

## 2016-2022 Award Recipients by Year

### 2022 Award Recipients

#### AWARD OF CLINICAL EXCELLENCE: BETH SULLIVAN-WELL, OTR/L

*For the demonstration of excellence, vision, and clinical expertise*

#### FIELDWORK EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR: LOU ELMO, OTR/L

*Recognizes the provision of exceptional fieldwork education by an OT Practitioner in fostering the growth and development of future OT Practitioners*

#### EMERGING LEADER AWARD: ANNE GRAIKOSKI, OTR/L

*Recognizes a student of occupational therapy or a novice practitioner who has demonstrated outstanding leadership within the profession of OT.*

#### PRESIDENT'S AWARD: MAGGIE MORIARITY, MS, COTAL

*“For the past 26 years Maggie has dedicated her career to educating and mentoring students in their journey to enter the profession as an OTA. She has served as a Professor, Fieldwork Coordinator, and retired this January as the Program Director for Manchester Community College’s OTA Program. I personally have had the pleasure of working with Maggie in the capacity of partnership as a board member of ConnOTA. Maggie has been a longtime member of our organization and began volunteering her service to us in 1999. She has dedicated countless hours and proudly serves as an executive board member serving two terms as both secretary and membership chair. Maggie’s passion for promoting the OT profession and interest in lifelong learning are merely two of the reasons I am so grateful to have her as a part of our OT tribe. She exemplifies setting an example, inspiring, and envisioning our future, challenges the process, actively involves others and always reminds us to celebrate our accomplishments.” - Corrin Campbell, ConnOTA President*

### 2021 Award Recipients

#### AWARD OF MERIT

*Recognizes an individual who has demonstrated outstanding accomplishments in clinical practice, research, leadership or innovation and whose body of work is considered exemplary and influential by peers.*

#### **JOYCE RIOUX, EdD, OTR/L, SCSS, FAOTA**

*“In addition to Joyce's work prior to the pandemic, she has led (and continues to lead) weekly COP meetings for CT School OTs since the start of the pandemic. She provided steady guidance for all of us in a time of great uncertainty. Joyce was able to refer us to*

the proper sources for information that helped us with our decisions about OT services in unprecedented circumstances. Many of us work alone. Being able to brainstorm with others under the guidance of Joyce was critical in our ability to maintain high quality OT service delivery.” ConnOTA gratefully recognizes Joyce’s generous sharing of her leadership, time and talent, most notably during this pandemic.

### **AWARD OF SERVICE**

*Recognizes an individual who has made significant contributions in advancing the mission and strategic goals of ConnOTA and / or the practice of occupational therapy in Connecticut through community leadership or advocacy.*

#### **KRISTEN DOWNER, OTR/L**

“Kristin has been an active contributor to the Statewide Occupational Therapy Community of Practice. She poses thoughtful questions to guide discussions around best practice, shares resources and experiences from practice, and digs in to further examine and share focused content that benefits the larger occupational therapy community. During the summer, she joined a small task group to investigate best practice in conducting evaluations during COVID. Her contributions were invaluable. She understands multiple perspectives--the needs of the student and family, the needs of the district, and the needs of the evaluator. Her practical sense making, sharing of knowledge, and ability to communicate her reasoning process has benefitted school practitioners in how to conduct services under these unprecedented times. We are fortunate for her leadership, advocacy, and can-do attitude.”  
ConnOTA is proud to recognize the many contributions of Kristen Downer.

**EMERGING LEADER AWARD:** *Recognizes a student of occupational therapy or a novice practitioner who has demonstrated outstanding leadership within the profession of OT.*

#### **Kailene Rampone, COTA/L**

“Kailene has developed from an eager student into an enthusiastic, compassionate, resourceful, capable practitioner, who is always willing to accept a challenge and offer a helping hand.

As a student member, she attended and participated in the Community of Practice for school-based therapists and continues to do so post graduation. She volunteered at Connota’s 2020 Spring and Fall conferences , and regularly attends the monthly membership meetings. Expressing a desire to pursue a more active role within the Association, she recently joined a sub-committee of Membership with the goal of enhancing membership initiatives, inclusive of retaining student members as they transition to licensed practitioners.

Kailene’s exemplary performance in the academic and clinical environments enabled her to validate her personal and professional commitment to the field of Occupational Therapy. Demonstrating the qualities of an emerging leader within the profession of Occupational Therapy, Kailene has a genuine style that exudes her confidence and competence while being friendly, enthusiastic and diplomatic . “

**ConnOTA salutes you, Kailene, and wishes you a long and successful career. We look forward to your continued contributions to the Profession and to this Association.**

**FIELDWORK EDUCATOR AWARD** *Recognizes the provision of exceptional fieldwork education by an OT Practitioner in fostering the growth and development of future OT Practitioners.*

**MEGHAN HOBOLD, COTA/L**

“I completed my fieldwork experience under Meghan’s supervision in the East Windsor School system, and my rotation was completed entirely through a telehealth platform. One of the many things that amazed me most about Meghan was her willingness to take fieldwork students during such unprecedented and unpredictable times. Meghan’s ability to adapt to this “new normal” of life while still fostering growth and development in me as a future practitioner was truly remarkable and deserves recognition. Throughout my eight-week experience with Meghan, I not only gained crucial knowledge and experience regarding the telehealth pediatric setting, but I also gained a new level of confidence in myself as an entry-level practitioner. Meghan’s ability to lead by example, coupled with her ability to guide me in beginning to fly on my own, was exactly what I needed to become the entry-level practitioner that I am today. The resources that Meghan provided and the feedback that I gained from her allowed me to grow both professionally and personally. She is the type of fieldwork educator that every student deserves to learn from.”

**ConnOTA is thrilled to recognize a former recipient of the Emerging Leader Award with the 2021 Fieldwork Educator Award. Congratulations, Meghan!**

**OT Scholarship Recipient: Kelly Riordan, OTS**

**Kelly, a second semester student, was elected in the fall as the ConnOTA representative for the Student Occupational Therapy Association at Sacred Heart University.** In her first semester, Kelly had already begun to make her mark, volunteering at ConnOTA’s fall conference, regularly attending the monthly membership meetings, and has been instrumental in encouraging her peers to become active Association members. In Kelly’s own words: *“I look forward to the many more experiences I will have within ConnOTA throughout my education and into my future practice.”*

**Kelly, ConnOTA shares your enthusiasm and wishes you great success in your academics and beyond.**

**OTA Scholarship Recipient: Kelley Heerschap, OTAS**

Kelley is President of the Manchester Community College Student Occupational Therapy Association and as such, is the representative to ConnOTA’s monthly membership meetings. Kelley is currently completing her 4<sup>th</sup> semester of academics and will be on Level II Fieldwork in the Fall 2021.

**Kelley noted in her scholarship application:** I began working in health care over 10 years ago and carried various titles along the way. I researched many possible

professions, until I discovered Occupational Therapy I am passionate about the Profession and attempt to involve myself in every opportunity to soak up any knowledge the world of OT has to offer. I take the privilege of being a part of caring for others very seriously, and I promise to always strive to live up to my highest possible level of function as an Occupational Therapy practitioner.” Kelley, All the best to you as you begin to prepare for your clinical semester and beyond!

## **2020 Award Recipients**

### **AWARD OF MERIT: STEPHANI SHIVERS, M.Ed., OTR/L, CDP**

Stephani’s nomination letter highlighted her many accomplishments as exemplary and influential in the practice of Occupational Therapy. Specifically, Stephani’s commitment to sharing her vision for the possibilities to change the lives of people living with dementia and their families is extraordinary. Of the multitude of projects and initiatives that Stephani has co-created, led and implemented, of particular note is her work to create “Hello Light”, a Dementia Peer Coalition, that creates opportunities for peers living with dementia to support and empower one another in the areas of peer support, advocacy, community education and research. This initiative is now achieving nonprofit status and changing the lives of those involved.

Stephani most recently received two major grant awards, further empowering PLWD/care partners to co -create research initiatives with researchers. She also serves as the State Lead for Dementia Friendly America, Master Trainer for Connecticut Dementia Friends, and Organizational Lead for Dementia Action Alliance Corporate Council. A 2017 graduate of the Leading Age National Leadership Academy, a certified Dementia Care Practitioner, and Skills2Care clinician.

Stephani’s passion for improving the lives of those living with dementia is an inspiration to all.

Congratulations, Stephani!

### **AWARD OF CLINICAL EXCELLENCE: MOIRA ETHIER, MSGRW, OTR/L *FOR THE DEMONSTRATION OF EXCELLENCE, VISION AND CLINICAL EXPERTISE***

A 1985 graduate of Quinnipiac College, Moira found her true love within the profession in her work with long term residents in SNFs. In 2004, she graduated from SHU, with a master’s in geriatric rehabilitation and wellness. In 2014, Moira completed the Leadership Academy at SHU and now assists as a facilitator in that program.. She has worked as a therapist, lead therapist, supervisor, program manager and now, an area manager within the state of CT. Her responsibilities include the clinical and financial management of rehabilitation services for all contracts in the state of CT. In previous leadership roles, her work was instrumental in developing and executing programs that

centered on decreasing length of stay, decreasing re-hospitalization, and producing high customer satisfaction. In addition, the roll out of a new electronic medical record in which she was a super user and completed all education for this 60+ member department was more than successful. Her work was instrumental in promoting a culture change from the typical medical model of healthcare. Her skill in and facilitating clinical expertise in her staff and mentoring peers, students, family members and caregivers, combined with her vision of promoting excellence in all of the organizations she has been associated with, has earned her this award of clinical excellence. We are very proud to have such a dedicated and committed clinician in our state.

Congratulations, Moira!

**FIELDWORK EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR: MAUREEN LEYES, M.Ed., COTA/L**

Maureen was nominated jointly by the Academic Fieldwork Coordinators at Quinnipiac University and Manchester Community College, in recognition of her exemplary work with OT and OTA students through the provision of Level I Fieldwork Experiences (for QU students) and Level II Fieldwork experiences (for MCC students).

Maureen epitomizes the characteristics of a superb fieldwork educator, displaying positive energy, strong clinical knowledge and a professionalism that enables her to guide students through the learning process on the journey toward becoming strong and compassionate entry level practitioners.

Quoting a current fieldwork student, “I am grateful for the opportunity to have Maureen Leyes as a fieldwork educator. She offers her students a wealth of knowledge and expertise that instills a sense of confidence and competence in the Acute Rehabilitation treatment setting. Her real-life experience and superb clinical reasoning skills have helped formulate my OT Toolbox and allowed me to learn new skills, in addition to overcoming common challenges faced by many fieldwork students. I am forever grateful for the knowledge and wisdom she has bestowed upon me throughout this fieldwork experience. She has helped shape me into the future OT Practitioner I have always aspired to be.

Thank you, Maureen!”

**EMERGING LEADER AWARD: KELLY PESTEY, OTAS**

A student at Manchester Community College, Kelly is President of MCC’s Student Occupational Therapy Association, where she has spear headed a variety of fundraising initiatives. Over the past year, SOTA raised in excess of \$1500, donated to charities inclusive of Beads for Life (benefitting women in Uganda), Make A Wish Foundation, Food Share and the MCC Cougar Pantry. With a dream of covering the cost of student registration for the AOTA Conference in Boston 2020, Kelly was instrumental in leading

her classmates to share the vision of raising \$12,000, thereby covering the cost of registration for the entire OTA class. The most ambitious endeavor was a full day conference at MCC, open to all Occupational Therapy Students and Practitioners, *Be the Practitioner You Were Meant To Be*.

Kelly continues to serve as liaison between her SOTA group and ConnOTA and is a most enthusiastic and visionary leader in the making. Given what Kelly has accomplished in her brief tenure at MCC, we can only imagine what goals she will accomplish as an OT practitioner.

We look forward to your continued dedication to this Association and the Profession of OT, upon graduation!

Congratulations Kelly!

### **AWARD OF SERVICE: JUDITH SHEEHAN, CFO, OTR/L**

Judi is recognized for her two decades long dedication and contributions to the Connecticut Occupational Therapy Association. Having served as the association's historian since 2000, she has also served as Fall and Spring Conference chair and co-chair for as many years and continues to offer great support and direction to the Members for Professional Development. Judi has formalized the system and structure for conference policies and procedures to ensure continuity and continued success of these important events.

Through her work as an entrepreneur and other clinical leadership roles, she was awarded the association's highest honor, The Award of Merit, in 2011 (which recognizes individuals who have attained outstanding accomplishments in clinical practice, research, leadership or innovation and whose body of work is considered exemplary and influential by peers.)

Judi served two terms as Vice President of ConnOTA (2010-2014) during which time she was instrumental in assisting in the development of the association's legal formation as an LLC and in the corresponding bylaws and policy and procedure updates, as well as the job shadow and mentor programs.

She received the President's Award in 2015 to recognize her volunteer contributions in assisting the incoming board in the transition, particularly the spring and fall conferences.

Judi assumed the role of President in 2018, and having successfully served another two terms, has expressed her commitment to remaining active as the historian, mentoring the incoming president, assisting with conferences and completing the work she has begun with the Scope of Practice Committee. She has worked diligently to ensure the association is well organized, structured and will run efficiently for all future boards and

has been recognized for sharing the work of Connecticut's state association with the national Affiliated State Association Presidents (ASAP) through AOTA. Congratulations and thank you Judi on your decades long commitment to ConnOTA!

### **SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS**

Nicole Salmon, OTS, American International College, Springfield, MA  
Kelly Pestey, OTAS, Manchester Community College, Manchester, CT

### **PRESIDENT'S AWARD: AMY BURTON, OTD, OTR/L**

The President wishes to gratefully acknowledge the countless hours, efficiency and dedication Amy has shown in quickly learning and implementing the conference programs these past two years. She exemplifies leadership and commitment and her work has been essential in ensuring the events run smoothly! Thank you, Amy!

## **2019 Award Recipients**

### **2019 Award for Clinical Excellence: Meghan Spielman, COTA/L**



Employed in the East Windsor Public Schools as a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant, Meghan Spielman is an individual with great passion and vision who has embraced her role, contributing to meaningful and important client outcomes. Valuing the collaborative partnership between the occupational therapist and occupational therapy assistant, she is evidence that together, great change can occur. Meghan was an active contributor to Connecticut's Guidelines for School Practice with a focus on the role of the occupational therapy assistant. With the anticipated soon to be revised guidelines, Meghan is already contemplating how this section can be updated and reorganized for use in the practice setting. Meghan was also recruited for her expertise on the role of the OTA in schools to write a chapter for the 2019 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of AOTA's *Best Practices for Occupational Therapy in Schools*. She presented at today's 2019 ConnOTA Spring Conference on the collaborative partnership of the occupational therapist and occupational therapy assistant in schools. These projects have led Meghan along a scholarly journey contributing back to the practice setting and promoting excellence. Meghan Spielman is a name to watch and is a rising star in the field of occupational

therapy. Her contributions to clinical excellence in school practice are to be commended. ConnOTA is proud to recognize Meghan with the 2019 Award of Clinical Excellence.

**2019 Fieldwork Educator of the Year : Deb Orris, COTA/L**



An employee of DMHAS' Grace House, providing innovative behavioral health services to young adults with trauma related issues, Deb Orris is recognized for the superior Level II fieldwork opportunities she provides to OTA students. A proud alumna of Manchester Community College, Deb generously shared her love and passion for the profession of Occupational Therapy in her role of fieldwork educator. Deb's tremendous regard for her clients, coupled with her desire to educate, mentor and shape the professional lives of her students, has made her a truly outstanding fieldwork educator. Embodying the heart of OT, Deb is a natural teacher who intuition, flexibility, creativity and positivity allow her to provide a diversity of opportunities for students as they endeavor to refine the skills necessary to experience clinical success on their journey toward entry level competence by the conclusion of the fieldwork experience. Beyond her demonstrated commitment to fieldwork education, Deb has presented collaborative research both locally (at the state level) and at AOTA's Annual Conference and exp (2018). Deb Orris is an exemplary fieldwork educator, most deserving of ConnOTA's recognition as the 2019 Fieldwork Educator of the Year.

**2019 Award of Service : Goesta H. Schlegel, MPS, OT/L**



Gus is currently working towards a Doctorate of Philosophy in Public Health with Concentration in Community Education. He received his Master of Professional Studies with Humanitarian Services Administration Concentration in 2016, his Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy in 1995 and is OTA certificate in 1988. Gus currently works in home care and is an adjunct professor at Sacred Heart University. He was previously the owner of a therapy company, and worked as an academic fieldwork coordinator for LaGuardia Community College. He has served with the US Army as a staff OT and Director of OT Detachment Commander, Company Commander, Occupational Therapy Assistant deployed to Persian Gulf during Operations Desert

Shield/Storm as the first occupational therapy assistant in a combat environment to assist in developing combat stress doctrine. Gus has been involved with Bon Samaritain School and Clinic, L'Acul, Haiti, WI March 2008 – Present and has participated in 10 trips to Haiti since 2008 to consult and collaborate with community leaders and healthcare providers in the rural community of L'Acul in Northern Haiti. He has collaborated with the community to reopen a medical clinic in the region in November 2009, which operates weekly to provide medical services to the local community of 12,000 people. With another occupational therapist, he began an occupational therapy clinic in May 2010 and has provided occupation-based interventions for over 100 adults and children with disabilities. Gus also co-leads service learning and mission trips to Haiti including groups of graduate occupational therapy students. He continues to provide ongoing support and consultation at the Bon Samaritan School, which has grown from K-5 to Pre-K to secondary school, which commenced in 2016. Gus provides consultation on various projects including a lunch program, an after-school program, construction and computers, and a reforestation program. He writes grants and conducts fundraising for ongoing support of a weekly medical clinic and the school operating budget. Grants written include school and clinic reconstruction, computers, and reforestation. He provides ongoing support for community members entering the medical field including two nurses who have completed their training and one current medical student. Gus has also volunteered his time with ConnOTA in the capacity of secretary since July 2018. ConnOTA is excited to award Gus the 2019 Award of Service.

**2019 Scholarship Recipient: Julia Garbriela Kowal, OTS**



A senior at Quinnipiac University, Julia Kowal is majoring in Occupational Therapy and minoring in gerontology. She describes herself as one who has pushed herself “academically and extracurricularly” to grow professionally as an OT student. Passionate about geriatrics, she is the vice president of the “Old Friends and New” Club at QU, which hosts events at Masonicare in Wallingford. She has participated in Quinnipiac’s Legacy Storytelling Program and is certified to lead “Dementia Friend” Information Sessions, as a Dementia Friend Champion. Over the summer (2018), Julia participated in a research project with two of her professors, and was proud to co present the findings at ConnOTA’s fall conference. A member of Sigma Phi Omega, the national gerontology honors society; Alpha Eta, the national scholastic honors society for Allied Health Professions and Pi Theta Epsilon, the national OT honors society, Julia is also the

alternate representative to AOTA's Assembly of Student Delegates in the OT Class of 2021. ConnOTA is delighted to recognize Julia Kowal as the 2019 Scholarship Recipient.

## **2018 Award Recipients**

### **Award of Clinical Excellence: Rick Klimowicz**

Rick Klimowicz holds a BS in OT and a MHS in Allied Health Education from Quinnipiac University. He also has a Masters of Divinity from the Iliff School of Theology in Denver. Rick has over 35 years-experience as a behavioral health occupational therapy practitioner providing excellence as a practitioner and clinical educator for fieldwork students. He has been an integral part of program development activities for the provision of high quality OT services throughout his career. Rick currently works on a 32-bed inpatient psychiatric unit of a community hospital where he assesses and treats adults on community skills and goal setting; coping skills; self-expression and social skills; sensory modulation; discharge planning (work/productivity skills and life skills); substance use; expressive media; cognitive task groups; and recreation, wellness and leisure skills. He has past experience serving adults diagnosed with severe and persistent mental illnesses and in addiction recovery. He has also worked in non-traditional behavioral health OT as the vocation specialist/clinical team coordinator in a residential program for veterans who were homeless where he supervised case managers in a shelter/transitional living program and a supportive housing program. Rick has also been an ardent volunteer and advocate throughout his life. Notably he visited India for 5 weeks to train at a Leprosy Research and Training Center and volunteered with the Christian Medical Center in Vellore. He is a Vietnam Era Veteran, a musician, and an ordained minister. Rick has been highly active in advocacy efforts for OT's and clients serving on ConnOTA's Government Affairs Council for 5 years and as Vice President for 2 years. He regularly shares his clinical insights by presenting at conferences and is a volunteer mentor and job shadow host for ConnOTA. We are honored to present Rick with the Award of Clinical Excellence for his long term commitment to excellence, innovation, client focus, mentoring, and leadership in the practice area of psychosocial occupational therapy.

### **Award of Service: Donna Sweeney**

Donna Sweeney has been pivotal in building capacity, promoting best practice, and serving the occupational therapy community. As the organizer of a local school focus group she has facilitated discussions, provided a place to share resources thru a drop box account, updated colleagues on ConnOTA and AOTA happenings, brought in subject matter experts, and recognized the work of the collective group to share best practice and evidence-based resources. As a servant leader, she has put the needs of others first, creating a welcoming environment for professional exchange and learning through this professional pediatric practice group. In academia, Donna has maintained the ideal of creating positive change for occupational therapy in Connecticut's schools. Her

unwavering commitment and recognition for meeting a need, led to the formation of a writing group to work on chapters for the Connecticut School Occupational Therapy Guidelines project. As the SIS Pediatric Liaison for ConnOTA, she actively facilitates many informational special interest sessions each year across the state for school practitioners and stakeholders and is sought out to answer practitioner questions as an expert in the area of pediatrics. Thru Donna's commitment to excellence, her servant leadership will continue to be a positive influence on school practitioners, school practice, and the occupational therapy community. We are blessed that she shares her time, knowledge, and expertise and are proud to award Donna with the Award of Service.

### **Fieldwork Educator Award: Erin Wells**

Erin Wells is a Level II fieldwork educator in the pediatric clinic where she is employed. She is recognized for her creativity, innovation, and professionalism within her role as a fieldwork educator and mentor. Erin is praised by her students for her passion for occupational therapy and her strong therapeutic use of self while providing therapy to clients. She is commended for building positive relationships with emerging psychosocial fieldwork sites in the community. Due to commitment to facilitating excellence in her students, we are proud to award Erin with the Fieldwork Educator Award.

### **2018 ConnOTA Scholarship: Katharine Carter**

Katharine Carter is a second year Occupational Therapy student at Sacred Heart University where she has excelled academically and participated in many service oriented and co-curricular activities. She is an active member of Phi Theta Epsilon Honor Society, the American Occupational Therapy Association, and Sacred Heart's Student Occupational Therapy Association. In the Fall of 2017 she participated in an inter-professional service learning trip to Guatemala where she provided services to those in need. Her academic achievements, committee work, and active service speak to her leadership skills, passion, and commitment to learning and the distinct value of occupational therapy.

## **2017 Award Recipients**

### **Award of Merit: Elaine Adams**

Elaine Adams has been an Occupational Therapist for 36 years and is currently a Corporate Director of Regulatory Compliance for Genesis Rehabilitation Services. Elaine eagerly shares her skills and knowledge with her peers throughout the country with a positive energy and is selfless in sharing her time in her many volunteer endeavors. She is recognized nationally and certainly in CT as an expert in the areas of health care legislation and regulation, especially in regard to the impact on clinical care, safety standards, business practices and reimbursement systems. She has collaborated with CMS and NBCOT and AOTA and was a government appointed delegate for CT to the 2005

White House Conference on Aging. She has presented at the local, state and national levels and authored several articles regarding OT practice.. She has received numerous state and national awards and was recently added to the AOTA Roster of Fellows. Closer to home, she has served ConnOTA as a Member for Government Affairs, is a frequent presenter for our state conferences and was a recipient of the 2013 Award of Service. We have all benefitted from Elaine's willingness to share her time and expertise and are fortunate to have such a valuable asset in our state.

#### **Award of Service: Sheelagh Schlegel**

Sheelagh Schlegel is a faculty member at SHU and has extensive clinical and supervisory experience. She has been a volunteer in Haiti for 9 years, carrying out Occupational Therapy interventions for adults and children in a rural setting. In earning the Award of Service, Ms. Schlegel is recognized for her significant volunteer service to a community organization in the form of advocacy for clients in Haiti and for sharing her experience with OT students who might not have been able to avail themselves of this unique opportunity. Her commitment to serving those in need has certainly touched the hearts and minds of many and is an inspiration to all of us.

#### **Fieldwork Educator of the Year Award: Joanna Perez**

Joanna Perez provides Level I and Level II fieldwork education for junior, senior, and graduate occupational therapy students. In earning the Fieldwork Educator of the Year Award, Joanna is recognized for her exceptional ethical, supportive, and student-centered values, which instill a foundation for clinical learning that her students remember and carry with them throughout their clinical educational experiences. Her flexibility, adaptability, and creativity in regards to fieldwork has made her a tremendous asset to her fieldwork students.

#### **Emerging Leader Awards: Donna Reed-Oliver and Lisa Marie Tarchini**

Donna Reed Oliver recently assumed the duties of the SIS Chairperson for ConnOTA . She has demonstrated exceptional leadership skills in quickly orienting and re-organizing each of the SIS section chairs in the performance of their duties. She assisted the President in the organization of the SIS Meet and Greet during the Fall Conference and has worked with the Liaisons to coordinate each of the well received SIS sessions with much enthusiasm and commitment. She quickly assimilates new information and independently seeks opportunities to apply it. Her efforts to ensure that the state OT/OTAs have an organized educational resource to expand and share their knowledge while earning valuable CEU credits is much appreciated! We look forward to many years with Donna at the helm as she leads our organization forward.

Lisa Marie Tarchini is a recent graduate of MCC where she was the President of the

Student Occupational Therapy Association. As President of SOTA, Lisa Marie and her classmates raised funds for Non-Profit Organizations including Bead for Life and Free Wheel Chair Mission. She also organized classroom food drives and represented MCC's OTA Program at the MS Walk and the Inequality Conference. Lisa Marie's passion, enthusiasm, and leadership skills were recognized and she was awarded the Lisa Poirier Award for Excellence in the Promotion of Occupational Therapy. Lisa Marie responded to the call for action at the Fall Conference when she volunteered her time to serve as the Member for Public Affairs for ConnOTA. She quickly revitalized our presence on Face Book and Twitter and has developed a following of national leaders! Her assistance was invaluable in the past 2 months in stepping in to coordinate the revitalization of the job shadow program. She has demonstrated exceptional leadership and a commitment to excellence with each new task. She is open to mentoring and feedback to assist ConnOTA achieve it's mission. She was formally appointed to the Board as the first OTA in the Association's history as a Member at Large in February where she has taken on additional duties and responsibilities with positive energy, which is an inspiration to the Board.

#### **2017 ConnOTA Scholarship: Kelsey Conlon**

Kelsey Conlon is an Occupational Therapy Student at Sacred Heart University where she has excelled academically and has demonstrated exemplary leadership and participation in a multitude of co-curricular activities and numerous committees. She currently serves as the elected President of the Phi Theta Epsilon Honor Society, is active in AOTA's SOTA, has applied for AOTA's emerging leaders program, formed a research team with the goal of presenting on the national and state levels, was recently awarded the Connecticut Association of Health Care Executives Women's Forum Scholarship and was selected for the amongst the top 11 national candidates for the ASAHP Thomas Elwood Award and Scholarship. She actively seeks new opportunities and events that facilitate learning and involvement among the professional community, facilitates engagement of her peers in academic pursuits and allows herself to be motivated and inspired by those she works with. She assisted both ConnOTA and AOTA at the 2016 Conferences. She assists the faculty at SHU as a Graduate Assistant in the Human Anatomy Lab, has participated in the annual Safe Patient Handling Inter Professional Workshop and is highly regarded by both faculty and her peers.

#### **2017 President's Award: Valnere McLean**

Valnere McLean has a long history of service to the association, which has continued into retirement. Her experience and views are appreciated by the each of the boards which have had the pleasure of meeting her. Her passion for the profession and for ConnOTA is

unwavering. From volunteering to assist the historian (current President) in organizing the massive archives in 2000 to promoting membership through letter writing this past summer, Valnere is an ever-present figure in our organization's history. We are blessed each year to have Valnere's presence at each of our conferences. The President has chosen with pleasure to recognize Valnere for her long-standing commitment and service.

## **2016 Award Recipients**

### **Award of Merit: Sharon McCloskey & Joyce Rioux**

Sharon McCloskey, MBA, OTR/L, DipCOT is currently working as a professor at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield. She has been a very active and important member of various occupational therapy associations, including ConnOTA, AOTA, WFOT and AOTI. Within ConnOTA, Sharon has served as the Chair of the Special Interest Sections from 2009-2011 and Member for Government Affairs from 2011-2014. Previously, Sharon McCloskey won the Award of Service for her constant dedication to the profession as a practitioner, educator, and for her efforts to create clear standards for occupational therapy practice within the schools along with Joyce Rioux.

Joyce Rioux, Ed.D, OTR/L, SCSS is currently working as the Assistant Director of Therapies for the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) and has recently joined Manchester Community College's OTA program as a member of the advisory council. She has over thirty years of experience practicing in pediatrics and school based practice, and is eager to share her knowledge with others in our state both through advocating for best practice and serving on advisory boards for AOTA. Previously, Joyce won the Award of Service for her tireless dedication to improving occupational therapy practice throughout the state, as well as her efforts to create occupational therapy practice standards for the state of Connecticut alongside Sharon McCloskey.

Because of their dedication to best occupational therapy practice for all students in Connecticut, Sharon and Joyce decided to ensure there was a clear standard for occupational therapy in the schools. Before the efforts of Sharon and Joyce, the standards of performance were based on a draft document that was almost twenty years old. Throughout this process, Sharon and Joyce donated countless hours of their time to completing this project. Specifically, they have organized numerous focus groups throughout the state, engaged all of the crucial stakeholders involved in this revision process with their warm nature and clear passion for the profession, and lead the writing team for the revision. The draft was submitted in the fall of 2015 for the State of Connecticut to review. Sharon and Joyce's tireless efforts to advocate for our profession make them both truly deserving recipients of ConnOTA's highest award, the Award of Merit.

### **Award of Service: Lisa Toussaint**

Lisa Toussaint, OTR/L is currently a clinical instructor of occupational therapy at Quinnipiac University. Previously, she served as the academic fieldwork coordinator at Goodwin College. She received her Bachelors in Occupational Therapy from Quinnipiac in 1996, and is currently pursuing her Occupational Therapy Doctorate with an expected graduation of June 2016. She has worked as an occupational therapist for 18 years in geriatrics. Lisa is known by her students for holding high standards for professionalism and encouraging the use of evidenced based practice as they enter the workforce. Nominated by a former student, Lisa has been described as “knowledgeable”, “motivational”, and “available to assist her students 24/7”. ConnOTA is proud to present this award to Lisa for her service to students as a dynamic professor who makes learning both interesting and accessible, as well as for her tireless efforts as a fieldwork coordinator to ensure students are meticulously prepared professionally for entering the field.

### **Fieldwork Educator of the Year Award: Karen Crainich**

Karen Crainich, OTR/L has been educating fieldwork level I and level II students through Quinnipiac University for twenty years, since 1996. She has volunteered countless hours of her time to educate graduate students on the expectations of entry-level practice. Nominated by a colleague, Karen is known as someone who is able to bring learning alive for students, and has even swayed students who did not think they would enjoy working in pediatrics with her love for her profession. Students consistently use words like smart, patient, excellent therapist and excellent teacher when describing Karen. We are lucky to have a fieldwork educator of her caliber in Connecticut, and ConnOTA is proud to present this award to such a deserving candidate.