Life History of Cassie Hilts, MOT, OTR/L

“That’s how I view all of my interactions, through the eyes of an occupational therapist”.

Nichole Arn, OTS and Mackenzie Funke, OTS

Introduction

Purpose
This life history report is one of 29 life history interviews which are a part of a larger project, Life History of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) in North Dakota and Wyoming. The purpose of the project is to gather information through life histories of individuals who have been influential in developing practice in North Dakota and Wyoming. It is anticipated that the life history process will be a powerful way to gather this information. This study is intended to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of history and how occupational therapy practice has evolved from it’s inception to current practice in North Dakota and Wyoming.

Methodology
A life history approach was used to interview the participant. This was guided by the Kawa model. Initial contact was made by the course instructors. The interview was completed by UND occupational therapy students, using a semi-structured interview format. The interview was completed at the participant’s workplace and lasted one hour. The instructors provided a semi-structured interview script that could be adapted and personalized for the participant. The researchers were allowed to add or modify interview questions. Post interview, data was transcribed verbatim and coded to find themes, categories and assertions. Trustworthiness was established using the verbatim transcription, researcher debriefing, and peer reviews.

Data Analysis

Personal Experiences
Cassie’s personal experiences revolve around her roles and family. Her roles as a mother, wife and grandmother have impacted her throughout her time in the field of occupational therapy. When she began her career as an occupational therapist she cared less about her work. Her focus at that time revolved around her family. Now that her children are grown, she cares a lot more about the impact she makes on the community and her students at Northland Community and Technical College.

Work Experiences
Cassie entered the field of occupational therapy (OT) as the sole mental health OT practitioner at her facility. When working in this area, Cassie recognized the importance of a health care team and now underserved mental health is in Grand Forks, ND. She believes that this is because it is a rural town.

Throughout her career, she moved on to work as an educator, first for the University of North Dakota and now at Northland Community and Technical College. Cassie enjoys instructing because it allows her to relate to students through what she experienced while practicing mental health OT. She believes that she has the ability to listen and provide comfort to students who are struggling in a challenging academic environment.

Along with instructing at NCTC, Cassie also is the director of the occupational therapy assistant program. As the program director, she has recognized that there is a lack of collaboration between occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants. She explained that this is not only in school, but also when practicing within the occupational therapy field.

Occupational Therapy Practice
Cassie believes that as the profession has aged and continues to age, there is a stronger presence of occupational therapy (OT). She also feels that there is a greater emphasis on research and occupational therapy today. Throughout time, occupational therapy has implemented it’s own theories and degree requirements. With these implemented requirements, the profession continues to grow and change. Currently, Cassie does not agree that obtaining a doctorate degree for an occupational therapy or a bachelors degree for an occupational therapy assistant is necessary for the growth of the profession. She does hope that more occupational therapy research articles become available as a product of the increased educational standards.

Conclusion

Through the Life History of Cassie Hilts, it was discovered that she has experienced both personal and professional growth, as the profession of occupational therapy continues to progress.

The impact that occupational therapy has had on Cassie Hilts influences the way she looks at her life everyday, not only at work but also in her personal life. Personally, her roles and family have had a huge impact on how she approaches work everyday, especially since her family has grown from two children to a full family, including grandchildren. Along with her family having an effect, her work experience has also had an impact on her. She wants to give back to her community and students by actively listening and comforting these individuals. Cassie believes she has seen great growth within the profession and that there has been an increase in research, theories, and requirements for the profession. She also mentioned the increased emphasis on research. Overall, Cassie feels that she has experienced the change of a constantly changing profession.

References

