

My O.T. Story
Plarn for a Cause
Jessi Statzer, OTS



Prologue:

I found out about this project on Level 1 fieldwork while visiting Warren Wilson College. The students at the college invited members with traumatic brain injury from Asheville's Hinds Feet Farm to their presentation. They spoke of the Greensboro, NC project called "Operation Bed Roll". The students started a group project to help the city recycle plastic bags and make plarn, which is used to crochet bed mats for the homeless population. I became passionate about the project. I wanted to implement occupational therapy (OT) into this process by starting a class for senior citizens in Johnson City to work in a group setting. The homeless population is an area of focus in OT and so is creating leisure activities for the geriatric community. With this project, I knew I could help our local homeless and bring senior citizens together for a social circle, creativity, and teach a functional new hobby.

Chapter One - Getting Started:

I started my expo project by contacting the Johnson City Senior Center to ask about schedule classes in their craft room. The activities coordinator was eager to help schedule dates on their public calendar. I scheduled days in March and April to hold classes with the interested members. I explained to her what I wanted to teach and make with the members, so she could advertise my classes in the monthly emails. She called to tell me a few days later that she received good feedback and interest in my project. I also took time in the beginning to learn this process myself to be a good teacher. My cousin, Jenny has crocheted since childhood. I sat with her before I held my first class to get started.



Chapter Two – Talking and Planning:

I had several women show up to my first class. All the women started to socialize and get to know each other right off the bat. I introduced myself and told them my story of being an OT student at Milligan College and what my project is about. I then show them videos and modeled the plarn making process step by step. Everyone participated for two hours, talking and making plarn. I was a great experience to hear the women's stories and witness everyone connecting with one another. I learned something about each individual the first day, rather it be why they moved here from California, their past careers, their hobbies, or their interests.



Chapter Three – Learning and Progress

During my second to fourth setting I made sure to schedule a day with my Grandmother and Great Aunts. I love spending time with these ladies and I knew they would love to learn. They started collecting bags since the first of March. My grandmother and great aunts are energetic and love to get together often, so I wanted to teach them a new hobby of making something with their hands. One of my aunts have arthritis, so I taught her how to use her hand to crochet whole bags with her hands instead of holding a crochet hook. All four ladies remembered the basic chain stitch from crocheting in their past and picked up quickly on crocheting the plarn. They said they would keep doing it on their own and tell people in their community of Bristol, VA and at their church. During my second and third class with the members of the Senior Center I learned that the teacher can be taught. One of the reoccurring

ladies came in on the third class to show me a crocheting method without the crochet needle, and cutting the bags into strips. She had taught herself how to braid with whole plastic bags from a video online. I thanked her for showing me and took notes to teach others. Progress was made during these classes by the women making several balls of plarn. Two new members showed up during these sessions, so I took time to show them step by step from the beginning to get them to the crocheting steps we were at. Every new member was eager to learn.



Chapter Four – The Project Coming to Life

At this point I have half of the bed roll made with the help of the women at the Senior Center. All of the members have started to make progress on their own and bring it to class to add to the project. They are excited about their new skill and the project being completed. During the last couple sessions, the members have improved their skill of planning and crocheting, getting quicker and being able to teach others. We made adaptations, such as wrapping the crochet needle with duct tape for an easier grip, using fingers instead of needles, and cutting wider strips for easier crocheting and a thicker bed roll. Two ladies from the first class have attended each class, two other members have come to every other one, and the new member has come back to the most current class. There is only a few feet to go until we have a 6-foot bed roll completed.



Chapter Five – The Story Continues (Keeping the Project Bed Roll Rolling):

Part of my project is to hopefully keep this project going when I graduate and go on to my fieldwork out of state. I am happy to say that the members attending my classes at the Senior Center speak of interest to keep the planning classes going at the Senior Center and/or their local church groups. They are all excited to spread the word on the green and caring project. I advocated It's benefits of getting plastic bags out of our environment, creating a social environment, and using your hands to make something functional for the homeless individuals.

Appendix A – Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Johnson City Senior Center and Its volunteer and program coordinator, Chyrl McLaughlin for hosting my classes. Thank you to the many women of the Johnson City Senior Center for participating in this project with excitement and dedication.

Appendix B – Contact Information

Jessica Statzer

jastatzer@my.milligan.edu

Please email with any question about this project and I would be happy to help you get started