

FALL 2023 NEWSLETTER



New Mexico Occupational Therapy Association

This issue:

Executive Corner

PAGE 2-3

Benefits of NMOTA

PAGE 4

2023 Conference Success

PAGE 5-6

Nominating Results

PAGE 7-9

Secretary Notes

PAGE 10

Membership Report

PAGE 11

Communications Message

PAGE 12

Practice Area Interview

PAGE 13-14

Legislative Matters

PAGE 15

Treasurer's Account

PAGE 16

Carolyn's Cause

PAGE 17

Meet Board Members

PAGE 18-19



Occupational Therapy Day at the Legislature

Save the Date: Wednesday, January 31, 2024

Where: New Mexico State Capital

Please join NMOTA, community practitioners, and students to promote the value of Occupational Therapy in New Mexico.

Learn how you can make a difference for the profession by advocating to your legislators.

Earn free continuing education credits.

Newsletter Created & Edited by:

**MORGAN MARTINEZ, OTS & DANA BOYLE, OTS
CO-COMMUNICATION CHAIRS FOR NMOTA**

Contact us:

Email: communications@nmota.org

Executive Corner

Dear Esteemed Members of the New Mexico Occupational Therapy Association,

We hope this message finds you all in good health and high spirits. As we reflect on the past year, it is evident that our collective efforts have propelled the profession of occupational therapy to new heights in our beautiful state. The dedication and passion each one of you brings to the table are truly inspiring. In our pursuit of excellence, we have been unwavering in our commitment to advancing occupational therapy through advocacy, professional development, and networking. Our state association stands as a beacon of growth and progress, fostering an environment where continuous learning, skill development, and professional engagement are not just encouraged but celebrated.



As occupational therapy practitioners and students, we understand that our journey in this field is multifaceted. It involves embracing new experiences, overcoming challenges, and staying abreast of the latest innovations. It is heartening to witness many of you sharing insights into your areas of improvement and the challenges faced in New Mexico. Your willingness to communicate and collaborate enables us to work together to overcome obstacles and further elevate our profession.



Our commitment to growth encompasses various facets, including continuing education, networking, specializations, clinical experience, research, community involvement, technology proficiency, and self-improvement. We believe that being open to new opportunities and challenges is the key to a successful career in occupational therapy. The enthusiasm and dedication of our members shine through as you actively engage in conferences and events, deepening your knowledge and expertise. Your participation in industry trends, policy changes, and advancements not only showcases your commitment to the profession but also positions you as knowledgeable leaders in the field. We take immense pride in the fact that many of you have taken the initiative to propose innovative ideas that benefit NMOTA and the occupational therapy community as a whole. Your commitment and engagement do not go unnoticed, and we encourage you to share your experiences and visibility within the association and its committees.

Executive Corner



PHOTO FROM 2023 CONFERENCE

We extend an invitation to all members interested in sharing their knowledge in occupational therapy, be it across the state, in conferences, continuing education, professional development, meet & greets, NMOTA representation, and more. Your voices are powerful, and advocating for your profession is a responsibility we all share. As we look ahead, there are several areas of concern and topics of discussion that deserve our attention, including Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), the OT Compact, advocacy in insurance and with third-party payers, exam updates, Legislative Day, and the National/State Conference. We want to express our heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of you who contributes to this wonderful team, volunteering your time and expertise to make the profession and NMOTA flourish. Together, we are making a difference, and we are excited about the journey ahead. Thank you all for your dedication and passion for the occupational therapy profession.

Happy Holidays,

Dara Sanders-Aceves, M Ed, BOE, COTA/L

President, New Mexico Occupational Therapy Association

Vanessa Stroman, OTD, MSW, MA

Vice President, New Mexico Occupational Therapy Association

Benefits of NMOTA for All OT Practitioners

BY: MARY THELANDAR HILL, MOT OTR/L ATP

The Occupational Therapy profession has a stronger advocacy voice when OTs and OTAs join.

Our work benefits all OT practitioners in the state. Here's how:

- **NMOTA ensures our distinct value:**

- NMOTA worked for years to ensure that the scope of practice for OT practitioners in New Mexico is updated to promote our distinct value. **We will need to work for this again.**
- Protecting our scope of practice means that professions like life coaches, physical trainers, and other non-licensed professions cannot claim to work within our scope of practice.
- NMOTA will advocate for the occupational therapy scope of practice every time the bill sunsets (expires).

- **NMOTA keeps OTs and OTAs connected:**

- The NMOTA annual conference is the best OT party in the state.
- We connect OTs and OTAs to conference presenters in different fields from NM and other states.
- The Conference introduces OT/OTA students with different practice settings (and future employers).
- NMOTA also connects the OT community on our website and social media.

- **NMOTA keeps OTs and OTAs informed:**

- Our newsletters (published by e-mail to membership and on our website for all OT practitioners) highlight important issues, such as the changes to the OT Rules and Laws.
- OTs and OTAs who present at conferences earn three-times the CEUs as their presentation length (so a 90 minute presentation = 4.5 CEUs for the OT/OTA presenters).

- **NMOTA ensures that lawmakers know about our powerful profession:**

- NMOTA follows legislation to watch for issues important to OTs, OTAs, and our clients.
- NMOTA updates OT practitioners on legislative matters on our website and social media.
- NMOTA coordinates the activities of a lobbyist to voices our concerns throughout the legislative session
- NMOTA has held legislative advocacy event even during pandemics and snow-storms.

- **NMOTA needs a strong membership base to serve OTs and OTAs:**

- Our profession is stronger when we are connected by sharing knowledge and networking.
- **Lawmakers know that NMOTA advocates for the whole profession when OTs and OTAs are active members.**

Conference Success

BY: ALONDRA JIMENEZ COTA/L, BREANA GASS COTA/L,
SHYLA ERVIN COTA/L

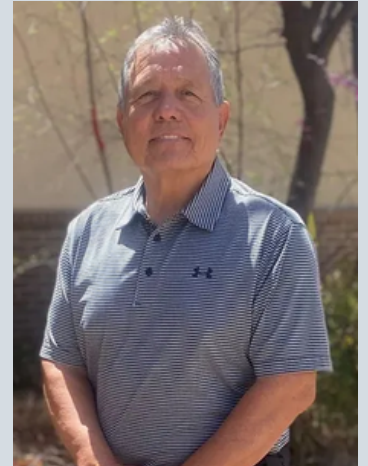
CONFERENCE COMMITTEE: CARMEN MCCLELLAND



**KEYNOTE SPEAKER
DR. GORDON MUIR GILES
PHD, OTR/L**



PICTURED: NMOTA BOARD MEMBERS



**PLENARY SPEAKER
SAMUEL CHAVES, BOE,
COTA/L**

The Conference Committee would like to extend our gratitude to everyone who attended and contributed to NMOTA's 2023 Annual Conference. This year's conference focused on how we, as a profession, can implement a functional and holistic approach when treating others.

The Keynote Speaker Dr. Gordon Muir Giles and plenary speaker Samuel Chaves demonstrated an unwavering dedication to the field of Occupational Therapy. Their presentations and all breakout sessions not only enriched our collective knowledge, they inspired our attendees to make a meaningful impact in their own professional journeys. We thrilled to have had a rise in attendance from last year's conference & exceptional engagement throughout the weekend.



We are excited to share the theme for the 2024 Annual NMOTA Conference
"Inclusivity in Everyday Living"

This will share AOTA's 2025 Vision "Occupational therapy maximizes health, well-being, and quality of life for all people, populations, and communities through effective solutions that facilitate participation in everyday living."

Conference Success

BY: ALONDRA JIMENEZ COTA/L, BREANA GASS COTA/L,
SHYLA ERVIN COTA/L



PICTURED: OT'S AND OTA'S AT CONFERENCE



PICTURED: GERRI DURAN, DARA SANDERS-ACEVES, DR. GORDON MUIR GILES



PICTURED: ROXANNA KELLER, OTAS



PICTURED: ENMU STUDENTS AND FACULTY

While hosting conference is a highlight of our year, it is also costly. That is why we are exploring various venues and ways to make next years conference more cost effective as well as time efficient for everyone.



PICTURED: ALONDRA JIMENEZ, VANESSA STROMAN & SUE SHELLY

Nominating Results

Voting for the executive board positions of Vice President and Secretary was held at the annual NMOTA conference business meeting. All members who voted supported the respective candidate.

Melodye Thomas was elected Vice President and Shyla Ervin was elected Secretary. These members will receive training from the current board members and begin their new roles in January 2024. Welcome!



PICTURED: MELODYE THOMAS ON THE LEFT & SHYLA ERVIN ON THE RIGHT

NMOTA really appreciates the efforts and valuable contributions of outgoing Vice President Vanessa Stroman and outgoing Secretary Mary Thelander Hill. Thank you very much!

The Executive Board consists of President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary. They meet monthly and serve for 2 years. Elections for President and Treasurer will take place in August of 2024. Please consider participating as a NMOTA board member. Open positions include Conference Committee, Membership Co-Chair, and Continuing Education. If you would like more information about the NMOTA board, please contact me at nominating@nmota.org.

Respectfully,
Sarah Sutherlin, Nominating Committee Chair

Nominating Results

Meet our Incoming Executive Board Member, Melodye Thomas, OTD, OTR/L

(Elected in August for January 2024-2026 term)



What is your professional background (practice setting/credentials)

I have been an occupational therapist since 1995. I have practiced in the Clovis Schools for 25 years and in early intervention simultaneously for almost nine years. I received my Doctorate of Occupational Therapy in 2010.

What made you willing to participate in NMOTA leadership?

I see how hard the few people in NMOTA leadership work to make our organization run smoothly, and I want to help. It is my turn to facilitate good experiences for the OT providers in our state like my predecessors have done for me.

PICTURED: MELODYE THOMAS,

What do you love about being an OT/OTA in NM?

So many things! I mean, what's not to love about being an OT? I love being able to touch families and colleagues in our community and encourage them in their abilities to support their loved ones who need occupational therapy. In New Mexico, I can work with any population I choose. I am blessed to work with and support excellent practitioners. I am a native New Mexican, born and raised in Clovis, so I relish the opportunity to contribute positively to my community.

Is there anything else you think NMOTA members would want to know?

I love to teach! I welcome learners of any level to join me for our mutual professional growth.

Nominating Results

Meet our Incoming Executive Board Member, Shyla Ervin, COTA/L

(Elected in August for January 2024-2026 term)



PICTURED: SHYLA ERVIN

What is your professional background (practice setting/credentials)?

I began my professional journey as a licensed COTA in the Fall of 2019. I am now going on my 5th year of servicing the rural school districts of Capitan, Corona, Carrizozo and Hondo. In August of this year, I jumped into the Early Intervention setting. I am now splitting my time between Early Intervention and the schools. I am loving both!

What made you willing to participate in NMOTA leadership?

When the opportunity arose 2 years ago, I knew it was my sign to take a leap of faith and be a part of something bigger. Something that would push me beyond my comfort zone. Serving on the conference committee allowed me to grow and collaborate with passionate OT professionals. Looking back as a student and later working behind the scenes, ignited a newfound appreciation for the contributions of NMOTA leadership to make a successful conference happen. As we know, in the field of Occupational Therapy, we are always striving to grow and be creative, participating in NMOTA leadership is the perfect place to continue doing so!!

What do you love about being an OT/OTA in NM?

New Mexico offers a vast selection of settings to explore. I love how rich in culture New Mexico truly is. Knowing that I can give back to my roots and make a positive difference in the lives of many is valuable to me.

Is there anything else you think NMOTA members would want to know?

I have a passion for dance! I've explored the styles of ballet, jazz, contemporary, modern and even a little tap throughout the majority of my life. I love teaching children of all ages and abilities. I love creating safe spaces for children to connect and tap into their artistic expression.

Secretary's Notes

BY OUTGOING SECRETARY, MARY THELANDER HILL, MOT OTR/L ATP

I was appointed Secretary of NMOTA in January 2023 when the elected Secretary, Vanessa Stroman, stepped up to fill an urgent need in the Vice President role. I have served this past year with great pleasure. It has been wonderful to continue to connect with the OT and OTA community in New Mexico through the NMOTA board.

In my time, I worked to benefit the organization in the following ways:

- Ensured that current and past newsletters are available for the OT and OTA community to see on our website
- Updated the website so that approved board meeting minutes are available for the community to see
- Collaborated with Carolyn's Causes to ensure that information about their mini-grant program is readily available:
<https://www.nmota.org/carolynscauses>



PICTURED: MARY THELANDER HILL

In August, 2023, Shyla Ervin was elected to be the Secretary of the organization. Shyla has shown a lot of dedication to the community through her leadership on the Conference committee and has wonderful energy to bring to the executive board. Shyla and I have already begun training so that she can take over the role in January, 2024.

Membership

BY SUE SHELLEY, MOT OTR/L, MEMBERSHIP CHAIR



PICTURED: SUE SHELLEY

As of October 1, 2023, we have 222 active members – We need more! Active members help our lobbyist ensure that laws that are important to us, like our scope of practice act, are enacted by the Legislature.

Thank you to all of our active members for being part of the New Mexico Occupational Therapy Association.

NMOTA relies on member participation to support our mission to educate, raise public awareness, and promote the distinct value of occupational therapy in achieving and maintaining quality of life through occupations that promote recovery, rehabilitation, and health. Benefits of membership (<https://www.nmota.org/benefits>):

- **Engagement:** Networking, Friends, Professional Opportunities
- **Representation:** NMOTA lobbies, testifies, presents, and advocates for the distinct value of the OT profession
- **Awareness:** We educate, raise awareness and promote the profession of Occupational Therapy
- **Leadership:** NMOTA is an all volunteer organization led by OTs, OTS, and OT students, dedicated to a job well done of operating a membership association.

**As of October 1, 20, we have 222 active members.
We need more to be heard at the NM Legislature.**

Thanks again, to all of our members!

Communications Report

BY MORGAN MARTINEZ, MOTS & DANA BOYLE, MOTS
CO COMMUNICATIONS CHAIR



PICTURED: DANA BOYLE ON THE LEFT & MORGAN MARTINEZ ON THE RIGHT

We are second-year graduate students at the University of New Mexico Occupational Therapy Graduate Program. We happily accepted the position of Co-Communications Chair for the NMOTA board in June of 2023.

Our Primary Duties Are:

- Share information about upcoming events through emailing members and posting on social media such as Instagram and Facebook.
- Posting news and events relevant to the New Mexico Occupational Therapy Practice.
- Editing a fall and spring newsletter highlighting past, future, and current events for the NMOTA association.
- Attending NMOTA board meetings 6-8 times a year and sharing our perspective.
- Reporting about the work of the Communications Committee at the NMOTA Annual Conference business meeting.
- Responding to questions on the website and email.
- Working hand in hand with other committees.

We are currently in the process of updating the social media to increase engagement and interactions. We would love to hear your feedback!

Follow the Instagram: @nmotacomm



Like the Facebook page: [NMOTA - New Mexico Occupational Therapy Association](#)

Practice Areas Interview

FATIMA GONZALES,

INTERVIEWED BY KAREN MAESTAS, OTR/L, CEAS II

1. When did you start Little Amigos?

I opened Little Amigos seven years ago.

2. What motivated you to start Little Amigos?

The families I worked with would ask me if I knew of a place that would take in children with special needs. For years I thought about what it would take for me to open a center. While I was in school one of the assignments for my class was to go out and identify a need in the community and develop a program that would meet that need. I took advantage of the assignment and began looking at what running a business like this would require. So, my Childcare Center and Therapy Center were my class project.



3. Are you still practicing occupational therapy?

I have been working as a COTA/L for 23 years and have loved every minute of it. I love working with children and making a difference in their lives. I work as the Director of both the centers much of the day. I also provide [OT] to a small group of children at the center and at a charter school.

4. How did your background in Occupational Therapy impact your business and the clients you serve?

My background in Occupational Therapy has given me a different perspective when it comes to the development of children. My professional experience has given me the opportunity to help identify some issues that may delay child development. I have also been able to educate and provide training to staff and families outside of the profession on how to work with children.

Practice Areas Interview

5. What challenges did you face in starting your own business?

I faced many challenges when I opened my business, things I was not trained in I had to teach myself. First, learning all the administrative aspects of running a business such as the expenses required to open a fully staffed and equipped center. Second, I had to learn labor laws, childcare rules and regulations, accounting, wages, and therapy billing, documentation, and insurance reimbursement. Third I'm still learning how to be a good and supportive leader both as a boss and as a therapy supervisor. Fourth I needed to learn how to write grants and administrative reports, and I really don't like writing. As if that was not hard enough, I had to navigate my business through the COVID-19 pandemic, which I was not trained on.

6. What advice can you give to entrepreneurs who are practitioners wanting to start their own business or want to expand their skills into another industry?

Be prepared for the struggles, make sure you have a good plan and support system in place. Try to get as much information as possible ahead of time and know that you will always be learning. Be versatile and learn to multitask because everything will be constantly changing and you will have to change with it, to succeed. If you are passionate about what you do and dedicate time, energy and sacrifice you will be successful.

7. If one of our fellow practitioners or new grads wants to work in the practice area of pediatrics, what do you recommend for training or skill development?

I think your first skill should be your love of children and be willing to keep learning as much as possible. Learning as much as possible from as many sources. Seek out opportunities to become certified in Autism, Sensory Integration, Behavior, ADHD and Learning Disorders. All the courses pertaining

pediatric development are crucial when working with children. for example, positioning and range of motion, vision, cognitive development, stages and age of development and brain development (neuroscience) and documentation just to name a few.



Legislative Matters

BY: JESSICA SALAZAR, MOT, MSW, OTR/L
INCOMING LEGISLATIVE CHAIR

The 2024 Legislative Day is planned for January 31, 2024 – Save the Date!

After many years serving as the Chair of the Legislative Committee, Jason Dunlap has passed the torch to me as the new committee chair. NMOTA has greatly appreciated all of his service and dedication to the organization over the years.

The 2024 Legislative day will be offered as a part virtual and part in-person event. The virtual event will be online CEUs (free to members) that focus on ways that all OTs and OTAs can participate in legislative advocacy from all corners of the state. We will Also continue the tradition of going to the Roundhouse to educate and advocate to our state legislators and the public about the distinct value of OT. Occupational Therapy Day at the Legislature will grow awareness of what Occupational Therapy is and how we benefit the clients we work with across New Mexico. Last year, students from the university of New Mexico and Eastern New Mexico University-Roswell and community practitioners participated in advocating for Occupational Therapy in-person at the Roundhouse and online. Students and community practitioners spent time talking to their legislators and sending letters advocating for Occupational Therapy. Although inclement weather did not allow many people to attend the event in-person, the event was still successful. Thank you to everyone who participated this year. We look forward to seeing you all again early next year.



ROUNDHOUSE, SANTA FE, NM



PICTURED: ENMU STUDENTS
LEGISLATIVE DAY 2023

Treasurer's Account

BY MELISSA TENCZA, MOT OTR/L, TREASURER



Expenses for services across the board have continued to rise, and we are in an ongoing process of adjusting our budget due to these increases. We were over-budget in terms of spending over the last year, primarily on conference, web hosting, and accounting software services. We are actively working as a group to find more economical options in these areas for next year. We were within budget for spending related to legislative day, including paying our lobbyist and supporting students during the event in Santa Fe. We also paid our expected fees for operating expenses including the required insurance to be an official organization for the state. We would like to continue to offer valuable events throughout the year to increase and maintain membership numbers and plan to prioritize this goal as we reconfigure other areas of the budget. NMOTA does not carry any debt (in credit card or other forms).

As of October 2023, NMOTA has \$47,959.50 in savings and \$19,784.20 in checking.



PICTURED: MELISSA TENCZA

Carolyn's Cause Mini Grant



Contact Carolyn's Causes

Mail To: Carolyn's Causes,
c/o Kay Thurman
10528 Ridge Top Ct. NW
Albuquerque, NM 87114

To honor the memory of Carolyn Rustvold, a gifted pediatric OT in our community whose life was taken, NMOTA is hosting information about the Carolyn's Causes Mini-Grant.

Carolyn Rustvold was a giving, passionate person who believed she could make a difference in the world. She was an occupational therapist by career choice and worked through the Albuquerque Public Schools in Albuquerque, New Mexico with children with developmental disabilities. Carolyn really enjoyed the children and her gift with them was obvious to all who watched their interaction. She honestly believed that she could make a difference.

Carolyn's friends and family created a fund in Carolyn's honor called Carolyn's Causes. To honor Carolyn's memory, Carolyn's Causes funds mini-grants to help pay for specialty training, equipment, supplies or other items that may help people in New Mexico function in their daily activities, the things they want to do, need to do or have to do in the job of life.



Who can apply:

Occupational Therapists, Occupational Therapy Assistants, Educators, Parents, families, students, families, people who have difficulty completing their activities in some way, or other therapists (SLP, PT...). Carolyn's Causes decides on grants based on the need, the amount, and the qualifications of the person asking for the grant. **There is no deadline.**

How to apply: visit www.nmota.org/carolynscauses

Please note: NMOTA hosts this information to honor Carolyn's memory and as a service to the community. NMOTA does not respond to requests for the mini-grant or have any influence on the mini-grant decision.

Meet Our Board!



Dara Sanders-Aceves
President



Melodye Thomas
Incoming Vice
President



Shyla Ervine
Incoming Secretary



Melissa Tencza
Treasurer



Sue Shelly
Membership Chair



Karen Mestas-Harris
Practice Areas Chair



Sarah Sutherlin
Outgoing Nominating
Chair



Jessica Salazar
Legislative Chair



Alondra Jimenez
Conference Co-Chair



Breanna Gass
Conference Co-Chair



Morgan Martinez
Communications
Co- Chair



Dana Boyle
Communications
Co- Chair

Thank you Vanessa!



Vanessa Stroman
Outgoing Vice
President

NMOTA would like to thank Vanessa Stroman, OTD, MSW, MA for her leadership on the executive board. In 2021, Vanessa was elected as Secretary to the organization, and served in that role for two years. In January 2023, however, the organization urgently needed a person to step-up to the role of vice-president. Vanessa was that person. As Vice President, Vanessa has brought a thoughtful, cheerful and thorough style to all of her roles with the executive board. Vanessa, it has been a pleasure to work with you, and there will always be a place for you on the NMOTA board.



PICTURED: NMOTA BOARD MEMBERS AT CONFERENCE