

Case study



Occupational therapists in social care

Q&A: An OT's perspective at operational manager practice level

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About Jon

Jon is a service manager for a children's OT service. He graduated in 2012, initially worked in social care for several years and then did some private work before moving to his current local authority in 2017.

What are your experiences of career progression as an OT in social care?

My first post at this local authority was as a senior OT. It was quite a different role to what a senior OT would be in other authorities; we didn't hold a caseload but were part of a practice team, developing and supporting best practice, improving OT provision and supporting the operational teams. After six months, an opportunity came up to for a secondment into the principal OT post, which I did for two years. It was a good opportunity to do a bit more strategic thinking and a bit more strategic planning in terms of how we delivered the OT service.

The principal social worker and principal OT were on the same band, same pay scale, same influence, same opportunities, but there were hundreds of social workers and roughly 65 OTs. As such, part of the challenge and opportunity was ensuring that the OT voice was heard and what we have to offer professionally was championed.

In spring 2020, I briefly moved to the NHS to manage community services with a range of allied health professional teams, but soon felt that my skills, knowledge and values further aligned with social care OT practice. Fortunately, another post

came up in social care and I was able to move back as an OT manager in children's services. Since then, we've had a lot of development as a system and an internal review of services and I'm now a service manager. I manage nine OTs and have responsibility for wider service requirements, assistive technology, improvement projects and some commissioning. The organisation evaluated the role and what I was already doing; also recognising that they could give me a couple of additional responsibilities. They subsequently re-banded me at a higher grade to create this opportunity.

There is no other OT expertise in children services at a strategic leader or management level. Right now, our OT voice is very strongly heard and that I've had the opportunity to influence. My supervision and management with my line manager and the assistant director allows me to look at wide scale use of our OT service and I think that's such an amazing opportunity.

'I'm probably the happiest in my career that I've ever been, because of the opportunities that I have.'

What are the enablers to your career progression in social care?


One of the biggest enablers is the growth and demand in opportunities for OT in social care. In the past, OT was a niche role within social care with a narrow focus, whereas now there are real opportunities for broader use of our profession and skills across social care practice.

What are the barriers to your career progression in social care?

OTs are a smaller number within social care, and slightly underrepresented nationally compared to our health OT colleagues. At times we must speak up, shout a little bit louder about what we are, what we do, or what we want to be able to do, to influence and improve things.

Where do you see your career in five years' time?

I take opportunities to progress and I still have ambitions to continue with that, however I need to take the opportunity to enjoy my current role and develop within it as so much scope for development in this role. I've realised how important wellbeing and satisfaction from a role is, and that's what I have right now.



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