

A summary of an article from The Herald-Sun, July 17, 2006

## Teaching occupational therapy

By **ADAM PLAYFORD**

Two-year-old Jesecia Ramirez just couldn't bring herself to leave the library without stopping to play.

So she wound up sitting on the grass in the shade of the library's lawn, leaning over a small box of sand and playing with toy bugs.

Tamina Brown, 26, sat and played with her.

"It lets her experience different sensory tactics," Brown said -- teaching things like object identification and how to define by touch.

Brown is a student in Durham Technical Community College's Occupational Therapy Assistant program. With her classmates, she was sitting outside Durham County Library's Main Branch to teach people what occupational therapy's all about.

The students were showing what they'd learned to demonstrate what occupational therapy is, said Sue Cheng, the director of Durham Tech's program.

"If you simply say, 'Come over here and learn about occupational therapy,' it's difficult to attract much attention that way, because people who don't know what it is won't know whether they want to come over there or not," she said.

At one table, Stephen Farrell showed people how to find therapy a little cheaper.

A sock, filled with rice and a bit of lavender, makes a good heating or cooling pad -- just stick it in the microwave or freezer.

And a helium balloon filled with flower? Makes a good stress ball.

The point of it all, though, was to teach people about a profession that's riddled with misconceptions, the students said.

"When you ask most people what occupational therapy is, they think you're going to help them get a job," Farrell said.

It's actually more like physical therapy -- but much broader.

"It's a very broad profession," Cheng said. "The job opportunities are very broad. The connecting thread, or the common thing among all of them, is that we're helping people be able to do something that's important for them to be able to do better."

"It's an opportunity to increase the quality of people's lives," Brown said.

And the event went well, Cheng said. Two people even approached her during her time there to ask about admission to the program.

"There were a lot of people passing through there and getting information about occupational therapy and having fun," Cheng said.