



Q: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

A: Sure. My name is Kelsey Voltz-Poremba. My passion is working with people of all abilities, and it comes from my brother who has autism. I grew up with him. My mom told me I was always helping him. For a long-time, I wanted to be a therapist because I was really into sports.

When I got into college, I decided to be a therapist because I want to help people with disabilities live independent lives. My first job was as an occupational therapist at Children's Hospital. I worked in the outpatient center, so I worked with mostly young kids through adolescents on fine motor skills, handwriting, and self-care skills. I did that for about five years.

Q: What was your biggest 'aha' moment or blessing?

I thought, wow, there's so much that occupational therapists can do with adults as they age out of the school system and stuff. There are no pediatric services after age 21. So that was like 'aha'. My profession needs to be in this area, but we're not well represented. I thought to myself, that's what I want to do.

Q: How did you do that?

A: I went back and got a Master and Clinical Science Doctorate in Occupational Therapy from the University of Pittsburgh. I'm full-time there now. Sometimes people think like, "A professor. Oh, you just teach." But that's just the tip of the iceberg! There's so much underneath that we have to do!

I started the SNAP program at the Upper Saint Claire Recreation Center 12 years ago as my intern project. SNAP stands for Special Needs Active Program. My department was raising money for SNAP funds, but they didn't have a program. So, we built the program. It was designed to be part in the gym and the other part in the pool. We work with the aquatic instructor and lifeguards.

Q: What has been your biggest challenge with this program?

A: I like the day when everyone's here and we're having fun. That's the easy part, the most challenging part is everything leading up to getting started, getting it into the system, making sure I have volunteers. The logistics of everything. Some of the more business ends of the thing.

So, since I became a professor at Pitt, it's nice because I will pull from my students. Who are looking for, uh, opportunities. Very clever! So that's who's been helping us, which has been really nice!

Q: What is that like for you?

A: It's good. I teach our classes on program and project development. I place all of our students in their doctoral capstone project work in their very last year. It's all based in the community.

So, I work with the students, which is great because one of my favorite things to be able to do is instill in my students a sense of community work. And, I love working with future occupational therapists, but I do miss, sometimes, the day-to-day of working with patients and clients.

Q: What else would you like to do?

A: I'd love to start an inclusive post-secondary education at Pitt for people with disabilities.

Those are popping up all across the country.

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