

Occupational Therapy Training Program - NorCal

Quarterly Newsletter

Healing through doing since 1999

September 2025

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Opening New Doors for Youth Mental Health Access

Ribbon Cutting

On Thursday, September 25th, OTTP-NorCal marked an exciting milestone with the official grand opening of our new East Bay location. Staff, community partners, supporters, and government officials and their representatives came together to celebrate the expansion of mental health access for youth and families across the region.

The ribbon cutting ceremony featured light refreshments, a tour of the building, and presentations from key leaders. Attendees also had the opportunity to hear directly from OTTP therapists about the programs offered throughout the East Bay, illustrating the impact of our services in the community.

Edwin Sevilla, Northern California Regional Director from U.S. Senator Adam B. Schiff's office, spoke about the significance of OTTP's work:

"This expanded capacity is the biggest testament to your unwavering commitment to our communities. Your efforts to support children, youth, and young adults, by connecting them with mental health programs, early prevention services, and workforce development opportunities is invaluable." -Senator Adam Schiff

Shalini Rana, Senior Director of Community Health at Sutter Health, highlighted OTTP's new partnership with Sutter Health in Sacramento, noting



From Left to Right: **Joni Pearce** (OTTP-NorCal 2025 Sponsor), **Hollie Alcalay** (Support Partner, Hollie's Homegrown), **Rebecca Leimbach** (Support Partner), **Tracy Feldman** (OTTP Development Officer)



From Left to Right: **Clayton Warren** (Communications Manager, Sutter Health) & **Josue DeAvila**, MHA (Manager, Community Health, Sutter Health)

that it “opens a doorway to healing, optimism, and opportunity across the East Bay.” She emphasized that community-based occupational therapy “meets young people exactly where they are” and praised the innovative model of care that removes traditional barriers, explaining, “There is no waiting room, just skilled, bilingual therapists integrating healing into the spaces where young people spend their time.”

Rana also underscored the critical need for mental health services, explaining that “fewer than 5% of occupational therapists nationwide work in mental health settings.” She added that access to mental health care, employment opportunities, and community support systems are all key factors that influence a person’s overall health, making OTTP’s expansion especially impactful for youth in the East Bay.

Elizabeth Vacca, District Representative for California State Senator Dr. Aisha Wahab, presented OTTP with a commendation in recognition of the organization’s contribution to youth mental health in the community.

The ceremony concluded with the ribbon cutting by Colleen Devine, MS, OTR/L, Division Director, and Katie Gordon, MS, OTR/L, East Bay Services Manager, officially opening the new space to the public.

The new East Bay location reflects OTTP-NorCal’s commitment to expanding access to mental health services and supporting youth on their journey toward a fulfilling and independent life. With this growth, more young people can access the guidance, support, and opportunities they need to thrive.



From Left to Right: **Elizabeth Vacca** (District Representative, CA State Senator Dr. Aisha Wahab), **Edwin Sevilla** (Northern California Regional Director, U.S. Senator Adam B. Schiff), **Tracy Feldman** (OTTP Development Officer), **Colleen Devine, MS, OTR/L** (OTTP Division Director)



Colleen Devine delivers her closing speech, sharing her reflections on the new building and expressing gratitude to everyone for their support of our organization.



OTTP occupational therapists, Shar Naidu Creasey & Tara Brown, sharing about our East Bay programs.

From Left to Right: **Shar Naidu Creasey, MS, OTR/L** (OTTP Occupational Therapist), **Tara Brown, MSOT, CNS** (OTTP Occupational Therapist), **Rickiea Lacy** (Scheduler, CA Assemblymember Mia Bonta’s Office), **Lana Fitzpatrick** (Support Partner).



Bryant and Kirsti Chou's unwavering support over the past 13 years has helped OTTP enhance our services and reach even more youth in need of mental health support.

Investing in Youth for a Brighter Tomorrow

Spotlight: Bryant & Kirsti Chou

Since 2012, Bryant & Kirsti Chou have been dedicated supporters of OTTP, helping even more youth throughout Northern California access mental health support, experience opportunities, and build the necessary skills for a brighter future.

"I was drawn to the mission of lifting youth," says Bryant Chou. "I have a brother with learning disabilities and occupational therapists have made his life more fulfilling and complete."

Bryant shared that "The concept of training occupational therapists while helping SF's at-risk youth was a double win for me." At OTTP, our multi-disciplinary team of clinicians mentor incoming therapists through hands-on internships, by working in the community and supporting youth directly. This "training" approach shapes the next generation of occupational therapists to cultivate a strong therapeutic use of self, grounded in a strengths-based, holistic lens. By building this foundation, we ensure youth in our community receive the most impactful support possible.

What fuels the Chous' continued support of our organization is their belief "that every young person deserves a chance to create a safe and fulfilling life for themselves." The Chous' believe that supporting youth lays a strong foundation for society. "It will help them reach their fullest potential as individuals, strengthen their ties and contributions to their communities and society, and encourage them to give to others around them in return. Growing up is hard, and it's particularly hard if you have to overcome great adversity."

A visit to the San Francisco Juvenile Justice Center brought their impact into focus. After accompanying an occupational therapist to an on-site unit, Bryant saw *"the impact she had on the youth there,"* underscoring that *"youth need all the support they can get at this critical point to stay on the right trajectory into adulthood."* Thank you, Bryant and Kirsti, for your continued support and belief in what's possible for every young person, regardless of their background or life circumstances.

Bring Hope & Happiness to a Youth this Holiday Season

Holiday Gift Drive

Looking to make a meaningful impact this holiday season? OTTP-NorCal's annual Holiday Gift Drive invites you to give thoughtful, therapeutic gifts to the youth we serve.

Last year, thanks to generous supporters like you, we delivered over 150 gifts—many designed to promote wellness, encourage self-expression, or simply bring a smile to a young person's face. These gifts created moments of joy that extended far beyond the holiday season.

This year's drive kicks off on November 3rd, and we can't wait to share more updates on how you can get involved. Together, let's make this holiday season unforgettable!

Thank you to our sponsor, [Proposition Chicken](#)!



A youth colors a picture of their gift, illustrating the meaningful impact of the drive and how it inspires creativity.



OTTP's Administrative team shared highlights from the past year and reflected on what they're most excited to accomplish in the year ahead.

From Left to Right: **Nick Rosener** (OTTP Database Administrator, Supervisor) & **Lex Phomvongsa** (OTTP People Operations Coordinator)

Celebrating Staff and Stories of Change

All-Staff Meeting

On August 7th, the OTTP-NorCal team gathered at Sports Basement in the Presidio for our annual All-Staff Meeting—a day dedicated to connection, reflection, and growth.

This year's theme, *"Rooted in Impact, Growing Toward Possibility,"* set the tone as staff revisited OTTP-NorCal's Purpose & Values, reflected on achievements from the past year, and shared highlights from across programs.

In small groups, staff exchanged stories of meaningful shifts and successes, illustrating the resilience of the youth and families we serve. To close the meeting, each program presented one impactful story that exemplified the heart of their work and the difference OTTP-NorCal continues to make in the community.

Shop with Purpose: Support OTTP Through Sports Basement

OTTP has been selected as a Sports Basement Basemementeer Beneficiary!

The next time you shop at Sports Basement, simply mention **"OTTP"** at checkout, and 10% of your purchase will go towards supporting our organization and the youth we serve.

Become a Basemementeer:

Make a one-time \$25 membership purchase to join, and you'll get 10% off every purchase you make at Sports Basement!

It's a win-win—find the perfect holiday gift and give back at the same time!



From Left to Right: **Natalie Doane** (OTTP Development Associate) & **Tracy Feldman** (OTTP Development Officer)



Staff from OTTP's Early Childhood Team share accomplishments

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Expanding OTTP's Reach: Bringing Community-Based Mental Health Services to Sacramento

New Partnership with Sutter Health

OTTP-NorCal is excited to announce our new partnership with Sutter Health, which is helping us expand mental health occupational therapy services to Sacramento and surrounding counties.

This collaboration first took root when Katie Gordon, MS, OTR/L, East Bay Services Manager, presented on OTTP's unique services during San Jose State University's Occupational Therapy Program's 80th anniversary celebration. Katie's presentation caught the attention of Marla Wasina, Occupational Therapist and Manager of Sutter's Pediatric Rehabilitation Department in Sacramento, who saw the potential to bring OTTP's model of care into the region. From that connection, OTTP was invited to submit a grant proposal to Sutter to address the critical need for community-based mental health services in Sacramento—especially for youth and families with limited access.

With Sutter's support, we are now working to expand our services across Sacramento, El Dorado, Placer, and Yolo counties. A particular focus for the upcoming year will be serving younger youth ages 3–12, who currently have very few in-person mental health options beyond telehealth.

Where We're Serving Youth

OTTP is proud to be providing services at several Sacramento-based sites, including:

- **AcademySTAY** – housing, mental health support, and life skills for youth transitioning from foster care.
- **City Year (AmeriCorps)** – workforce development for young people ages 17–25.
- **Sacramento Youth Center** – drop-in support, case management, refugee resources, internships, mentoring, and workforce training.

Through these partnerships, we've primarily served transitional-age youth (TAY), focusing on mental health and wellness strategies, job readiness, driver's license support, and community exploration. Sessions often take place directly in the community—for example, practicing interview skills at restaurants or supporting youth at the DMV.

Building Strong Partnerships

Our expansion has been strengthened by working alongside PRO (People Reaching Out) Youth & Families, whose network has connected us with community-based organizations such as AcademySTAY, Queens of Eve, City Year, and Sacramento Youth Center. Together, we are reaching more young people with vital mental health occupational therapy services.

In addition, OTTP is collaborating with the University of the Pacific's OTD program and Sacramento City College's OTA program to engage students and practitioners in advocacy, professional development, and workforce pathways in mental health occupational therapy.

Why Sacramento?

Sacramento's wide geographic spread means that resources and experiences differ dramatically across cities, counties, and school districts. By bringing OTTP's community-based model to this region, we are helping to fill significant gaps in mental health access so more youth have the tools and support they need to pursue their goals and build stronger futures.



From Left to Right: **Raymond Nubla, OTR/L** (OTTP Occupational Therapy Co-Manager, Sacramento Services), **Kiera Anderson, Ed.D** (Director of Advancement, PRO Youth & Families), **Jacqueline Cantrell, OTR/L** (OTTP Occupational Therapy Co-Manager, Sacramento Services)

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At the heart of this work is OTTP's mission: supporting young people experiencing mental health challenges and trauma in building positive self-concepts. By expanding into Sacramento, we are not only serving more youth but also cultivating a future workforce of racially-informed, trauma-aware mental health clinicians.

Already Making Change

One young person, age 19, recently opened a bank account with Cantrell's support and practiced interview skills at the restaurant where she hoped to work. This week, she interviewed and got the job—a meaningful step toward stability and confidence.



Tenaya Jo with their Behavior-Sensory Tree.

Rethinking Children's Behaviors Through a Sensory Lens

Behavior-Sensory Tree

Tenaya Jo, OTD, Mental Health Rehabilitation Specialist, serves on OTTP-NorCal's Early Childhood Mental Health Collaborative, where they provide occupational therapy services to children ages 3–5, their families, and staff across 13 OUSD Early Childhood Education sites.

As part of their work, Tenaya developed the Behavior-Sensory Tree, a tool designed to help parents reframe challenging behaviors by looking through a sensory lens—focusing on unmet needs rather than just surface reactions.

At the top of the tree are the Apple Behaviors: the things parents can readily see, such as screaming, crying, or refusing to get dressed. These are the outward signs, but they don't tell the whole story.

Parents may respond with Behavior-Based Responses, like becoming frustrated, yelling, or insisting a child wear clothing they dislike. While these reactions are common, they don't always address the root cause.

That's where the Sensory Roots come in. These represent what's really happening beneath the surface. For example, a child refusing to get dressed might be reacting to clothing that feels scratchy. A child crying and screaming might be overwhelmed by too much noise or activity in their environment.

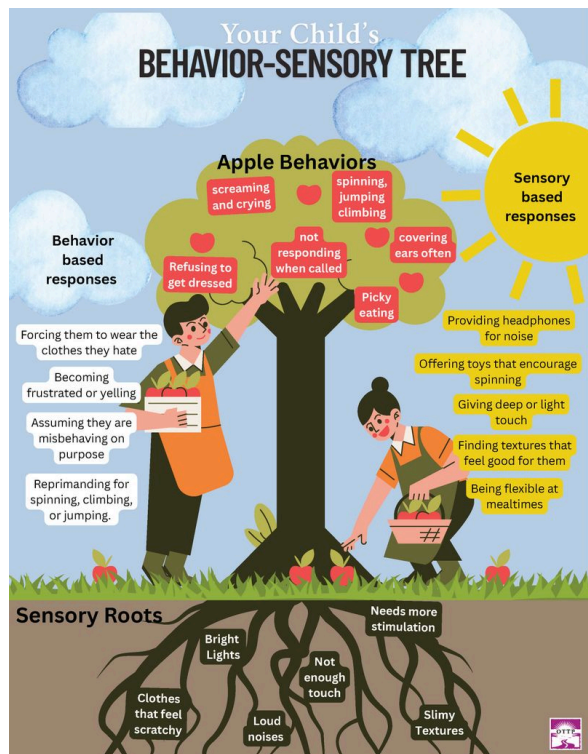
By shifting to Sensory-Based Responses, parents can better support their child's nervous system and foster positive behavior change. In the clothing example, that might mean finding fabrics and textures that feel comfortable and soothing.

Paraphrased from Tenaya on why this approach is important:

“When we meet children’s underlying sensory needs—rather than just reacting to behaviors—we create safer spaces that foster growth, understanding, and stronger connections.”

Through tools like the Behavior-Sensory Tree, Tenaya helps families move beyond frustration and discover strategies that nurture both understanding and connection.

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The Behavior-Sensory Tree is a valuable tool that helps families explore the deeper roots of a child's behaviors, encouraging understanding rather than quick conclusions.

How Your Support Turns Small Rewards Into Big Achievements

Incentive Program

At OTTP-NorCal, our Incentive Program empowers youth to set meaningful goals and stay motivated by offering tangible rewards once those goals are reached—whether it's a new pair of sneakers, tickets to an event, or a gift card for something special.

These incentives help youth follow through on life-changing goals: consistent school attendance, job readiness, and regular therapy participation. For many of our clients, these steps are hard-won and require sustained effort amid real barriers (transportation, family stress, housing instability). A small, meaningful reward at the finish line turns goals into doable milestones—and momentum into measurable progress.

This program is made possible thanks to generous cash donations from supporters like you. To show its impact, we're sharing how Allie Sharon, OTR/L, Vocational Specialist, uses incentives to help her clients thrive.

Allie explains:

"I use the incentive program with clients to help them reach their goals and to be able to buy things for themselves—whether it's self-care items or tools that support their hobbies and meaningful activities."

One recent example involved a client who had missed a significant amount of school due to mental health challenges, raising concerns from both family and teachers. Together, Allie and her client set a goal to improve school attendance. To make the goal achievable yet motivating, they tied it to the promise of a Target gift card.

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The client successfully met her attendance goal. As a celebration, she and Allie went to Target together, where the client chose a book.

Later, when reflecting on coping strategies, she named reading as one of the things that helps her feel better.

Allie reflects:

“The incentive program adds that extra spark to keep clients focused and motivated. They feel a sense of pride knowing they’ve earned the gift card or item by working hard to achieve their goals.”

Thanks to your support, this program continues to turn small incentives into big moments of growth, confidence, and resilience.

Dining with Purpose: Proposition Chicken Gives Back to OTTP

Partnership with Proposition Chicken for Non-Profit Mondays

This past August, Proposition Chicken in Laurel Village generously partnered with OTTP-NorCal through their Non-Profit Mondays program. Each Monday, 10% of the proceeds were donated directly to our organization.

Thanks to this incredible community support, nearly \$900 was raised to benefit youth in our group programs, including those at the San Francisco Juvenile Justice Center. These funds will help make the upcoming holiday season brighter and more supportive for our clients.

Ari Feingold, Founder of Non-Profit Mondays and REMA Restaurants (owner of Proposition Chicken), along with Nick Wyner, Director of Human Resources at Proposition Chicken, shared why they chose OTTP-NorCal as a beneficiary for this program:

“We chose to partner with OTTP-NorCal because of the incredible work they do empowering youth and families in our community. Their holistic approach to mental health is inspiring, and we were proud to support them through our Non-Profit Monday program.”

We're so grateful to Proposition Chicken and to everyone who dined with them on Mondays in August. Together, you've turned meals into meaningful impact for the youth and families we serve.



OTTP staff and supporters gathered on a Monday in August to enjoy a meal together at Proposition Chicken.

From Left to Right: **Tracy Feldman** (Development Officer), **Grecia Chong Cuy, MHRs** (Mental Health Rehabilitation Specialist), **Olivia Feldman** (Support Partner), **Kyra Rossiter** (Marketing Coordinator), **Erik Feldman** (Support Partner).

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Reach for the Stars: SkyStar Ferris Wheel Brings Joy & Growth to OTTP Youth

SkyStar Ferris Wheel Donation

We're thrilled to celebrate the second year of our partnership with SkyStar Ferris Wheel at Fisherman's Wharf! Through SkyStar's Community Benefit Program, which provides complimentary tickets to local organizations, like OTTP-NorCal, our youth clients have the chance to experience the thrill and joy of riding the SkyStar Wheel.

This collaboration began in 2024 when Emily Tunnat, MS, OTR/L, Occupational Therapist and Program Manager, connected with Todd Barbee, Business Development Director at SkyStar. Their shared vision has made it possible for our youth to enjoy memorable adventures in a safe, supportive environment.

Thanks to SkyStar's generous donation of 50 tickets, our youth can benefit from experiences that promote confidence, mindfulness, motivation, and social connection—all while enjoying a fun day out.

We are deeply grateful to the SkyStar team for their continued support, and we thank all our supporters for helping us create special moments for the youth we serve.



From Left to Right: **Simmi** (SkyStar Ferris Wheel) & **Kyra Rossiter** (OTTP Marketing Coordinator)



Donations like SkyStar's make it possible for OTTP to provide youth with experiences they might not otherwise have access to.



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