

OT in housing: pen portrait

About me

Name: Claire Wise

Current role: Director of Supported Housing (interim)

Organisation: Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing (MTVH)

Years in housing: Since 2007

Previous OT roles: Social Services OT (Housing Adaptations), Housing OT (Local Authority Housing)

My journey into housing

How I got here

I have a strong interest in accessible environments and the impact of a good quality home on independence and recovery. I completed an MSc in Accessibility and Inclusive Design to help develop my skills. My current role isn't an OT role but has been shaped by my OT experience.

I have worked as an OT in Health, Social Care and Housing, managed Homelessness service delivery and now shaping supported housing and older people's housing delivery.

What surprised me most about being a housing OT

An accessible and good quality environment can have an enormous impact on independence. As an OT, in a role that doesn't need an OT qualification, I can see the impact of the knowledge of inclusive design principles on housing delivery and service design.

What I actually do

My typical week includes:

- Reviewing the suitability of existing supported housing and designing a programme to improve the quality and supply of supported housing and older people's housing.
- Liaising with local authority Adult Social Care commissioners to design buildings and services to meet local needs.
- Overseeing the operational management of supported living and older people's housing services.
- Delivering the strategy for supported housing and older people's housing.

The most rewarding aspect: seeing the value of a solution focused approach.

The biggest challenge: Funding for supported housing delivery and development.

Skills and knowledge I've developed

Technical knowledge I've gained:

1. Inclusive design principles.
2. Allocation of accommodation of accessible housing criteria.
3. Writing and delivering strategic plans.

Skills that have been essential:

1. Critical thinking.
2. Knowledge of Housing and Social Care policy and regulation.
3. Outcome focused thinking. An ability to break down big changes into smaller, measurable tasks.

An unexpected competency I've developed:

An ability to recognise barriers, whether small barriers to independence through to systemic barriers to access services. This has helped in helping to shape service improvements at strategic level as well as service level.

My top tips for OTs considering housing

Three things I wish I'd Known:

1. To recognise that career pathways aren't restricted to OT roles.
2. Be curious. Our critical thinking skills are key in all roles. Our ability to ask questions, listen and shape solutions are so valuable.
3. Network outside of OT. Develop a network of peers and mentors that are outside of OT to broaden strategic thinking and future opportunities.

Essential learning / training:

Inclusive design applies to buildings and services.
Social and healthcare policy.

One piece of advice

Occupational Therapy skills are incredibly transferrable. I often hear of our critical thinking and problem solving skills as 'common sense'. It may feel like that to us but these are skills crafted through professional training and experience. Don't limit yourself to roles that have Occupational Therapy in the title.

Why housing OT matters

Occupational Therapists are uniquely placed to bring a goal-orientated approach to individual therapeutic interventions as well as cross department/organisational strategic planning. We are enablers by training, outcome focused and disciplined in record keeping and reflection. All of these are valuable qualities, whether you work with individuals and families or managing teams and services.