

SERVICE COORDINATOR PROFILE: OLIVIA BENN, PACT OTAGO

What is your history with Pact?

I have been working at Pact for around six years and began my journey working part time at Pact's women's service, while I was studying for my Bachelor of Social Services degree in counselling.

I then moved to one of our supported accommodation services for a while before moving to another service in North Road. I spent over three years there, eventually became its service coordinator. I started my current role as the permi-flex service coordinator when North Road was turned into Pact's crisis respite service.

What were you doing before coming to Pact?

Before Pact entered my life I worked in the food industry, travelled, married, became a mother of four and finally an adult student.

What attracted you to the organisation?

I was attracted to the organisation because I wanted real-life experiences to enhance my learning, and I happened to know someone who worked here who thought I would enjoy the role. She was right!

What is the best thing you do at work?

I feel privileged every day to be part of the lives of the people we support. There is not a day that goes by that I do not laugh repeatedly, bounce around energetically, solve problems, learn new jokes and just generally have so much fun. I have been able to be present for so many joyous moments and quite a few firsts too. Swimming in the ocean at Brighton Beach and go-carting at Highlands Motorsport Park in Cromwell are a couple of outstanding memories that I share with clients.

What is the best thing about working for Pact?

It's difficult to pinpoint only one thing really. I do know that when I wake up in the morning, I am eager to get to work, and I enjoy arriving and being greeted with smiles and lit-up faces. This also lights up my face and lifts my spirits. I also really enjoy the colleagues I work with and feel like I have a great support network surrounding me that I can turn to if I am struggling with anything.

What have you learned since being with Pact?

Self-belief. I have learned that I am much more capable than I thought I was, and that I am actually quite a good person. This knowledge has come to me through feedback that I have received from colleagues and clients.

What are you most proud of in your role?

I feel really proud that I am making a difference in people's lives. Sometimes the differences are small, like teaching people a new recipe that they enjoy. Sometimes it's a bit more involved, like being able to listen and support someone through a traumatic experience or memory. Sometimes it is creating a fun experience that has never been achievable for someone before.

What would you say to someone thinking about joining us?

I actually do say this to people regularly: It's the most rewarding job ever, full of variety and fun. I love it! I have also encouraged my daughter to become a support worker, and she is loving it too.

