

REVISTA OT

A NEWSLETTER OF THE TEXAS OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION

VOL 39 NO. 1 / Winter 2026 EDITION

Thank you for Attending! 2025 TOTA Annual Conference



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REVISTA OT: Winter Edition 2026

WE
NEED
YOU!

to let other OTs and OTAs understand the importance of becoming a member of TOTA – the ONLY professional organization that supports and advocates for occupational therapy practice in Texas. Invite someone to join TOTA today!



Scan code to see the benefits of a TOTA Membership and Join or renew today!

THANK YOU TO OUR TOTA ANNUAL CONFERENCE SPONSORS AND EXHIBITORS!

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Real OT Solutions
Sonrisas Therapies
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Texas Health and Human Services
Texas Occupational Therapy Foundation (TOTF)
The Stepping Stones Group
The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center
Texas Tech Health Science Center Health Professions
Viva Pediatric Healthcare

ETHOS ACCESS

Ethos Access is a Texas based company in Minor Home Modifications and Adaptive Aids, dedicated to creating safer, more accessible environments for individuals with limited mobility or physical disabilities. Our team is committed to enhancing independence and quality of life through thoughtful, expert-driven solutions.

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March 27-29, 2026 | Dallas, TX

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Excellent preparation for CHT Exam or to enhance your general hand therapy knowledge and expertise

Appropriate for beginner to advanced levels

Earn up to
24.5
hours CEUs



<https://asht.org/education/events/2026-hand-therapy-review-course-dallas-tx>

Neurodiversity Children's Conference

An in-person conference with workshops and events created to inspire and empower early childhood professionals, providers, and advocates with the best practices for nurturing and supporting children with special and neurodiverse needs.

When:
Saturday, February 28, 2026
7:00 am – 4:45 pm
Breakfast starts at 7:00am

Post Conference Reception immediately following the conference

Where:
Embassy Suites by Hilton Houston- Energy Corridor
11730 Katy Fwy
Houston, TX 77079

OTPs earn 7
continuing
education
hours
approved
through TOTA

Target Audience:
Early childhood therapists, teachers, caregivers, doctors, nurses, social workers, leaders and advocates who support young children with special and neurodiverse needs.

Contact us: Website: Avilopeds.com, Email: ndchild@avilopeds.com

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TOTA Announces 2026 & 2027 Annual Conference Location

TOTA is making strategic changes to ensure the association's long-term sustainability while continuing to serve occupational therapy practitioners across Texas. After careful evaluation of rising post-COVID event costs and our responsibility to steward member resources wisely, the Conference Committee and Board of Directors have selected the Embassy Suites San Marcos Hotel & Conference Center as the host site for the 2026 and 2027 Annual Conferences—including TOTA's 90th Anniversary celebration.

This shift from our traditional regional rotation was not made lightly. However, centralizing the conference for these two years allows TOTA to:

- Maintain financial stability during a period of increased operational costs
- Expand educational offerings and hands-on learning opportunities
- Provide a consistent, high-quality conference experience for attendees, exhibitors, and presenters
- Plan ahead for a milestone anniversary worthy of our profession's legacy in Texas

San Marcos offers a central location, accessible travel options, and a venue capable of supporting the growing needs of our statewide community.

We remain committed to serving practitioners across all regions and will continue exploring ways to bring meaningful programming and engagement opportunities to members throughout Texas.

Thank you for your continued support as we take intentional steps to strengthen TOTA's future and elevate the impact of occupational therapy across our state.

48 Hours is not Enough to Study for the NBCOT, and why it matters in 2026

John S. Luna, OTR, OTD – TOTA President



John S. Luna, OTR, OTD

The New Year brings new beginnings, and with each new beginning come aspirations, goals, and resolutions we set as we turn the page from December 31st to January 1st. According to a recent Pew Research study, only about one out of every three Americans actually make a New Year's resolution, surprisingly, most of those who make these resolutions are still following them by the end of January (Garcia, 2024). This left me wondering: What resolutions are we making for our professional lives as we move into 2026? Are we, like the rest of the country, in a place where only one in three OTPs sets a professional goal or aspiration for themselves, or even more broadly, for the profession?

This reflection took me back to the first time I set a professional goal for myself. As a new graduate my first goal was simple: become a registered occupational therapy practitioner by passing the NBCOT exam. My resolution that January was to study consistently for the boards, however, by the end of January, I had not followed through. My first supervisor asked me one day at work how the studying was going, I admitted, that I had not really started yet. As an experienced practitioner, she knew I was heading into this exam unprepared.

I was given a few days off and my boss sent me early to San Antonio, which at the time was the nearest testing center, so that I could focus on my preparations. I locked myself in a hotel room, finally opened my books, and quickly discovered what she already knew: I was not ready. I studied intently for the next 48 hours, sat for the exam, and walked away not knowing whether I had passed or failed. Weeks went by, and I checked online almost every day for my results. Finally, a few months later, I saw the results, luckily I passed.

I share this story not as a model to follow, but as a lesson in what not to do. What matters in this message is (1) preparation and engagement matter (2) occupational therapy practitioners and students—we are not alone. We have tremendous strength through our community of practitioners, who support each other in pursuing their professional goals (3) We are an influential profession when we set purposeful goals, prepare with intention, remain engaged, and follow through. It is through this collective discipline that we can shape the future of occupational therapy.

As TOTA revises its strategic plan for 2026 and beyond, we remain focused on empowering occupational therapy practitioners and students in their professional preparations and engagements by strengthening advocacy efforts, increase professional visibility, and expand opportunities to support practitioners across Texas. We want practitioners and students to recognize their strength through connection to a broader OT community, through TOTA events, meetings, and networking opportunities that strengthen our shared voice. Finally, I want to encourage every occupational therapy practitioner, educator, and student across Texas to set at least one professional resolution this year: to strengthen our profession and shape the future of occupational therapy here in Texas and beyond.

As we close 2025, significant challenges and opportunities lie ahead. The recent reclassification in which occupational



AI generated Image Chat GPT, 2025

therapy (post-baccalaureate) is no longer listed as a professional degree for select student loan programs (Saffer & Parsons, 2025) may represent a potential challenge. Potential opportunities exist with the continued growth of practice areas such as mental and behavioral health, community health, and pelvic floor therapy, areas in which occupational therapy can lead. Continued initiatives at both the state and national levels towards licensure portability may also represent potential opportunities. Regardless of the challenges or opportunities that lie ahead, policy conversations are happening every day, with or without occupational therapy practitioners at the table. 2026 is not the year for us to sit on the sidelines—this is the time for us to prepare, engage, and elevate our voices.

Strong professions are built on strong memberships. I want to thank each and every TOTA member for fueling our advocacy, education, and community efforts. I cannot thank you enough for your membership and encourage you to sustain your membership and invite colleagues to join us. Thank you to our TOTA volunteers, employees, and board members for your leadership and dedication in 2025. 2026 is our moment. Let us step forward together, prepared, engaged, and ready to shape the future of occupational therapy in Texas and beyond.

References

ChatGPT. (2025). *A top-down photograph of a person writing 2026 New Year's resolutions related to occupational therapy, including lifelong learning, mental health integration, advocacy, and TOTA membership* [AI-generated image]. OpenAI. <https://chat.openai.com/>

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TOTA 2025 Annual Conference Summary

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



Judith Joseph,
OTR, MA, FAOTA

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped make this year's Annual Conference such a success! Together, we created an inspiring event filled with learning, connection, and celebration of our OT community.

Here is a snapshot of what we accomplished:

- Nearly 50 reviewers supported the call for proposals
- 142 speakers shared their expertise
- 751 registered attendees joined us
- 56 exhibitors showcased their work
- 14 student organization tables and 3 organization members participated
- 20 volunteers (not including board members) gave their time and energy
- 38 educational sessions on Friday, 41 on Saturday, plus 38 poster presentations and 12 on-demand sessions

The conference truly thrives because of the generosity of our community. Academic programs, student organizations, and employers stepped up to cover registration fees and lunches. And in response to the government shutdown, the TOTA conference committee removed the \$50 post-early bird increase. Even more inspiring, three TOTA members personally offered to cover registration fees for any practitioner who had been furloughed. That spirit of care and solidarity is what makes our profession so special.

This was our fifth year using the Whova conference app, and participation was outstanding:

- 856 attendees downloaded the app (85% of all attendees)
- 1,887 private messages exchanged (compared to Whova's average of 465)
- 1,769 community board posts (compared to Whova's average of 381)

Clearly, our members love connecting and sharing ideas!

Looking ahead, the conference committee and the TOTA Board of Directors remain committed to improving the experience each year. Venue selection continues to be one of our biggest challenges, as we balance space needs with keeping costs manageable for attendees and exhibitors. With that in mind, we are excited to announce that the 2026 and 2027 Annual Conferences will be held at the Embassy Suites Hilton San Marcos Hotel Conference Center.

Once again, thank you for your support, enthusiasm, and dedication to TOTA's Annual Conference. We could not do it without you, and we look forward to seeing you next year!

Warmly,

Judi

Save the Dates

November **2026**

su	mo	tu	we	th	fr	sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

November **2027**

su	mo	tu	we	th	fr	sa
			1	2	3	4
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

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:	Renee Shepherd
Rio Grande:	Grisel Contreras
Trinity North:	Kayla Allen

Appointed Committee Chairs

Committee on Conference:	Evie Harness
Committee on Development:	Paula Perkins
Committee on Education:	Megan Taylor
Committee on Legislative & Political Affairs:	Emily Navarro
Committee on Membership:	Patricia Bowyer
Committee on Standards and Practice:	Leslie Smart
Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:	Open

Adhoc Committee Chairs

Awards and Recognition Committee	Carol Regli
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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

TOTA Legal Advisor	Richard Y. Cheng, JD, OT, CHC
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Newsletter

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TOTA Conference – Thank You for Your Participation



Evie Harness, OTR
State Conference
Committee Chair

Evie Harness, OTR

As the Conference Committee we cannot thank all of you enough for your participation in the 2025 Annual Conference. It makes all the preparation work beforehand so rewarding when we see sessions full of attendees and a bustling exhibit hall.

With 72 live educational sessions, 49 live poster sessions, and more than 100 speakers, not to mention almost 750 attendees, the TOTA conference closed out 2025 with a successful conference.

A special thank you to the amazing dynamic duo of Judi Joseph, TOTA Executive Director and Kami Lusson, TOTA Vendor Services Coordinator who juggle the many details going on behind the scenes during conference planning. Thanks also to the Conference Committee for 2025 including: Eileen Garza (Whova Conference App Organizer), Megan Taylor (Education Committee Chair), Theresa Powers (Check-in and Volunteers), Paula Cook (OTA Continuing Education Coordinator), and a big TOTA welcome to Sarah Stevens who will pick up the reins as the new Exhibit Hall-TOTA Vendor Services Coordinator moving forward. Every one of these individuals put in many volunteer hours helping to facilitate the various components of conference.

Conference cannot be successful without you, who supported conference by attending, the exhibitors who filled the exhibit hall and sponsored various events. Finally, thanks to the many speakers who provided us with two days of educational sessions. We recognize this has been a challenging year for many of you with layoffs, the extended Federal Shut Down, and other decisions that impacted the economy which make us appreciate all of you more for your willingness to participate in conference.

Please do not forget to take advantage of the on-demand presentations that will be available through February 15th. Most are listed with 400 course numbers and one speaker for session 223 graciously opted to convert her canceled session to the on-demand format.

Just a reminder the conference next year will be held November 13th and 14th 2026 at this same Embassy Suites by Hilton San Marcos location. The 2027 Conference will also be held at this location so please plan to join us!

OTA 2025 Award Recipients



OT of the Year
Julianne Krug,
PhD, OTR, CLA



OTA of the Year
Layman Darnell Miller,
COTA, MBA, MED



Roster of Merit
Patricia Bowyer, Ed.D.,
MS, OTR, FAOTA, SFHEA



OTA Academic Educator
of the Year
Amy Anderson,
COTA, M.Ed.



Roster of Merit
Heather Roberts,
Ph.D., OT



Roster of Merit
Claudette Fette,
PhD, OTR, FAOTA



Roster of Merit
Dawn Phillips,
COTA, CBIS



OT Student Leadership
Annabeth Dorris,
OTD Student



Distinguished Service
Heather Doreck, OTR



Distinguished Service
Cynthia Hoskins, DBH,
MOT, OTR, CCTS-I



Distinguished Service
Camille Ko, OTD, OTR,
CBIS



Distinguished Service
Kami Lusson,
OTA Vendor Services/Continuing
Education Coordinator



Committee Chair
Carol Regli



OTR/OTA Collaboration
Michelle McCarty,
COTA, MA, SP, CAPS, ECHM, CEOLD
Melissa Saffron,
OTR, MS, CAPS, ECHM, CEOLD



Interdisciplinary Team Award
Tomball ISD Assistive Tech Team



OTA 2025 Service Recognition Awards

STATE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Michelle Atanu, OTR, MOT - Committee on Standards and Practice Chair

Dahlia Castillo, OTR, OTD - Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Chair

Giselle De Leon - Adhoc Social Media Committee Member

Angela Duell, OTR, MS, OTD - Trinity North District Chair

Amanda Elsner, OTR, OTD, CNS - Adhoc Social Media Committee Co-Chair

Chanae' Jones, OTR, MOT, DrPH - Gulf Coast East District Chair

Kayla Homeyer, OTR, OTD - Adhoc Social Media Committee Member

Sue Ram, OTR, OTD - Committee on Development Chair

Tamera Traber, OTR, OTD, CLVT - Adhoc Social Media Committee Co-Chair

GREAT PLAINS WEST

Mandi Moorhead, OTR - District Vice Chair

Donna Walls, OTR, OTD, CHT - District Secretary

Cindi Tiongco, PhD, OTR - Committee on Education Chair

Melinda Underwood, OTR, OTD - Committee on Membership Chair

Leah White, TTUHSC SOTA Representative

GULF COAST EAST DISTRICT

Amanda Elsner, OTR, OTD, CNS - Committee on Membership Chair

Elisa Pascencia Avila, COTA - Committee on Education Chair

Liliana Salinas, COTA - District Occupational Therapy Assistant Rep.

RIO GRANDE

Clarissa Medrano, OTR, MOT - District Secretary

Valerie Vasquez, OTR - Committee on Membership Chair

TRINITY NORTH

Demetria Sweatt, COTA - OTA Representative

Gloria Jeffrey, OTR - Committee on Membership Chair

2025 NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Kim Broussard, OTR, OTD, PhD (Trinity North) - Committee Chair

Amber B. Armstead, DrPH, OTR/L, BCPR (Gulf Coast East)

Elizabeth Deluca-Berg, OTR, OTD, CAPS (Capital Centex)

Tiffany Green, COTA, M.Ed. (Gulf Coast East)

Ricky Joseph, Ph.D., MA-HRM, OTR, FAOTA (Alamo South)

Donna Walls, OTR, OTD, CHT (Great Plains West)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TOTA

LOOK WHAT'S NEW

Greetings TOTA Community



My name is Sarah Stevens, and I am honored to join TOTA as your new Client Services Manager. With over 15 years of experience in healthcare, primarily in neurology and cardiology, I have developed a deep passion for

advocating on behalf of others and sharing knowledge through education.

In this role, I look forward to supporting and connecting with our community, fostering collaboration, and bringing forward fresh ideas that strengthen our collective mission. Outside of work, I enjoy learning through travel, exploring new foods, and building meaningful connections with people.

I am excited to learn from this amazing team and contribute to the continued growth and success of TOTA. Thank you for welcoming me. I look forward to working alongside each of you!

Hello!

**TOTA THANKS OUR
ORGANIZATION MEMBERS**

**Occupational
Therapy Benevolence
Endowment**

**Texas Occupational
Therapy Foundation**

**Texas Society
for Hand Therapy**

Connecting Jobs and Employers

Are you looking for a new job? Employers, are you looking for a new hire? Visit our TOTA Career Center where we connect talent with opportunity.



TOTA Career Center
Connecting Talent with Opportunity

Find a new job. Find a new hire. We can connect you.

TOTA 2026 Elections

TOTA is recruiting volunteers to serve on the nominating committee. If you are interested, contact your district chair. <https://www.tota.org/state-and-district-offices>

The following table is an overview of important dates regarding nominations and voting.

January/February	Call for Nominations will be posted on the TOTA website and printed in Revista. The chair of the Nomination Committee will be selected by the committee.
April	Deadline for submission of all names to state and district nomination committees.
June	Ballots will be live on the TOTA website. Deadline is June 30.
July	Election results will be announced to the membership on July 5th.
November	New Officer orientation. All elected state officers and district officers shall assume office upon adjournment of the annual business meeting at which their election has been announced.

The following positions are up for election in 2026

State Board:

President
Treasurer

CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO

District Positions:

Alamo South	Capital Centex	Great Plains West	Gulf Coast East	Rio Grande	Trinity North
District Chair	Vice-Chair Secretary	District Chair	Vice-Chair Secretary	District Chair	Vice-Chair Secretary

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

STATE OFFICERS

- Any candidate for the office of President, President-Elect or Vice President of TOTA must have been a member of the Association for three (3) years immediately prior to the nomination deadline.
- State officers may reside in a border state, but must be licensed to practice in Texas.
- All officers shall maintain membership in good standing with TOTA and AOTA during their terms of office.
- No state officer can concurrently hold a position as an elected officer in AOTA, a district division of TOTA, or another state's OT membership organization.

DISTRICT OFFICERS

- Nominees for District Chair must have been a member of the district for a minimum of one year prior to the nomination deadline.
- Officers must be licensed to practice in Texas and have chosen to be a member of that geographical district.
- All officers must remain TOTA members in good standing throughout their term.
- No District Officer shall concurrently hold more than one elected position in AOTA, a state office of TOTA, or another state's OT membership organization.

In Memoriam

Mary Frances "Francie" Baxter, PhD, OT, FAOTA



TOTA members were deeply saddened to learn of the passing of our beloved colleague and friend, Dr. Mary Frances (Francie) Baxter, on December 31, 2025. She was surrounded by her husband, Doug Baxter, and her son, David, who were at her bedside. Francie's loss is felt profoundly across the Texas occupational therapy community and far beyond.

Francie was a steadfast supporter of the Texas Occupational Therapy Association and the Texas Occupational Therapy Foundation. Among the handful of pioneers who have shaped and sustained our organization over the decades, she stands out as a leader whose influence touched every corner of the profession.

Francie earned her bachelor's degree in occupational therapy from Colorado State University, followed by a master's degree in Rehabilitation Technology in Occupational Therapy from Texas Woman's University. She later completed her PhD in Kinesiology and Health at the University of Houston. She became a member of TOTA in 1993 and, from that moment forward, dedicated herself to advancing occupational therapy at both the state and national levels.

Her service to TOTA was extensive and transformative. From 2009 to 2017, Francie served as conference program chair, Board of Directors and as President of the Texas Occupational Therapy Foundation from 2014 to 2017, where she helped establish a sustainable line of research funding for both emerging and seasoned OT researchers. Through her leadership, she brought distinguished scholars and speakers to Texas, inspiring practitioners and students to pursue rigorous inquiry into occupational therapy practice.

Nationally, Francie represented Texas in the AOTA Representative Assembly, ultimately rising to the role of Vice Speaker. She also served on the AOTA Board of Trustees from 2013 to 2016. Her volunteer service—always grounded in advocacy for the profession, earned her numerous honors, including TOTA's OT of the Year Award (2016), the TOTA Roster of Merit (2012), and recognition as a Fellow of the American Occupational Therapy Association (2011), along with multiple additional service awards at both state and national levels.

Francie's academic contributions were equally profound. She joined the faculty of Texas Woman's University in 1995 and later became Emeritus Faculty in the School of Occupational Therapy, also serving as Associate Director of the Houston Campus. She taught an extensive range of courses across all levels of occupational therapy education and served as chair or committee member on numerous master's theses and doctoral dissertations. Her mentorship guided countless novice researchers, strengthening the profession through her commitment to developing future scholars. She authored numerous textbook chapters that continue to shape the education of occupational therapy students nationwide.

Her clinical practice was broad and impactful, spanning oncology, physical disabilities, pediatrics, assistive technology, school systems, nursing homes, outpatient clinics, and cancer centers. Her scholarship reflected these areas, with contributions in oncology, particularly cancer survivorship, creativity in occupational therapy, and postural control. She published widely and presented her work at state, national, and international conferences.

In every role, volunteer, educator, clinician, researcher, and advocate, Francie Baxter embodied the highest ideals of occupational therapy. Her legacy is one of service, scholarship, compassion, and unwavering dedication to the profession she loved.

Her influence will continue to be felt for generations.



TOTA Membership Matters: A New Year of Connection

Patricia Bowyer, OTR, MS, Ed.D., FAOTA, SFHEA
State Membership Chair



As we begin a new year, I am energized by the opportunities ahead for the Texas Occupational Therapy Association (TOTAL) and for members across the state. TOTA serves as the voice for occupational therapy in Texas, and the strength of that voice depends on the engagement of its members. Whether through advocacy, continuing education, networking, or leadership, every member plays a vital role in advancing our profession. If you are already involved, thank you for the time, energy, and commitment you contribute. This year brings renewed opportunities for connection and growth at the district level. Local events, virtual and

in-person, will offer valuable spaces to learn, collaborate, and share ideas that elevate occupational therapy practice across the state. I hope you will participate, bring a colleague, and help build an even more connected and engaged OT community.

Thank you to all current members for your continued support of TOTA and your dedication to the clients, families, and communities we serve. Membership is a choice, and your choice to support TOTA makes a meaningful difference in the future of occupational therapy in Texas.



We Gathered, We Networked, We Brainstormed—and Now We Are Moving Forward

Layman Darnell Miller COTA, MBA Med
TOTALA State Representative



Layman Darnell Miller,
COTA, MBA Med



The OTA Forum at this year's TOTALA Conference brought together more than 40 Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) practitioners and OTA students. Participants from five of the six TOTALA districts attended, creating a highly engaging and interactive event.

Research conducted prior to the conference identified the following areas of concern for OTAs:

- Workload Management
- Burnout
- Financial Compensation
- Role Misconceptions

Using these topics as a foundation for discussion, participants divided into small groups to share their experiences, explore how these concerns impact their practice and well-being, and develop strategies for achieving that elusive work-life balance.

It was inspiring to see everyone actively engaged and contributing during the session—networking at its best!

So, riding the momentum of the conference, what happens next?

Two major goals for 2026 emerged from a survey completed during the OTA Forum:

1. Establishing an OTA mentoring network
2. Creating committees to address the areas of concern discussed during the Forum

The consensus was clear: OTAs need an avenue to support, encourage, and share ideas with one another. These goals can only be achieved with your support and participation.

A statewide meeting will take place in January to begin laying the foundation for these initiatives. OTA practitioners and students are invited to join us for this event. During the meeting, a major OTA initiative will also be announced.

Call to Action:

Do not miss your chance to shape the future of OTA practice in Texas!

Join us in January, connect with peers, and help build a stronger OTA community.

Scan the QR code now and secure your spot!

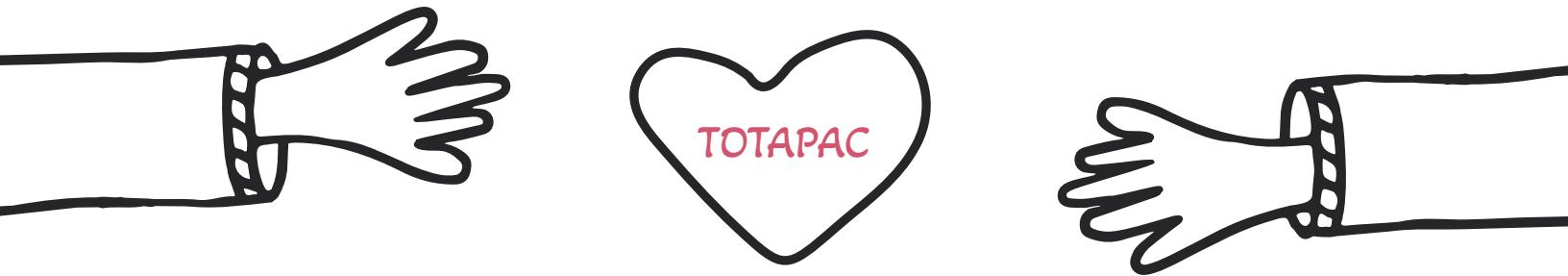


Thank You for Supporting TOTAPAC

Eva Anger, OTR, OTD
TOTAPAC Chair, Executive Committee



Eva Anger, OTR, OTD



On behalf of the TOTAPAC Executive Committee, I extend heartfelt thanks to all TOTA members who contributed to TOTAPAC this year. To date, you have collectively donated \$1,478, with more than half of those contributions made during our annual conference in San Marcos.

If you were unable to donate at the Conference but would still like to support TOTAPAC, you may do so anytime by visiting the TOTAPAC webpage. Simply scroll to the bottom of the page and select "Members – Donate Today", or use this link <https://tota.memberclicks.net/tota-pac-donations>. I encourage each of you to consider making a yearly contribution to sustain our important work.

Conference Highlights

During this year's TOTA Conference, I had the privilege of staffing the TOTAPAC table in the exhibit hall. It was a joy to meet many students and professional members, some for the very first time. A recurring theme in our conversations was that many attendees were unaware that TOTA membership dues do not fund TOTAPAC.

Membership dues support vital services such as:

- Public relations materials
- Legislative advocacy and information
- Practice forums
- Educational meetings and continuing education
- Volunteer and professional development
- Student services

Why TOTAPAC Matters

While TOTA's mission includes "anticipating and responding to the organizational, political, economic, and social features of the health care delivery system at the local, state, and national levels," the purpose of TOTAPAC is distinct.

TOTAPAC provides financial support to Texas legislators and candidates whose work benefits the public by improving and protecting issues related to occupational therapy. This support is possible only through separate contributions from TOTA members.

Together, TOTA and TOTAPAC form complementary organizations, each playing a unique role in strengthening and advancing the occupational therapy profession in Texas.

Get Involved

If you have suggestions or questions for the TOTAPAC board, please feel free to email me at evaanger@sbcglobal.net. I will gladly bring your input to our next meeting. We look forward to hearing from you, because many hands truly make light work!

Collaborative Occupational Therapy Engagement Promotes Inclusive Sensory Experiences at Dallas Zoo

Linda R. Barnett, OTR, MA, OTD, IMH-E®

Linda Barnett, Dallas Sensory Consortium representative for the TWU School of Occupational Therapy coordinated a sensory inclusive experience for entry level doctoral occupational therapy students from the Dallas and Denton campuses. Students collaboratively facilitated an inclusive sensory day at the Dallas Zoo, designed to provide sensory-friendly activities in a supportive environment. Throughout the year, the Dallas Zoo opens its gates early in the morning to accommodate visitors who benefit from a calmer, quieter setting. During these designated times, the zoo temporarily minimizes auditory and visual stimuli—turning off music and flashing lights—and vendors adapt their offerings to enhance accessibility and comfort for visitors with sensory processing differences.

The event featured a range of activities aimed at engagement across sensory modalities. Participants engaged in gross motor exercises alongside the zoo's elephants and primates, and participated in yoga sessions near barnyard animals, enabling occupational therapy students to interact with families and children

through movement-based interventions. Concurrently, other students facilitated sensory-friendly spaces within tents equipped with fiber optic lighting and sensory toys, providing a tranquil environment conducive to sensory regulation and relaxation.

This sensory experience offers a valuable opportunity for future occupational therapy doctoral students and volunteers to learn the importance of creating inclusive recreational interventions in a natural setting. Students are encouraged to approach the event with an intent to appreciate the subdued atmosphere and apply occupational therapy principles to tailor experiences that foster engagement, regulation, and well-being for children and their families.

In summary, this experience exemplifies the integration of occupational therapy practices within community-based settings, emphasizing the importance of sensory-informed approaches to support diverse sensory needs while promoting inclusive access to recreational spaces.



Linda R. Barnett,
OTR, MA, OTD, IMH-E®





TOTA Student Knowledge Challenge Bowl 2025

Thanks to the
Texas Ensign Services Team
for sponsoring and
hosting another successful
Student Knowledge Challenge Bowl!

Congratulations to Our Winning Teams

1st Place

Texas Woman's University, Denton
Award: \$1,000



2nd Place

TexasTech University Health Sciences Center
Award: \$500



3rd Place

Abilene Christian University
Award: \$250



Looking Ahead: The 3rd Annual Challenge Bowl

Mark your calendars! The 3rd Annual Student Knowledge Challenge Bowl will take place on Saturday, November 14, 2026, at 3:00 PM during the TOTA 2026 Annual Conference.

New for 2026: The competition will feature both an OTA test and an OT test in the same room, making this year's event even more dynamic.

Call to Academic Leaders

We need your support to make the 2026 Challenge Bowl a success!

- Please provide 10 multiple-choice questions from each program.
- Send submissions to **Andrew Cisneros** at: acisneros@ensignservices.net

Time to Apply for TOTA Scholarships!

www.TOTA.org



Two scholarships are awarded each year, one to an entry-level occupational therapy student (MOT, MSOT, OTD) and one to an entry-level occupational therapy assistant student currently enrolled in an accredited program in the state of Texas. Eligible applicants reside in Texas and are members of the Texas Occupational Therapy Association.

Judith Joseph,
OTR, MA, FAOTA

TOTA Endowed Scholarship

2026 Applications Open in January 2026

The American Occupational Therapy Foundation (AOTF) manages our annual OT scholarship

<https://www.aotf.org/Scholarships/How-to-Apply>

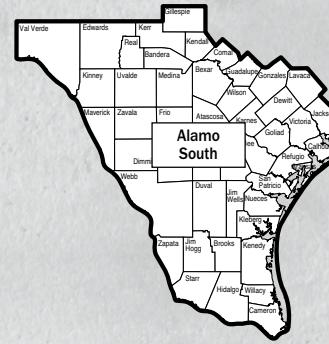
View all [available scholarships](#) and apply.



DISTRICT ZONE

Alamo South

Thelma Ochoa, OTR, OTD
Alamo South District Chair



We return from the 2025 TOTA Conference on *fire*, recharged, reconnected, and ready to step into 2026 with purpose, momentum, and a renewed commitment to the future of occupational therapy. The energy in San Marcos reminded us why OT is a profession driven by innovation, compassion, and the desire to make lives better

Rejuvenated and Ready for the New Year

The conference reignited our passion for OT and strengthened our resolve to grow as clinicians, educators, and leaders. As we enter 2026, we are focused on improving ourselves so we can continue uplifting our students, our facilities, and the communities we serve.

Bringing Innovation Into 2026

We move into the new year with fresh perspectives on emerging research, technology in rehabilitation, population health, trauma-informed care, and culturally responsive practice. These insights will directly shape how we teach, mentor, and prepare our students for the ever-evolving world of OT.

Empowering Our Future Practitioners

A powerful message echoed throughout the conference: Our students have the potential to change the world. We enter 2026 committed to nurturing that potential through knowledge, creativity, and advocacy assuring that our future practitioners feel confident stepping into their roles as leaders and innovators.

Networking and Growing Together

TOTA reminded us of the strength of community. Reconnecting with colleagues across Texas fuels collaboration, scholarship, and growth. As we begin the new year, we remain dedicated to building these relationships and modeling professional engagement for our students.

Membership Matters More Than Ever

TOTA membership is not just a requirement, it is an investment in the future of our profession. Membership strengthens our voice in legislation, protects our scope, and keeps us connected to the pulse of practice. Entering 2026, we encourage all OTPs to stay engaged and stay involved.

A Call to Action: How Will You Advance Our Profession in 2026?

As we look ahead, we invite every OTP to pause and reflect:

What are YOU doing to advance our wonderful profession?

Are you mentoring students?

Advocating for legislation?

Engaging in research or scholarship?

Supporting your local district?

Sharing knowledge with your team?

Growing your own clinical skills?

Small actions shape big futures.

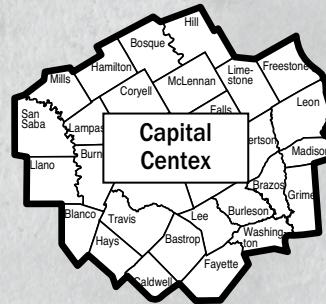
Looking Forward with Purpose

We begin 2026 energized, inspired, and committed to bringing everything we learned back to our classrooms, clinics, communities, and colleagues.

This new year holds tremendous opportunity, and together, we will shape the future of occupational therapy.

DISTRICT ZONE Capital Centex

Lacey Spark, OTR, MOT, OTD
District Chair



What an incredible year for the Capital CenTex District! As we look back on 2025, we celebrate the connections, learning, and advocacy that defined our work together. Last year, we hosted a UE Anatomy Refresher CEU course, submitted four nominations to the awards committee, participated in the Buddy Walk to support the Down Syndrome Association of Central Texas, and connected with future healthcare professionals by speaking at an area high school's Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) club meetings. We also enjoyed catching up with students and practitioners during meetups at conference which is always a highlight of the year!

As the new year brings time for reflection, we are proud of the progress we have made and we are excited for what is ahead. In 2026, we will continue meeting monthly as a board to plan ways to serve our membership and promote knowledge, connection, and advocacy. We are also looking to fill our open Committee on Standards & Practice board position. It is an excellent opportunity for someone who is passionate about advancing our profession.

If you would like to get involved, share ideas, or simply learn more about what is happening in the district, please reach out to me, your district chair. We are here to support you and our profession. Hope to see you at a future meeting, gathering, or event in 2026!

Lacey Spark,
OTR, MOT, OTD

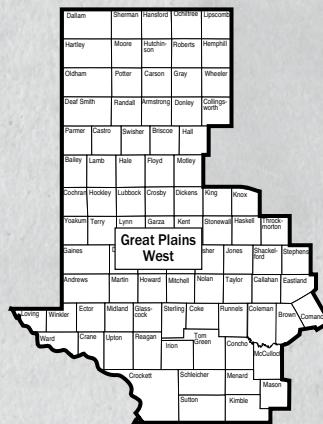


2025 Buddy Walk

DISTRICT ZONE

Great Plains West

Chris Lasek, OTR
Great Plains West District Chair



Chris Lasek, OTR

The Great Plains West District (GPWD) was well represented at TOTA's annual conference this year. Our district members gave several engaging presentations which included: 1) Molly Setliff & Sandra Whisner, "Fine Tune Interventions: Applying Rehabilitation Treatment Specification System"; 2) Tamara Traber, "More Than Just Observation: Transforming FW1 into Meaningful

Learning"; 3) Amy Gibbs, "A New Pediatric Assessment: The Childhood Assessment of Self-Care"; and 4) Laurie Stelter & Cindi Tiongco, "Work Intervention for Young Adults with Intellectual / Developmental Disabilities". We also had a district meetup at the conference. It was fun getting to connect with others in our district.



TOTA Alamo South District meetup at the TOTA 2025 Annual Conference

DISTRICT ZONE

Gulf Coast East

Renee Shepherd, COTA, Ed.S
District Chair



As we close out 2025, GCED would like to extend our deepest gratitude to three exceptional individuals whose dedication and service have left an indelible mark on our community. First, we recognize Chanae' Jones,



our outgoing Chair, for her steadfast leadership and commitment to driving the mission of the Gulf Coast East District forward. Chanae' has been an advocate for growth and inclusion, leaving a lasting legacy for us to build upon.



We also express our heartfelt appreciation to Elisa Avila for her invaluable contributions as part of the Committee on Education. Elisa's unwavering passion for enhancing the knowledge of students and membership has helped to shape impactful initiatives and opportunities for our members to grow and thrive.



Renee Shepherd,
COTA, Ed.S

Finally, we celebrate Liliana Salinas, our OTA Representative, for her tireless efforts and advocacy in representing the voice of the OTA community. Liliana's work has been instrumental in fostering stronger connections and amplifying important perspectives.

As we celebrate the accomplishments of our outgoing leaders, we are excited to look toward 2026 with renewed focus and ambition. Our primary goals for the coming years are to increase engagement and expand our membership. We aim to create a more vibrant and inclusive community where every member has the opportunity to connect, contribute, and grow.

To achieve these goals, we are prioritizing targeted outreach initiatives, organizing engaging events, and launching programs designed to meet the diverse needs of our district. Together, with your support and participation, we can continue building a thriving network of individuals dedicated to excellence and collaboration. We look forward to achieving great things together!