

# An introduction to some eminent occupational therapy researchers



## **LINDY CLEMSON**

**PhD, Professor in Ageing and Occupational Therapy; NHMRC Career Development Research Fellow; Co-ordinator, Ageing, Work and Health Research Unit, Faculty of Health Sciences, The University of Sydney**

Lindy started with a diploma, working in mental health, vocational rehabilitation and then aged care, where she discovered she had a special connection with older people. Motherhood led to a home modifications consultancy and 'quality assurance' role at Westmead Hospital. A research masters followed, then a PhD in epidemiology. She secured a Sesquicentennial Fellowship at University of Sydney, and is currently Professor in Ageing and Occupational Therapy and an NHMRC Career Development Research Fellow.

She has led four NHMRC-funded trials. Her falls prevention manuals, which provide clear direction for implementation, are sold worldwide. Her Stepping On program, supported by NSW Health, was selected by the US Center for Injury Prevention and Control for national dissemination, and three of her

Occupational Therapy in Australia: Personal profiles

programs are highlighted in the US CDC Compendium of Effective Fall Interventions: What Works for Community-Dwelling Older Adults (2012), Westmead Home Safety and the novel Lifestyle Functional Exercise program (LiFE), which focuses on embedding balance and strength training in daily routines. Lindy has translated her skills in conducting trials of complex interventions into the area of dementia, testing promising interventions for the Australian health context. She has published 104 peer-reviewed journal articles and her papers have been cited more than 1350 times.

Lindy believes that clinical reasoning is informed by both research and experience, which is at best an iterative process. When refining and developing an intervention, she partners with leading practitioners. She considers herself fortunate to be supervising PhD students who excite and energise her, as does the wonderful research undertaken by the occupational therapists with whom she collaborates.



## **JENNY ZIVIANI**

### **PhD, Professor, Children's Allied Health Research, Queensland Health, and Conjoint Professor, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, The University of Queensland**

Jenny graduated in occupational therapy in Sydney and commenced her career at Concord Repatriation Hospital before moving to the NSW Blind Society, where she established the first occupational therapy student training unit. Subsequently, Jenny worked both clinically and academically, conducting research related to children's health and wellbeing as well as to the contribution of occupational therapy in this area. Jenny advanced her initial occupational therapy diploma to a bachelor's degree and went on to complete a BA majoring in Psychology, a Masters of Education and a PhD (all at The University of Queensland where she assumed an academic post).

Securing a number of small grants and ensuring that publications emerged from these projects enabled Jenny to successfully apply for nationally competitive Australian Research Council and NHMRC grants. To date she has held five of these, as well as other nationally competitive grants plus a Canadian Institute for Health research grant. These grants have focused on children's physical activity, time use and obesity; specific occupational therapy interventions for children with cerebral palsy; and on translating outcomes into clinical practice. Jenny's research success includes more than \$7 million in

research funding; twenty-four books and book chapters; more than 200 internationally peer-reviewed articles; and 200 conference presentations.

Jenny says that her greatest joy is working with postgraduate occupational therapy students; to date there have been thirty-five successful completions. She says that: 'Every research journey is unique and we are privileged to have occupational therapists of high academic calibre keen to make a meaningful difference to the lives of children and their families.'

In 2010 Jenny commenced as the inaugural Professor of Children's Allied Health Research, a collaboration between Children's Health Queensland and The University of Queensland. This position enables her to continue to foster the multidisciplinary research that has been a hallmark of her career. More importantly, she says that this position ensures the research being undertaken is clinically relevant and that findings can be readily adopted into practice. In 2015, Jenny was the recipient of the highly esteemed Sylvia Docker Lecture award at the Australian National Occupational Therapy conference in Melbourne.



## **CHRISTINE IMMS**

**Professor of Occupational Therapy, Head of School of Allied Health, Australian Catholic University; Honorary Researcher at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute in Melbourne and CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research in Ontario, Canada; founding Director of the Centre for Disability and Development Research (CeDDR): Enabling diversity across the lifespan, ACU**

Christine grew up in Tasmania but studied to be an occupational therapist in South Australia. Between 1983 and 1999 Christine's clinical practice spanned rehabilitation and community services provided within schools, children's homes and acute inpatient intensive care units and wards (paediatric, general medicine and mental health) in three Australian states and also in British Columbia, Canada.

Christine began research as a clinician in Canada and then completed a Master of Science (Rehabilitation Science) in Canada, followed by a PhD in Australia. Christine's research has investigated the effects of occupational therapy interventions; built evidence about measurement tools; and translated research findings to practice. Christine has secured approximately \$6.5 million in competitive grant funding, including an NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in cerebral palsy; an NHMRC Partnership project that supports knowledge translation for allied health professionals working with children with cerebral palsy; and a Department of Health-funded multi-university randomised trial evaluating the effectiveness of a simulated occupational therapy professional practice experience. Christine's recently established research centre focuses on enabling children whose lives are complicated by disability or chronic medical conditions, and their families, to meet the challenges of healthy growth, development and participation across the whole lifespan. Christine's track record

includes fifty-eight peer-reviewed journal publications, a co-edited book that has been translated into Japanese and ten book chapters as well as editorials and multiple abstracts in peer-reviewed journals.

Christine has supervised twenty-seven honours and higher degree students (nineteen completed, eight current) and mentored four post-graduate fellows. Christine emphasises that professional practice, research, teaching and mentoring have all provided her with a myriad of personal rewards as well as captured opportunities to support the growth of occupational therapy knowledge and practice. In 2015 Christine was the recipient of the Occupational Therapy Australia Research Foundation National Research Award in the open category.



## **VIGNETTE: NATASHA LAYTON, PhD**

Natasha Layton is an occupational therapist practising, researching and teaching in the areas of assistive technology, disability and outcomes. She is currently a Research Fellow with the Summer Foundation, President of ARATA (Australian Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Association) and represents Australia internationally on the ISO 9999 Assistive Products Standards Working Group.

As a new graduate, Natasha found herself arguing for better services for her consumers on an individual basis. She completed her doctorate at Deakin University on the topic of technology and client care. Barriers to best practice, including waiting lists and insufficient funding, impacted Natasha's capacity to deliver successful occupational therapy outcomes. This early clinical experience developed Natasha's interest in how to initiate change—not just for one consumer, but for all consumers facing barriers.

Today Natasha incorporates advocacy in both her roles within the Aids and Equipment Action Alliance (see [www.aeea.org.au](http://www.aeea.org.au)) and as the Professional Practice and Standards Manager at Occupational Therapy Australia. In individual advocacy Natasha may, for example, work with consumers to obtain a wheelchair that will meet their needs, write funding requests and support their efforts to find 'top-up' funding if the basic wheelchair provided by the government equipment provider is inadequate. To do this, Natasha's work includes empowering consumers, challenging policymakers and advocating to government treasury departments. Natasha uses internationally recognised health frameworks—including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (2001)—to demonstrate gaps in the consumer experience and propose better policy solutions.

In her previous role for Occupational Therapy Australia, Natasha used her advocacy skills to champion 'what good looks like'. This included reviewing evidence and gathering practice wisdom from occupational therapists to inform the association's position on various issues, publishing position statements and lobbying key stakeholders to improve health and disability systems.

Natasha believes that occupational therapists have a strong set of skills for advocacy and promotion. These include a holistic approach to health care, problem-solving skills and the ability to plan and set goals. She considers it is important to use critical thinking skills to evaluate the parts of the systems that

may need to change. This 'systems' thinking helps identify barriers, facilitators and partners as well as discern what outcomes are realistic and possible.

Natasha has identified that occupational therapists can develop advocacy and promotion skills in various ways—for example, volunteering or engaging with special interest groups and communities of practice; offering skills to formal advocacy organisations and participating on boards and committees of non-profit groups, local government disability advisory committees and similar associations are all opportunities. Natasha encourages engagement in advocacy work even though it can be slow and complex. She reiterates: 'even if nothing appears to be changing, you are taking an ethical stand, pointing out "what good looks like" and working towards it'.





## **VIGNETTE: MARILYN PATTISON**

Marilyn Pattison graduated as an occupational therapist in 1975 and has predicated her extensive experience and knowledge on providing assistance and support to both individuals and the wider community. Marilyn has become involved in various companies in order to help injured workers return to work with a minimum of disruption; develop injury prevention programs (minimising the risk to workers in the first place); and help people with chronic injuries to live a more meaningful life while trying to minimise the longer term burden/cost to society.

Marilyn has served as the President of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT). Among her achievements, she has been a recipient of the OT Australia National Award and a finalist in the Telstra Business Woman of the Year. She is also a recipient of the Sylvia Docker Award from OT Australia—the highest award for an occupational therapist's contribution to the profession in Australia. Internationally Marilyn has been conferred an Honorary Life Membership by the Swedish Occupational Therapy Association.

Marilyn currently employs twenty-five staff in her clinical practices. She reports that being a good leader requires her to listen to her staff with an open mind and be respectful of the skills and expertise of her team members. Although ultimately responsible for decisions about her practice, Marilyn consults with her staff to ensure she makes informed decisions. According to Marilyn, effective leadership ensures that, on arrival at a destination, everyone is in agreement about the journey. She considers that leaders need to encourage their teams to have a vision. For Marilyn, this vision relates to providing evidence-based, high quality health care.

Early in her career, Marilyn became involved with Occupational Therapy Australia. Initially, she participated in regional interest groups, then moved to take on leadership positions within state and national associations. This background enabled Marilyn to acquire the leadership skills required to become President of the World Federation of Occupational Therapy (WFOT). As president, it is necessary for Marilyn to use her leadership skills to advance the occupational therapy profession at an international level, while working with member organisations and therapists from eighty-four different member counties.

Completing a Masters of Business Administration provided another critical opportunity for Marilyn to develop the leadership skills necessary for running a successful private practice. Marilyn also believes that occupational therapists can be leaders in a range of different capacities—for example, in their treatment team, in their workplaces and within the profession of occupational therapy.

Marilyn says that a starting point for good leadership is to have a strong belief in what you do. She uses a quote from Henry Ford to illustrate this point: 'Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right.' She recommends that students and new graduates use a range of strategies to develop leadership skills. These include:

- Identifying role models who demonstrate good leadership. These people could be within the occupational therapy profession, other areas of health care or in the business sector. Focus on the skills that make these people good leaders by observing them and asking questions.
- Working with other leaders; utilising opportunities to develop leadership skills.
- Believing in yourself and having confidence in the skill set that comes with being an occupational therapist; focusing on what you can do rather than what you can't.



## **VIGNETTE: FIONA JONES**

**Dr Fiona Jones, PhD**, is Director and Senior Occupational Therapist of On Call Children's Therapy Network. She has presented at state, national and international conferences. Fiona is an Honorary Lecturer at the University of Queensland and is co-author of the Foundation Literacy Program. Her PhD focused on the transition to secondary school for children with cerebral palsy. She is a representative on the National Professional Practice and Standards Committee (OT Australia) and Paediatrics subgroup and a member of the OT External Advisory Committee, Australian Catholic University.

Fiona started her clinical career in the private practice sector. In the early stages of her PhD studies, she was contacted by a colleague who asked if she would consider offering occupational therapy assessment and intervention to a small group of children who did not qualify for other services and/or were on long waiting lists. Within a year OCC Therapy was established and she had more than seventy clients, working to put the necessary frameworks in place to formally establish her private practice.

Today, OCC Therapy offers individual assessments and intervention as well as group intervention. There is a growing leisure program, which includes circus training and a dance club. In the school setting, OCC Therapy offers whole class screening, consultation and professional development for teachers. Fiona and her team currently provide the majority of their clinical services in homes and schools across South-East Queensland. OCC Therapy works with children who are gifted, those who have learning difficulties and are struggling to participate optimally at school (e.g., children with autism spectrum disorders, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome) and children who have experienced trauma or neglect.

Fiona believes that OCC Therapy is unique due to the size of the business, the affordability of mobile services and the accessibility, flexibility and accountability of the staff. She believes that credibility, communication and accountability results in the majority of their new business being generated through 'word of mouth'. Fiona places an emphasis on creating a 'family' feel atmosphere in her business as she considers this is not only critical for staff satisfaction but also allows the families with whom she works to feel comfortable and supported.

Fiona says that a range of entrepreneurial skills have enabled her to develop a successful private practice. She provides the following tips for graduates who might consider starting their own clinical practice. These include:

Occupational Therapy in Australia: Personal profiles

- Being in it for the long term, not short-term financial or professional gain.
- Being critical about your business and your skills, and reflecting on a plan to improve them regularly.
- Actively seeking to learn from others.
- Investing professionally in your staff, and giving them the opportunity to develop.
- Knowing your own strengths and limitations. You do not need to be good at everything—use people who know more than you do. Find a good accountant!
- Being willing to take risks and put in an enormous effort every day.
- Being resilient, accountable, transparent and trustworthy and, in doing so, maintain your integrity and credibility.
- Loving what you do!