

Podcast transcript

Career conversations: an introduction

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.

This brief introduction gives a bit more context to how the series came about and a short overview of the Kawa model, and analogy of career journey as river that's being used throughout many of the conversations. To find out more about the Kawa model, please do visit kawamodel.com and see the references in the notes that accompany this podcast.

Through a number of project group discussions with members of our occupational therapy community, we've heard that what can often be helpful in terms of career progression and development is to see possibilities, to see routes, pathways, representation and to hear narratives, particularly around overcoming challenges and underrepresentation, around inclusive, engagement and equity, diversity and belonging.

So with emphasis on journeys, pathways, narratives and possibilities, and with its natural lean towards creative or visual learning styles and multimedia formats, using the Kawa model and that analogy of career journey as river course was a natural fit in terms of a lens to frame this career conversation series.

The Kawa model of occupational therapy was devised by Professor Michael Iwama. Kawa is the Japanese word for river and the Kawa model conceptualises life flow as a river. The path of the river flowing from source to the river mouth is a metaphor for life's journey. In its original form, the water represents life flow, the river banks and bed are its multifaceted environment. Challenges or obstacles are represented by rocks or boulders, and influencing factors such as personal values and so on, which can either help hinder or both are defined by the driftwood. The spaces between these elements are considered as the opportunities to enhance the life flow.

The metaphor can evolve in endless ways or take an entirely different form led by the individual and their perspective and understanding. The Kawa model can be used in a number of ways, for example, looking back at the river course or looking at the here and now in a cross section snapshot of the river course.

Kawa is versatile in its' use in practice and reflection. It gave an equally universal and accessible lens for those conversations to all members of our occupational therapy community in sharing their career narratives.

And what's particularly beautiful is that river course of life and career inseparable from the environment is something that's consistently changing and evolving; it's unique for each individual and not necessarily linear, which felt like the perfect lens to highlight the breadth and depth of roles, life circumstances and experience, workplace context and career possibilities across the diversity of occupational therapy.

So we asked people about the source of their career journey as river. What drew people to occupational therapy? How did it all start? We asked about the tributaries, what has contributed to the career flow in terms of skills, experiences and opportunities? We've talked about how the environment has enabled or restricted development and progression and the boulders or challenges, times of whitewater and turbulence and what's helped during those times. We've also spoken about those meanders in the river course, the ways in which people's career journeys may have turned or changed course, either anticipated or otherwise. And the outlets, the possibilities, opportunities, alternatives that they've experienced.

And I'd personally just like to say a huge thank you to everybody that's contributed to this series. It really has been a privilege to facilitate and capture these conversations, and I very much hope that you enjoy listening to them.