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SPEAKER:

You are listening to the AOTA podcast. Here is your host, Matt Brandenburg.

MATT BRANDENBURG:

Today, we are joined by three very, very special guests, Samantha Shann, Ginny Stoffel, and Douglene Jackson, to explore the work and the impact of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists. Sam, Ginny, and Douglene, thank you so much for being on the show today.

GINNY STOFFEL:

Glad to be here.

SAMANTHA SHANN:

Yeah. Great to be with you.

DOUGLENE JACKSON:

Thank you. Excited for this.

MATT BRANDENBURG:

Of course, me too. I've been really looking forward to learning from each of you. Our plan is to learn about WFOT's mission, its collaboration with AOTA, and how occupational therapy practitioners can engage globally. You all have a breadth of experience and are internationally recognised leaders for our profession. And I just again wanna thank you so much for taking the time to be here today and share your insights with us. Could we start with a brief introduction? I'd like to ask if you could introduce yourselves and share your current role, especially as it relates to the World Federation of Occupational Therapists.

SAMANTHA SHANN:

I'm Samantha Shann, as you said. I'm the president of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists, and that role is a real honor and privilege to have. What does that actually relate to each day today is very, very, very different. I guess I lead the general assembly for the World Federation. So the World Federation is made up of national associations and that general assembly is chaired by myself. But it means really that I lead on a lot of the work that we do with our international partners, so working with the World Health Organization, for example, but also having conversations and support with our national associations, and working with them to help them to promote and develop occupational therapy in their country. I think I can safely say as president of WFOT not one day is the same, which makes it truly exciting.

GINNY STOFFEL:

My name is Ginny Stoffel and I serve as the AOTA United States delegate to the World Federation General Assembly. I've been in this role, actually following serving as the alternate representative, which for AOTA means that you get to work with the delegate and the staff member from AOTA that supports international affairs. But you also get to represent international perspectives on the representative assembly, and that's a role Douglene can perhaps say more about because she's the current incumbent. I am a past president of AOTA and actually have served in various leadership roles for nearly fifty years. 1975 is when I attended my first national conference and also became a student voice in AOTA. As delegate, I get to work with Douglene and now Melissa Tilton, and we are thrilled to be a part of the link between AOTA and WFOT. WFOT was with us as we celebrate their one hundredth anniversary back in 2017 and we look forward to their upcoming anniversary.

DOUGLENE JACKSON:

And I am Douglene Jackson. I am the current alternate delegate for the American Occupational Therapy Association to WFOT. And I've been in this role since I wanna say 2022 already. And as Ginny said, get to work closely with her as well as our representative from AOTA, where we form the international team. Also, as the alternate delegate, I do get to sit on the representative assembly serving as that voice for those therapists who are licensed in the US and maybe live abroad internationally, as well as help bring that international lens to matters pertinent to AOTA when the representative assembly convenes. So, thank you.

MATT BRANDENBURG:

Of course. Thank you each for introducing us to your background, your roles with WFOT. Can you describe what WFOT is and what its global role entails?

SAMANTHA SHANN:

Yeah. I'm happy to go first with that. I mean, WFOT is a federation of national and regional occupational therapy associations. So countries and territories can have one national association to become a member of WFOT. And it's that national association that makes up our general assembly. So we work a little bit, I guess, like the United Nations and each full member, so that's a full member is a national association that has a constitution that meets our membership requirements and also at least one WFOT-approved education program. It's the full members that are able to vote at our general assembly but our associate members, so those are countries where there are no education programs that are WFOT approved, they still contribute to discussions and decision making, they just don't have the vote at the final say. And then we have six regional groups who again

contribute to discussions, shape the policies and intentions of the organisations, but don't vote. And that general assembly meets every two years in person, but we also have lots of face to face meetings and consultations to keep the work going forward because WFOT is the international representation of the occupational therapy profession, and we liaise with a key number of other international stakeholders such as the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization, UNICEF, World Physiotherapy, International Society of Prosthetics, Orthotics, International Crescent of Red Cross, Humanity and Inclusion, so a whole range of international partners to help us develop the breadth and depth of occupational therapy, but to make sure that we are relevant for now but also the future needs of the global population.

GINNY STOFFEL:

I will say that I think for us in the United States, having been part of the founders of the WFOT way back when, that we value the representation that WFOT brings to our world collaborative partners. We value that often member organizations are able to connect with whomever it is that's representing WFOT. And I think sometimes in certain places, we might even have someone from our organization be that representative. So to be able to contribute and affirm the position that WFOT holds for our profession internationally is just a really huge stabilizer in the broader healthcare community.

DOUGLENE JACKSON:

I think you all have said a lot about it and I wanna bring a little personal touch as to what WFOT means for me. And it is that opportunity to network with other practitioners across the globe, especially when we convene for the Congress that occurs every four years. So for me, it's a platform to engage with others, especially those who are delegates and see how we can collaborate. And it just creates that opportunity to build community beyond the United States.

MATT BRANDENBURG:

I love that. Thank you so much. I think everyone enters our profession has a good sense of the value that we can bring to the healthcare system and to the everyday person that we may work with. And it's wonderful to know that there's this well-led international organization that's striving to help establish community that's representing occupational therapy and working towards increased and continued relevancy of the profession. Ginny, you mentioned earlier that you've been around for 50 years almost within the OT realm. WFOT is gonna be celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2027. What does this milestone mean to each of you, and how is the organization planning to mark the occasion?

SAMANTHA SHANN:

Yeah. I think like any anniversary, it's really important that we stop and reflect. Day-to-day

life just takes over sometimes and we forget how far we've come. A reason to have some celebration around who we are as a profession is perfect. So the 75th anniversary of WFOT, I think, is a real milestone. It's a milestone in bringing the profession together globally to build in that cooperation internationally, but just taking stock of where we are. I've been involved in WFOT now for nearly 25 years in different roles, and I know that some of our member organisations are very good at capturing that history of the profession in their country. Other national associations maybe don't have so many resources to capture that. One of my visions for the WFOT 75th anniversary is to be able to collect a history of WFOT, not necessarily the profession internationally but the development of WFOT, what WFOT means to our national associations and our members, but also looking at the milestones that some of our member organizations have taken during those 75 years.

And I think to do that, we have to have some level playing field. So we're doing like a survey and we will be sharing news from our member organizations and being able to look at some comparisons of how the profession has started quite differently in each of our member organisations and some of the key milestones for them. One of the main things in the WFOT minimum standards for the education of occupational therapists is that we learn about our history and we celebrate it. But if we don't collect that globally, then that's really hard to celebrate it altogether. So bringing this history together of WFOT is a really key part of the 75th anniversary.

MATT BRANDENBURG:

I love that. That is a such a wonderful initiative and a great way to celebrate the anniversary while continuing to inspire a new generation of members and practitioners across the globe.

GINNY STOFFEL:

For me, this 75th anniversary is a I just turned 70. And there is something that's wonderful about being able to not only enter a profession, but be a part of a profession and watch it grow and change and evolve. I feel that way about both AOTA and the World Federation. I think it's exciting when we gather together to see really every generation of practitioner serving as delegates across the world. For example, we were in Bermuda a couple of years ago for our council meetings and to interact with Pasha, their delegate, and know that she had to come to the US for her OT education because that's not available yet in her country. But she is very much a leader and is able to shape not only practice in her country, but also be an active contributing leader in WFOT. So to watch things expand across time and change and be responsive to particular needs that surface has been really delightful.

DOUGLENE JACKSON:

And the only thing I would add is that it's an opportunity to document where we've been,

how the organization came to be. So those who might not have that information are made privy to that. And also an opportunity to then reflect on where we can go, what the future of OT globally looks like.

MATT BRANDENBURG:

That's beautiful. Thank you. What a wonderful opportunity to learn about WFOT and the international impact that occupational therapy can make and learn from other cultures, other countries. And how can OT practitioners become members of WFOT and what are some of the benefits that you'd like to highlight right off the bat?

GINNY STOFFEL:

This is actually something that Douglene and I have worked a lot on in our roles as the WFOT delegates. We know that it is only through membership in AOTA, the National Association, that an individual can be an individual member of WFOT because WFOT is an organization of national associations then the first step is to be a member of AOTA. When you renew your membership, when you first sign up as a member every year, you have opportunity to check the box being WFOT individual member. That means that you do make a financial contribution to the organization, which is absolutely critical. So among the 50,000 or so, somewhere between 50 and 60 at any point in time, members of AOTA, people have that opportunity to offer their engagement so as to be able to be active in the activities of the WFOT and accessing the information that they make available through their website primarily and to become a part of a project that might be active within WFOT. To be able to run to be a delegate, obviously, you need to have a history of being an individual member.

If we could increase our WFOT membership tenfold, I would be happy. And I say that knowing that we have about 2,000 to 3,000 of us who are WFOT individual members in the United States. And it seems to me as though one evening out is all it would take to add that checklist and be that active member.

DOUGLENE JACKSON:

Yes. And as Ginny said, check that box - it's what funds the work of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists, and how you can contribute to that. There are many resources available on the website. There are lots of benefits when it comes to what you can find when you log in and see because work has to be done, the advocacy needs to be there so that we can have that international footprint. And you being a member is what helps that be possible.

SAMANTHA SHANN:

Thanks, Douglene and Ginny. I think what you say is really, really important, it's like WFOT is

a membership organization. So obviously most of our funding does come through membership fees, which is at really that national association level but the individual membership does make a difference. What I always say is when people ask me is how can I be involved in WFOT? As I say, you need to be a strong member of your national association. WFOT gets lots of requests from the World Health Organization or other international organizations looking for experts or volunteers onto projects. We can only recommend people via our national association. So we would come to AOTA, for example, to ask for an expert in pediatrics or war trauma or whatever that might be. So your participation in AOTA is really, really essential so that we know where experts are around the world. But the other big thing for me, and as I say, I've been a member of WFOT for over 25 years now in very different cultures. I started out in Uganda in a very low-resource setting.

And WFOT for me there had a very, very different meaning because it was those access to resources that I couldn't access anywhere else. But now I work and practice in a high-resourced country where there are maybe lots of resources available to me. But the value of my WFOT membership is not what it brings to me...

JUNIOR SAM:

It's the value that it brings to the profession. Your membership enables WFOT to represent occupational therapy at high level government interagency meetings and policy developments around the world. And without that funding, WFOT couldn't advocate for you or the profession.

SPEAKER:

I've been able to observe over the years the impact that WFOT has had on those parts of the world that want to develop the national association or want to develop their education programs. Your leadership has helped to select and those leaders before you select places in the world where interacting with the local government and the local organizations that could support the development of occupational therapy and OT education programs has truly made a difference. And so, selecting places to meet so that you can actually expand the impact and power of that place and space has been a just a really kind of a, I think, a remarkable way to actually bring resources to parts of the world where that may make a huge difference.

JUNIOR SAM:

Yeah, I think the selection and placement of our meetings is always key. Like you say, it helps to raise the profile in that country. When WFOT goes into a country, it's always at the invitation of the National Association. And we always work in partnership with the National Association, and part of WFOT's role is really to develop the leaders of the profession

moving forward, and therefore, that strong cooperation with the National Association's important. So, having representation in a country really enables us to raise the profile there. If we look at the last Congress that happened in France, the French occupational therapists have really gone on to advocate quite highly in some of their national policies working at really high government levels around that. And we're already starting to reach out to organizations and government officials within Bangkok to look at what influence we can have on our next Congress. I think the other thing though is that a lot of the interaction is, you know, and I always smile with people when they say, oh, you've been to this country or you've been to that country, and if you follow me on Facebook, it looks like I'm constantly on a plane, which sometimes it can feel like, but I think it's really important to point out that most of WFOT's work is done virtually.

So, we are a virtual organization. There is no fancy headquarters, there are no offices. It is everybody working in their office, kitchen table, bedroom, cafe, wherever that might be. And most of our interactions with our member organizations is that virtual interaction, supporting and developing that leadership from a distance.

SPEAKER:

I love that the world is so interconnected now, and WFOT is such a wonderful organization in bringing international collaboration and community to our profession and occupational therapy. I wanna highlight wfot.org. There's so much work and resources that the organization provides that are outlined on the website. Could you walk us through some of WFOT's most impactful areas of work?

JUNIOR SAM:

The one piece of work that always captures people's attention is the Human Resources Project. And that's a project that's been going on since 2006 now, and it's where WFOT every two years surveys its member organizations. And we collect data from occupational therapy associations around the world on the number of occupational therapists, where they might be working, education programs, number of students, occupational therapy assistants, where the profession's regulated, not regulated, where there is a shortage. The data has changed over the years as we've got more responsive as we've learned from the World Health Organization and other organizations of useful data that we should be collecting. But what's really exciting this year is that we've just enabled a life platform for this. So, for the first time, occupational therapists or anybody around the world can go on the platform via the resource center and actually access that data themselves. And I encourage everybody to go on it and have some fun with it.

You can do a whole selection if you just want to concentrate on the Asia Pacific region, you can just look at that region. If you want to look at the Americas, you can look at the

development of the profession in numbers since 2006, just in whatever regions you want, or if you want to concentrate on students, whatever. It's a really, really exciting platform. And we're excited to share that with everybody. Another new platform is around our global strategy on workforce development, and there is a hub, where people can share resources really. We work very closely with the World Health Organization and the World Rehabilitation Alliance on the back of the World Health Assembly Resolution in 2023, looking at strengthening rehabilitation health systems. Part of that is around workforce development. Now, we know occupational therapy is an essential part of rehabilitation, but we don't want to just get lost in the full rehabilitation healthcare professions. So, we've got our own WFOT occupational therapy, global workforce strategy.

And through that hub, individual occupational therapists can look at resources from around the world, but also share resources that may be useful to other people so that we can truly develop the workforce of the future as we think it should be as occupational therapists.

DOUGLENE:

I love going on to the learning platform because I'm a lifelong learner. And being a Floridian, we have hurricanes, all type of things that come through. And disaster preparedness is something that's innate to me. When you look across the globe, there's so many things that can happen and there's so many needs that arise, and occupational therapists can be on that front line. And there's a module, the Disaster Preparedness and Risk Reduction one and a few others that speak towards working with those who may need to resettle. It gives you those tools if you don't know where to start and that baseline knowledge. So, there's great modules out there already. You don't need to reinvent the wheel. It's OT centric and really speaks our language and highlights how we can get involved, how we can make a difference. And also, when World OT Day comes around, you can go there and you get the logos and all the media to get that marketing, because to this day still, you hear WFOT is 75 years old, AOTA is well over 100 years old, but many still do not know what occupational therapy is.

So, the graphics and visuals and everything is already created for you to help bring awareness of our profession to everybody. So, there's lots on there. It's free to download. It's offered in multiple languages as well. So, I invite everybody to go and visit and see what they can find. And a lot there is very useful.

SPEAKER:

So, just last week, I did a presentation for the OT program in Northern Arizona. And they asked me to talk about what it's like to serve in this role as delegate to talk about some of what I thought was important happening at WFOT. So, I asked the students before they

came to the session to go to the wfot.org website and to really look through whatever was of interest to them and to come prepared to either ask a question or make a comment during the session that we had together. So, I was really delighted to see what it was that captured different the attention of different students. Some of those are the ones that haven't already commented on, but others really talked about how much they appreciated having the occupations website, which has been developed over the last decade, has a number of videos that allow you to see and experience occupations and their impact on health and wellbeing across the world to find those places that that really kind of a treasure chest. Students, of course, are always interested if they can be a part of an international practice placement as either part of their field work or as they seek their first employment.

Back in last fall, a new updated guide was published and is available at the website. So, I encourage everybody to kind of almost do your own scavenger hunt and find the things that appeal to you, you know, make use of those and share those widely with others.

JUNIOR SAM:

There's just one more that I would like to mention. I mean, I volunteer with WFOT, but I still work as a practitioner. And one of the tools that we use within our private practice is the QUEST, and that's the quality evaluation strategy tool. Now, I know that there are loads of quality indicators out there, but what's really special about the QUEST is it was developed by occupational therapists for occupational therapists. And certainly as a practitioner in our service, it helps us to look at what we're doing well, but what areas we need to improve and to have some strategy and direction there. So, the students, practitioners, but also researchers and educators, please do look at the QUEST. There's a whole range of examples out there of how it's been used around the world. There's modules on how to use it, but as I say, the fact that it's been developed by occupational therapists really makes its special.

SPEAKER:

Thank you for highlighting these awesome resources. I personally wanna look into'em more and see how I can apply them to my own practice. I truly empathize with the clinical occupational therapist. I think it's a shared sentiment that we're at risk of burnout, that sometimes we feel very alone in our settings. And sometimes working through lunch to finish our documentation and meet productivity standards can be very stressful. It's things that people are working through on an international level. And these resources really present the creativity and the action and the access that is improving the wellbeing of people who practice within our profession on a global scale. And being aware of that, I think can do so much good for an individual and for the profession as a whole. Could you share an example, be it personal or something you've seen of how a WFOT resource helped

guide a specific policy or practice in a country or region that really made life more meaningful and fulfilling for OT practitioners?

DOUGLENE:

Yes, I definitely will. I remember a while back, probably last year, I spoke to the Association of Caribbean Occupational Therapists, and one of the things they wanted to talk about was how to advocate for the profession. And literally, I went on the WFOT website right away, looked under the resources, and there was advocacy tools right there. So, oftentimes, it's bringing awareness to it. I did not have to recreate the wheel. However, situating it within each person's country is where they needed that help. So, it was nice to have that focused time where I was able to help bring awareness to how to go about and advocate for occupational therapy in your country, and then help them to start brainstorming those steps as to what that might look like, who you need to liaison with, who you need to identify as your partners, because as I said earlier, advocacy is something that I'm very passionate about, especially at the community level. And when we think of countries where occupational therapy does not exist, people need tools, people need a guide, people need a way so that they can know how to do that effectively.

So, the resources on the website really help them get started in that process, and being able to connect with others, even on oceans to see how they're implementing OT in their country and navigating the challenges is key. So, finding resources to learn as well as opportunities to connect and learn from others is how I've leveraged the resources on the WFOT website to help others.

SPEAKER:

I love that, Douglene. Thank you so much. Junior Sam, was there an additional experience or story you'd like to highlight?

JUNIOR SAM:

Yeah, I mean, I think on a full global level, I think one of the big documents from WFOT is the minimum standards for the education of occupational therapists. And I can't emphasize enough the change that this document since 1958 has had on our profession. It has really helped us establish ourselves in many, many, many countries. And I see national associations and education programs working with this document day in, day out to ensure that students are getting the right education experience, but ensuring that the scope of practice for occupational therapists around the world is really clear and really identifiable. There are really passionate group of occupational therapists in Uganda right now as we speak, working, volunteering, their time to develop a BSC curriculum, to move the profession from diploma graduates to BSC, helping professionals, occupational therapists in Uganda to really be recognized as effective contributors to rehabilitation in the health

system. And that power of volunteering and that power of coming together is really, really special.

SPEAKER:

I really have found WFOT through its educational standards and through its resources to help us globally think about how can we impact populations and systems. Often, we are drawn to the profession because we wanna make a difference in a person's life, but what we know is, is that when we go beyond the individual to a community, to a population, our impact can actually be much greater than what we might do at that individual level. And so, looking for the examples that that people are able to share through WFOT's website. I've been part of a project called ICAN, the Innovation Change Agency Narratives. I think we have about 12 ICAN narratives available through the website. And each of them talks about how it was that they approached a need in their community. And there are examples at kind of the macro level as well as the meso level and the local micro level to talk about, for example, students who were concerned about insurance coverage or the quality of care offered to older adults in their country were able to be part of making a difference in the quality of services and the oversight that that their government played in assuring quality care.

Thank you. Those are all such wonderful examples of WFOT.

DOUGLENE JACKSON:

Resources in practise, and it sounds like a wonderful way to strengthen the occupational therapy community. You know, we're stronger together and can have more of an impact together. You all have unique experiences and perspectives in working with WFOT and national organisations. What does that really look like when the rubber meets the road? How does, first off, the American Occupational Therapy Association collaborate with WFOT? And how have you seen professional association partnerships in motion in your own experiences?

VIRGINIA (GINNY) STOFFEL:

Having served as a past president, the president and the board of directors of the AOTA pay attention to what's happening internationally. And I think that that's a really important role that DeGlane and I play, both with our board, but also our staff at AOTA, to assure that we are responsive to their calls for either data or assistance or recommendations, but also to raise awareness to ask the question, well, how might our actions impact other parts of the world? So, sometimes just the well-placed question allows whatever group that we're working with from AOTA to really consider. And I think to even to be more likely that they will be connected down the road. A quick example, this year in Philadelphia, Sam was our keynote speaker at the International Breakfast. And she talked a lot about intentionality as

a part of international advocacy. And she simply spoke through her own narrative about her own development as a leader and some of the sage advice that she had based on those experiences.

I had my great nieces next to me at the table, and they really enjoyed seeing how somebody might be able to step into those roles early on in their careers. But I also had another AOTA staff member there who has decided to meet with us on a regular basis so that the part of AOTA that she oversees can be more linked to communicating both what AOTA is doing, but also an awareness of WFOT and what they are doing around the same topic or issue.

SAMANTHA SHANN:

WFOT has such a wide region impact, and sometimes it's extremely humbling to be the president. I go to many countries at the invitation of the National Association and work with the National Association in really helping them to raise their profiles. So, just recently, I was in Greece, and by having me visit and be at the conference, they were able to take advantage of that. And after many, many months of asking, we finally got a meeting with the Minister of Health. And we were able to sit with the Minister of Health and talk about working conditions for occupational therapists in Greece, which haven't necessarily changed for a number of years. And that ability to say that WFOT is here that the Greece Association work at international level helped to raise that profile and get that very high level meeting. Last year in Pakistan, similar experiences by being able to have meetings to be able to talk about the World Federation and its links with the World Health Organisation. At the conference in Pakistan, we were able to engage in quite high-level meetings with the higher education assembly and to really look about occupational therapy education standards across Pakistan.

So, sometimes I see WFOT as that enabler. I know that our member organisations. I know that the national associations work tirelessly every day. But sometimes it's just that extra little bit of support that WFOT can give either in person or through a letter or through a video message that just enables them to get their message to that next higher level that can then start influencing policy and make changes, not just for the people that receive our services, but also for the rights of occupational therapists and the standards that they work in day to day.

VIRGINIA (GINNY) STOFFEL:

And the only thing I would add to that is the regional. I know the question said national, but the regional groups I find to be very impactful. Each of them has their own congresses, and it creates an opportunity to have that discussion at a regional level and create that community, so everyone can come together and support each other. So, having the president attend these congresses really allows people to collaborate in time about the

issues that they are facing and learn from each other and have that guidance. So, we appreciate that.

DOUGLENE JACKSON:

I love that. I love that. Thank you so much for highlighting those acts and initiatives of WFOT and the importance of collaboration. Let's transition now to discuss World OT Day, which is coming up on October 27th. Can you talk to us about World Occupational Therapy Day? Why is this such an important day? And how did WFOT... How was WFOT involved in World OT Day?

SAMANTHA SHANN:

World OT Day came really from our member organisations, from occupational therapists around the world wanting a day where we could come together and really recognise ourselves as a profession. I think we've all mentioned during this conversation some days we get bogged down in the day-to-day realities of life, and World OT Day is really that chance to just step back and to think about ourselves and to recognise the impact that occupational therapy does bring to the world and to bring us together as practitioners. We often concentrate on the service user, the end user, the people, and the communities that we work with. But World OT Day is also a chance to say thank you to occupational therapists around the world.

VIRGINIA (GINNY) STOFFEL:

So, Sam, it's helpful to hear you recognise that it really came up from the grassroots, from the member organisations. And I was trying to think in my own mind when I recognised World OT Day as a WFOT project? And it's obviously been more recently that WFOT has done a lot of helping to promote awareness of World OT Day. But from the early days, it was really through social media that people became aware that there was a 24-hour day. And each hour, there was a different practitioner or group of practitioners who presented on topics. And so it became that 24-hour, almost like a podcast that people were able to respond to. If in any part of the world, that either an organisation or a group is celebrating World OT Day in their own unique way, to be able to share that back with others, to take pictures, to have ways to bring the excitement and the energy that comes as a part of that, back to the larger group. Because in my mind, World OT Day has gone from that 24-hour day to something even bigger.

So, AOTA has attempted to be generous with some of the resources that we typically only offer our own members to the world during at least a week of that month where World OT Day falls in October. And to allow people to either interact with some of the highly sought after continuing ed programmes, or some of the publications. Or some of the tools that we have so that others can have a taste of what that looks like and can know that we would

also, we welcome members from anywhere in the world that some of us are members of several national associations. And so being able to have a sense of that, I think, has been a nice gift that our board of directors has offered through WFOT World OT Day.

SAMANTHA SHANN:

And I think since I think it was 2010, when WFOT launched World OT Day, it's taken very, very many different formats. And it changes from year to year as member organisations and occupational therapy practitioners respond to it in different formats. Some years we have themes, and other years it's more about the collectiveness of occupational therapy. This year's theme, Occupational Therapy in Action, really enables every occupational therapy practitioner and student to engage and think about what occupational therapy means to them. And I think what I love about the day is how people share their experiences. We see that across social media. We see it from the news that the member organisations share with us. You know, some member organisations always manage to get on the front page of their national newspaper and really be able to promote and talk about occupational therapy. I think one of the things that I really enjoy watching is the number of cakes that are baked. Occupational therapists across the world must be very good bakers because there are always some wonderful baking and some wonderful cakes showing occupational therapy.

I love OT to very creative cakes and biscuits. And I think it's just that energy of coming together, as well as what Ginny says, that importance to remind us to share our examples of good practice, that opportunity to share the resources that we have with each other, and make each day better.

DOUGLENE JACKSON:

I love that. I love that. What a beautiful theme, OT in Action, and what a beautiful way to highlight the creativity and the really impactful work that so many OTs across the globe are doing. I love that baking is a theme, and I'm going to bake a cake for World OT Day this year. I would invite our listeners to do the same and check out these resources, try and become more involved, and increase their scope to see what OT does on a truly global scale. It's pretty amazing to see.

SAMANTHA SHANN:

I do. And if you're baking a cake or any other activity, don't forget the hashtag World OT Day.

DOUGLENE JACKSON:

Hashtag World OT Day. I will remember that for sure. What is the Global Day of Service, and how does this initiative connect to World OT Day, or how could practitioners get involved with the Global Day of Service?

SAMANTHA SHANN:

It's another example of partnership of WFOT, so we partner with the Global Day of Service as just another way of showing the impact of occupational therapy and enabling occupational therapists, again, maybe just to step back from their day-to-day work and to join a different project, to share their experiences elsewhere. And again, it just highlights the work of both organisations to do a little bit more each day.

VIRGINIA (GINNY) STOFFEL:

When you think about occupational therapy and action scenes, bringing that as a piece of service to whatever community that one is connecting with is a really wonderful way to show our value and our commitment at the community level, at the societal level. And I was also thinking about your comment earlier about some of the burnout and some of the challenges that practitioners and students have with their own state of health and well-being. And wouldn't it be great for us to engage in sharing as part of World OT Day, ways of being well? What are those occupations that you do that keep you at your best? So that you can be the occupational therapy practitioner that you wish to be.

DOUGLENE JACKSON:

That's a beautiful sentiment. I love that. And for some people, maybe that's baking. For some people, maybe it's meditation or mindfulness practices, and sharing those habits and routines that increase your own well-being can be really impactful on that day. The WFOT Congress 2026 is coming up in February. It's going to be in Bangkok, Thailand, this year. What should we know about the upcoming Congress?

SAMANTHA SHANN:

That it's going to be lots and lots of fun. I think one of the hardest questions people always ask me is, Describe a WFOT Congress. And to be perfectly honest, I can't describe it in words because a WFOT Congress is to me just this wonderful overload of emotions, cognitive stimulation, learning, and connecting. You never know who the next conversation is going to be with. You never quite know what language that conversation is going to be in, Google Translate or any other application is absolutely fantastic and enables us to bridge those language gaps. But the energy in a WFOT Congress always, always amazes me. And it's one of those really special environments.

VIRGINIA (GINNY) STOFFEL:

I can't say enough about the importance of figuring out how it is you can fit attendance and the costs associated with attendance at a WFOT Congress. So, my first was actually in Montreal. And that was amazing back in the 90s. Actually, no, right before that, I was in London, England, and learned that Princess Anne was a part of the Royal College of Occupational Therapists. So, she sits on their board. That's one of the charities,

organisations that she has included as part of her lifelong commitment. And so, being able to be in other parts of the world whose history you may or may not know much about, you get a sense of what that is. The opening and closing ceremonies at the Congress usually showcase some incredible kinds of culture. You have a sense of where the country and that part of the world is, but also what the meaningful occupations are that people engage in. I love being able to go into the community. And often there's a day when you can pick several tours of places where occupational therapy offers its services.

In Yokohama, Japan, being able to see in a long-term care setting an activity that was based around kimonos and using kimonos as a piece of creating art. Just incredible ways to see the different ways that occupations and engagement and occupations can offer new insights that you can go home with and try in your own space.

DOUGLENE JACKSON:

I love that. There's so much we can learn from other cultures and other applications of OT throughout the world. How can practitioners submit proposals or attend? Is there anything our listeners should start preparing now if they're interested in making it to Congress?

SAMANTHA SHANN:

Our abstracts are closed, so by the time people are listening to this podcast, those who submitted abstracts will know whether they're presenting at Congress, and congratulations to those who were. For those of you who weren't, the next WFOT Congress is in 2030, so start planning now. But for those, I think, who still come along to Congress. It's a real chance to learn. Ginny and I have just talked about the fun aspects and the talking and the connecting, the networking, but there are some really, really strong scientific papers that are presented at the WFOT Congress, and presenters come from all around the world. I think the one thing that I've really learned from WFOT and all of my international work is that we really need to learn from each and every one of us. Some of the work that is going on in the low and middle-income countries around occupational therapy is absolutely phenomenal, and we really need to be taking that into our practice in high-income countries as well.

SPEAKER:

And likewise, the research that's happening, you know, in the US, in Canada, in the UK, really, really strong. You know, our Scandinavian countries always come out with some really good research on primary healthcare. So, you know, that opportunity to listen to the scientific base of our profession, as well as that fun and creative side, is really, to me, the beauty of the WFOT Congress. I know times are hard. I know that financially, everybody is struggling around the globe. Very early on in my career, one of my mentors talked to me about WFOT, actually, well before I got involved with WFOT and talked about that she had a

WFOT bank account, and whenever she had some small cash or, you know, would think every now and again rather than buy in that cup of coffee to just put that small amount into the bank account, so that every four years that money had slowly accumulated to enable her to get to a WFOT Congress. And I think, you know, that that preplanning, whether it be for 2026 or 2030, is something that maybe all of us can start to do because we can all invest in our professional development.

We chose occupational therapy because we are passionate about it. And a WFOT Congress really does help reignite that passion again. That's wonderful. Thank you so much for sharing, you know, some insight into the impact that happens there at the Congress. Looking forward to Bangkok, Thailand 2026, hearing about that. I wanted to ask, are there virtual options or, you know, is there access to some of these wonderful resources or research articles that WFOT members could get without physically attending? We will stream the keynote sessions and some of the WFOT sessions that won't be live, but it will be within sort of like, you know, I don't want to commit our Congress organizers to a time frame, but certainly within sort of like 48 hours, within a week. The key sessions from WFOT will be made freely available to everybody. It occurred to me, as we were talking about building the science base of our profession and the importance of those countries that have highly developed research networks and bringing those to the Congress, that has been also a really great place for researchers to meet face to face and to figure out how it is they can continue to collaborate across the world and using technology to help support that.

And I think that a lot of times it's who you sit next to at lunch. Lunch is usually a kind of open spot where people gather. And so some of the people I collaborate with today, I just happen to get a cup of tea next to. And we started talking about our collaborative interests and then quickly and easily connected. So I think that the power of attending really is the doors that it opens for you and the relationships that you develop across time. Those, you know, have enriched my career and certainly have influenced the line of research that I'm involved with. Photovoice, for example, as a tool that I use in my research where people take pictures of their everyday life and create their own narratives around that picture to help others understand how whatever they're dealing with, you know, has impacted their everyday life. And so the power of being able to use a tool that actually can easily go across languages where the pictures tell the story in a powerful way that's reached a level of scientific support.

WFOT allows us to have a time and a point in time to share our work and reengage with new people that we meet. I love that. Thank you so much. I want to end our discussion today with some reflection questions and maybe a peek ahead into the future as well. How have

you seen occupational therapy grow its global impact during your time and involvement with WFOT? So, I've been involved with WFOT since 1998, when we were starting to establish the Africa Regional Occupational Therapy Group. So many, many different ways. I was involved with WFOT in Uganda when the profession was very, very new. And I think what I've seen with WFOT is its role and influence growing year upon year. And that influence really only comes from the strength of its member organizations and the impact that they have nationally. I do see that over really sort of like the last 10-15 years, organizations such as the World Health Organization, recognizing WFOT more, but also recognizing the impact and the unique contribution that occupational therapy brings to health and well-being around the world, and that impact really making a difference into international policies that we then see cascading into regional and country policies.

And that's really, really amazing to see. I see the impact of things like World Occupational Therapy Day that bring us together as a profession. I see us connecting across the globe a lot, lot more, not just through research, but through practice, but even through friendship. And it's those friendships that really probably keep us alive as practitioners and students each day. And I think that's the strength of WFOT and the strength of occupational therapy globally. I love that. I think the 'F' in WFOT could stand for friendship, maybe in some settings. Oh, I like that one. Yeah, I might use that. Thank you. Please do. Please do. And, Ginny, how about you? So, when I think about the global impact, I think about the huge influence of the disaster relief and the preparation for disaster planning. And the fact that when we met in Yokohama, we had the emperor and empress. Yeah, we had people who were, well, leaders well into their 90s who come to like 1 or 2 big events like this a year. And they chose occupational therapy because of the impact that the occupational therapy community had on the country as it responded to the great earthquake or the tsunami.

Depending on where you live in the world, you refer to it differently. Because people and their communities and their everyday occupations were ripped away by a sudden disaster. And so the work that has developed around that has been just incredible. Having been a very active member of our own representative assembly across the years at AOTA. Yeah, that was the first place we would look when we were dealing with our own disasters are the resources that we developed and the policies that they helped to populate. But at the personal level, the friendships that have been developed and the open doors and opportunities that we offer one another, I like nothing more than if I'm invited to come do something to stay in the home of someone who's willing to share their lived space, personal space. Because there is nothing like learning about a culture, but really being among the culture, not staying at one of those fancy downtown hotels, but being with people and seeing how they carry out their everyday occupations.

So I think when I come home and make sense of those experiences, they kind of add to my repertoire that I can share with others about, you know, have you ever thought about going and spending time, or experiencing a particular culture that you want to learn more about? WFOT is a community that makes connections. Just a week ago, Douglene and I worked with a student who was interested in making connections with some of the African occupational therapists. And next week, she's leaving for a conference that will take place there with their regional group. And we were able to give this person access to that information simply by using the WFOT website and looking at the individual country reports, where they often share upcoming events. So helping bring the world to people and helping people be exposed to the world. I mean, that's a really rich part of what being an active person with WFOT means to me. I often hear people say, "Oh, nobody really understands occupational therapy or knows what we do." You know, I see that not being the case around the world.

I think, you know, we still have a long way to advocate for, you know, the true picture. But as an example, WFOT is working in Kyrgyzstan at the moment where there is no rehabilitation services developed within to the Ministry of Health. And the request for occupational therapy there in Kyrgyzstan is coming from parents. Parents with children with disabilities. Not from the health professionals itself, it's from members of the public that have learned about occupational therapy and are requesting it directly from their government. And we see that impact so much around the world now. So we really need to be very proud of ourselves as occupational therapists and really talk about what we bring as practitioners, students and educators and researchers into that sort of like health system. That's beautiful. The impact OT practitioners make is real. And I encourage our listeners to strive every day to continue making that impact. I want to wrap things up with one final question. If you could tell OT practitioners across the globe one thing, what would you say?

I would say get active in your national associations, be sure to join the World Federation of Occupational Therapists as an individual member, see how you can connect and collaborate with others, attend the congresses, because that's that in-person opportunity. But above all else, have a worldview of our profession and think beyond your locale, because there's so much we can do together and we have stronger numbers when we look outside our individual locale. Joining each of your associations is key because that's where that work happens. That's where that advocacy takes place to further our profession, even create it in places where it doesn't even exist, because we are the ones who can create that change, not only for the clients we serve, but for our profession globally. Thank you. So I talked a little bit about, you know, how, as individuals, we can think about how we get to congresses, you know, by saving, by, you know, if we submit abstracts and get accepted, funders will often fund people that are presenting.

But an initiative that WFOT also has is the Congress Grants program. And I know that, you know, finances are hard for everybody, but if some people do have a little bit of spare money, I do ask them to think about donating to the WFOT Grants program, which then enables occupational therapists from low and middle income countries to attend the WFOT Congress and present their research. And over the years, the grants program has enabled a number of occupational therapists to do that, and we've seen those researchers and young graduates go on to really form partnerships and now be impacting on the profession at quite high levels with their research and engagement. So do think about it. If it is a possibility for you, the WFOT Grants program for the Congress and more details on the WFOT Congress website. Enjoy the journey. Each day will bring challenges, but it will also bring some absolute amazing opportunities. But really enjoy the journey. Enjoy engaging with the people that you meet on a day to day basis.

Learn and grow from their stories as well. And be proud of the difference of occupational therapists. Let us really stand out and show the world what makes us stand out as a profession. So it's hard not to want to echo some of what Douglene had to say about this, in terms of being active in your national association and recognizing the importance of engagement. I'm going to borrow from one of our philosophers who basically said, "Let your life be your message." Gandhi, I believe, generated that statement. And when we let our life be our message, as occupational therapists, we start with ourselves and living authentically engaging in those occupations that mean the most to us, living the life that allows us to give and recognizing that that in giving we do receive, I give a lot, but I feel like I get so much more back as a leader, as a therapist, as a person. And so take what it is that matters most to you and make that be how you enrich our profession, the community, the world around us.

I love that. Thank you so much and enjoy the journey. Let your life be your message. Douglene, Sam, Ginny, thank you again for taking the time and speaking with me today. It's been such a pleasure to learn from you, and I'm really grateful for all the work that you've done and continue to do for our profession. Thanks (CROSSTALK) pleasure. Before we end this podcast, all of us at the American Occupational Therapy Association would like to take a moment to recognize and thank Samantha for over ten years of service at WFOT, with the most recent years serving as president. Thank you, Sam, for supporting occupational therapy practitioners all across the world. Thanks for listening to the AOTA podcast. Tune in again next time. (PODCAST THEME MUSIC PLAYS).