opportunities and experiences have presented themselves along my career path, including developing a postural support seating assessment tool, travelling around Western Australia with the Country Resource and Consultancy Therapy Team and the Independent Living Centre Tech Team, working for Invacare Australia, and more recently returning to Curtin University’s School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work to complete a research project investigating the role and impact of home and community care services.

Across my career I have had opportunities to present at conferences and workshops, and I was fortunate enough to receive a Ray Young Scholarship from the Disability Services Commission which allowed me to travel across Australia to compare the different services provided to people who have a disability in rural and remote areas.

My occupational therapy degree from Curtin equipped me with a range of skills that have served me well in the real world. I love the challenges that I face on a daily basis and know that I am making a difference in people’s lives. I always valued my time studying at Curtin; not only for giving me a fantastic degree, but also for the people I met during my studies including my wife Bree.

Occupational therapy is a great career choice that offers a wide range of opportunities and experiences.
I was one of seven graduates from the first school of Occupational Therapy in Western Australia (WA) and later undertook degree completion studies at the School of Occupational Therapy, Curtin University. Having worked as a clinician in both physical and psychiatric rehabilitation I lectured at the Occupational Therapy School and then worked as the Chief Occupational Therapist at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital (SCGH).

From SCGH I was seconded to the Public Service Commission to head the State Task Force in overuse injury and stayed on to become a policy officer in occupational safety and health. At that time I was fortunate to be selected for the Executive Development Year Program which included a number of secondments and the completion of an Advanced Management Program at a local university.

I worked as a consultant to the Police Commissioner and his executive team and then moved to become Director of Social Policy and Social Justice in the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Later I worked as assistant director Medical and Specialist Services at the Disability Services Commission and Manager Access and Improvement.

I left WA to work for five years in Kenya as director of an East African non-Government organisation. Upon returning to Australia I worked as principal policy officer of WorkCover WA and then as senior therapist for the Southern Wheatbelt in WA Country Health. Recently I was appointed to my current post of manager, Community and Regulatory Services, Shire of Wagin. All these positions have been possible due to my undergraduate education at Curtin University. I continually use the many skills and acquired knowledge that my studies in occupational therapy gave me. I have adopted a lifelong learning ethic and have remained close to my professional roots through involvement at local, state and international levels of professional associations. As national President I became very aware of the role Australian therapists played across the world and later went on to become President of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists. This position allowed me to make some significant inroads into the development of the profession in many countries.

In parallel with all of the above, I have also been a wife, mother and grandmother. I believe that my work as a health professional equipped me with special abilities in these life roles. I continue to mentor others and promote the values of study and work in the health sciences.
Following graduation from the School of Occupational Therapy at Curtin University, I was lucky enough to get an occupational therapist position with Royal Perth Hospital at the Shenton Park Rehabilitation Campus. Since then I have had an extended rotation on the State Acquired Brain Injury Rehabilitation Service Unit. My role involves working with people following an acquired brain injury as a result of a traumatic injury, such as a car accident or a vascular accident requiring brain surgery.

I appreciate the variety of patients I get to work with, some requiring months of daily rehabilitation to achieve goals. Primarily, I see patients displaying cognitive deficits, which limit their ability to care for themselves. However, they commonly have physical and communicative deficits as well, which necessitates working closely with the entire multidisciplinary team. It is a wonderful experience to be involved in a patient’s treatment that enables them to achieve a meaningful goal which may have seemed unachievable to them and their family, such as writing their name, getting showered and dressed independently or cooking a meal. I personally feel the best reward comes from seeing a previously highly dependent patient returning home to lead a normal life with their family.

I have recently had the opportunity to diversify my skills by spending time in the occupational therapy upper limb unit, and so I have hit the books again to review my anatomy and splinting techniques. Having completed my first splint on a patient yesterday, I am relishing the opportunity to expand my knowledge and skill base. I find the variety of work available for occupational therapists amazes me and is one of the best aspects of the job. Catching up with university colleagues always leads to in-depth discussions on the diverse industries and client groups that we now see as professionals.

So, what does the future hold? I am planning on heading to the United Kingdom to work for a few years, joining the great procession of occupational therapists getting experience overseas before heading home with a greater wealth of knowledge.
Following graduation from the School of Occupational Therapy at Curtin University, I worked briefly in Western Australia with the Association for the Blind before heading overseas to the United Kingdom (UK). For the following two years I worked at various hospitals in and around London and travelled extensively through Europe and America. On my return to Australia in 1993 I did a short stint in vocational rehabilitation before taking a break from occupational therapy to work as a research assistant and coordinator with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research on a large cohort study under Professor Fiona Stanley. It was my qualification in occupational therapy and the breadth of skill and knowledge it provided that enabled me to branch out into a non-traditional occupational therapy role.

I briefly returned to work in the UK in 1994 and on my homecoming to Australia took up an occupational therapy position with Fremantle Hospital, where I have been employed since 1995. During my time at Fremantle Hospital I have worked up from a junior leave relief locum, to a permanent senior position on the Aged Care Assessment Team, to clinical section head/coordinator, to chief occupational therapist in 2003.

In 2002 I was awarded a Department of Health Leadership Development Program Scholarship in Health Services Management, which led to the completion of a Graduate Diploma in Health Administration at Curtin. I also worked as an adjunct lecturer for Curtin’s School of Occupational Therapy in 2005 and have given numerous lectures at the school on aged care, physical rehabilitation, health service management and employment with the Department of Health.

My occupational therapy degree has provided me with a number of professional and personal opportunities and experiences including travel, job security and career progression, diverse work choices, further study and involvement with education.

I enjoy great satisfaction from running a large occupational therapy service in a tertiary teaching hospital that plays a major role in the teaching, training, development and shaping of our future occupational therapy workforce and profession.

Occupational therapy has met all the expectations I placed on it as a career choice when filling in my university preferences all those years ago.
Curtin University postgraduate courses have led me to appreciate the importance of life-long learning and "looking ever forward".

I started postgraduate studies at the School of Occupational Therapy (OT) in 1992. Since then, my connection with the school is strengthened each day. The postgraduate diploma course was stimulating and challenging. These qualities, along with a flexible study plan made it possible for me, a busy clinician with a young family, to pursue my life-long goal of learning. The course gave me the most advanced clinical skills in orthopaedics, geriatrics and elderly mental health which I continue to use. In completion of the diploma, I consolidated my clinical skills using advanced OT theories and practices, which helped me to maintain the competitive edge of my private clinic. Since then, I have kept in touch with my fellow classmates with a view to sharing and learning new knowledge and practical skills.

While I pursued Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy research degrees, I was presented with opportunities to conduct research projects in the area of cognitive rehabilitation and driving. Upon completion of the degrees, I had built up a competitive academic and research profile and was invited back to teach in Hong Kong Polytechnic University (HKPU). I came back to the School of OT at Curtin University as a full-time academic in 2002, and continue to hold a visiting associate professor position in HKPU.

I chose the School of Occupational Therapy at Curtin to further develop my professional and research skills because it is known as one of the most prestigious OT institutes across Southeast Asia. Since the commencement of my lectureship, I have been awarded a total of a quarter of a million in research grants, published twenty papers in refereed journals and written two book chapters. Without the intensive training of the postgraduate courses, these tasks could have never been achieved.

I have had the opportunity to connect with universities and research partners all over the world including Sweden, USA and China. Recently invited by the Red Cross, China Disabled Persons’ Federation and HKPU, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to exercise my clinical and research skills to help the most needy in the earthquake stricken zones in Sichuan, China. The six-month volunteer position was demanding, but rewarding. I led a team of local healthcare workers to set up an OT department, through which free rehabilitation services to thousands of earthquake victims will be provided for the next five years. To achieve the best results, having an open mind to deal with the ever-changing demand of relief efforts is vital.

In hindsight, the completion of my postgraduate studies with Curtin University is the best thing I have ever done in my life. Their postgraduate qualifications will offer you mastery and choice of your own career whether you aim to be a clinician, an academic or a researcher.
I never knew that a degree from the School of Occupational Therapy (OT) at Curtin University could give me the opportunity to travel across Western Australia and work with people employed in such varied industries! Since graduating, I worked for five years as an injury management advisor for a national insurer. I’ve since moved to the beautiful South West to manage a branch of PeopleSense – a fast growing and energetic vocational rehabilitation provider. The skills I gained in my occupational therapy degree have well-equipped me to seek out new and exciting pathways in providing injury management, injury prevention and occupational health and safety services within mining, construction, local government, health, meat works, and the viticulture industry.

The practicum I completed in India through the OT Abroad program stimulated me to be resourceful in a resource-limited environment. Choose your practicum wisely and soak up as much information as you can, as you never know how experiences will transfer across to the line of occupational therapy you choose to take on!

I am looking forward to building the business and expanding our product lines in the South West. The opportunities are endless. Let the world be your oyster!
SUZY RETALLACK
Health and Safety Manager – East Pilbara Operations – Rio Tinto Iron Ore
BSc (Psych) (1996), BSc (Curtin) (2000)

After graduating from occupational therapy, I worked in the injury management field, consolidating my occupational therapy skills whilst developing a passion for the resource industry. I then commenced work for Rio Tinto initially in the health field and quickly became exposed to hygiene, safety and later environment disciplines. This was also an opportunity to experience the challenges associated with a fly in fly out lifestyle. I have now been working with Rio Tinto for six years and have been provided with amazing opportunities to develop my leadership skills and have thoroughly enjoyed leading teams of professionals in different product groups.

My current role as a health and safety manager exposes me to technical, leadership and wider business challenges. My interest in broadening my management experience to non-technical operational roles has resulted in me undertaking my MBA through the Curtin Business School.

My Psychology and Occupational Therapy degrees provided me with a fantastic grounding from a technical perspective, however, the more subtle skills you learn as an OT in communication, team working and counselling have been invaluable. I am a huge advocate for OTs in the mining industry and would certainly recommend it as a challenging but immensely rewarding industry.