

OT in housing: pen portrait

About me

Name: Jill Pritchard

Current role: Self-employed Housing Occupational Therapist

Organisation: Self employed

Years in housing: Involved in Housing for all of my 45 years qualified. Self-employed for 11.5 years.

Previous OT roles: Social care

My journey into housing

How I got here

In my first job in Dundee Social Work Dept I was immediately involved in attending the 'Wheelchair Housing Allocation Panel' to represent my 'clients' who were assessed as needing to be re-housed and this sparked my interest.

Several years later, working in Fife, I was seconded to Kingdom Housing Association to provide OT input to assessment, allocation, development, design and housing management.

Later I became a Housing Association Board Member and have continued that involvement to date. I think that a pivotal moment was finding that the value base of the housing association movement chimed very much with my person-centred outcome focus as an OT.

What surprised me most about being a housing OT:

The breadth of the role, the opportunities to make a difference, and the impact we can make as OTs across the whole gamut of housing functions continues to surprise me and continues to expand!

What I actually do

My typical week includes:

I do not really have a typical week due to being self employed and having had and continuing to have so many varied opportunities in terms of pieces of work – some examples:

- Developing a 'Building Design' course for OTs, Architects, Housing and Technical colleagues and delivering that in several areas across Scotland.
- Working on 'Adapting for Change' adaptations improvement project within Scottish Government including delivering the 'Housing Solutions Change Programme' across Scotland.
- Doing interviews and focus groups with a range of stakeholders as part of several pieces of research including 'Making Adaptations Work for Older People', 'What Next for Adaptations'
- Inputting into design of new Extra Care Housing for a Housing Organisation.
- Working on a Wheelchair/special Housing Needs Assessment for a Health & Social Care Partnership.

The most rewarding aspect: Feeling that I am making a difference at individual and collective levels and hopefully helping to deliver more general systemic improvements for people experiencing housing challenges.

The biggest challenge: I think the biggest challenge for me working in an embedded way in the housing sector is in ensuring that accessibility and adaptability are maintained in the face of all the other pressures that our Housing colleagues face – net zero, fuel poverty, damp & mould, fire safety etc.

Skills and knowledge I've developed

Technical knowledge I've gained:

1. Building design
2. The development process
3. Housing Finance

Skills that have been essential:

1. Communication, communication, communication
2. Listening, brokering, influencing
3. Solution focused

An unexpected competency I've developed:

Being confident to try to influence colleagues/policy at Strategic/Gov levels

My top tips for OTs considering housing

Things I wish I'd known sooner:

1. I wish I had thought about starting my self-employment sooner
2. The advantages that come from joining a Housing Association Board.

Essential learning / training:

Building design
Keeping up to date with legislation and policy

One piece of advice

Moving into Housing was one of the best things I ever did: a great way of gaining confidence, understanding, knowledge and skills is to join the Board of a Housing Association.

Why housing OT matters

The best thing about working in Housing is the satisfaction you get from supporting and achieving positive outcomes for people. The difference you can make can be transformative for people when they have the optimum housing environment to enable them to just get on with their lives!