

# SUPPORTING PATIENTS WITH CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

## Renee Fitisemanu (nee Bradfield)

TE ARAWA

I completed a three-year degree at AUT University which is based on the North Shore. Driving from South Auckland to the North Shore every day was a bit rough but when there is a will there is a way.

*“the reward of graduating helped me keep my eye on the prize”*

### An average student

I went to Onehunga High School before transferring to Mount Albert Grammar to complete my 7th form year. Back then I'd have classed myself as an average student. I tended to be slightly better at English than maths or sciences. Later I enrolled in art subjects such as photography, art history, art practical etc. I didn't pass NCEA level 1 or 3 but somehow, I managed to get enough credits through my art based classes to pass level 2.

### Family influence

When I left school, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I worked as a teacher aide with children with cerebral palsy. This led me to working closely with occupational therapists, and understanding the value of occupation and wellness.

My mother changed careers when I was growing up, and I saw the hard work she put into her studies and how challenging it was for her as a solo mother with three young children. When I talked to her about studying she was very encouraging, and supported my choice. My dad was supportive as well.



### Finding my pathway

Occupational therapy as a career pathway fits best with my personality. I love supporting patients with creative solutions so they're able to get back to their usual lives.

Initially it was hard to adjust to writing in an academic way, but all you need to be successful at university is commitment. I treated my degree like a job – I'd put in 40 hours a week - and although it was hard it was worth it.

The occupational therapy degree usually takes three years however I fell pregnant in my second year. I took a whole year off and returned when my daughter turned one to complete my studies.

### Hard work pays off

My family kept me going and helped me balance life. It's not easy being a Mum, wife, daughter and friend. Studying involves a lot of effort but the reward of graduating helped me keep my eye on the prize.

My family were so proud – it was a real 'aha' moment. I am the first of my brothers and sisters and my whānau on both sides, including my first cousins, aunts and uncles, to work in health.

### Love what you do

I work at Tiaho Mai – which is the Acute Mental Health Inpatient Unit in Counties Manukau. My core job is facilitating a group programme for the tangata whaiora in the unit and completing occupational therapy assessments. The assessments are to analyse what supports (if any) a person may need to return home after a period of unwellness. As I love my job, it's not considered hard work although there are hard days. I love being able to support people to access occupations and be able to achieve something they haven't been able to do previously.