

# Case study



# A portfolio career

Lisa Westhorpe

# A portfolio career

Lisa Westhorpe



Lisa Westhorpe

## About Lisa

It was while studying for a degree in Human Genetics that Lisa realised, she didn't want to pursue a career in science. Her work as a domiciliary care provider and as a rehabilitation assistant confirmed that she wanted to work with people, but it was an open day at Queens Medical Centre in Nottingham that finally convinced Lisa that occupational therapy was the career for her.

In the ten years since qualifying, Lisa has accomplished a great deal in her life and career. She is now a mother of two and has a portfolio career that includes three jobs. She is the founder and owner of Nurture Occupational Therapy, a community OT lead and works as an OT and project facilitator as part of the national team at Sports for Confidence CIC.

“With multiple jobs you have to boundary your time, but not your knowledge. Applying your knowledge across boundaries is a real asset”.

## Career challenges and opportunities

Lisa's exposure to working in new and innovative settings started when she was a student. She had the opportunity to complete placements in a young offenders institution and a private clinic in the USA, providing services for children with a variety of diagnoses.

'I was very lucky to have a supervisor who was interested in role emerging placements. I was influenced by that, and the idea that you didn't have to work in areas of practice that already existed, has somewhat set the tone for a lot of the work that I've done since'.

The opportunity to work in the school system in the USA gave Lisa valuable insights into the impact of OT in early intervention and population health. But it was the birth of her daughters that helped Lisa to realise OTs have a valuable role to play in supporting new mums.

'I realised that there was a huge role for OTs supporting the transition to motherhood. I was using my OT skills to support myself, so I did a bit of research and asked other mums if they thought this support would be useful'.

Her growing interest in maternal health and the lack of job opportunities in this field, led Lisa to start a not-for-profit business in 2019. Nurture Occupational Therapy runs online groups for parents and professionals, to support new mums to feel connected and confident while caring for their baby.

Moving back to the UK and into the NHS after seven years in the USA was another leap of faith for Lisa.

Working three days a week as a community OT lead (job share) in Gloucestershire as part of an integrated community team gives Lisa the work life balance that she was looking for.

'I didn't know if I'd fit back into the NHS, having been away for so long. But the NHS is amazing; having worked in completely different areas of practise and in different countries that don't have something like that, it makes you value it even more. If you join an organisation like the NHS, you're going to get opportunities for development... there are so many opportunities and so many great colleagues to work with in the NHS'.

Lisa's most recent role came about at an RCOT conference when she was inspired by a plenary speaker, Lyndsay Barrett, Director and Lead OT for Sport for Confidence CIC. Being curious about Sport for Confidence's work, Lisa connected with Lyndsey, which led to an interview and job offer. Working one day a week developing an online education platform provides Lisa with new opportunities to share and learn, which fits in well with her family and other work commitments.

'I love working with Sport for Confidence because it is so innovative and very inspiring. It's very different from my other roles... The team are spread across the country...it's very interesting work, I feel I'm making a difference to the education of future OTs and I get exposed to a lot of resources which benefit my NHS role'.

### Key learning points:

A portfolio career has provided Lisa with the flexibility to follow and develop her passions, whilst giving her the work life balance she needs. Lisa shares some of her key learnings.

- **Be brave** – 'If you don't ask, or don't apply for that job, you won't get it. You won't have learnt any more about what you want to do, or what's a good fit for you. Think "what have I got to lose?", rather than "what will happen if I don't get it, what will people think?". If it feels good, then go for it!'
- **OTs can work anywhere** – 'If a job doesn't have the title "occupational therapist", but it still interests you, think about how you can use your

OT skills within that role and explain that on your application form and at interview. Non-healthcare organisations are starting to know the value of OT, more so than when I qualified. I applied for quite a few "non-OT" jobs when I came back from the USA'.

- **It's possible to combine different roles, and for that to be beneficial to everyone involved** – 'When I first started my Sport for Confidence role, I was worried that it would impact my NHS work. It has...but in a good way! I can bring the health promotion and education focus of my Sport for Confidence work into my NHS role knowing what's happening within the NHS and the current pressures on OTs and placement educators is incredibly valuable in my Sport for Confidence work. I've also been able to educate staff in both organisations about how OTs can work with new mums. It's win-win for the organisations, for patients and for my own development'.
- **Look after yourself** – 'Switching between different roles can take a lot of energy. I'm fortunate that I have a great support system (partner, family, paid childcare) and I must find ways to switch off from work. Admittedly, I'm not great at this (I love my jobs!), but spending time with my daughters and engaging in my own meaningful occupations such as netball really help'.

“I wish I could say that I planned to have a portfolio career, but it's the product of me needing and valuing flexibility, asking employers for what I need (as well as meeting their needs), and finding work that aligns with my own values”.