

MEDIA RELEASE

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Occupational therapy boot camp improves independence for stroke survivors

For many, the simple act of tying a fishhook is a routine aspect of pursuing a hobby.

For one participant of an Australian Catholic University program designed to restore independence to stroke survivors, the movement is life-changing.

Student-led Constraint Induced Movement Therapy (CIMT) Boot Camps held at the ACU Health Clinic in Brisbane have empowered dozens of stroke survivors to rediscover their passion for writing, driving, fishing and even playing musical instruments.

Self-described CIMT veteran Josh Goicoechea has completed three boot camps under the guidance of professionally supervised occupational therapy students since experiencing a stroke two years ago.

Writing had initially been a challenge, but he can now play the piano and cuddle his infant child.

“The students are so quick at thinking on their feet in terms of problem solving,” the 35-year-old said.

“If they come across something they’re not sure about they consult some one quickly or they’ll have a solution themselves.

“That shows they’re state of the art.”

In the latest Australian national stroke audit 72 per cent of stroke survivors experienced upper limb impairment. For many of these stroke survivors their impairment will linger for months and years after the initial event.

In the National Stroke Guidelines CIMT is the only strong recommendation to facilitate upper limb recovery. Sadly, only 11 per cent of stroke survivors with upper limb deficits receive constraint induced movement therapy in Australia.

Boot camps are two weeks of intensive upper limb and hand function therapy using the evidence-based rehabilitation approach of CIMT. Participants complete four hours per day of task specific practice designed by their occupational therapy student therapist to

work towards their individual goals with the stroke-affected hand while wearing a mitt on their unaffected hand.

Some of the other daily life goals that stroke survivors work towards during their individually tailored CIMT program including doing up buttons, putting on shoes, typing and buttering bread without assistance.

“Here, you can visibly see change happen in front of you and it’s exciting,” said Kate Pomeroy, a third-year occupational therapy student.

“My second client can now use their left hand in a supportive role in tying a fishing knot. They couldn’t do it at the start and now they’re doing it with accuracy and speed.

“It’s amazing to see. Very cool.”

Josh’s only regret was not having commenced the CIMT program sooner.

“Three times is probably plenty, but I would have come more,” he said.

Around Australia there are now three ACU Allied Health Clinics operating 14 different programs. Some of these programs are multidisciplinary, which provides students with additional insights and experiences about working within an interdisciplinary health care environment.

Hi-res images and interviews with ACU Allied Health Clinic staff available on request.

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