



The right move?: it's difficult making housing decisions in later life

Written by Barbara Davies, founder of The National Care Line

I read the latest All Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Care for Older People inquiry report, 'Housing our Ageing Population: Positive Ideas'¹ and wanted to share my thoughts as someone in her 60s

I am 64 years of age, a homeowner and disabled, and realise that the whole issue of my housing choices in older age is galloping towards me. I also run the 55+ and Retirement Roadshows to keep The National Careline open and have worked in the advisory sector for over 25 years.

One thing that disturbs me greatly is: why there is a lack of housing in general - not only for the elderly, but for the young too? In the village where I grew up, very few of the young people can afford to live there when they grow up and have to find accommodation to rent or buy in the nearest town to live and work. Ours was a rural setting and, with the downturn in agriculture, people were forced to reskill and look to other industries for work. However, they still wanted to live near their parents and their children go to the village school. This didn't happen and the shop died, the village school survived because it took children from other villages that had closed their own schools and only one pub is still surviving.

There is still some housing provision for older people locally in the form of sheltered housing but not nearly enough. If there was more and a better choice, older folk could move out of the bigger homes, thus releasing more homes for younger families to meet the problems mentioned.

The HAPPI 3 report rightly explains the 'vacancy chain' a move creates. This is well known but it doesn't happen because people in later life leave it too late before they move. They insist in staying in homes that are no longer fit for them. In fact, in my view, a great many people endanger their lives by continuing to live in substandard housing simply because they are afraid or, more truthfully, cannot cope with a move. They are afraid of the unknown, of leaving their friends and neighbours - the people with whom they have shared memories - making the thought of moving something they would rather not think about. This is where I feel we need to focus our attention. We need to ensure the housing proposition for older people is far more attractive. I suggest the following:

Drawing on the new APPG inquiry report, the first is building more multi-generational homes, ones where children, parents and grandparents can live. The children in this country miss out on so much because their grandparents are not nearby. The children help to keep the grandparents young as the cover of HAPPI 3 illustrates!

¹ www.housinglin.org.uk/HAPPI3

They help them with techy stuff and they are very involved in their grandparents lives and their well-being. These grandparents are not lonely because they have their families around them. They are also someone for grandchildren to talk to, to listen to them and to share experiences with. This can and does, have a very positive on their own mental health. Care can come in as needed through the District Nurses etc., but they may never need to move anywhere else.

The second route is the local one. We tend to put old people into 'care' homes. The homes are good but not where they should be as they are not part of the community. Every village should have some safe provision for older people and this should be an ongoing thing. The existing stock tends not to be central to the village, like next door to the village hall; these homes are often up at the end of the village and, if the shop has closed, they end up seeing no-one. Let alone work out how they are going to get food. We need to plan our communities better with older people in mind. For example, accommodation for the older people should be outward looking; adjacent to the village hall, school so that they can see the young children - possibly their grandchildren can pop in after school and have a snack with Nan and Grandad until Mum comes home - in any case, where they can see life.

I think the key to all of this is to present a community offering based on what they see as being an acceptable future. If you can get the vision right, then mechanics like moving can be done with caring 'help to move' workforce teams that work with the individual to help them sort and pack and settle them in their new home. I think the key is to find out how they feel they want their future to be and where, understand the hoops that they may need to go through, identify what choices exist locally and then work out how best to match it.

I do hope this helps as I may need to be an elderly resident one day

For more about the National Careline, go to: www.thenationalcareline.org

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