Occupational therapists as system convenors in Derby

Bringing people, services and communities together

In Derby, occupational therapist Daisy Giuliano is helping reshape how organisations work together to support people to live meaningful lives. Working across both Derby City Council and Active Derbyshire, Daisy brings an occupational therapy perspective to system-wide work focused on healthy ageing, physical activity and neighbourhood health.

Rather than creating a new service, Daisy's role focuses on connecting existing people, organisations and community assets around what matters most to local residents. This approach, often described as system convening, involves bringing together partners from health, social care, local government, primary care, charities and communities to find shared solutions to complex challenges.

At the heart of this work is a simple question: what happens when services focus not only on helping people become safe and independent at home, but on supporting them to return to the occupations, relationships and activities that give their lives meaning?

Supporting people to return to meaningful lives

The work began through a partnership with Community First, Derby's integrated reablement service. Together, partners developed a test-and-learn approach to explore how people could be better supported following a hospital stay.

Traditionally, reablement services focus on helping people return to their previous level of function and independence. The Derby project sought to build on this by asking broader questions about participation, confidence, social connection and community life.

Working alongside multidisciplinary teams at Perth House, a bedded reablement unit, the service helped teams have more strengths-based conversations with people about their goals, aspirations and support networks. This included exploring what people wanted their lives to look like after discharge and identifying community resources that could help them achieve those goals.

Building relationships across boundaries

A key feature of the project has been its focus on relationships and community assets.
Rather than seeing support as something delivered only by health and care services, the work has explored how a much wider range of organisations can help people reconnect with meaningful activities and roles following illness or injury.

For example, partnerships have been developed with local transport providers to help people regain confidence travelling independently and accessing activities in their communities. Conversations with taxi services highlighted practical barriers that can prevent people from taking part in everyday life, helping partners identify new ways to support mobility and participation.

The work also involved collaboration with community organisations, social prescribing teams, local area coordinators and leisure providers. Through these relationships, people can be connected with

opportunities that align with their interests and goals rather than being directed solely towards traditional health and care services.

One innovative partnership has involved working with Derby County Community Trust. The Trust's strong presence within local communities has helped create opportunities for people to connect with physical activity, volunteering, social groups and sources of support that they may not otherwise have encountered. By recognising the role that organisations such as sports clubs play in community life, the project has broadened understanding of the assets that contribute to health and wellbeing.

What can occupational therapists learn from this approach

This example demonstrates that occupational therapists can play a leading role in neighbourhood health, even when they are not working in traditional occupational therapy services.

Occupational therapists are well placed to connect everyday life with health and care systems. Their understanding of occupation, participation and the wider determinants of health enables them to act as convenors, bringing together services, communities and partners around a shared goal of helping people live well.

This example shows the power of working relationally rather than transactionally. By investing in relationships, curiosity and collaboration, occupational therapists can help create solutions that are more human, more connected and more closely aligned with what people want from their lives.

> **‘Stop waiting around, we’re the ones that create the change. As an occupational therapist, I feel a real credibility and legitimacy to be working in this area. Despite the understandable scepticism that accompanies big policy change, I think neighbourhood health presents a genuinely exciting opportunity for the profession to lead, and shape, as well as for us to feel our practice is more closely aligned with our values.’**

Daisy Giuliano, Occupational Therapist, Derby City Council