

REVISTA OT

A NEWSLETTER OF THE TEXAS OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION

VOL 38 NO. 2 / Summer 2025 EDITION

TOTA SUMMER

ADVANCING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY,
EMPOWERING PRACTITIONERS, AND
ENHANCING LIVES ACROSS TEXAS.

Contents

- 3 | Letter from the President
- 4 | From the Executive Director
- 6 | TOTA Announcements
- 7 | Expanding Acts of Benevolence in Community
- 8 | Why Membership Matters
- 9 | Education Chair Report
- 10 | DEI Committee
- 11 | TOTA PAC
- 12 | AOTF
- 13 | Burnout in Pediatric Outpatient Occupational Therapy: A Call for Systemic Change
- 14 | Where are the OTPs?
- 15 | Student Zone
 - Transitioning from Student to Practitioner
 - Meet the State Student Reps
- 17 | District Zone
 - Great Plains West
 - Rio Grande



Revista OT is posted online three times a year by the Texas Occupational Therapy Association, Inc., 2323 Clear Lake City Blvd. Suite 180-197 Houston, TX 77062.

Office Number:
832-915-9238
email: judith.joseph@tota.org
Web: www.tota.org

REVISTA OT: Summer Edition 2025

TOTA 2025 ANNUAL CONFERENCE EXHIBITOR AND ADVERTISING INFORMATION

Exhibitor and Advertising Information

Live Exhibit Dates:

November 14-15, 2025

(with a Virtual-Only option)

Embassy Suites by Hilton
San Marcos Hotel Conference Center
1001 E. McCarty Lane
San Marcos, TX 78666

Exhibit Hall Schedule:

Friday 11/14 - 11:00 am - 4:00 pm
(unopposed lunch 12:15 pm - 1:45 pm)

Saturday 11/15 - 10:00 am - 2:00 pm
(unopposed lunch 12:00 pm - 1:30 pm)

The TOTA Annual Conference provides the ideal place and time to promote your products/services to the OT community. The event is being held in person in San Marcos, Texas..

Review the prospectus for exhibitor and advertising options (Virtual-Only option for those who cannot join us in person). Once you have read the details and decided on the booth and sponsorship you would like, click on the Exhibitor/Advertising Registration Form to begin your online registration process.

Questions? Contact Kami Lusson 832-915-9239

**CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO AND
TO ACCESS THE 2025 PROSPECTUS**



Embrace Our Role in Shaping the Future of OT in Texas

John S. Luna, OTR, OTD – TOTA President



John S. Luna, OTR, OTD

Take a moment to think back to the beginning of your journey into the field of occupational therapy. What are your first memories? For me, it is sitting down to prepare my application for submission. Back then, there was no OTCAS, no streamlined centralized application system as we are familiar with today. Programs had simple checklists that you could pick up in person at their office or download from their website. Just like applicants today, my journey began with preparation. I reviewed the requirements, took inventory of what I had, identified what I still needed, and began checking items off my list.

After logging over 100 hours of volunteer work, gathering the required letters of recommendation, and requesting transcripts, I found myself sitting in front of an admissions committee member, contemplating my answer to the first question of the interview: **“Why do you want to become an occupational therapy practitioner?”** I’m sure I gave some version of “I want to help others,” but looking back, I do not think I fully understood the **leadership role** that comes with being an occupational therapy practitioner.

Let me ask you a question: **Do you consider yourself a leader?** In his TED Talk “Everyday Leadership,” Drew Dudley challenges us to reconsider how we define leadership. He asks his audience how many of them consider themselves leaders, and he finds that most hands do not go up. Why is that? Dudley argues that it is our **definition of leadership** that holds us back. We often associate leadership with grand achievements, titles, or major milestones—things we believe are out of reach for most people. This mindset gives us permission to **opt out** of leadership, to avoid taking a seat at the table, or to wait for someone else to step up. However, leadership is not about the big, grand moments. It is about the **small, everyday opportunities** which we have to influence the lives of those around us. As occupational therapy practitioners, that is exactly what we do every day.

As you reflected on the beginning of your professional journey, what came to mind? Each of our journeys in this profession is unique. Our paths may have led us through school-based settings, hospital rehabilitation units, community centers, and into our clients’ homes. This diverse set of experiences has prepared us with a collective skill

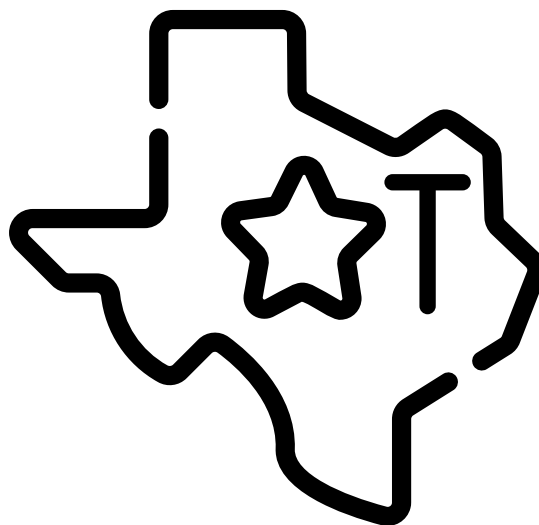
set that is uniquely poised to meet the needs of society and meet the challenges of leadership. While we bring different experiences, skills, and strengths to the table, we are united by a shared vision “To enrich life for all individuals and society through meaningful engagement in everyday activities” (AOTA Vision 2030). Today, more than ever, **our profession needs you. Our profession needs the everyday actions of advocacy, membership, engagement, mentorship, and service** to shape the future of occupational therapy. Embrace the impact you have on the future of our profession, to inspire, to inform, and to connect to make a greater impact in the occupational therapy profession (TOTA 2024). Your voice matters. Your leadership matters. Let’s shape the future of occupational therapy here in Texas together.

References

American Occupational Therapy Association. (2025). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from <https://www.aota.org/about/mission-vision/vision-2030> on June 1, 2025

Dudley, Drew. (2013). *Everyday leadership*. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAy6EawKKME> on June 1, 2025.

Texas Occupational Therapy Association. (2025). *TOTA’s Why*. Retrieved from <https://www.tota.org/>





Where is the Good News?

Judith Joseph, OTR, MA, CDRS, FAOTA –TOTA Executive Director



Judith Joseph, OTR,
MA, CDRS, FAOTA

I am writing this article with rose-colored glasses on. If you have never heard of this phrase, it means taking an optimistic view of things. So, let’s get started. In January, TOTA’s board of directors met to establish specific goals for the association and update the strategic plan. We took a unique approach by aligning the goals with TOTA’s Why Statement. “To inspire, inform, and connect our members to make a greater impact on the occupational therapy profession.” [https://www.tota.org/tota-strategic-plan] This resulted in TOTA focusing on member engagement and non-member engagement. The Texas OT community of practitioners and students is stronger when we work together. This approach pushed TOTA leadership to enhance how we address our Why Statement and then create events that show off what we do.

The first event TOTA held this year was our Day at the Capitol on February 4th. Over 250 practitioners and students attended this advocacy event. Of the 250 participants, 114 were not TOTA members. In the past, participants were required to be members of TOTA to participate, and many times, the number of participants was less than a dozen. To get the TOTA OT Compact Bill passed in the Texas House of Representatives, it took the effort of the Texas OT community. TOTA sent out an action alert across our social media platforms, WhatsApp, and email-- the OT community responded by contacting their state representatives. Despite our bill (HB 932) being referred to the Texas Senate Committee on Health and Human Services, it did not receive a hearing. Our lobbyist, Denise Rose, commended the efforts of the OT community and encouraged us to increase our membership for a more powerful and impactful voice.

AOTA sent an action alert calling for its members to contact their Attorney General in the states that had filed a federal lawsuit against the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that sought, among other things, to have Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 declared unconstitutional. TOTA shared this action alert with members and non-members of TOTA, and as a collective community, our letters reached the office of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton. On May 13, 2025, we received an email from AOTA’s Federal Affairs, Chuck Willmarth, announcing an AOTA and State Association advocacy victory <https://www.aota.org/advocacy/advocacy-news/2025/section-504-victory>

TOTA collaborated with the Occupational Therapy Benevolence Endowment to host the first Maternal Mental Wellness Symposium. Because of some generous donations from Katharine Lawson, Eugenia Gonzalez, and others, we were able to offer this 3.5-hour event free of charge to the OT community. Practitioners, students, and other professionals from all over the country were invited to attend. I am happy to announce that over 300 people enrolled in the symposium, and it will be available on demand through November 17, 2025.

Jean Polichino and the TOTA school-based practice focus group organized TOTA’s third bi-annual OT and PT Service Delivery in Schools: Policy, Research and Best Practices Conference. The conference took place on June 13-14 at Austin Community College. The conference was attended by over 100 OT and PT practitioners. A thank you goes out to Estrella Barrera for agreeing to host this conference, allowing us to keep the price the same as the 2023 conference.

Over 100 occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, students, and other professionals submitted proposals for the TOTA 2025 Annual Conference. Kami Lusson, TOTA Vendor Services Coordinator, continues to recruit exhibitors. We are anticipating another successful conference.

Finally 194 TOTA members voted in the 2025 elections. Once the results are confirmed and the winners are notified, the information will be made available on the website.

Even without my rose-colored glasses, I am optimistic about the strength of the OT community. Evidence of our strength and unity is acknowledged in this article. While growing our membership is important, staying engaged with the only professional organization in Texas dedicated to inspiring, informing, and connecting occupational therapy professionals is even more critical.

Best regards

Judi

Officers

President:	John Luna
Vice President:	Keegan McKay
Secretary:	Laurie Stelter
Treasurer:	Jason Perez
Executive Director	Judith Joseph (<i>employee</i>)

District Chairpersons

Alamo South:	Thelma Ochoa
Capital Centex:	Lacey Spark
Great Plains West:	Chris Lasek
Gulf Coast East:	Chanaé Jones
Rio Grande:	Grisel Contreras
Trinity North:	Angela Duell

Appointed Committee Chairs

Committee on Conference:	Evie Harness
Committee on Development:	Sue Ram
Committee on Education:	Megan Taylor
Committee on Legislative & Political Affairs:	Emily Navarro
Committee on Membership:	Patricia Bowyer
Committee on Standards and Practice:	Michelle Atanu
Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:	Open

Adhoc Committee Chairs

Awards and Recognition Committee	Carol Regli & Gloria Jeffrey
Mentorship Program	Monica Clark

Appointed Board Members

Historian	Esther Bell
Parliamentarian	Lynda Jennings
OTA Representative	Layman Darnell Miller
OT Student Representative	Maya Landgrebe
OTA Student Representative	Leena Lozano

Consultants

Legislative Advisors	Denise Rose, JD - Lobbyist
TOTA Legal Advisor	Richard Y. Cheng, JD, OT, CHC

Newsletter

Editor:	Rachelle Elliot
Design and Production:	Justine Boyer
Vendor Services	Kami Lusson
Continuing Education Services	Paula Cook

TOTA Election Results Coming Soon

The election results will be announced after the winners have been officially notified by the TOTA 2025 Nominating Committee. The results will be posted on the website and announced in the July 18th TOTA Tidbit.

TOTA 2025 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Shaping the Future of OT

November 14 - 15, 2025
San Marcos, Texas

ANNOUNCEMENTS

LOOK WHAT'S NEW

Thank you for voting in the TOTA 2025 Elections!

The results will be posted after the votes have been certified and the candidates have been notified. All state and district elected positions will serve a two-year term from October 2025 to October 2027.

The newly elected officers will assume their roles following the 2025 Annual Business Meeting on October 15, 2025.

The TOTA 2025 Annual Business Meeting - Virtual

Date: October 15, 2025
Time: 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM CST
Location: Virtual via Zoom (the link will be contained in the LMS)
Agenda: To be posted on or before September 24, 2025

[Click here](#) to submit questions or comments to the board of directors

**TOTA THANKS
OUR ORGANIZATION
MEMBERS**

**Occupational
Therapy Benevolence
Endowment**

Share Your Nest

**Texas Occupational
Therapy Foundation**

**Texas Society
for Hand Therapy**

Expanding Acts of Benevolence in Community

Reggie Michael Campbell, OT-Retired, MS, FAOTA
OTBE President



Reggie Michael
Campbell, OT-Retired,
MS, FAOTA



One of the marvelous things about community is that it enables us to welcome and help people in a way we couldn't as individuals."

Over 300 occupational therapy practitioners and health care professionals registered in May Mental Health Awareness Month for the OTBE-TOTA co-sponsored Maternal and Mental Health Symposium. The symposium was made possible by the benevolent donations of Dr. Katherine Lawson, Dr. Eugenia Gonzalez and friends, in memory of a beloved OT colleague who tragically lost her life to postpartum depression.

The OTBE Board and TOTA volunteers collaborated in community with donors to expand "acts of benevolence" beyond OTBE grants to develop the webinar symposium. The symposium speakers, in sharing evidence-based literature, their own personal maternal health challenges and their occupation based maternal health intervention practices, demonstrated by example the role occupational therapy can play in meeting the occupational needs of new mothers and infants.

The symposium committee is grateful for the speakers' granting permission to record their webinar presentations. The 3.5 approved CEU presentations will be available, without costs, on the TOTA webpage Learning Management System link until November 17, 2025.

Claudette Fette, PhD, OTR
(Opportunities and Gaps in Mental Health OT Practice)

Khadijah Johnson, OTD, OTR/L
(Bridging the Gap: Occupational Therapy's Role in Maternal Mental Health for Women of Color)

Jessica Peterson, OTD, OTR, CLC
(The Sensory Symbiosis of Pregnancy to Parenthood)

Haydee Medrano, OTR, MOT, CBS
(Supporting Mothers in Postpartum Through Community-Based Maternal Health Programs).

"Community is a place where connections are made, relationships are built, and support is given."

The overwhelmingly positive feedback from symposium attendees acknowledged the value of being in community with colleagues. Building strong communities of support starts with individual contributions. The individual volunteer contributions of Judith Joseph (TOTA Executive Director), Belinda Alexander, Alicia Lohmann, Dawn Phillips, and Dahlia Costillo contributed to the success of the OTBE-TOTA Maternal Mental Health Symposium.

Serving the mission and goals of TOTA & OTBE can give one a sense of belonging and the feeling that you are never alone, as you strive to advocate for the promotion of mental health for yourself and others and advance the practice of occupational therapy. For further information on how to support the missions of OTBE and TOTA in service to the advancement of occupational therapy visit their respective webpages: OTBE.org & TOTA.org.



The 3.5 approved CEU presentations will be available, without costs, on the TOTA webpage Learning Management System link until November 17, 2025

Why Membership Matters: Don't Miss Out — Join TOTA Today!

Patricia Bowyer, OTR, MS, EdD, FAOTA
State Membership Committee Chair



Patricia Bowyer, OTR,
MS, EdD, FAOTA

Are you experiencing FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)? Do not miss your chance to be part of a powerful professional community — become a member of the **Texas Occupational Therapy Association (TOTA)** today!

As a TOTA member, you gain access to **continuing education events, networking opportunities, and a strong advocacy organization** working on behalf of occupational therapy practitioners in Texas that are **TOTA members**. And remember — because everything is bigger in Texas — our state is divided into six dynamic TOTA Districts (listed alphabetically):

- Alamo South
- Capital Centex
- Great Plains West
- Gulf Coast East
- Rio Grande
- Trinity North

Membership means you have access to all TOTA has to offer, not only at the state level, but also within your District. Whether you are a **new graduate** looking to build connections or an **experienced practitioner** eager to mentor the next generation, TOTA is the place to be.

Get Involved: Meet Your District Membership Chairs

District	Membership Chair
Alamo South	Jennifer Parpacen-Smith
Capital Centex	Carol Regali
Great Plains West	Melinda Underwood
Gulf Coast East	Amanda Elsner
Rio Grande	Valerie Vasquez
Trinity North	Gloria Jeffery

If you are already a member, ask your colleagues if they have joined — and if not, consider hosting an event with your District Chair to share the value and importance of TOTA membership. Let's grow our community together!



Membership Happenings: Around the Town — A Sampling

Capital Centex

Planning is underway for a **summer CEU series** offering an online upper extremity anatomy refresher. The series will include three one-hour virtual sessions (shoulder, elbow, and hand anatomy) spaced throughout the summer. Also, do not miss their team at the **Buddy Walk** with the Down Syndrome Association of Central Texas on **October 19th!**

Great Plains West

During OT Month, Molly Amlung gave a short talk to **Abilene Christian University's OT Program Class of 2026** about the benefits of TOTA membership. A great way to inspire future leaders in our profession!

Gulf Coast East

On **April 18, 2025**, GCED hosted a successful **OT Month Social Game Night** at Cidercade in Houston. The event brought together OT practitioners and students for a fun-filled evening of arcade games, food, networking, and community-building. Thank you to everyone who attended — and to the GCED leadership and volunteers who made the event a night to remember!



Trinity North

Trinity North hosted a **Spring Hike at Cedar Preserve** to raise awareness for OT in the Park. Coming up on **June 13**, they will partner with the **Down Syndrome Association of North Texas** and **iCan Shine Bike Camp** at **UT Arlington** — another great opportunity to engage with the community.

Together, we strengthen our profession, build lasting connections, and make a difference — **one event, one member, one shared mission at a time.**

Ready to join or renew? Visit www.tota.org today!



Education Chair Report

Megan Taylor, OTR, OTD
TOTA Education Chair



Megan Taylor,
OTR, OTD

Thank You District Education Chairs

Since our last *Revista* update, I am thrilled to share that all of our District Education Chair positions have been filled! Please join me in welcoming our newest volunteer leaders:

- Capital Centex District: **Terri Grundy**
- Great Plains West District: **Molly Setliff**
- Rio Grande District: **Sandra Gutierrez**

We are grateful for their commitment to advancing educational opportunities across their districts. I also want to express sincere appreciation to each of our continuing District Education Chairs. Your dedication to high-quality education is making a lasting impact across TOTA:

- Alamo South District: **Isaac Montes**
- Gulf Coast East District: **Elisa Avila**
- Trinity North District: **Melissa Morgan**

Thank you all for your time, leadership, and passion in supporting OT professionals and students across Texas.

Explore TOTA's Continuing Education Opportunities

Have you checked out TOTA's latest continuing education (CE) offerings in our Learning Management System (LMS)? In 2025, we continue to deliver high-quality, evidence-based content that supports your professional growth. These peer-reviewed courses are now available for your convenience:

- **Introduction to Lymphedema**
Isaac Montes, OTR, OTD, CHT, CLT, CSCS
- **Maternal Mental Wellness Symposium**
Fette, C., Schwee, G., Peterson, J., Medrano, H., and Johnson, K.
- **DIR-Floortime: All the Time with Everyone**

Amy Gibbs, PhD, OTR, CEIM, DIR-Advanced

- **The Integrated School OT: Supporting Students through Intentional Collaboration**
Angela Saul, OTR, MOT and Molly Amlung, OTR, MSOT
- **What to do with your TBOTE License**
Stephanie Johnston
- **Basics of Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics –**
Jerilyn Callen, OTR, ppOTD, MSOT, NIPMHF
Visit the LMS today to explore these courses and more!

Save the Date

We are already looking ahead to the 2025 TOTA Annual Conference, happening November 14-15 in San Marcos. Join us for inspiring CE sessions, dynamic networking opportunities, and conversations that continue to shape the future of occupational therapy in Texas. Let's keep learning, leading, and growing together!



DEI Committee

Dahlia Castillo, OTR, OTD,
Outgoing DEI Committee Chair



Dahlia Castillo,
OTR, OTD

As I conclude my role as TOTA DEI Committee Chair, I want to thank our community for the opportunity to advance inclusive best practices in occupational therapy across Texas. I challenge every OT to reflect on whether their practice truly embodies inclusion.

In the context of occupational therapy (OT), inclusion refers to ensuring all individuals, regardless of their physical, cognitive, emotional, social, cultural, or economic differences, have equitable access to meaningful occupations and participation in

everyday life. It emphasizes removing barriers that limit participation and create environments where diverse clients feel respected, supported, and fully engaged.

Definition of Inclusion in OT Practice:

Inclusion is the intentional practice of enabling and advocating for the full participation of all individuals in occupations, communities, and systems, particularly those who have been historically marginalized or excluded.

Key Aspects of Inclusion in Occupational Therapy:

Dimension	Application in OT
Client-Centered Practice	Tailoring interventions to respect each client's unique identity, values, and lived experience.
Environmental Adaptation	Modifying physical, social, and attitudinal environments to support participation for all.
Cultural Responsiveness	Recognizing and integrating the cultural backgrounds and beliefs of clients into practice.
Advocacy & Systems Change	Challenging structural inequalities that limit occupational access or outcomes.
Interdisciplinary Collaboration	Partnering with families, schools, workplaces, and communities to foster inclusive opportunities.
Universal Design & Accessibility	Promoting design that works for a wide range of users, including those with disabilities.

Examples of Inclusion in OT Practice:

Examples of Inclusion in OT Practice:

- School-Based OT: Ensuring children with disabilities can fully participate in classroom and playground activities with peers.
- Community Mental Health: Supporting individuals with mental illness in gaining employment or housing in integrated settings.
- Geriatric Care: Helping older adults remain active in community life despite age-related challenges.
- Policy Advocacy: Promoting legislation that upholds the rights and participation of people with disabilities or marginalized identities.

Ethical and Professional Context:

Inclusion aligns with the AOTA Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics, particularly the principles of:

- Justice (promoting fairness and objectivity),
- Autonomy (respecting the client's right to choose and engage), and
- Beneficence (doing good for the client).

References

- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2020). *Occupational therapy code of ethics (2020)*. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74(Supplement_3), 7413410005p1–7413410005p13. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.74S3006>
- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2020). *AOTA position statement: Occupational therapy's role in inclusive practices for children and youth*. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74(Supplement_2), 7412410015. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.74S2005>
- Kramer-Roy, D., & Ashby, S. (2017). Diversity and inclusion in occupational therapy education and practice. In B. A. Boyt Schell, G. Gillen, & M. Scaffa (Eds.), *Willard and S kman's occupational therapy* (13th ed., pp. 1238–1248). Wolters Kluwer.
- Pollard, N., Sakellariou, D., & Kronenberg, F. (Eds.). (2008). *A political practice of occupational therapy*. Churchill Livingstone Elsevier.
- Sakellariou, D., & Pollard, N. (2013). A commentary on the social determinants of health and occupational therapy: The need for culturally-responsive, occupation-based practices. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 76(7), 295–298. <https://doi.org/10.4276/030802213X13706169932919>

We Need You! Advocacy in Occupational Therapy

Eva Anger, OTR, OTD
TOTAPAC Chair, Executive Committee



Eva Anger, OTR, OTD

Advocacy—defined by Merriam-Webster as “the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal”—requires collective effort. While even one person can make a difference, professional advocacy cannot rest solely on the 4% of Texas’ 20,330 licensed occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) who are members of the Texas Occupational Therapy Association (TOTA).

Political advocacy takes many forms—serving an organization, protesting a policy, or making financial contributions—but it requires all of us to ensure patients receive the care they deserve. Whether it is aligning insurance definitions with the Texas OT Practice Act (1999) to expand service eligibility or joining an interstate licensure compact to allow Texas OTPs to practice across state lines with fewer barriers, your voice matters!

TOTA’s mission is to “anticipate and respond to the organizational, political, economic, and social features of the healthcare delivery system at the local, state, and national levels.” The TOTA-PAC complements this work by providing a voice for OTPs in Texas’ political arena through financial support for legislative and constitutional officeholders who champion occupational therapy. To donate to the PAC, you must first become a TOTA member.

By the time you read this, the 89th Texas legislative session will have ended. Any unfinished business will have to wait until January 12, 2027, when the 90th session begins. One victory during the 89th session was the Texas Occupational Therapy Association’s success in advancing HB932, which passed the Texas House of Representatives by a decisive vote of 131 to 9. If enacted, HB932 would have allowed Texas to enter the OT Licensure Compact, granting OTPs the ability to work across multiple states with fewer regulatory hurdles.

Unfortunately, the bill failed to receive a hearing in the Senate’s Health and Human Services Committee—a bittersweet victory. Without sufficient support, we may not have another chance in 2027. With fewer than 4% of Texas OTPs engaged in TOTA and PAC advocacy, the question remains: Will you step up and make a difference?

Join Us Today!

Becoming a TOTA member is the first step in strengthening our advocacy efforts. Click here to join today: [TOTA Membership Link](#)

If you are already a member, thank you! Consider making a PAC donation using the QR code below. Every dollar helps, and if a one-time donation is not feasible, a smaller monthly contribution can still make a meaningful impact.



References:

Merriam-Webster. Retrieved May 31, 2025, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/advocacy>.

TOTA. Retrieved May 31, 2025, from <https://www.tota.org/>



American Occupational Therapy Foundation (AOTF)

Lawrence Liff, MA
AOTF Chief Development Officer



Lawrence Liff, MA

At the American Occupational Therapy Foundation, AOTF, we are committed to advancing the science that empowers OT professionals and improves the delivery of high-quality care. Today, opportunities for occupational therapists to obtain funding for research, education, and professional development are declining, but AOTF remains dedicated to making the critical investments we need to strengthen our profession.

This year AOTF celebrates our 60th anniversary. Over these many decades, AOTF has made lasting impacts on evidence-based practice and in the lives of millions of people who receive occupational therapy services. Did you know that AOTF funded some of the first research studies into MOHO, sensory integration, play as a pediatric occupation, functional cognition, and mental health? Were you aware that over the last decade AOTF has supported over 90 early-stage research studies, including 6 in Texas, covering more than 2-dozen different topics in OT practice areas? Have you used OT evidence generated by an AOTF funded study or scientist? **Most likely!**

Central to our future, and the future of OT science, we will be broadening engagement with our community. This includes OT researchers, faculty, students, clinicians, and community partners. AOTF is excited to launch 2 new research grant programs this summer: Community-Engaged Research and the Hand in Hand Research Grant. Community-Engaged Research will bring OT researchers and community partners together to address community identified needs and priorities with authentic participation

throughout the research process. The Hand in Hand Research Grant emphasizes a research collaboration between OT scientists and community partners as they examine intervention therapies, access to health services or implementation improvement to address key areas in hand and upper extremity therapy.

The Intervention Research Grant and Implementation Research Grants will also open in August. Later in 2025 we will open applications for our research recognition awards, STRIDE Mentored Research Fellows and nominations for the Academy of Research. Student scholarships, including the TOTA Scholarship, will open in January 2026.

AOTF invites all TOTA members to explore our grants, awards, resources, and upcoming events. **Apply, nominate, and participate!**

Occupational therapy is about people and our 60 years of accomplishments have only been made possible thanks to the generous support of donors and volunteers who are essential to our unique mission. Thank you to all of you who have supported AOTF and helped us advance the science of occupational therapy to support people's full participation in meaningful life activities.

To learn more about AOTF and join us in our scientific and philanthropic endeavors, please visit www.aotf.org



Burnout in Pediatric Outpatient Occupational Therapy: A Call for Systemic Change

Cecilia Zepeda COTA, BHS



Cecilia Zepeda
COTA, BHS

The Personal Story Behind the Data

When I began my journey as an occupational therapy assistant in a pediatric outpatient setting, I was filled with excitement and a deep sense of purpose to initiate my career. However, it did not take long for me to recognize a shared struggle among my coworkers, including OTs, SLPs, and PTs –we all faced the same mounting stress, time constraints, and emotional fatigue. In an effort to cope, we started incorporating lunchtime pickleball games and table activities to give our brains a much-needed reset. These micro-moments of relief became a lifeline amid the chaos of packed schedules and emotional demands. This article is not only based on my experience but also on the collective voice of 32 OT practitioners who shared their insights through a burnout-focused survey.

Understanding Burnout in Pediatric Outpatient Settings

Burnout, a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress, is an increasing concern among pediatric occupational therapists. According to Goffredo et al. (2024), pediatric OTs are uniquely vulnerable due to their emotionally charged work and high administrative burdens. In outpatient pediatric clinics, therapists often face additional logistical stressors: longer evaluation times, high energy demands from active children, late clinic hours due to after-school appointments, and inconsistent attendance. For contract-based practitioners, these factors can translate into unpaid administrative tasks and weekend note-writing, further exacerbating burnout.

Survey Findings: The Scope of the Problem

Our survey results underscore the prevalence of burnout. A majority (63.64%) of respondents reported usually feeling emotionally drained after working with patients, and 45.45% usually experienced physical exhaustion. More than half (54.55%) noted emotional strain from working with children and families as a key stressor, while 72.73% cited paperwork and documentation as the most significant contributor to burnout. Alarming, only 22.73% had access to mental health resources through their workplace, a service typically more available in hospital-based settings than private outpatient clinics.

When asked about support from their clinics, 40.91% answered “somewhat” supported, and 22.73% felt no support at all. Only 27.27% believed they had adequate time to complete their clinical duties without sacrificing quality. These numbers align with findings from Abaoğlu et al. (2020), who highlighted that inadequate administrative support and unrealistic productivity expectations were major contributors to burnout among OTs.

Why Burnout Matters

Burnout does not just impact therapists; it has ripple effects on patient care, safety, and treatment outcomes. Garcia et al. (2019) found a direct link between clinician burnout and increased risk of patient safety incidents. Moreover, Bakker et al. (2023) explain through the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model that burnout results when job demands

exceed personal and professional resources, leading to disengagement and reduced performance.

In our survey, 45.45% of practitioners rated their burnout as moderate, and 13.64% as severe. Notably, 54.54% reported that burnout had occasionally or frequently made them reconsider their careers. Without intervention, we risk losing passionate clinicians to preventable stressors.

A Path Toward Healing and Sustainability

Therapists deserve a supportive work environment that prioritizes their mental health alongside productivity goals. Our data suggests several practical changes:

- **Improved Work-Life Balance:** 77.27% of respondents supported policies promoting work-life balance.
- **Flexible Scheduling:** 45.45% called for more flexibility to help manage late evening appointments and reduce after-hours workload.
- **Administrative and Wellness Support:** Respondents emphasized the need for better staffing and access to mental health resources.

Small interventions like team-building activities, active listening from management, and structured wellness programs can promote a more resilient and engaged workforce. Brown and Pashniak (2018) highlight that occupational therapists who feel supported are more engaged and less likely to experience chronic burnout.

A Call to Action for Clinic Owners

Clinic owners and administrators must recognize that sustainable productivity is linked to therapist well-being. Incorporating stress relief into the clinic culture, listening to staff needs, and balancing business goals with human-centered leadership is not just ethical—it’s strategic. A happy, supported therapist delivers more consistent care, improved patient outcomes, and greater clinic success.

It is time we stop viewing burnout as an individual issue and start addressing it as a systemic one.

References

Abaoğlu, H., Demirok, T., & Kayihan, H. (2020). Burnout and its relationship with work-related factors among occupational therapists working in public sector in Turkey. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 28, 294–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11038128.2020.1735513>

Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Sanz-Vergel, A. (2023). Job demands-resources theory: Ten years later. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 10, 25–53. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-120920-053933>

Brown, C. A., & Pashniak, L. M. (2018). Psychological health and occupational therapists: Burnout, engagement and work addiction. *Work*, 60, 513–525. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-182759>

Garcia, C. L., Abreu, L. C., Ramos, J. L. S., et al. (2019). Influence of burnout on patient safety: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *Medicina*, 55, 553. <https://doi.org/10.3390/medicina55090553>

Goffredo, C. A., Bowyer, P., Reis, H. I. S., & Humphrey, J. (2024). Pediatric Occupational Therapists and Occupational Stress: A Scoping Review. *Occupational therapy in health care*, 38(3), 827–841. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07380577.2022.2156024>

Goffredo, C. A., Bowyer, P., & Yeatts, P. (2024). Stress among Pediatric Occupational Therapists: A Study of Prevalence, Work and Demographic Factors. *Occupational therapy in health care*, 38(3), 816–826. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07380577.2024.2309677>

Where are the OTPs?

Perceived Challenges Amongst Stakeholders Within Occupational Therapy Pediatric Fieldwork

Michelle Atanu, OTR
Leeann Dockall, OTS

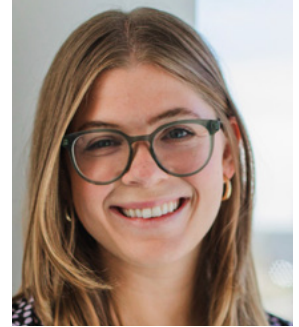
Michelle Atanu, OTR (Director at Avilo Pediatric Solutions & Consulting) and Leeann Dockall, OTS (Texas Women's University Doctoral Capstone student) completed a 14-week capstone project together, to better understand the perceived challenges related to occupational therapy (OT) student pediatric fieldwork rotations. We collected and analyzed our findings through polls, surveys and a robust needs assessment. The surveys were administered to three different stakeholders which included academic field work coordinators, OT and occupational therapy assistant (OTA) students and professionals directly involved in pediatric OT practice settings.

Academic fieldwork coordinators across the state are required to place hundreds of students at fieldwork sites each year. The concerns they expressed were profound yet interesting. 64% of fieldwork coordinators surveyed, reported that the number of pediatric sites available does not meet the number of student requests, they noted that there is high competition amongst other programs which limits placement availability, and they reported the challenge in recruiting new fieldwork educators in the field. Our data shows that the challenges fieldwork coordinators face could hinder their perceived job performance from others and could also impact their ability to meet the demands expected of them.

While students enrolled in an occupational therapy assistant, master's, or doctoral program expressed strong interest in obtaining a pediatric fieldwork placement, many also shared concerns related to a lack of perceived competence regarding working in pediatrics after graduation, especially when they were unable to gain experience in a pediatric setting during school. According to our findings, 78% of students surveyed expressed interest in completing a pediatric fieldwork rotation during their education. However, amongst those who requested but did not receive a pediatric placement, 100% reported feeling "somewhat incompetent" in their pediatric knowledge and skills due to their lack of fieldwork opportunities and training. Additionally, 80% of these participants who did not receive a pediatric placement further reported having no interest in working in the pediatric field after graduation. These findings suggest that when students are not given the opportunity to complete a fieldwork placement in a pediatric setting during their formal



Michelle Atanu, OTR



Leeann Dockall, OTS

education, they are less likely to enter the pediatric workforce, contributing further to the ongoing pediatric OT shortage.

Finally, our findings revealed alarming trends when surveying professionals directly involved in the pediatric OT workforce. Of those who identified as owners or CEOs, 92% agreed that hiring occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) is a significant challenge. Many reported that a major barrier to serving as a fieldwork site is the lack of OTPs available or willing to take on the role of a fieldwork educator. According to our data, the workforce shortage in OT could be largely driven by the lack of qualified OTPs entering the workforce, difficulty in retaining OTPs on staff and the additional burden that accepting a fieldwork student place on fieldwork sites is not seen as desirable.

In conclusion, the findings overwhelmingly identify the current challenges in fieldwork placement and within the pediatric workforce. It is crucial to direct our efforts towards identifying solutions as the demand for pediatric services as well as the workforce shortage continue to widen. As OT professionals and advocates, we must address the problems at hand and find valuable ways to help grow and flourish occupational therapists in pediatric settings.

Michelle Atanu is a pediatric occupational therapist who specializes in working with children with neurodiverse needs. She is the CEO of Avilo Pediatric Solutions & Consulting and is the founder of Occupation in Motion, 501c3, in Missouri City, Texas. She has a mission to help children with neurodiverse needs meet their highest potential through therapy, provider mentorship programs and professional development workshops. Michelle can be reached at info@avilopeds.com.

Leeann Dockall is an OTD candidate at Texas Woman's University – Houston, graduating in May 2025. She is eager to enter the OT workforce as she is passionate about finding creative solutions in an effort to bring light to the lives of those she serves. Leeann can be reached at Ldockall@twu.edu

If you are interested in finding out more about this project, have any comments or suggestions and/or want to hear about some solutions we have identified please reach out to us. We look forward to hearing from you!



Transitioning from Student to Practitioner

Kim Garcia, OTA State Student Representative &
Annabeth Dorris OT State Student Representative



Kim Garcia, OTAS



Annabeth Dorris, OTS

May is a time of transition and change for many of us. Some of us are graduating and hopefully taking time to celebrate, rest, and reset. Others may be transitioning from one clinical site to another, beginning their capstone, or preparing to take their board exam. Wherever you are in your journey, TOTA is here to support you and encourage you throughout. There are many benefits of being a TOTA member, including education, advocacy, networking, and resources. The first-year practitioner membership is 50% off for the first two years of licensure. See the membership options and details on the TOTA website.

TOTA offers continuing education through seminars, conferences, and more. This is a great way to stay up to date on the progress of our profession and new techniques. Advocacy efforts through TOTA are made possible by memberships and getting involved when action is needed. Not only will TOTA keep you up to date on legislative efforts, but through your membership, you will have the opportunity to attend events like Day at the Capital where professionals and students meet at our state capital to push our legislative efforts forward.

Through your TOTA membership, you can attend state and district meetings. In district meetings, you learn about what is happening in your district and how you can get involved at a local level. If you attend the TOTA conference, you will have the opportunity to network with many attendees and learn about new things happening in our field and community. Attendees often say they feel invigorated and inspired after attending the TOTA conference. Within the website, you can see job postings and opportunities within TOTA.

We are so proud of the students of TOTA and hope you will continue to stay a member of this great organization throughout your time as a practitioner.



Meet the State Student Reps –

Get to know your State Student representatives for 2025/2026.



Maya Landgrebe, OTS
TOTA State OT Student Representative

TOTA: Where do you attend school?

MAYA: Texas Woman’s University Institute of Health Sciences - Houston Center

TOTA: What is your favorite thing about OT?

MAYA: My favorite thing about OT is the creativity this profession offers. I love the idea of adapting and finding odd solutions to complex problems!

TOTA: What do you hope to accomplish as an OT practitioner?

MAYA: I want to get involved in Prosthetics and their development to make prosthetics more functional for everyday life and adaptable to each person. I also want to become a safe space for my clients to learn and grow throughout their treatment.

FUN TAKES

TOTA: Describe yourself in one word.

MAYA: Effervescent

TOTA: Favorite movie quote?

MAYA: “You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.” -Inigo Montoya, The Princess Bride.

TOTA: Favorite sport, pastime, or hobby

MAYA: I love to garden and read!

TOTA: What Disney character are you?

MAYA: Probably Jack Skellington because I’m tall and curious like him!

TOTA: Marvel or DC?

MAYA: Marvel 100% I love Loki!! Honorable mention to Wonder Woman, though she is the BEST!

TOTA: Starbucks or a local coffee house?

MAYA: I’m not a big coffee drinker, but I love going to local coffee houses to study or read.

TOTA: Social media platform of your choice? Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter

MAYA: Instagram, but I’m trying to get off social media, so LinkedIn!

TOTA: Spotify, Pandora, Apple?

MAYA: Apple, mostly because it’s just easier lol!!

TOTA: Do you have a pet?

MAYA: Yes! I have a cat named Walter, two dogs, Cowboy and Zucchini, and a flock of chickens and ducks! The ducks are my favorite (Don’t tell the others!)

TOTA: If you could redesign the food pyramid without health consequences, how would it look?

MAYA: Pasta, Pickles, and Enchiladas all the time!!



Leena Lozano, OTAS
TOTA State OTA Student Representative

TOTA: Where do you attend school?

LEENA: I attend Houston Community College Coleman Campus in the medical center in Houston! I’m a 2nd-year student in the OTA program, expected to graduate in May of 2026.

TOTA: What is your favorite thing about OT?

LEENA: The way we help people through meaningful activities, and that there is always an intended purpose. Occupational therapy offers a fun and creative way for people to regain the highest level of independence and quality of life. There are also so many specialty and emerging practice areas, which offer many opportunities to work in what you are interested in!

TOTA: What do you hope to accomplish as an OT practitioner?

LEENA: I hope to make a difference in people’s lives through occupational therapy once I become certified to practice. I also hope to continuously advocate for the profession and people who need OT services. I expect myself to be the best practitioner that I can possibly be so I can truly help others that need occupational therapy.

FUN TAKES

TOTA: Describe yourself in one word.

LEENA: “Hardworking”. I always like to work towards a goal that offers challenge and growth opportunities, and I give it my all while trying to achieve those goals.

TOTA: Favorite movie quote?

LEENA: “Murphy’s Law doesn’t mean that something bad will happen. What it means is whatever can happen, will happen.” ~ Matthew McConaughey in Interstellar. Although not the original concept of Murphy’s law, it offers a new perspective that anything is bound to happen regardless of the possibilities being positive or negative.

TOTA: Favorite sport, pastime, or hobby

LEENA: I love swimming. In fact, I swam competitively for four years in high school and became a lifeguard. Although I don’t swim as much as I used to, I try to swim occasionally.

TOTA: What Disney character are you?

LEENA: Jasmine from Aladdin.

TOTA: Marvel or DC?

LEENA: I have enjoyed both Marvel and DC movies and continue to watch both!

TOTA: Starbucks or a local coffee house?

LEENA: My go-to spot is a Yemeni café called Mazajj Organic Coffee. Not only do they have good coffee, but there are also a variety of drink and food options to choose from.

TOTA: Social media platform of your choice? Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter

LEENA: Instagram!

TOTA: Spotify, Pandora, Apple?

LEENA: Spotify for playing my music during car rides!

TOTA: Do you have a pet?

LEENA: Although I don’t have a pet, I would adopt a golden retriever!

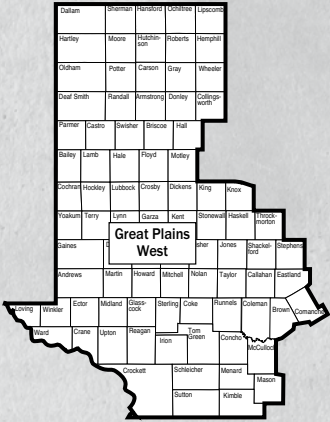
TOTA: If you could redesign the food pyramid without health consequences, how would it look?

LEENA: If I could change the food pyramid, I would keep carbs at the bottom because I can’t live without pasta. The next level would be vegetables, followed by dairy, meat, fruit, and then sweets at the top of the pyramid. I grew up not being a heavy meat eater, along with eating vegetarian dishes that were cooked. I can eat more vegetables compared to fruits, as fruits are either too sweet or tart for me.

DISTRICT ZONE

Great Plains West

Chris Lasek, OTR
Great Plains West District Chair



Chris Lasek, OTR

The Great Plains West District wrapped up our annual Bubba Klostermann series this spring. We hosted 3 Lunch & Learn virtual courses focusing on pediatrics. These were all great CE's and well attended – these are available to view on TOTA's LMS website if you missed them. For OT Month, our district had several events planned (i.e. mini-golf in Amarillo, PTE 5k run/walk & SOTA pickleball tournament in Lubbock), but some of our participation in these were hampered by inclement weather. For the summer / fall, we are in the works of planning 2 CE events as well as a career development event geared towards students. If you are interested in connecting with other Occupational Therapy Practitioners in our region and/or serving with TOTA, please let me know. We are always interested in getting people plugged in. We wanted to highlight one of our district's Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) groups. TTUHSC's SOTA has been busy serving the community, promoting OT, and building lasting friendships.

This spring has been full of excitement and engagement for the Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC)! TTUHSC SOTA members have continued to build community and promote occupational therapy through fun, inclusive, and meaningful events.

They were proud to host a successful **PTE 5K walk/run**, bringing together students, faculty, and community members to support their program and promote wellness through physical activity. Soon after, they served up friendly competition at a **SOTA Pickleball Tournament**, a high-energy event that gave everyone a chance to bond outside the classroom.

In celebration of **OT Month**, their organization got creative by launching a custom **SOTA Bingo Challenge**, a fill-in-the-blank bingo card featuring personal and professional goals tied to their OT school journey. From attending community events to building clinical confidence, the activity encouraged members to stay engaged throughout the semester. They wrapped up OT Month with a **big lunch gathering**, sharing laughs and stories while celebrating the im t of their field and the strength of our community.

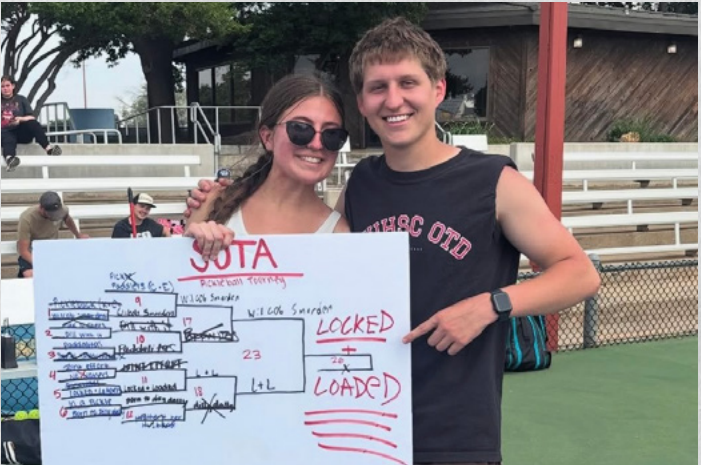
They also marked a new chapter for SOTA by **welcoming newly elected officers**, a group of passionate students ready to lead and serve. At the same time, they **send their best wishes to the outgoing officers** as they begin their **Level II fieldwork placements**. They are grateful for their leadership and dedication and are excited to see the great things they will accomplish in their clinical journeys.

At TTUHSC, students are always looking for ways to grow, connect, and give back, and they cannot wait to see what the rest of the year brings!

Update provided by Carolina Sanchez, TTUHSC SOTA representative.



TTUHSC SOTA Members cheering on students who ran/walked the 5K



TTUHSC SOTA Pickleball Tournament winners holding up the tournament's bracket

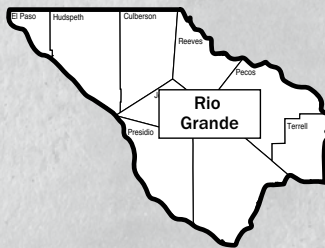


TTUHSC SOTA Old/New Officers

DISTRICT ZONE

Rio Grande District

Grisel Contreras, OTD, OTR
Rio Grande District Chair



Grisel Contreras,
OTD, OTR

The Rio Grande District remains committed to increasing membership in the Texas Occupational Therapy Association (TOTA) and promoting the benefits of professional involvement within our district.

During Occupational Therapy Month, the TOTA Rio Grande District had the opportunity to participate in a celebration hosted by the University of Texas at El Paso. This event brought together several community partners and clinicians from across the region to honor and celebrate the occupational therapy profession.

At the event, the Rio Grande District promoted the importance of TOTA membership, gathered ideas for future continuing education opportunities, and built relationships with community partners. These efforts support our goals to plan collaborative community events, give back to the region we serve, and increase public awareness of occupational therapy.

As part of the celebration, we held a raffle that included a free TOTA membership and other fun occupational therapy-themed items, such as t-shirts designed by Student Occupational Therapy Associations (SOTA). We engaged with more than fifty active occupational therapy practitioners, and the raffle winner was Manuel Vaquera, a pediatric occupational therapist. He shared his excitement about joining TOTA and expressed his eagerness to take advantage of the continuing education opportunities available through membership.

