

**“To make it better to *live*, you know?”**



**The impact of hoarding behaviours and social networks on attitudes towards supported housing in older individuals**

**A North East of England study: 2021-22.**

As we get older, our housing needs change. Supported housing, such as sheltered accommodation, may be something we have to consider. Moving house is stressful at the best of times, and many of us will need to leave a home we have lived in for many years. The move from independent to supported housing can be especially difficult for older people with hoarding behaviours, who may find moving traumatic, and whose homes may be more cluttered than usual. And what of our social and personal networks, such as family and friends? Can their support help us through this difficult time?

## **Our study**

A team of researchers from the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at Northumbria University, together with colleagues from the housing team at Gateshead Council, worked together on a 12-month project funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust to explore older people's experiences of moving from independent to supported housing. We also had an advisory board made up of older people's organisations, social housing providers, and specialists in hoarding support. We set out to get a better understanding of the barriers faced by older people in thinking about the move to supported housing, and the added difficulties for people with hoarding behaviours.

We interviewed people aged 50 or more who were thinking about moving into supported housing, or who had moved within the last 6 months. 22 people from Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, and Northumberland took part. The youngest volunteer was aged 49, the oldest aged 81. Of our group of volunteers, 19 had moved and 3 were thinking about it. 4 of our volunteers described themselves as having hoarding behaviours. We also asked some baseline questions about social inclusion and managing daily living.

### **What did we ask volunteers to do?**

A researcher visited each volunteer in their home. We used the data collection tool Network Canvas (<https://www.networkcanvas.com/>), to ask each person about their social networks (e.g., relatives, friends, neighbours, professional or care support). We asked:

*"Before you moved, or if you have not yet moved, who would you typically see or have support from at least once a month?"*

### **What did people tell us?**

Social networks:

- 19 of our volunteers said they had regular contact with relatives
- 15 had regular contact with friends
- 7 had contact with neighbours
- 5 had contact with professional support (e.g., carers)

We asked what kind of support volunteers received. Most of the support came from relatives who provided emotional ( $n=17$ ), practical ( $n=16$ ) and information-based support ( $n=14$ ). 20 of the volunteers discussed the option of supported housing with their networks and said they found it helpful (including people *not* moved), and 16 said it had helped them to decide to move.

Of our 4 people with hoarding behaviours:

- All 4 had contact with relatives *not* living with them
- All 4 had contact with friends
- None saw or received support from neighbours
- 2 said they had regular support from professionals
- All 4 said that they found discussing the option of supported housing with others helpful, including 1 person yet to move. 2 said it helped them to decide to move

### What did we ask for next?

16 of our volunteers also took part in a follow-up one-to-one interview with a researcher. During the interview, we asked for their experiences or views of supported housing, and the possible impact of hoarding behaviours or social networks on their decisions about moving. We wrote up the interviews and used Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is a way of looking for repeated words or phrases (codes) in the interview text, which might help us to generate themes based on what our volunteers told us.

The interviews generated 102 codes and here’s what 11 themes emerged and what some of what our volunteers said:

### “The Move: before, during and after.”

Before	During	After
Theme: Our needs change as we age	Theme: Struggling with belongings	Theme: Supported Housing = A Bright Tomorrow

<p><i>"..the main reason we moved was because I couldn't manage the back stairs, and I was having trouble with me back, and I was having trouble with the bath..." (P:9)</i></p> <p><i>"I suppose the main reason (for considering supported housing) would be, somebody to come and find me if I've popped me clogs. A lot quicker in than in my own place" (P:16)</i></p>	<p><i>"Had to get rid of a lot of stuff – treasured stuff but that – you knew, you just had no room for....But that's the choice you make to downsize. But yeah, it makes a deal of having to leave some stuff, you know?" (P:8)</i></p>	<p><i>"I would say go for it. Don't....let other people's opinions put you off. Because it-it is wonderful. You know, if you want to make friends, like you've seen in the lounge, if I wanted to go down there, I'm not a one for that, I like my own space. And I like to be on my own. But, you know, if you like company, if you play bingo and whatever...it's there. You know, you don't have to go out and seek it. You-you're not alone. You don't have to be alone." (P:11)</i></p>
<p><b>Theme: Getting to Crisis Point</b></p> <p><i>"...the biggest advantage for me was living somewhere with where I had my own front and back door, and I was away from neighbours that were actually, basically, want...making me self-harm, And were actually....hurting my life." (P:1)</i></p>	<p><b>Theme: Reciprocal family ties</b></p> <p><i>"The main reason for me was, it was gonna bring me closer to the school for the bairn. For pick up....And plus, me daughter's just up the road." (P:5)</i></p>	<p><b>Theme: Supported Housing = A Bright Tomorrow</b></p> <p><i>"Make sure you go for...right supported housing that is for your needs. But also, depending on your age, on...your health condition, maybe just think about the future as well." (P:1)</i></p>
<p><b>Theme: Stigma attached to supported housing</b></p>	<p><b>Theme: Importance of professional support</b></p>	<p><b>Theme: Information I'd wished I'd had before and during moving:</b></p>

<p><i>“And I know there’s a huge stigma....really...still as er-you know: ‘where do you live?’ ‘Oh, in sheltered housing’ ‘Oh-you must be so old!” (P:11)</i></p>	<p><i>“The warden in here. She’s fantastic. Really good...she did help iz a lot and I think – the other thing about moving is all the claims and everything...for...housing and for different things like that and it seems – it takes a long time, when you’re waiting for pension credits and things like that to come through, and I worry, and she knew I worried.” (P:10)</i></p>	<p><i>“...ask whether...if they could, er, have a look at a flat which is currently occupied. To see what can be done.” (P:13)</i></p>
<p><b>Theme: Anticipating the stress of moving day!</b></p> <p><i>“Very stressful...but, saying that, I do have a lot of friends that would help, so...But I think moving’s stressful anyway, plus it’s leaving...it’s like leaving your old place behind, which I know is gonna be hard, ‘cos I lived there a long time, seventeen year.” (P:2)</i></p> <p><i>On moving: “I expected it to be a nightmare.” (P:9)</i></p>	<p><b>Theme: Continuing Community Links</b></p> <p><i>(of previous neighbours before moving): “Oh, I still see them, because the one lady I spoke to you about?...She’s my friend. We’re not friends anymore, we’re friends now....I see her once a week...we now sort of go around on a Wednesday for a cup of coffee, you know?” (P:12)</i></p>	<p><b>Theme: Impact of COVID-19 (throughout)</b></p> <p><i>“...we didn’t have people to come and help us in any way, really, it was something w’had to do on our own and it wasn’t er, it wasn’t like you could just phone somebody out and they would come out and see yer...But that was understandable, with....COVID. We understand that, but it meant that the move was made that little bit tougher, and maybe more so for somebody older than us, you know? Might have been worse.” (P:8)</i></p>

## **Volunteers with hoarding behaviours told us that what was important to them:**

### **Professional support:**

*"...if I hadn't had my housing officer....there were times when I would've cracked.....The other thing she said was, 'I will not come in here and take away any of your stuff. That has to be your decision.'" (P:1)*

### **Need for peer support:**

*"...I don't really know anybody else with a hoarding issue that's done it. You know, that's moved. So that-I think that would be really helpful, to know other people who have managed it successfully." (P:2)*

### **Support from family in managing the stress of moving:**

*(On getting rid of possessions): "The was the hardest.....(Volunteer's daughter) waited till I moved.....I left it all to them." (P:4)*

## **And what did professionals have to say?**

We asked professionals working with older people to complete an online survey:

- 9 professionals completed the survey. 8 out of 9 worked in public sector housing, and 1 person worked for a social enterprise supporting vulnerable people
- A further 5 professionals took part in an interview, 4 worked in local authority sheltered accommodation and 1 worked in environmental health.
- 11 of our professionals had experience of working with people with hoarding behaviours.

Our interviews with professionals generated 28 codes and the 4 themes emerged:

1. Taking a person-centred approach	2. Supporting older people with hoarding behaviours	3. Holistic approach to 'Home'	4. Still providing a service with an end goal in mind
-------------------------------------	---	--------------------------------	---

<p><i>"I think it's all about patience, and, you know, going at the person's pace. And seeing it from their point of view." (P:3)</i></p>	<p><i>"I think it would be very helpful to have some training....because we have things like dementia training and things similar to that, but I don't feel like hoarding is really talked about enough." (P:5)</i></p>	<p><i>"...when they walk into the building and see, get the vibe, see people sittin' having cups of tea...seeing the facilities, and seeing how they'll be able to manage... when they know the support that's in place, how safe they're gonna be, it's normally when they come to visit....you see that lightbulb moment and they say, 'Oh, I definitely...want to come in.'" (P:4)</i></p>	<p><i>"...it's usually making sure that the transition is the right one for the person in question, so...finding out, you know, is sheltered housing the right place for them." (P:4)</i></p>
---	---	---	---

### **Our study had its limits:**

- COVID-19: we couldn't do very many face-to-face visits until September 2021. Lots of organisations who would have liked to have helped us recruit volunteers were also busier than normal because of the pandemic
- This meant we had a smaller group of people to gather data and responses from than originally planned
- Lack of diversity: everyone we interviewed described themselves as White British / Irish, so there is a need to speak to people from a range of other ethnicities, identities, and backgrounds
- Moving into supported housing is already a stressful experience without talking to researchers about it!
- People with hoarding behaviours in our volunteer group were in recovery and ok to talk about it, but others may be at a different stage in their recovery journey, making hoarding difficult to talk about

### **What we learnt:**

- Supported networks are vital in helping older people, both with and without hoarding behaviours, decide about supported housing and whether to make the move
- Moving is a major stress event for everyone

- Professional support is vital during the moving process for many
- Every volunteer in our group who had moved said that it was well worth it “Do it!” was said time and time again during the interviews!
- Peer support would be helpful for people with hoarding behaviours in helping others to make the decision about supported housing
- The opportunity to visit a sheltered scheme and flat, and to meet others already living there, would have been very helpful to support many of our volunteers to decide – or it would have certainly made it easier!
- Professionals said they would like more Hoarding Awareness training opportunities
- Professionals also said that they would find it useful to visit someone in their home before they move into a scheme to assess the persons needs and help them to plan ahead

If you would like to view our research data visit: <https://osf.io/n2ze6/>

Many thanks to the additional members of our Project Advisory Board:



Mother Clutter UK



North Tyneside Council

And thanks to other organisations and people who also supported our project:

Caring Hands Charity, Gateshead Housing Team, Gateshead Environmental Health, Clean Slate Financial Wellbeing Services CIC, North Tyneside Living, Northumberland County Council, Search Newcastle

**And thanks to all the volunteers who took part in this study:  
we couldn't have done it without you!**

For more information about this research project contact Prof Nick Neave, Project Lead,  
Dept of Psychology, Faculty of Health & Life Sciences, Northumbria University:

[nick.neave@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:nick.neave@northumbria.ac.uk)

Twitter: @HoardingResNE

Facebook: @HoardingResearchNE



