

Certified Occupational Therapist Wins Prestigious NBCOT Innovation Award

Gaithersburg, MD: The National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy, Inc. (NBCOT®) announces Michele L. Alaniz, BCP, OTR/L, a certified occupational therapist from La Verne, CA, has won the 2024 NBCOT Innovation Award. This award recognizes certified occupational therapy (OT) practitioners who demonstrate the delivery of an evidence-based, effective, and innovative program or intervention that enhances the quality of life for a person or persons.

Michele received the NBCOT Innovation Award for establishing an innovative aquatic therapy program to improve water safety skills and address drowning prevention for children with autism from ages 3 to 7. She was nominated for the award by Lacy Wright, OTD, OTR/L, BCP. Michele's structured approach involves small group therapy sessions that are led by skilled occupational therapy practitioners and conducted in a swimming pool. The sessions focus on swim skills and water safety skills, including pool navigation, breath control, swimming independently, exiting the pool, back float, and changing positions while swimming. The program not only promotes greater independence and confidence among children with autism, but it also fosters social interaction, skilled development, and inclusion in recreational activities, substantially improving the children's overall quality of life. Results from this program indicate that significant improvements in water safety can be achieved within 8 to 16 hours of group aquatic therapy. The program design and results have been published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, enabling replication by other practitioners and broadening its impact. Michele's program has garnered praise from practitioners across the United States who have benefited from the training provided. Testimonials highlight the program's practicality and effectiveness, with many professionals noting significant improvements in their practices. Michele has also created free training videos for city recreation programs to educate pool staff on how to include children with various ability levels in pool activities. By addressing occupational injustices and providing evidence-based care, Michele's program sets a new standard in therapeutic interventions for children with autism and provides a replicable model for enhancing their quality of life and safety.

Michele earned her national OT certification in 2000. She is the director of the Children's Services Center at Casa Colina Hospital and Centers for Healthcare. She is also a faculty member for Summit Education, a continuing education provider, as well as a published researcher and professional speaker.

For more information about the NBCOT Innovation Award, visit www.nbcot.org/awards.

About NBCOT

The National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy, Inc. (NBCOT®) is a national not-for-profit organization that provides certification to over 220,000 occupational therapy professionals. NBCOT develops, administers, and continually reviews its certification process based on current and valid standards that provide reliable indicators of competence of occupational therapy practice. Above all else, our mission is to serve the public interest. Initial certification from NBCOT is a requirement for licensure in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico. We also work with state regulators and employers to provide information on credentials, professional conduct, and regulatory issues. NBCOT's certification programs have received and maintained accreditation from the International Accreditation Service (IAS) and the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA).

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