

## Podcast transcript

### Career conversations: Tatenda Nambureti-Gwizo

#### Hannah Spencer:

Hi everyone and welcome to this podcast recorded and produced by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists.

This is one of a series of podcasts which really focus on hearing and sharing the career narratives of our diverse workforce and highlight a whole range of possibilities in occupational therapy.

My name is Hannah Spencer and I'm an occupational therapist that's had the absolute pleasure and privilege of facilitating and capturing these conversations with members of our occupational therapy community.

I'm here today with a member of our very much valued support workforce.

#### Tatenda Nambureti-Gwizo:

Yes, hi, my name is Tatenda Nambureti-Gwizo. I'm an occupational therapy assistant and I work for the integrated mental health team.

#### Hannah:

So the purpose of our conversation today is around career journeys. Thinking about your career and your experiences in getting to this point, I've found it quite helpful to use that Kawa analogy, the river analogy, in my thinking to guide my reflection.

If we take it right back to the beginning, what drew you to occupational therapy or allied health? Can you pinpoint the source? How did it all start?

#### Tatenda:

So, from the get go, I've always known that I am drawn to people. I like helping people, I like talking to people, I like making changes in people's life. And one of the things that I live by, one of the philosophies that I live by in my life, probably my own thought process, is that if I can change one person's mind or one person's life, and that person can go on to change somebody else's life, it becomes a domino effect. From that, I went to Uni and I did mental health nursing and I qualified in 2007.

However, I think I was too young. I was 21, newly qualified, and I just couldn't do it. I enjoyed my training, but then once I got into the job and being responsible for people's minds and bodies and thoughts and you name it, it became a lot for me. So I quit straight away. I think six months into Preceptorship, I packed my bags and I left London and I came to Coventry.

#### Hannah:

Wow.

**Tatenda:**

Yeah, talk about change. So from that, I went to work for a company which worked with people who have learning disabilities. And then I started wanting to go back to Uni, but I didn't want to do nursing. But then I thought, I already have a diploma, why don't I just turn that into a degree and then I can do a master's into something else?

They said to me, 'you've been out of practice for more than five years. You need to come back, do your back to practice for two or two years or something'. 18 months, that's too long for me. So I was like, allow it, I'm not going to do that. And I stayed at home, got married. I did, I literally did the long, short thing, stayed at home, continued to work, got married, had the first baby, and then went and started doing research on either OT or physiotherapy. Randomly. Because my mom always said, you're really good at trying to put things so people can find an easy way to get from point A to point B. Why don't you do something around that?

So I was trying to think of ways of making use of myself to be a bridge between somebody who can't do something and enabling them to get to somewhere. And I stumbled upon occupational therapy on Reed. You'd get to do, like, it's a course, a very short course, so you can do it within six months. I did it within a week because I was that excited. I was like, wait a minute. It sounds like something that speaks to me as the person that I am. I did it within a week and then I started applying for Uni straight away.

**Hannah:**

Okay, wow.

**Tatenda:**

And then here I am.

**Hannah:**

Your current role is as an occupational therapy assistant?

**Tatenda:**

Occupational therapy assistant. 2022 April; I did my placement where I'm working right now and my supervisor at the time was like, 'we absolutely love you. You bring in this different pzazz in the job and you challenge us a little bit'. Because one of the things that I find with occupational therapy is, there's no better way of saying it; it's a very white profession. There's not very many black people or people of colour.

So one of the things that we spoke about with my supervisor was that she went to a talk or something about diversity and inclusion. So I said to her, 'oh, who was there?' And she said you know how it was this person and that person and that person. So I googled the people. So I questioned her and I said, 'explain to me how three white women can know anything about diversity and inclusion?' And I was asking, I said, 'are they within the LGBTQIA+? What is it that makes them feel the need to adapt when they're in situations?' Because if you're talking about diversity, at least have somewhat experience of having had to adapt yourself. Because the moment I get into someone's house, I'm thinking, what do I need to do to adapt myself to make that person feel comfortable? Whereas people that come from a privileged place don't have to think that way most

times.

So she said to me, 'I've never had to think about things like that. And it's people like you that we need in our team so that we can, would you like to work for us?' Just within that conversation. 'Would you like to work for us? Once you finish your placement, can you please come work for us?' I said, I have to think about that. Just give me a moment. And then I finished my placement and I came back and worked.

**Hannah:**

So you explained a bit about kind of what's contributed to your flow along the way. Kind of It sounds like you were always drawn to working with people, which is why you initially trained as a mental health nurse. And then tell us a bit about your role with working with people with learning disabilities.

**Tatenda:**

I absolutely loved it.

**Hannah:**

What was the role?

**Tatenda:**

I was a support worker.

I was a support worker. Again, it allowed me to be a bridge because I was an advocate, for the most part, because people tend to not understand people. I worked mostly with people who have autism and they find it very challenging to connect with the community. So part of the role was trying to get them out in the community and also to get the community to understand some of those challenges, which was a really tough job, but absolutely loved it because no two days were the same at all. You'd get into work thinking, oh, we're going to do this, we're going to do that. You probably were not going to do that. The service users were leading us to where they wanted us to go and that was the amazing part of the job, that we didn't get to do what we thought was right for everybody. And I think that's how client centred-ness came into play, because it just allowed a person to be who they are and then leading us, instead of us thinking, maybe we should try ABCD and E or whatever.

But, yeah, absolutely loved it.

**Hannah:**

And that directly contributed to where you are now, I guess.

What do you love about your role, both in the present day and over the course of your journey, what have been the joys?

**Tatenda:**

I love the challenges. I don't like a boring life where everything is the same. I like going into places where I can be challenged to think a lot. But with this job, I very often have to think outside my own comfort and my own box. But also it allows me to have a lot of teachable moments, even with my

colleagues. And what that means is I'm a black woman coming in and having these very adverse challenges where I'll go into a house where somebody will ask me a lot of questions about my race and then I come and share that with my colleagues. That's very racist. And of course they want to protect me and I understand that. But then I also have to take a step back and be like, 'Why do you think that's racist? Somebody can ask me questions about my race without the intention of being racist and just being curious'. And I love that because it gets me to a place where I'm not just an OTA, I'm now something else other than that, and teaching people more about just not just OTA, but me as a person and the race and awareness. So it allows me not to just focus on one thing. It allows me to be greater than OTA.

**Hannah:**

What have been the boulders along the way? What have been the challenges? Kind of in the present day or over the course of your journey, what have been the biggest challenges?

**Tatenda:**

Communication.

**Hannah:**

Communication?

**Tatenda:**

Yes. I find that communication, it's easy, but it's very hard because I know there's policies and procedures, I know there's ways we do things, but I feel like very often all those things get lost in translation because people get comfortable within a job. And when that happens, we tend to forget. So then communication gets really blurry.

**Hannah:**

And I guess thinking about your journey as a whole, thinking about your career path, what has helped you along the way?

**Tatenda:**

I think just having the drive... and my mom. I think I am very driven, I absolutely love what I do and when I go into people's houses or when I talk to somebody on the phone, I really love what I do and I think that drives me and that gives me that motivation. And I think it goes back to motivation comes from doing. So the more I do it, the more I get to enjoy it.

**Hannah:**

How has your environment around you enabled or restricted your career journey?

**Tatenda:**

I want to talk about restriction first and then enabling.

**Hannah:**

Yeah, go for it.

**Tatenda:**

In terms of restriction, it doesn't feel very diverse. Not just it doesn't feel it, it is not very diverse. So that can be very restrictive.

And then that makes the people around you too protective to a point of where, again, it becomes very restrictive. And if I take that into consideration, I then put myself in a very small box to where I cannot move or manoeuvre, and it becomes very tight for me.

But then with that comes the enabling part. So because it's such a non-diverse environment, it allows me to challenge those non-diverse situations in order for it to become bigger than what it is, in that it fuels me a little bit and it allows me to have uncomfortable conversations with people that people wouldn't necessarily have.

I think it goes back to allyship okay; I don't want to be a blind ally. I want to have very uncomfortable conversation, but also being aware of how my mouth can become insensitive to somebody else's feelings. Okay? So we can have uncomfortable conversations, so I can learn, so you can ask me about things about my race, you can ask me things about my sexuality. We can talk about how my job can make those things comfortable or uncomfortable because we face these things within the NHS. We work with people who are from a very diverse background. And I don't want to be just in a box and ticking a box to say, I've done this, it's paperwork is gone. I want to look after a person holistically. And part of that, it means I have to take what I've got and have an uncomfortable conversation with my colleague to say, how do I unpack this and how do I deal with that? How do I even help me understand what I'm dealing with, and sometimes that impacts my personal life.

It's funny because I'm a daughter of an immigrant who's partly grown up here, partly grown up in Zimbabwe, so my life is literally split in half. So before coming here, I didn't have knowledge of half the things that I know now. But then, now I'm here, I had to adapt my way of thinking. And then when I go back to Zimbabwe, my way of thinking is completely different. We don't even think the same. But then again, when I go back and see them, I slightly have to adapt my way of thinking because it's not the same. So I'm always having to adapt in a sense. Therefore, that's where that uncomfortable conversation comes in to how do I fit in? Where do I fit in, and how can I make my me fitting in not necessarily so loud? And I think that if a lot of people were willing to be to sit in their discomfort long enough, it would literally drive more change than what it is doing.

**Hannah:**

So you mentioned that occupational therapy isn't a particularly diverse profession. Did that impact on you considering a role in occupational therapy?

**Tatenda:**

No, absolutely not. The world can't become diverse by me just staying in my house.

I live in a very non-diverse area to begin with, and one of the first things that I was told was, why did you come here? It's a very racist area. And the housing agent that I was moving in with and I said to him, 'I'm a very black woman, I'm very fat, they're going to see me coming a mile away and I'm not

moving'. And he laughed. He was like, 'I've never had such a statement from anyone'. I said, 'they're going to see me whether they like it or not, and they have to deal with that'. And I'm not moving anytime soon because I absolutely love this area. It's quiet. My kids love it.

**Hannah:**

Is there any other way in which your environment has restricted your career generally, do you think?

**Tatenda:**

Not necessarily. I feel like usually my thing is always, where there's a will, there's a way. Not really.

I think half the challenges that I face, to be honest, are most around my race, okay? And that's around patience that I see sometimes. But I always take it as a teachable moment, and I don't take it as a way of undermining myself or them undermining me. I try and think outside the box. There has to be a different way of thinking other than just the one way of thinking.

**Hannah:**

How have those conversations gone?

**Tatenda:**

They never go the way they're supposed to go. Usually a lot of people try and avoid them. Okay. Because, again, it's uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable for me to come and say, I think I experienced racism, but maybe it's not.

So usually I don't start with that. Usually I start with the experience; 'so this is what happened today, what do you think of it?'. 'That was very racist'. I'm like, 'maybe not, let's unpack it a little bit...'

**Hannah:**

It's that critical thinking.

**Tatenda:**

Yeah, because I try and unpack things a bit more so we can make more sense of it rather than just jump into conclusions. I never want it to be a situation where this one experience happened and immediately I'm discharging somebody. Then what message are we sending?

**Hannah:**

I think the impact of that on you shouldn't be underestimated either.

**Tatenda:**

No. And I think that's what my colleagues are always trying to say, that we're not underestimating how this may weigh heavily on you and how much that might impact you.

**Hannah:**

What about your experiences of supervision?

**Tatenda:**

Oh, I absolutely love my supervision, and it's helped massively. It's a space where I can be myself. I can talk about my experiences, I can get help if I need it. I get to talk about whether I'm having difficulties or I'm having any challenges that I might not be able to deal with by myself. I get to have those chances to express myself. So it's amazing.

**Hannah:**

And so my next question would be, do you feel that you've been able to bring your authentic and best self to occupational therapy or to your support workforce role? And I'm hearing yes 100%.

**Tatenda:**

I feel like I'm able to just be myself and the people around me. I think we have a really great team, and they rally around us and celebrate each and every one of us as we are and individually, and they celebrate our individuality as well. And I love that about the team that we work for. So it's amazing.

**Hannah:**

Have there been points where your river, your career journey, has changed course in a way that you'd not anticipated?

**Tatenda:**

Yes, but it's slightly changed course. But I'm a person that takes things in bite size and I try not to overthink things. So for now, this is what's happening, and I can deal with it in this moment, and I can reflect about it in this moment. How is it affecting me? Am I going to be okay? How can I make it better? Would I have done anything differently? And then move forward?

**Hannah:**

And I guess almost becoming an OTA has been an unanticipated part of your journey, hasn't it?

**Tatenda:**

Yeah. I didn't expect it to happen either. Yeah.

**Hannah:**

Because you became a student occupational therapist at Uni, and then it was out of your placement that your support workforce role kind of evolved, which is..

**Tatenda:**

...yeah.

**Hannah:**

...good, though.

**Tatenda:**

It's a brilliant thing. Absolutely.

**Hannah:**

What has been or is most important or helpful for you in your development and progression as a member of our support workforce? What helps you develop in your role?

**Tatenda:**

Being able to reflect.

**Hannah:**

So reflective space?

**Tatenda:**

Yes, reflective space. And being able to have people that I can talk to and lean on if I need help. Because if that wasn't there, then I just feel like that would somewhat cripple me, in a sense.

**Hannah:**

Good, supportive, team, allies, people that are willing to have those uncomfortable conversations as well, for sure.

What do you wish you'd known prior to joining our support workforce? What would you say now to your early career or your younger self?

**Tatenda:**

It gets better. I definitely would have said it gets better because younger me back then thought, this is it, I'm finished. Because I think my experience as a newly qualified nurse was very traumatic, as compared to now, as a 37 year old, almost 37 year old woman, and again finding myself in a mental health team, which says a lot about me, because my passion is in domestic violence, which again leans on to mental health. So it says a lot. But back then, I just thought, I couldn't do mental health, I couldn't do it. It's hard.

**Hannah:**

And I think those earlier experiences, kind of as a newly qualified mental health nurse, must have contributed to your skills, experiences, knowledge that you bring to occupational therapy and those life experiences in the meantime as well.

Where's next for you?



**Tatenda:**

It's endless. I don't know.

**Hannah:**

Is there anything else you'd add to anything we've discussed today?

**Tatenda:**

I don't know. No.

I think that for anyone wanting to join and become a support worker, it's great to think outside the box. You're not just a support worker, you're bigger than that. There's so much more to offer. You as a person are a skill within your own right, so it'd be amazing. It's a great way to meet different people, new people, and to also just get to share your knowledge with the world and change lives one life at a time.

**Hannah:**

You clearly have a lot of love for your role.

**Tatenda:**

I do. I love it. Absolutely love it.

**Hannah:**

So I've got a quick fire finish the sentence question to end with:

Being part of the occupational therapy support workforce is...

**Tatenda:**

Amazing.

**Hannah:**

Thank you so much for talking to me today Tatenda.

**Tatenda:**

Not a problem.