About DICE

00:00 [MUSIC]

00:14 [MARK]

DICE, a series of six podcasts about social inclusion, housing and the experiences of older people from socially diverse backgrounds. This is part six about what lies behind the research project and we meet the researchers themselves.

00:32 [SASHA]

See, I'm Jewish, but I'm not a practising Jew, but to me, being Jewish is more than a religion, it’s ethnicity as well and history. I'm very multifaceted and I like that.

00:48 [WARD]

If you look at the notice board downstairs, you'll find that under the statutory notices about inclusion diversity, you'll find one for the local LGBT+ group. And that was the manager leading with me on that particular area, but all schemes are not the same.

01:06 [MARK]

Hello. Those are the voices of some of the people who can be heard in the accompanying podcasts on this website about their experiences of social inclusion and diversity in housing schemes for older people.

01:18

They and many others have taken part in the University of Bristol’s housing study called DICE, which stands for diversity in care environments. My name's Mark Smalley and in this podcast, I've been finding out about the background to the study, why it was set up and what's going to be done with its findings. First, let's meet the study's lead researcher.

01:41 [PAUL]

So my name's Paul Willis. I'm an Associate Professor in social work and social gerontology in the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol and the School for Policy Studies.

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It also hosts the current research projects we've been working on called DICE, and this is fundamentally a three year project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council to look at the different forms of housing, with care and support currently provided for older people and how those different schemes support social inclusion of residents of different backgrounds within those schemes and within the communities that are integral to those schemes.

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We know that there is increasing range of different forms of housing for older people, and that's partly driven by the fact that we have an aging population. So there's a growing demand for different forms of housing. A lot of older people want to maintain their independence.

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They want to live locally in communities that they've lived in for a long time or near communities that are important to them. But they also want to live in communities where they feel recognized and valued and included, and a sense of connection to other people too and that can be really important in helping to alleviate social isolation as well, particularly for older people living alone.

03:01 [MARK]

As Paul says, there are an increasing number of housing schemes in the UK that offer care and support, such as extra care, sheltered housing and supported living. They enable older people to continue living independently by providing them with additional support if they need it.

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However, the Dice Project was set up to shed more light on how these living environments support older residents from social minority backgrounds and to find out what's being done to ensure that all residents feel equally valued and included.

03:37 [PAUL]

Within our department a very few of us, as researchers who have a longstanding interest in housing schemes for older people and how different forms of housing schemes provide care and support in later life. And that includes enhancing people's social wellbeing as well as their physical and mental wellbeing.

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A few of us got together to develop this project about four years ago with this shared interest, and when we looked at what research is available, we could see that there wasn't a lot of research, not a lot out there about social inclusion practices within these new, different forms of housing.

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So we wanted to get a better understanding of what it's like to belong to a minority group to maybe experience marginalization as an older person in earlier life and what it was like to integrate and transition into these particular housing schemes and what made people feel included and valued within those communities.

04:37

But what also might make people feel marginalized or excluded and so get a better understanding of the social and interpersonal dynamics operating within those schemes between residents, between older people from different backgrounds and also between residents and staff.

04:54 [MARK]

Besides helping organize and conduct interviews with residents of housing schemes in different parts of England and Wales, Dr Jillian Powell has also interviewed staff, managers and others in the housing sector to hear their experiences and insights.

05:11 [JILL]

So we did stakeholder interviews with commissioners, housing providers etc and talking to some of the stakeholders. I think inclusion, you don't see in a lot of different ethnicity in the housing schemes we've actually worked in, even though some of them are in areas, surrounding areas, the population is quite ethnically diverse and I think it's a concern that there's an assumption that perhaps families will provide care in, especially the Asian communities, and coming out of the stakeholder interviews was that's not so much the case anymore.

05:48

So I think it's being mindful and ensuring that people from say the more ethnically diverse communities know that these are places for them too. So I think it's being mindful about perhaps ensuring advertising websites reflect that. So reflect a diverse population and especially, as I said, ethnically.

06:09 [MARK]

And is that something that DICE will be doing, you know, reaching out to the management of the national and regional homes that you've been collaborating with, but more broadly in order to really encourage that fine tuning?

06:24 [JILL]

Well, I think it'll be in our recommendations, obviously. And I think it needs, people need to know because I know speaking to some people with a different, diverse sexuality as well. Some people are perhaps uncomfortable telling other residents, you know, so they tend to sort of hide their sexuality.

06:42

And I think people need to know these places, they can just be themselves. They don't have to sort of hide as they get older, suddenly sort of hide who they are.

06:51 [PAUL]

I think we have to keep in mind that these schemes are micro versions of a regular neighbourhood and in many sense, you want that kind of regular sense of neighbourhood and the reality is that some people are not going to always going to get along well with their neighbours while they may build strong connections with other neighbours.

07:09

But the additional factor here with these schemes is that there's also that responsibility to make sure that all the residents feel safe and that they feel that this is protective and supportive environment.

07:24

So I think it's a real tension for scheme managers and housing providers more generally to balance that between resident autonomy, like you would have living in any general neighbourhood and the choices people make about how much or how little they connect with their neighbours, versus those responsibilities around providing a safe, secure, caring environment that people want to grow old.

07:49 [MARK]

Paul and Jill's colleague, Dr. Alex Vickery, explains how they set the project up.

07:55 [ALEX]

There’s two different parts of the study so the first part I worked quite closely with a colleague at ILC, he led on that part, which was we sent out questionnaires to a large number of residents across the three housing providers that we were working with.

08:07

Selected sample of housing schemes. Dr. Brian Beach at ILC UK. He analyzed that data and I worked with him on that. And then the second part of the study was a qualitative study where we did interviews with a number of residents.

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So these included longitudinal interviews, which my colleague, Dr. Jill Powell led on and longitudinal interviews with a number of residents, where we met residents three times over a period of four months in between.

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We managed to recruit these participants through the questionnaires that we originally sent out with a section at the back asking if they'd be interested in taking part in our research and we also got in contact with some of the associations as part of those housing providers like LGBT groups and those kind of associations, and we got participants contacting us saying they'd like to be involved.

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And then the cross-sectional study, which was one off interviews with a selected number of schemes from the three housing providers, and we interviewed residents from those schemes, those who volunteered to take part.

09:08 [MARK]

But with the study up and running and the first rounds of interviews having been carried out face to face with participants, well, we all know what happened in March 2020. COVID struck, which meant things had to be done a bit differently.

09:23 [JILL]

Recruitment did get a little bit more difficult, and we were much more reliant then on estate managers and general managers at housing schemes to help us recruit. So we had that kind of, we didn't have that direct contact so much with potential participants.

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So then we did most of our interviews, then by telephone or over Zoom or Microsoft Teams or something. I think it went well. You know, I think we adapted well and I think residents adapted very well and I think in the circumstances, you know, we managed to sort of develop relationships with residents and continue doing the interviews.

09:58 [MARK]

Do you think your findings are going to be different as a result of the experience of the pandemic than to where the project set out in 2019?

10:08 [JILL]

I don’t know whether so much different, but I think it's going to highlight certainly going to highlight isolation, how people have coped and I think especially when you've got people, perhaps with disabilities who are quite marginalized in the first place. I think they became further marginalized. I think staff then became very integral in how they made sure that people didn't get isolated.

10:31 [MARK]

And besides resulting in a range of academic papers, Paul Willis confirms the study is intended to make a difference to housing policy and to benefit all older residents in their homes.

10:43 [PAUL]

It is an applied study in the sense that we want the findings that come out of the research to directly inform the provision of housing and to make a difference in terms of making residents from different and minority backgrounds feel included and valued within their schemes.

11:03 [MARK]

The DICE team have been working with Housing LIN. That's the housing, learning and improvement network to make sure the findings and outputs from the study speak directly to housing providers and staff and reach these key groups.

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If you have enjoyed listening about how and why the DICE research project was set up, do have a listen to the other accompanying podcasts on this website, which feature five remarkable residents reflecting on their experiences of the housing schemes they live in and the difference they make to every aspect of their lives. Thanks for listening.

11:47 [END]

12:06 [MUSIC END]