



Sarah Braithwaite

The Barbara Tyldesley Student Award 2018

Sarah Braithwaite, a second-year occupational therapy student from York St John University, received The Barbara Tyldesley Student Award, sponsored by The Constance Owens Trust, in January 2018. The award contributed to a 10-week international placement in Bangladesh, at the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP), from January until March 2018.

The centre provides treatment, rehabilitation and support services for spinal cord injury (SCI), neurological and orthopaedic conditions, and houses a paediatric unit. CRP's mission is to promote an all-inclusive environment where anyone with a disability has equal access to health, rehabilitation, education, employment and information. Placement was completed in the SCI unit, consisting of 11 inpatient wards and a community reintegration programme.

The role of an occupational therapy student in Bangladesh holds many similarities to that in the UK, however practice does differ slightly. Communication was the biggest challenge, however being immersed for 10 weeks provided an opportunity to develop skills. Learning the local language, much to the amusement of staff and service users, promoted positive working relationships and worked well alongside non-verbal techniques. Working in a country where resources and equipment are not readily available, highlighted the resourcefulness and creativity of the local people, and encourages therapists to think outside the box. The centre relies on public donations or uses locally sourced and recycled materials to make their own equipment. Wheelchairs are made to measure at the on-site workshop, and paper technology provides a large proportion of the table top activities used in therapy sessions.

The centre places a large focus on education and modifications as there are little or no services to provide adaptations or access to healthcare assistants. The local environment holds many barriers for wheelchair users and those with disabilities and can restrict accessibility. A purpose built 'half-way hostel' enables service users and their families, their carers, to spend 2 weeks living on-site at the hostel, designed to replicate community living. Occupational therapists use an educational approach to facilitate traditional cooking using mud stoves and utensil adaptation, and modification techniques for the home and work environment. Wheelchair safety and transfer skills are a primary focus prior to discharge. The rickshaw is one of the main modes of transport in Bangladesh, therapists facilitate rickshaw transfers within the rehabilitation phase. Community follow-up services are completed by a MDT who access all areas of the country. Due to the nature of limited services, travel times can be in the region of hours, and assessments take place in and amongst community members and local animals.

It was an honour and a privilege to work as part of the team at the CRP, a centre so valuable to the people of Bangladesh, and to experience first-hand the developing healthcare system. It gave an insight into the values and traditions of the local people and the influence and importance of religion within therapy. Going forward as a developing practitioner, this placement was an opportunity to consolidate and apply theory, skills and knowledge to better support service users and extended networks in the future.

A special Bengali *Dhonnobad*, an English thank you, to The Constance Owen's Trust who supported such an opportunity, and their kind contribution to enable this once in a lifetime placement experience.