

OT in housing: pen portrait

About me

Name: Sadie Cooper

Current role: Principal Housing OT

Organisation: Caerphilly County Borough Council

Years in housing: 10

Previous OT roles: Community OT, Joint funded OT hospital discharge & Reablement OT

My journey into housing

How I got here

I have worked in Caerphilly Borough for over 30 years. In my last role as a Community OT we always had close links with housing and joint worked cases. When the opportunity for this full-time role in housing became available, I saw it as an opportunity to work in a different section of the council and saw it as a new learning challenge.

What surprised me most about being a housing OT:

Initially it was the lack of education within housing about what OT was, and our role in the housing process. As the only OT in the housing team there was a lot of work in educating and building communication with other areas/sections of housing.

It was also a big learning curve to understand housing and get to know the stock.

What I actually do

My typical week includes:

- Prioritising and assessing housing applications, dealing with housing queries from applicants and professionals.
- Visiting void properties and attending viewings with applicants.
- Team developments and staff managements tasks.
- Management meetings as part of the Private and accessible housing team and wider housing service.

The most rewarding aspect: Seeing the impact that the right home environment has on an individual and their family.

The biggest challenge: Keeping on top of everything. Housing is busy, busy, busy. Not one day is the same.

Skills and knowledge I've developed

Technical knowledge I've gained:

1. Reading whole site plans
2. Understanding the feasibility of works – so I can now be more creative with options
3. That level-access doesn't always mean level-access – check the detail!!

Skills that have been essential:

1. Effective Communication with every aspect of the housing service and other professionals and agencies
2. Promoting the service – presenting in various forums
3. Getting out there to know what you have, get to know the stock, the area. OTs know the people. If you understand the stock, you can advise what people need and where

An unexpected competency I've developed:

Collaboration – as a small team in a large service area it has been so important to provide an effective service. This has only been possible by joint working and developing relationships with staff across the board.

My top tips for OTs considering housing

Three things I wish I'd known:

1. Where I fit in the housing bigger picture – that strategic level is where you can influence, make an impact and make changes. Accessibility goes beyond the property.
2. That there are other housing OTs out there – reach out! When I first started, I felt isolated in the role.
3. That the devil is in the detail – get on site check things!

Essential learning/training:

Look at others – source good practice roles.

Management – opportunities to progress in housing are available.

One piece of advice

The housing OT plays a pivotal part in the housing process, and we are best placed to understand the person and the property. Being in the housing team with housing colleagues, and having access to all the information, is essential for the role to be successful and will put you at the heart of decision making.

Why housing OT matters

A home is a safe and accessible space where life can be meaningful. Being connected to the local and wider community is purposeful. For OTs to be part of that transformation for individuals in the housing process is powerful and rewarding.