

Inspiring Future Occupational Therapy Practitioners Through Community Outreach

11 February 2026

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Acknowledgment: Illinois OT Association Community Outreach Committee

No financial disclosures

Background

- Over 80% of occupational therapists in the United States (U.S.) identify as white and female.
- Improving workforce diversity to support equitable access is a WFOT priority, with research demonstrating **improved client outcomes** and access to care.
- Limited awareness, representation gaps, and **systemic barriers** constrain recruitment of diverse OT/OTA students.

State Association Responds: Community Outreach Committee



Formed in 2020 to directly address awareness gaps, representation, and access to the OT profession, with three targeted sub-committees:

- **Resources:** Develop and disseminate promotional materials that increase representation
- **Connections in the Community:** Partner with schools and organizations underrepresented within the profession
- **Mentoring:** Support and guide individuals interested in pursuing careers in OT/OTA

Resources Subcommittee:

Resources Website Created

- Contents include:
 - “What is OT” handouts to define occupations and the profession of OT
 - Local students’ videos of IL OT practitioners
 - “ABCs of OT”
 - NBCOT’s “Why Choose OT” campaign resources
 - Interactive station ideas

Resource Subcommittee: Examples



ABCs of OT
Example Infographics



Videos

Connections in the Community Subcommittee

- Identification of priority communities
 - High schools and youth groups
 - Places of worship and wellness center
 - Village halls
- E-mail outreach to listed contacts
- Request for occupational therapy information

- Volunteer pairing & support (events)
- Volunteers supported (resources + CEUs)

Responding to Connections in the Community

State Association Members' Volunteer Requests

- OT Volunteer geographic preferences and availability
- Career Fairs
- Summer Science Camps
- Township Wellness Health Fairs
- Veggie Fest, Farmer's Market and Ethnic Fairs
- Promote OT Challenge



Responding to Connections in the Community

Volunteers are supported with:

- [OT Activities](#) to complete at career fairs
- [Resources](#) compiled by the committee
- Meetings with committee representatives, if desired



After the event:

- Post-Event Feedback Survey, Record of Attendance & continuing education units



Image Credit: Canva

Connections in the Community: Outcomes



- Almost 40 Volunteers
- Promote OT Challenge alone has 64 volunteers, 8 visits completed reaching over 500 prospective students
- Totalling **thousands** of potential occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant students reached

ILOTA Mentorship Subcommittee: Pre-OT Mentorship Program

- Pairs prospective OT & OTA students with current OT practitioners & students
- Approximately 5 months
- Virtual workshop & individualized mentorship



PRE-OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

ILLINOIS OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION

MENTEES

- Get support along your journey to becoming an occupational therapy practitioner
- Open to prospective OT/OTA students
- Application:
<https://forms.gle/bk6ggnFXQANgoUEc6>



MENTORS

- Seeking current occupational therapy practitioners and current OT/OTA students
- Application:
<https://forms.gle/5EH8Wicr47E8MPaS7>



Application Deadline: February 22nd, 2026
Kick-Off Workshop: 1-4 PM on March 1st, 2026

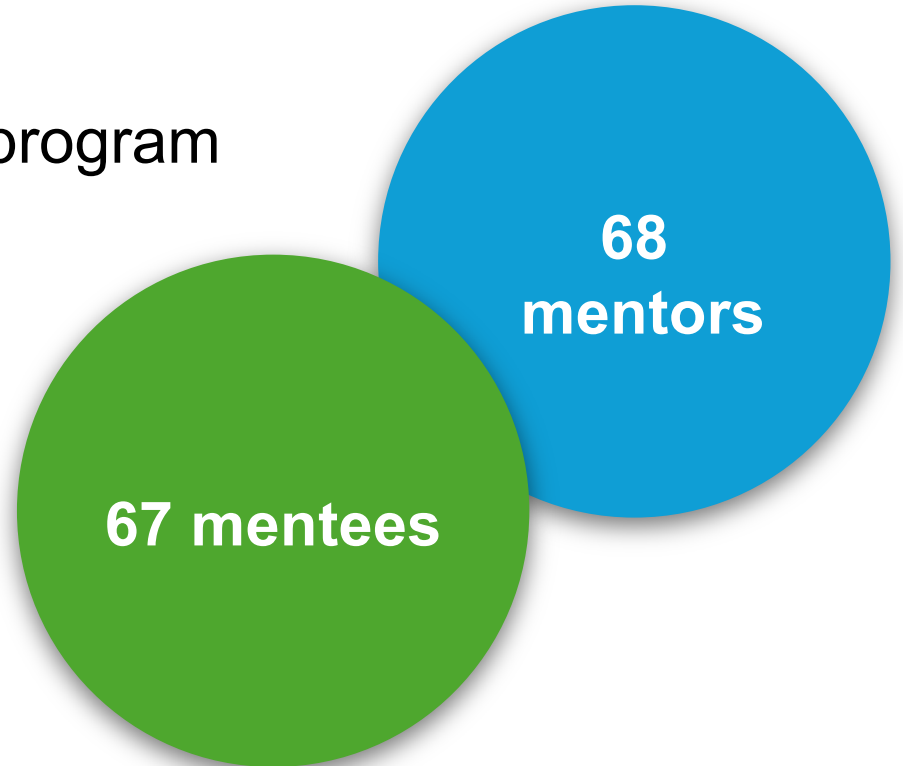
FOR MORE INFO

<https://ilota.org/pre-ot-mentorship-program>

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Pre-OT Mentorship Program

- Application
- Choosing a degree type & program
- Interviewing
- Shadowing
- Volunteering
- Gap year
- Resume
- Scholarships



Responding to the Need for Change

- OT continues to be an in-demand profession, but there are not enough practitioners to meet the need of our diverse communities
- Local organizations within the profession can help recruit a diverse OT workforce

**ILOTA Community Outreach
Committee Website**



**Presentation
References**



Thank You!