



*“There’s huge variety in this role and, at the end of the day, you are doing something (as part of a wider team) to benefit a child. What’s better than that?” – Deana Quissy (Occupational Therapist, Blenheim).*

Having the right equipment has made settling into school a whole lot easier for six year old Hayden.

Hayden has cerebral palsy, which, in his case, means he cannot use his legs and has limited use of his arms. He has very little speech and limited muscle tone in his body.

The youngster is supported by a wide range of health and education specialists – including an occupational therapist from the Ministry of Education.

It’s his occupational therapist who has been at the centre of his life recently, organising the equipment he needs to learn and develop at school.

Together, they’ve trialled a microphone to help Hayden communicate with his teacher, travelled the school grounds to identifying wheelchair trouble spots and ordered a range of new equipment.

There is a wheelchair accessible desk on order and Hayden’s occupational therapist is flat out working with builders on the school toilet block, adding ramps, a special toilet chair and a purpose built change table.

Pretty soon Hayden will have everything he needs to learn alongside his peers. And, that’s exactly what he’s after.

#### **Nature of work**

Occupational therapists, within the education sector, work closely with parents, caregivers, teachers and other specialists to help children and young people with special education needs learn and develop.

Occupational therapists observe and assess the physical needs of children and young people who are referred to the Ministry of Education. They talk to adults in a child or young person’s life to identify, set up and provide advice about the support, equipment and technology they may need.

As an occupational therapist, you'll adapt the way you work to suit the individual needs of a child or young person and tailor your approaches to suit the context in which they live and learn.

*"I've been working with mum, at home, to analyse and better understand how my student uses a mouse to play computer games. It's given me insight into how we can better support him at school."* – Deana Quissy (Occupational Therapist, Blenheim)

Occupational therapists work with other specialists and agencies for extra support with behaviour, communication, hearing and other special education needs. As a result, they develop close working relationships with a range of education, health and community professionals.

Preparing occupational therapy interventions that help a child or young person perform daily living tasks and providing them to the support team for feedback and ideas are also central to the role. Programmes become part of a child or young person's individual education plan (a plan can be made up of several programmes each tailored to meet the individual's different needs). Over time, programme strategies are implemented, monitored, reviewed and adapted.

*"The role varies depending on a child's development and the needs of everyone in that child's life – mum and dad particularly. Often it's the specialist who is having most contact with a student."* – Deana Quissy (Occupational Therapist, Blenheim)

As an occupational therapist, you'll also have the opportunity to share your knowledge and experience by developing programmes and providing training to early childhood education services, schools and community groups.

Want a job with purpose and variety? You've found it.

## Who are we?

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The Ministry of Education is a significant employer of occupational therapists and we're looking for more. The Ministry has offices throughout New Zealand where we aim to provide access to education and learning to all New Zealand children and young people.

Working for us, you'll help people see that children and young people with special education needs are more than their disability and with the right support can participate, learn, achieve and contribute.

Still at school or studying at university? In a related career but feel like a change? Regardless of your situation, now is a good time to think about career opportunities with the Ministry of Education.



*"The challenges are what keep you motivated and interested. It's great."* - Deana Quissy

## Where can I go in my career?

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For starters, there is plenty of work available in New Zealand. Occupational therapy is on Immigration New Zealand's long-term skills shortage list.

Becoming an occupational therapist with the Ministry of Education will give you the rewards and challenges of the job itself, as well as opportunities to develop your career.

You'll be supported and supervised by experienced professionals within the Ministry. Keeping up to date with the latest evidence, taking part in ongoing training and mixing with a wide range of highly skilled and talented professionals will keep you challenged and stimulated.

*"There are opportunities everywhere – that's a highlight."* – Deana Quissy (Occupational Therapist, Blenheim)

Moving into one of our fixed term, practice focused leadership roles will give you the chance to lead change and improve services from within the organisation. Other career opportunities include management, getting involved in special projects and offering and receiving supervision.

What are you waiting for? The professional possibilities are endless.

## What skills and knowledge do occupational therapists have?

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- ▶ knowledge of occupational therapy theory and practice
- ▶ knowledge of child and human development
- ▶ skill in managing assistive equipment and technology in a variety of settings
- ▶ knowledge of sensory, motor, cognitive, psychosocial development

# Meet Deana Quissy, an *Occupational Therapist* in Central Otago



9AM TUESDAY MORNING: Deana believes sensory exploration begins with having fun.

*“It’s a wonderfully varied workforce – one that’s really rich with knowledge, skills and a shared commitment to seeing kids succeed.”*

**HER BACKGROUND:** Deana Quissy is a full time Occupational Therapist with the Ministry of Education in Blenheim.

She works with 40 to 50 children and young people aged between five and 21 located in the upper South Island. Deana’s been with the Ministry for 10 years and has worked as an Occupational Therapist for 12. She has a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology and Occupational Therapy.

**HER STORY:** Waking up and knowing she can make a difference in a child’s life is what gets Deana on the road each morning.

Yet, the Occupational Therapist is also quick to add that she’s just one of many people working with a child. It’s the team approach that really makes the difference. All assessments involve tapping into the knowledge and expertise of other specialists.

Settling a child into school can mean working with teachers and teacher aides, parents, project managers, architects and orthopaedic surgeons.

“It’s a wonderfully varied workforce – one that’s really rich with knowledge, skills and a shared commitment to seeing kids succeed,” says Deana.

**THE REWARDS AND CHALLENGES:** Deana lists the range of learning opportunities with the Ministry as one of the big rewards in her career to date.

She enjoys regular meetings with health and education therapists in the region and across the South Island. And she’s loved the two year lead practitioner role she took on with the aim of improving occupational therapy services in her district.

Recently, she tried something out of the ordinary and ran a wheelchair training day at the Ministry’s Nelson office.

“It was an opportunity for parents, siblings and students to see what life’s like in a wheelchair – it was an awesome day, with a really effective message.”

The hard part of the job is squeezing everything into an eight-hour day, particularly with the big distances she travels. Sometimes, work takes Deana as far afield as Kaikoura or Hokitika.

It’s the catching up that can be tough going, she says.

**HER FUTURE ASPIRATIONS:** Deana’s future looks bright, with plenty more to learn and plenty of opportunities ahead.

“I remember how overwhelming it was starting out. Nowadays, the challenges are what keep you motivated and interested. It’s great,” she says.

Want to speak to someone like Deana about a career as an Occupational Therapist? Give us a call or drop us an email.

- ▶ knowledge of community and family support services
- ▶ excellent communication, teaching, research, planning and administration skills.

### **What qualifications and experience do I need?**

You will need a Bachelor's Degree in Health Science (Occupational Therapy) or its equivalent. You'll need to be registered with the [Occupational Therapy Board of New Zealand](#).

If you're still at school, you'll need a tertiary training entrance qualification to go to university. Research and plan for your career by checking out the [Career Services](#) website. Useful subjects include biology, science, maths and English.

Undergraduate degrees in occupational therapy are offered by [Otago Polytechnic](#), [Waikato Institute of Technology](#) and [The Auckland University of Technology](#). These qualifications suit school leavers or people new to tertiary education.

Postgraduate qualifications in occupational therapy are available through [Otago Polytechnic](#), [The Auckland University of Technology](#) and [Victoria University of Wellington](#). The courses are aimed at people with relevant undergraduate degrees and work experience.

You'll find previous experience in the education sector, a special education service or health agency an advantage.

### **What salary can I expect?**

Salaries for occupational therapists vary between \$40,000 and \$75,000 per year, depending on skills, experience and the sector in which you work.

### **What about my personal qualities?**

You'll spend lots of time with people from a range of ages, cultures, backgrounds and lifestyles. So, you will need to listen, build trust and inspire confidence.

Being understanding, patient, supportive, creative and practical are all great personal qualities for an occupational therapist.

Having a strong interest in team work and collaborating with other professionals is important.

### **What are the benefits and working conditions?**

The Ministry of Education offers five weeks' annual leave and flexible working conditions, giving you the opportunity to balance work with child care, travel and training commitments.

Ready to go? Now's a great time to start a rewarding and dynamic career as an occupational therapist.

### **Who can I talk to?**

Speak to an occupational therapist or contact the Ministry at:

- ▶ 0800 622 222
- ▶ [special.education@minedu.govt.nz](mailto:special.education@minedu.govt.nz)

### **Where can I find out more?**

The Ministry of Education, Special education

- ▶ [www.minedu.govt.nz/educationsectors/specialeducation.aspx](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/educationsectors/specialeducation.aspx)

Scholarships and study awards

- ▶ [www.minedu.govt.nz/educationsectors/specialeducation.aspx](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/educationsectors/specialeducation.aspx)
- ▶ [www.minedu.govt.nz/sestudyawards](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/sestudyawards)

Occupational Therapy Board of New Zealand

- ▶ [www.otboard.org.nz/](http://www.otboard.org.nz/)

New Zealand Association of Occupational Therapists

- ▶ [www.nzaot.com/](http://www.nzaot.com/)

The Auckland University of Technology

- ▶ [www.aut.ac.nz](http://www.aut.ac.nz)

Otago Polytechnic

- ▶ [www.tekotago.ac.nz/](http://www.tekotago.ac.nz/)

Careers information

- ▶ [www.careers.govt.nz](http://www.careers.govt.nz)