

# Questions & Answers



**“Nobody I worked with had any concept of OT in the community. That’s why it has been such a good experience for me to educate people about the various roles that OTs can play and about our role in the community.”**

—Tori Goldhammer

**O**n top of her work as an occupational therapist, **Tori Goldhammer, MS, OTR/L, ATP, CAPS**, owner of Living at Home Consultations in Washington, D.C., is a member of D.C.’s Money Follows the Person advisory committee, the leader of the city’s Home Accessibility Improvement Program task force, an advisor to D.C.’s Age Friendly City initiative, and the leader of the city’s Falls Free Coalition. Goldhammer recently took time out to talk with *OT Practice* associate editor Andrew Waite about how her volunteer leadership roles help her advocate on behalf of the profession.

**Waite: In these volunteer positions, you are not necessarily serving in any official occupational therapy capacity. How does your professional expertise come into play?**

**Goldhammer:** What initially got me in the door was being the leader of the local Falls Free Coalition. That is what has gotten me involved with some of these other groups and into other relevant meetings. I always tell people that I am an occupational therapist and that is the reason why I run the Falls Free Coalition. I have the knowledge of fall risks as an OT, so that is what makes me the natural leader for the coalition. My OT background has actually become more important because now I am working with other groups who didn’t understand the role of OT in regard to home assessment and fall prevention, and I am getting the opportunity to educate agency staff about what OTs can do.

**Waite: Did the knowledge gap inside these organizations surprise you at all?**

**Goldhammer:** A little, yes. These are people that are working with older adults, and my assumption was that on some level they knew what OT was. But I think their understanding of OT was more from the medical model perspective of ADLs [activities of daily living] and upper extremity exercises. Nobody I worked with had any concept of OT in the community. That’s why it has been such a good experience for me to educate people about the various roles that OTs can play and about our role in the community. And it’s been great how open people have been to truly listening. But it is not just me talking about OT. They listen because I am at a lot of meetings and am always participating and helping out, so they know that I’m not just there to push my practice and OT. They know I am there because I am genuinely concerned and want to help, and I just so happen to be an OT.

**Waite: Did you always imagine yourself as someone who would hold these sorts of leadership positions?**

**Goldhammer:** Honestly, I never would have thought it was a natural role for me. But I think it is because I feel so passionate about what I do. I want to help people remain in their homes, and when I identify the barriers and know that there are solutions out there but know there are obstacles in the way, I become very driven to help eliminate those obstacles. This all started with me working with

people in their homes and slowly learning about the different programs in the city and then finding out they are not always well executed. That made me want to get involved because I was frustrated that these programs weren’t working as well as they could. I met advocates in the other groups I belong to and realized I had an option to advocate for change instead of just being frustrated.

**Waite: What advice would you have for your fellow occupational therapy practitioners who might be interested in these kinds of volunteer leadership positions?**

**Goldhammer:** There are Falls Free Coalitions in almost every state in the country. So if someone were interested in working with older adults and fall prevention, that might be a good place to start. And it wouldn’t have to be going to regular meetings, but just helping with events a couple of times a year. AARP is another option because many of the local chapters have events where someone could volunteer. So that’s just from the older adult perspective. But, generally, my advice would be to look at whatever population you work with, what are some of the nonprofits that work with that population, and see whether you have any skills to offer, even if it is just a once- or twice-a-year volunteer event, or coming in and doing an education program. ■