

## **SYDNEY**

### **My Background:**

- Hon. B.Sc. in Psychology and Exceptionality in Human Learning. Currently working towards the completion of Clinical Masters in Occupational Therapy
- Currently a student pursuing a career in Occupational Therapy (OT)
- Type of disability: Mobility (uses a wheelchair)

### **How I disclose or have disclosed in the past:**

I usually disclose before the interview when I am going to fieldwork for OT. If I was applying for a job, I would probably disclose during the interview because the employer would see me and probably would want to talk about it anyway.

My philosophy is that when I am approachable and comfortable with myself, that others will reciprocate – which is why I'm upfront about discussing my disability. Also, I know what my skills are, which is something that people are uncomfortable about because they don't know what it's like to live in my shoes. It's easy for people to make assumptions about me, so I'd much rather get the cards right on the table. So far my methods have worked really well for me. As well, it's taught me to provide regular up-dates to my supervisors and employers so they know about the things I'm going through – this helps them to know how they can better support me and increase my productivity.

### **The barriers I've faced and how I've dealt with them:**

The kinds of barriers I've faced have been mostly physical barriers. For instance, I have problems going to the library (access issues as well as not having enough time to work with AccessAbility services downtown). I usually need more than 2 days to get my materials if I use the librarian services. Sometimes I can't get into lab spaces, which can be frustrating. The way I deal with inconvenience like this is to ask my peers for assistance. But sometimes I feel like I am inconveniencing my classmates because they have to change their studying space for me. It's sometimes hard to find a washroom that can fit my power wheelchair.

I often use my classmates to help me problem solve and figure things out. My professors and faculty advisor in the OT Department have also been a tremendous support. Currently I am doing a research project on how

navigating the accommodations at university impact the ability of students with physical disabilities to be students. Listening to the stories of others have helped me cope.

I felt that in my undergraduate degree I had to fight a lot more to get the things I needed. I find that now that I am doing my Masters degree within the OT department, that people are very interested in discussing options with me. I partly chose this degree because of that. I don't think that other programs would have been this supportive.

### **How I prepared for the world of work:**

Before applying to a school or workplace, I usually go to the building first to get a feel for the environment. If I cannot go into the building or find an accessible washroom on almost every floor, I scratch the company off my list. I also see what security and information services are like, and their policies around the equipment they use (i.e., elevators).

While pursuing my undergraduate degree, I volunteered and worked on my campus a lot. These experiences allowed me to meet a lot of important people and supporters who helped me further my career development (i.e. [AccessAbility](#), Psychology Club, etc.)

The best resources that I consulted were people. The Career Centre was great! For example, I participated in the Extern Program (job shadowing program) and I went for resume tips and interviewing advice. At the Career Centre I did a lot of talking about how and when to disclose my disability.

### **My advice:**

It's a huge undertaking to look for work. Sometimes it's hard to find the time, the energy, and the motivation to work as hard or even harder than our peers. But it's very worth it, and learning to talk to as many people as possible can really change how you think about your abilities and skills. You also develop a valuable network that can help you out long after you graduate.

Finding a mentor is key! I have many people that I have met who are also practicing OT and who have mobility impairments. This is giving me a realistic outlook as to where I can apply, what my career is going to look like, and how I will manage. It's good to have people to fall back onto, and it also really helps me to be able to ask people for guidance, because I usually do not have the extra time to do internet searches or go to a lot of events myself. People can teach you a lot about what's out there and sometimes help you with your goals.