

## Happy Anniversary OT!

A baby learning to hold a bottle, a toddler enjoying the playground, a grade school student making a sandwich, or a teenager making a purchase in a convenience store; these are all essential life skills, often taken for granted, that CORA's Occupational Therapists work diligently with their clients to accomplish. Helping individuals to define their roles in society is the desired outcome of occupational therapy. In 1917, six professionals, from diverse the disciplines of psychiatry, nursing, neurology, social work, teaching and architecture, met in New York to analyze the human experience in the workplace. This was the origination of occupational therapy. What started as a conversation about the important service of rehabilitating injured workers to return to work, is really a very small part of the occupation as a whole. Today, the practice of occupational therapy is known as the therapeutic use of occupations, including everyday life skills activities, with individuals to support participation and function, in situations at home, at school, in the workplace, and in other community settings. OT addresses the physical, cognitive, psychosocial and sensory-perceptual aspects of performance in a variety of contexts and environments to support engagement in occupations that affect physical and mental health, well-being and quality of life.



Occupational Therapy celebrates its 100-year anniversary in 2017, but services at CORA started about 5 years ago, when Kristy Kulak was hired to provide OT services for CORA's Early Intervention Program. Dr. Paul Haughton, Director of Psychology, introduced the idea of adding related services including Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy in the Mastery Charter Schools, in addition to the Psychology Services already provided there by CORA. From then on, the OT department at CORA began to grow as therapists were hired to meet the needs of the Mastery Charter Schools, additional charter schools and Early Intervention Program.



Alison Andregic, CORA's Occupational Therapist at Seedlings, facilitates a weekly yoga group for children ages three to five. *"Smell the roses and blow out the candles,* is a phrase many of my young yogis hear over and over again, during



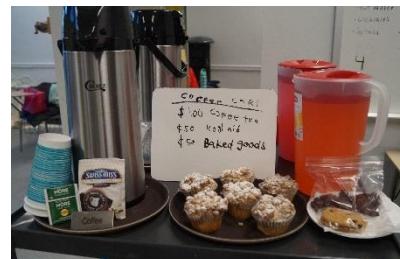
our weekly yoga sessions in the social skills classroom," says Ali. "The students participate by imitating a variety of poses in a group setting. The incorporation of partner poses and the opportunity to take turns, further promotes social interaction. It has been such a pleasure for me to see the students grow and make progress not only while participating in the yoga group, but likewise across both the school and home environments. I am teaching them to play. At this stage in their life, this is occupation." Yoga facilitates improvement in motor planning and coordination and serves as a means to facilitate increased regulation for students as well as adults. While yoga may just appear to be a fun movement-based activity to the students, it is important to note the worthwhile array of benefits associated with group yoga.

At the middle school level, CORA staffs the Chichester School district with Occupational Therapists. Ashley Mujica Conneen, CORA's Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA), facilitates life lessons with Chichester's grade school children. Recently, she arranged a lesson around making mini fruit tarts. While completing the cooking activity, the students worked on their bilateral, fine motor and life skills. Bilateral skills are the ability to use both sides of the body together in a coordinated way; in this case, cutting fruit and scooping the whip cream. Fine motor skills are small movements that use the small muscles of the fingers, such as pinching their thumb and index fingers together to pick up the fruit. Following a recipe, cutting and assembling the fruit and even eating the fruit, necessitate skills that do not come easily to all children.



In the high school setting, the OT focus shifts to sensory-regulation, providing strategies to compensate for poor visual perceptual skills or poor handwriting, or starting to develop pre-vocational skills. Temple University's Occupational Therapy students teamed up with CORA Occupational Therapist, Laura Pietropola, at Simon Gratz Mastery Charter High School, to develop a coffee cart that students receiving OT had to master setting up and managing. The Temple OT students raised money to purchase items to jump start the project, in addition to reaching out to the local Shop Rite for donated items.

Not only does the coffee cart promote routines and positive habits, but it also provides students with specific roles to help them improve upon their social skills. The students focus on various life skills such as money management, organization and problem solving abilities. The OT driven coffee cart promotes meaningful community participation by utilizing adaptive strategies for successful community integration after high school graduation.



Today CORA has a staff of nine Occupational Therapists, supervised by Siobhan Ideishi, who provide services in Charter Schools, Early Intervention Centers and community sites. We have a wonderful partnership with Temple



University's OT Department and have enjoyed providing student supervision and professional mentorship for the past 4 years. Occupational Therapy often is included in lists of best jobs with high demand, but it also aligns closely with CORA's mission - OT is just one of the many ways CORA works with children to help them overcome obstacles to success.

*Happy 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary OT!*