



# Meet Penny

Occupational Therapist, West Sussex County Council

**Penny works as an occupational therapist with West Sussex County Council, supporting people who have just left hospital or are at risk of going into hospital. Before she became an occupational therapist she worked as a GP receptionist and for the ambulance service. Her interest in social care began when she was caring for a family member. She decided to become an occupational therapist and applied first to work as an occupational therapy assistant and then did a degree to get qualified.**

## What is an occupational therapist in social care?

Penny works as an occupational therapist (OT) in the Regaining Independence Service at West Sussex County Council.



The community based OTs work with a team of regaining independence assistants to deliver a rehab programme. This supports people who wish to remain living at home, have just left hospital, or who are at risk of going into hospital.

The Regaining Independence Service supports people towards independence in activities of everyday living for up to a six week period.

She enjoys working with individuals and their families; sometimes they can be in challenging situations and she enjoys supporting them to solve these and providing assurance.

Knowing that people feel supported and calmer is very rewarding

## How did she get here?

Penny previously worked as a receptionist in a GP surgery. Her husband had been made redundant and she was working as a freelance hairdresser so she took the role to improve the family finances. In this role she developed an interest in medicines and medical conditions and would often look up information for her own interest.

She left this role to work as a call taker with the ambulance service but found that the long hours were difficult to fit in with her children. She went back to work at the GP surgery where her interest in health conditions increased.

In her private life, Penny supported her mother after she had a stroke. Initially she went to live in a care home after hospital; a decision Penny didn't challenge as she didn't know there were any other options. However, an OT supported her to move back home, sparking Penny's interest in the role.

She researched how to become an OT but didn't have the qualifications to complete a degree. However, she successfully applied for a role as an OT assistant and after some time in this post, was encouraged by her manager to complete a qualification.

As she was sole carer for a friend, she did not think she had the ability or the time to complete a degree. However after her friend passed away, she was funded by her employer to complete the Open University Health and Social Care module (K101).

Getting a distinction in this qualification gave Penny the confidence to apply for a degree, for which she had to write an essay and be interviewed by her employer. Penny gained a first class degree and is now a qualified OT. Since qualifying she has already progressed up the pay scale and is now supervising students and staff.

## Where can it take her?

Penny would like to gain more experience in her role. She's particularly interested in developing her knowledge and skills in the area of moving and handling, and would consider taking a specialist lead role in this in the future.

## What would she say to others interested in a career in care?

Penny would recommend social care to anyone interested in working in the sector.

She's benefited from support from her employer, particularly to qualify as an OT, and continues to get support to develop her career further.

For anyone looking to progress, she recommends finding an employer committed to staff learning and development.



**I would definitely recommend a career in social care**

