

Meet Bella Cairns – Student Occupational Therapist

Hi, I'm Bella Cairns, a student occupational therapist (OT) from McMaster University. I am in the final six weeks of my academic career and am thrilled to be joining CAPA for part of my final placement. I am working alongside Laurie Proulx and Annette McKinnon to launch a project to better understand the diverse experiences of individuals living with arthritis. We are hoping to gain a sense of your favourite tips, life hacks, and gadgets to manage and live well with arthritis.

I was excited about the opportunity to work with CAPA because it is a patient driven organization that aims to support others living with arthritis. While I believe that OTs can serve our patients to promote health and well-being, I also think there is so much value in understanding the perspective and experiences of those we work with. For those who are not familiar with OTs, our profession is focused on supporting our patients to do all the activities of daily living they want to, need to, and ENJOY doing! I was drawn to this project in particular because of the strengths-based approach and to work with individuals living with arthritis.

I first discovered my interest in OT when I was in my grade 10 civics and careers class. We were asked to look into a profession that interested us and present some information to the class. My sister had received occupational therapy support as an infant and I was intrigued by the services she received. I then later went on to work as an administrative assistant at a physiotherapy clinic during my undergraduate degree and met their OT who specialized in hand therapy. I instantly fell in love with the role of a hand therapy OT!

Five years later, I have shadowed a hand therapy OT for countless hours, completed an 8-week placement in a hospital-based hand therapy program, and attended several conferences. Through each of these experiences, I have had the pleasure of working with individuals living with different kinds of arthritis. I'm hoping that this project will provide me with new learnings that I can then use to better support my patients in a hand therapy setting after graduation (as well as knowing more general tips and tricks).

A few fun facts about me – I grew up spending countless hours in the pool and did competitive swimming for 5 years. I have visited every province and territory at least once except for the Northwest Territories. And I have two bunnies who are very sweet but also cause lots of mischief, they are named Crumpet and Bean.

I look forward to getting to know some of you over this summer!