JANE’S PODCAST

00:00 [MUSIC]

00:13 [MARK]

Dice, a series of six podcasts about social inclusion, housing and the experiences of older people from socially diverse backgrounds. This is part two, Jane's story. A woman who identifies as trans.

00:31 [JANE]

Hi, my name is Jane, and I live in a housing association outside of London. I've been here for about eleven years. It's OK. It's a nice place to live. Its single units are one up, one down. There's laundry facilities, parking facilities. It's OK. It's a nice place to live.

00:51 [JILL]

Hi, Jane is a white woman who, as she says, lives on a small estate in the home counties just outside the M25. This story is one of five insights into the lives of older people, as seen through the lens of the housing experiences. They're all available as podcasts on this website.

01:10

Jane and the other contributors have taken part in DICE, the University of Bristol study, which stands for diversity in care environments.

01:21

My name's Dr Gillian Powell, the Senior Research Associate on the project, and with my colleagues, we've been looking at ways in which social inclusion and diversity in housing for older people can be improved. Hearing what works well and what needs more attention.

01:40

Raised in Canada, Jane came to live in the UK in her thirties. The move to her housing scheme’s estate eleven years ago followed her gender transition from male to female when she was in her mid-fifties.

01:53

Besides the medical procedure at the time, she was also dealing with the breakup of a long term relationship. A pressing concern for Jane was the need to find a suitable new home where she could live with Gizmo, her beloved pet dog.

02:11 [JANE]

OK. When I was starting out my, my journey and I was just starting to transition and I lived in another part. When I separated from my ex partner, we had a dog and she was going to get rid of the dog, and I couldn't do that. So I was sorry. That was hard. Yeah. So I couldn't have a dog.

02:37

I couldn't have my pet where I lived and because my ex was going to get rid of the dog or, you know, have him rehoused, and I couldn't do that. So a friend of mine at work had said, you know, if you ever thought about looking into these housing associations that are for older people above 55 that you can apply for?

02:54

And I said, Oh, OK, I didn't know anything about that, but they encouraged you here to have pets. So for me, that was a win-win situation. So I went online and got the applications and I then got lucky and got to view a few places, and I came here and this place was available.

03:15

So I took the flat. I got moved in and my dog came here and that was it. Yeah, been in the same flat now for for eleven years here.

03:28 [JILL]

Having had Gizmo to live with has clearly made a big difference to Jane's quality of life.

I've spoken to her in depth before, during and after lockdown, and it's clear to me that her experiences point more broadly to a host of issues that housing staff often need to bear in mind, like how the need to be able to feel safe and secure in one's home environment is important to everyone, as is getting the right balance between privacy and socializing.

03:57

Jane's home is a one bedroom, ground floor retirement apartment with communal outdoor garden spaces, part of a modern development built as a series of cul de sacs. She was attracted by its affordability and the fact that pets are actively encouraged. She likes to keep herself to herself and explains why she had mixed feelings about the communal outdoor spaces.

04:21 [JANE]

It's OK, but everybody uses the same area, so you figure now the summertime’s here you get loads of family, people that are outside, some barbecue and some of them get together and all sit outside together and I'm not generally like that.

04:37

I'm pretty well much myself to myself, and I get on with my own things. But I do go outside and I do sit outside and the benches that are provided around the car parking area or out the back and sometimes when you do sit and talk to people.

04:51

But I don't go out and sit with them when they're having barbecues or drinks in the evening or something like that, I don't generally do that. But yes, you do have that option here.

05:03

There is only like flats are like one above and one below, so it's not like an apartment building. You do have a bit more room to move. So if you don't want to sit indoors, you can go outside in a winter or a summer, so it does have its benefits, yeah.

05:21 [JILL]

Jane retired three years ago. So what was the transition like, I wanted to know, because her working career had been of such importance to her.

05:26 [JANE]

I didn't retire because I wanted to. I retired because I had to, because of the osteoarthritis. I had trouble with my back. If my back went on me, I'd find myself in bed for a week and then I'd be - rehabilitation would take a month to get back on my feet.

05:41

I lived alone, you know, so it was hard, really. I would, I wanted to work till I was 70 and then retire after that. But my body told me that it's I'm sorry, 67 as far as you're going to go.

05:54

So retiring, well, I had Gizmo, the dog. Retiring for me wasn't too bad, I had cameras and all kinds of fancy lenses and stuff, so I take the dog to different places and he'd walk and I'd get there earlier and early hours of the morning.

06:12

So to get the best shots, and I could take him off the leash because there was nobody else around for him to eat and he chased the deer and the rabbits and everything else and I could just get on with with my camera stuff.

06:23

So Gizmo and I went everywhere, but after Gizmo passed away, everything changed. Then it became hard because it felt like I have nowhere to go, you know, I didn't want to go anywhere because everything, everywhere I went, it was I didn't have Gizmo.

06:40

I did have the opportunity to get another dog, but because of my arthritis, and that's basically what happened to him, his back legs went, so I wanted to get another dog, but I couldn't, because it wouldn't be fair if I got really sick of being on my own, I couldn't, I couldn't help the dogs, so I decided not to.

07:01

Then it just happened that I had two neighbors moved in with two Shih Tzus, and we kind of pet share. So I babysit for them when they go out. Some days get hard because where do you go?

07:14

What do you do? You know what I mean? I mean, there's nothing to do but go for a walk in the park or I used to go to Canada because I used to go back and visit my parents.But I can't do that now because because of COVID, so I'm kind of grounded at the moment.

07:29 [JILL]

That's now since COVID, but during the period of her medical transition, Jane was delighted at the level of support she received from her then employers.

07:39

She describes, for example, taking two weeks off work to complete her gender transition, returning to work as Jane. What was the whole process like, I wanted to know.

07:51 [JANE]

At first, I think it was a bit nerve-wracking, when I first was going to transition at work,

I'd already seen H.R. and everything else and all that kind of stuff and I went into my boss one day and I said to him, I've got to have a talk with you, we were in the office by ourselves.

08:08

And he said it wouldn't be something to do with a name change, would it? And I said, How did you guess that? He said, well, you've been coming in with nail varnish on like clear nail varnish and you're starting to grow your hair long, so, yeah, I kind of figured it.

08:20

He was probably my strongest pillar, he was the one that looked after me. I had loads of text messages, phone calls from guys that I worked with and said, You know, you're brave. Sorry, they said well done. You know, and all that. To me, it meant a lot.

08:48 [JILL]

It's probably fair to say that all of Jane's life experiences come into play at her housing scheme.

08:54 [JANE]

You don't have to go out and associate with people or, you know, outside. You don't have to do it if you don't want to, but sometimes I just have a walk outside and you know, if somebody is sitting on the bench in the summertime, I'll have a chat and there are some that sit out there and read, so I just avoid them.

09:10

But there is a couple of ladies here that I talked to that, you know, we would get along. We have a bit of a laugh in the conversation, but it's maybe an hour or something less than that, so, but there is that opportunity, but you have your own choice, the choice is yours.

09:25

You have choice here, so yeah, and there's no communal area such as some of the associations have meeting rooms, they have coffee rooms and places like that where people can go and sit and interact with it.

09:37

We don't have that here or we have to stay outside. So when the wintertime comes, you don't see anybody. In the summertime, pretty well, most people are out, so yeah.

09:47 [JILL]

So what was Jane's reception from other residents when she moved in as a trans woman?

09:52 [JANE]

First thing is, I don't, I don't see myself in any other way, but who I am as being female. So when I came here, I don't know how people perceive me. I just get on with life and I just talk to people in a normal way.

10:06

I didn't have any problem mixing with anybody. Nobody ever said anything to me or were condescending in any way or avoided me in any way. Everybody just accepted me as just another person and moved in and everybody said hello and if I had any queries or something, you could ask somebody and nobody's ever looked at me or said anything in any other way, so yeah.

10:31

My expectations in life was that, I made a life change, so my preferred gender’s being female, I look at things through my eyes now as being Jane so to me, the world around me, it's just as it was.

10:44

It hasn't changed, only I've changed in my role. So I just get on with life in a normal world. You know, I don't go outside and walk up to somebody to say hello and think I know what they're going to say and it doesn't cross my mind.

10:57 [JILL]

Jane is clear that she's not the one with the problem.

11:02 [JANE]

That's true, isn't it? Because I don't have the problem. I had a problem, I took care of that problem and when I finally was diagnosed as being gender dysphoria, and I knew where I was in life and what the problem was, not a problem, but you know, I knew why I had all these mixed emotions and feelings and things weren't right. So that's what I did.

11:26 [JILL]

And what has Jane's experience been of lockdown?

11:29 [JANE]

Well, I classified the lockdown as to be no different than being retired because I prefer my own company and a lot of times, so it didn't make any difference to me I just got up in the morning, you know, do a bit of cleaning and that and I've got my X-Box.

11:48

You get whatever comes on TV, like shows, movies and stuff like that you might want to watch, or especially when a sports are on, tennis or something like that that I can watch then or golf or something like that, then yeah. No, I didn't find it stressful at all. None whatsoever.

12:06 [JILL]

In terms of our findings on the DICE Research Project, Jane's experience flags up a range of issues that housing staff often need to bear in mind, such as recognizing that residents may have experienced a lot of losses in their lives before moving into the scheme.

12:23

Having a pet, and now pet sharing with neighbours has clearly made a big difference to Jane's quality of life. Jane’s story highlights the importance of housing environments that are inclusive of all individuals and enable living environments where residents feel safe to live their lives as their true, authentic selves.

12:46

Also highlighted is that respecting the independence of residents includes respecting privacy and the decision to live a quiet life, that there may be some people who choose not to engage with other residents and the social life of the scheme.

13:09

Alongside this podcast, you can listen to the experience of four other people in the context of their housing and a 6th one about how and why we've conducted the DICE research project. Thank you for listening.

13:23 [END]

13:32 [MUSIC END]