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## **LOCAL OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST WINS NATIONAL AWARD FOR “UNSUNG HEROES”**

An occupational therapist from Manchester has won the Stannah Stairlifts' Occupational Therapist of the Year Award for 2006, and received his award from Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal at a prestigious awards ceremony in London.

Mike Sharkey is a Senior Occupational Therapist in Alcoholism Treatment at the Brian Hore Unit in Withington Hospital, Manchester. He was nominated for the award by a former patient, and interviewed by a panel of judges including consumer investigator and children's rights campaigner, Esther Rantzen. Michael was crowned Stannah Stairlifts' Occupational Therapist of the Year 2006 by HRH The Princess Royal, Patron of the College of Occupational Therapists, at an awards ceremony yesterday evening (Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> April).

Mike was nominated for the award by a former patient, who completed a five-week course for alcoholism treatment last year. Before starting the course, she felt suicidal and unable to cope with the pressures of looking after her parents and her grandson, who is suffering from Leukaemia. Mike helped her by educating her about the effects of drinking and teaching her anxiety management techniques and communication skills. As a result, she feels in control of her life for the first time after 40 years problematic drinking, and is now training to become a counsellor.

Mike's patient commented:

“Mike's method doesn't use patronising language or magical thinking. Although constantly challenging, very few sessions were without laughter and with the support and dedication from Mike, I have now become abstinent. I feel in charge of my own life for the first time and sincerely wish for Mike to get the recognition he deserves for the selfless work he continues to do.”



Mike, who was delighted to be nominated for the award and overwhelmed to receive it, said:

"It was such a surprise to be nominated for this award. I'm delighted to have won it and meeting The Princess Royal was quite overwhelming. I am passionate about my job and nothing gives me greater pleasure than seeing someone regain the confidence and ability to lead an independent and fulfilling life. I'd recommend occupational therapy for anyone seeking a career which is fulfilling and varied."

Esther Rantzen said:

"The role of an occupational therapist is often underestimated and misunderstood, which is why awards like these are so important. It was wonderful to meet Mike Sharkey – a real unsung hero – and I hope that these awards will help to raise the profile of the profession as a whole."

As the Occupational Therapist of the Year, Mike has won **£1,000** in cash, plus **£200** for the nominator, **£2,500** for an installation of a Stannah stairlift in a venue of his choice, and tickets, travel and accommodation for two people to attend the College of Occupational Therapists' Annual Conference in Eastbourne in June 2005.

Occupational therapists are the unsung heroes of the health and social care profession who work with people of all ages with physical, mental and/or social problems, enabling people to achieve as much as they can for themselves so they get the most out of life.

Treatment can involve adapting living and working environments, developing coping strategies for the client and others affected by the client's disability, and discovering the most beneficial therapeutic activity in each case. The activities selected relate to the client's personal, social, cultural and economic needs and the environmental factors governing his or her lifestyle. Information on occupational therapy as a career is available on the College of Occupational Therapists' website: [www.cot.org.uk](http://www.cot.org.uk).



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**Editors' notes**

- **Judging Panel for the awards:** Esther Rantzen; Jon Stannah, Managing Director, Stannah Stairlifts; Julia Scott, Chief Executive Elect, College of Occupational Therapists; Samantha Shann, Council Member, College of Occupational Therapists; Hilary De Lyon, Chief Executive of the Royal College of GPs and Valery McConnell, Editor, Yours Magazine.
- **The College of Occupational Therapists**, the professional body for occupational therapists across the UK, has nearly 29,000 members, including students and support staff. Occupational therapists help people who are ill, disabled or feeling the effects of ageing to do the things that are important to them – such as preparing a meal, working, or undertaking a favourite hobby. There are over 26,000 qualified occupational therapists in the UK, working in hospitals, social care, schools, charities and a variety of other settings.
- **Stannah Stairlifts** is the world's leading stairlift manufacturer and has been making stairlifts since 1975. Stannah Stairlifts is a family run firm based in Andover, Hampshire. Stannah Stairlifts and The College of Occupational Therapists have a shared goal of helping those with physical, mental and/or social problems to lead as active and independent a life as possible. This award allows Stannah Stairlifts to highlight and thank those unsung heroes whose work enables countless people to enjoy a more independent and rewarding life.
- **Esther Rantzen** has personal experience of a stairlift having rented three Stannah Stairlifts over the course of 1996-2000 for her daughter who suffered from ME.
- **Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal** has been Patron of the College of Occupational Therapists since 1989.