

# FULLY IMMERSSED WITHIN THE OPTICAL INDUSTRY



## DISPENSER DETAILS

**Name:** Sarah Thompson  
**Position:** Practice manager and senior optical dispenser  
**Location:** Will Street Eyecare, Bendigo, VIC  
**Years in industry:** 14

### 1. What initially attracted you to a career in optical dispensing, and how did you enter the profession?

My interest started when I landed a gap year job working for the local ophthalmologists in town – and what an exposure that was. In just over 12 months I was exposed to a range of ocular health conditions and emergencies all requiring treatment and management. Being involved in minor procedures and observing in theatre was a real eye-opener. I then went off to university to study a Bachelor of Education majoring in Health and PE and a sub-major in Social Work, which I graduated from. In my first year at university I was asked to come and work for what was then a budget eyewear store, but now OPSM. Fast forward 14 years and I'm working in an independent practice as practice manager and senior optical dispenser.

### 2. What are your main career highlights?

My most recent career highlight is attending the ODA conference in Sydney along with my graduation ceremony and excellence awards. Not only did I officially graduate, but I was awarded the National Excellence Award for Role Model and Leadership. Other highlights include being able to follow a child's journey from initial presentation, frame selection to putting lenses in front of their eyes and seeing their reaction of taking in the world around them clearly for the first time, which is often their parents. That's special. I remember when I first edged blanks into a frame, that was certainly a good feeling too. Even just creating a positive experience for patients through individualising care is an awesome feeling. In hindsight, had I not taken my gap year working at the ophthalmologists, I wouldn't have continued in the industry or be in the position I am today.

### 3. What are your strengths as a dispenser and what excites you about your job?

A big part of being an optical dispenser that can be overlooked is understanding personalities and how that is going to impact a frame choice. I love allowing a patient to feel understood with

the frames I suggest in their selection process. Whether that be conservative or bold. Patients love my attention to detail and style advice. I am honest and patients actively show appreciation for this. I love throwing a curve ball in there to empower people to feel confident in expressing themselves, whether they take it, or it plants the seed for next time.

### 4. If you could go back and provide advice to yourself at the beginning of your career, what would you say?

Say yes to any opportunity. Whether it be a lab tour, attending conferences or workshops or even being involved in the frame buying process with reps if you're with an independent. The industry within optical dispensing is so broad. Most definitely though, advocate for yourself and complete the Cert IV in Optical Dispensing.

### 5. What do you see as the key opportunities and challenges facing the future of optical dispensing in Australia?

Optical dispensers within a practice are vital. Recognition of our role, and the knowledge and continued learning that is necessary to do our job well, is so important. Credibility for the work we do has traditionally been overlooked. With continued learning and compulsory CPD point structure to maintain qualification, it is a great opportunity for both industry recognition, and credibility for the roles we play. ODA has a fantastic educational program whereby subscribers obtain CPD points for each webinar they attend, which is a fantastic way to build

knowledge and skills that are current and relevant. This is a great step forward.

### 6. How do you ensure your skills and knowledge stay up to date in such a fast-moving industry?

I am a member of ODA which is a great starting point to access current recourses within the industry. I attend workshops run by ProVision and talk regularly with sales reps about frame trends, and with lens companies about design updates or new releases. I actively read *Insight* and ask questions around medical advancements, technology, or studies to build on my understanding. I network and collaborate with other optical dispensers and practice managers where we share ideas, knowledge and support one another.

### 7. Why did you become a member of Optical Dispensers Australia, and what value do you see in the organisation?

ODA has begun to pave the way for optical dispensers in recognition and credibility. I became a member once I completed my Cert IV to keep up to date with knowledge and gain access to some great resources and learning opportunities.

### 8. What would you say to others thinking of joining Optical Dispensers Australia?

It's a no brainer – you will gain access to a wealth of support, resources and opportunity to attend their next conference where you will have exposure to so many industry experts to learn from and network with. Go for it! ■



At Will Street Eyecare, Sarah Thompson likes the patient to feel understood with the frames she suggests.