

OT in Housing: Pen Portrait

About me

Name:	Jennifer Jarrett
Current role:	Housing OT
Organisation:	Abri – a Registered Social Landlord (RSL)
Years in housing:	13 solely in housing Been involved in housing adaptations and rehousing in social care since 1987; In reverse chronological order: OT Lead/OT & SNS & BB Team Manager at Unitary Authority c.10yrs; Social Services Senior OT c. 12yrs; NHS hospital OT (3/7 adults & 2/7 paed's c.3 yrs); Community OT in rural Australia 2yrs; cumulative 18months locum Senior OT in various NHS & social care settings; Basic Grade OT rotation post 2.5 yrs in NHS hospital
Previous OT roles:	

My journey into housing

How I got here

I've always been interested in housing construction and design (I originally wanted to be an architect). Social care roles reinforced this as I would get so frustrated at limited housing options for people with disabilities. After voluntary redundancy from a Unitary Authority I was thrilled when I saw a specific housing OT role as I wanted to move from working in public sector. When I went for interview, everything the employer said they wanted ticked all the boxes and I felt I could really make a difference at the time.

What surprised me most about being a housing OT:

Recognition and appreciation of housing OT skills/knowledge and the benefit to the organisation. Salary being matched against surveyors not public sector pay scales.

Being thanked for efforts and achievements; proactive positivity of management who were really keen to help vulnerable customers in the best way. They encouraged creativity and exploration of ideas. Having autonomy to use skills and knowledge where most effective.

What I actually do

My typical week includes:

- 2 days a week – customer related activity This is mostly advisory. I have little direct in person customer contact. My responsibilities include: housing needs assessments and property matching; giving advice to colleagues when they are concerned about 'vulnerable' customers; feeding into new-build development regeneration projects; advising Planned Works teams when upgrading kitchens and bathrooms; interpreting recommendations received from Local Authority (LA) & NHS professionals; acting as go-between for finding suitable adapted decant properties; making Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) referrals for replacement major adaptations such as step-lifts, through-floor lifts (TFL's), specialist baths; supporting the resolution of complaints.

- 3 days a week – 60% project work (preparing for Regulator inspection due early Summer 2026) advising on internal protocols, minor adaptation minimum disability standards, improving website and publicising adaptation work.

Skills and knowledge I've developed

Technical knowledge I've gained:

1. Building construction including Precast Reinforced Concrete (PRC) that impact adaptation design and implementation feasibility.
2. Electrical zones in bathrooms, asbestos, building regulations, planning implications (flooding; fencing; room sizes etc)
3. Pre-requisites for specialist baths/TFL installations

Skills that have been essential:

1. People skills/Repertoire of communication and professional assessment skills
2. Verbal and written reporting
3. Ability to read, understand and use architectural drawings. Use of IT to access information, resources and best practice.
4. Negotiating skills

An unexpected competency I've developed:

Nothing is particularly unexpected – I think I just constantly learn and hopefully do everything better as each year passes. I never stop learning - passively as well as actively.

My top tips for OTs considering housing

Three things I wish I'd known:

1. How quickly everything can change in the private sector compared to public - literally overnight without any lead time for planning and implementation or consultation in some situations. And there is negligible support/protection.
2. Better understanding of differing responsibilities of housing authorities and social housing providers.
3. That supportive organisations like Foundations exist to assist housing practice. I spent a lot of time consulting and creating resources when I could have just gone to them for advice.

Essential learning/training:

Keeping up with current legislation as I often need to quote key sections to influence decision-making and remind colleagues of their/our responsibilities.

Ensure that you have a network of people to consult and derive support from – including other housing OTs who can share their knowledge, offer tips and disseminate learning opportunities, and also colleagues in internal and external teams.

Attend conferences and exhibitions to be aware of what is on the market, and speak to suppliers/manufacturers.

One piece of advice

Take the plunge but never work in isolation – it's amazing what useful information you find out from people, including lots that you wouldn't expect.

Why housing OT matters

Housing OTs are so important and valuable because, in my personal experience, literally no-one else in RSLs thinks in the same person-centred, creative way as we do.