



Accessible Housing & Social Care Summit: A Community Peer Researcher Speech and Reflection

December 2024

In Partnership with



ACCESSIBLE HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE SUMMIT: A COMMUNITY PEER RESEARCHER SPEECH AND REFLECTION

In Discussion with Chris Baird

Introduction

On the 26th of September 2024, Horizon Housing (a partner in Link Group) and Scottish Housing News held the first ever Housing and Social Care Summit hosted at the V & A in Dundee. The goal was to bring together leaders, from areas such as local and national governance, disability rights advocacy, health and social care and inclusive home design, to address a chronic shortage of accessible housing in Scotland.

In this reflective piece, Chris Baird, disability activist and campaigner, and one of the key summit speakers shares his experiences of disability and his hopes for the future. Chris is also a Community Peer Researcher on the ISPA Project and a board member with Horizon Housing and the Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living.

Event Speakers & Sessions

The event included speeches by the Scottish Housing Minister, Paul McLennan, Dougie Herd, Joint Managing Director of Champion Homes, Katherine Crawford from Age Scotland, and Jeremy Porteus from The Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

There were three panel sessions focusing on:

- Partnership working between housing, social care, and health service providers.
- Financial implications of accessible design in healthcare.
- The societal benefits of inclusive design in construction.

Finally, the closing plenary discussion focussed on positive change. Throughout the event participants were able to share updates and thoughts via social media including X and LinkedIn using the hashtag **#HSCAS2024** and we are lucky to now have Chris to share his own role and experiences with us in the ISPA Blog.

Reflections by Chris Baird

What was your role in the summit?

I got involved with the Accessible Housing and Social Care Summit primarily because I think housing and the chronic shortage of accessible housing in Scotland is one of the key issues around disability. So, that's why I've chosen to get involved with housing associations.

Housing is a really major issue for disabled people. Lorna Cameron, the Chief Executive of Horizon Housing approached me and wanted me to introduce a video. This is about Horizon tenants who are now in accessible homes, and they share the positive difference housing has made to their lives.



Figure 1: Chris Baird

How did you prepare for the summit?

I was able to call on the experience that I've gathered over the years as a member of the Purple Poncho Players (a theatrical wing of Glasgow Disability Alliance). We use drama sketches, music and poetry to get across key messages around disability. The advantage of using this approach is to disarm your audience. I'm sure you've all been there when you listen to a presentation and it's death by PowerPoint, whereas when you use drama, music and poetry, you get your message across.



Figure 2: Glasgow Disability Alliance's Purple Poncho Players

In preparation for my speech, I was supported by Valerie from 'Second City', Horizon's public relations company. We had a discussion, and she seemed quite happy with what I was going to talk about. I really appreciated the professional support while preparing for the summit which allowed me to make a more powerful piece. I memorised my speech which was about 300 words off-by-heart because I feel when you read from notes, it doesn't come across as well.

What was your speech hoping to achieve?

You want to get out your message and you want to do it well. I aimed to get out the key messages around accessible housing, especially for this audience - made-up of movers and shakers, and policy and decision makers. I think that the summit was trying to highlight different perspectives, such as those impacted by accessible housing or the lack of it I and hope that you feel I got my message across in my speech below.

Chris's Summit Speech

My name is Chris Baird, and I want to share inspiring stories of individuals whose lives have been transformed by living in accessible social housing. I have the pleasure today to introduce to you a short film, Accessible Housing Changes Lives, so without any further ado I would ask you to sit back and enjoy the film:



Figure 3: Horizon Accessible Housing Short v1

I'm sure you will all agree that this is a powerful film that demonstrates, as the title says, that 'Accessible Housing Changes Lives'. It shows the truly transformative impact having an accessible home has made to the participants and their families' lives. One of the key messages from the film is what can be achieved when inclusive design and thinking are at the forefront from the start. Accessible housing is a cornerstone of inclusive living. Having

an accessible home that fully meets your needs is fundamental for disabled people to participate and contribute to society as full and equal citizens.

Without accessible housing, it becomes so much harder - almost impossible to:

- access work, education, social and recreational opportunities.
- It is harder to lead an ordinary life and to do the everyday things that non-disabled people take for granted.
- Harder to have a dignified life, not just an existence.

The fact that thousands of people today are stuck living in unsuitable and inaccessible houses is a badge of shame for 21st Century Scotland. We need a collaborative and co-ordinated approach in contrast to the current fragmented and disjointed situation. Disabled people and disabled people-led organisations must have a seat at the table. We need to work together with all of you, utilising our collective strengths and skills to bring about the positive change that is desperately needed.

In May this year the Scottish government declared a national housing emergency - for disabled people there has always been a housing emergency, as well as a social care catastrophe. The dictionary definition of an emergency is 'a serious and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action.' Today, we all need to ask ourselves two questions:

- What immediate action can we bring about?
- How can me and my organisation be part of meaningful lasting change?

We have an opportunity to be bold – let's make the most of it!

What was your own experience of the summit?

My actual experience of talking at the conference was positive, with lots of good feedback. I was supported throughout the whole experience to ensure my participation and accessibility, starting with the staff from Horizon Housing. They made sure that the hotel I was staying in, fully met my needs. A month or two before the event, we went and checked out the hotel and venue to make sure not just my accessibility needs, but those of everyone who was attending the event were met.

On the actual day, there was a ramp onto the stage so that I could easily introduce the video and do my speech. I ran through my speech before the event started, so that was really helpful.

Toilet access is really important for me, and I was able to access a *changing places toilet*. At home I need track hoisting to be transferred onto the toilet and knowing that the place you are visiting has facilities, it gives you the confidence to go out there and not be worrying about that stuff at the back of your head. Feeling supported meant that you can concentrate on what you're there to do, and you're not worrying about accessibility issues.

What are your reflections of the event?

When I think back and reflect on the event, there's a couple of things that stick out. I was really disappointed that the Scottish Government Housing Minister who was supposed to be the main person opening the summit, was unable to attend and sent a 9-minute video which got played at the beginning. I thought it was really noticeable at the end of the 9 minutes video that no-one clapped. For me, it highlights how seriously the Scottish Government takes accessible housing. I don't think they take accessible housing anywhere near as serious as it needs to be and it's not a big enough priority on their agenda.

According to Audit Scotland's report on Affordable Homes, the Scottish Government built 35,000 new social rented homes between 2016 - 2021. The Chartered Institute of Housing advises that in 2019 only 1.07% of homes built met accessibility standards. We really missed a golden opportunity to impose a 10% quota for accessible housing which would have gone some way to dealing with a chronic shortage of accessible housing in Scotland.

We all know that the demographic time bomb where we're getting an ageing population, so the demand for accessible housing is just going to grow and grow, whereas the supply is diminishing all the time.

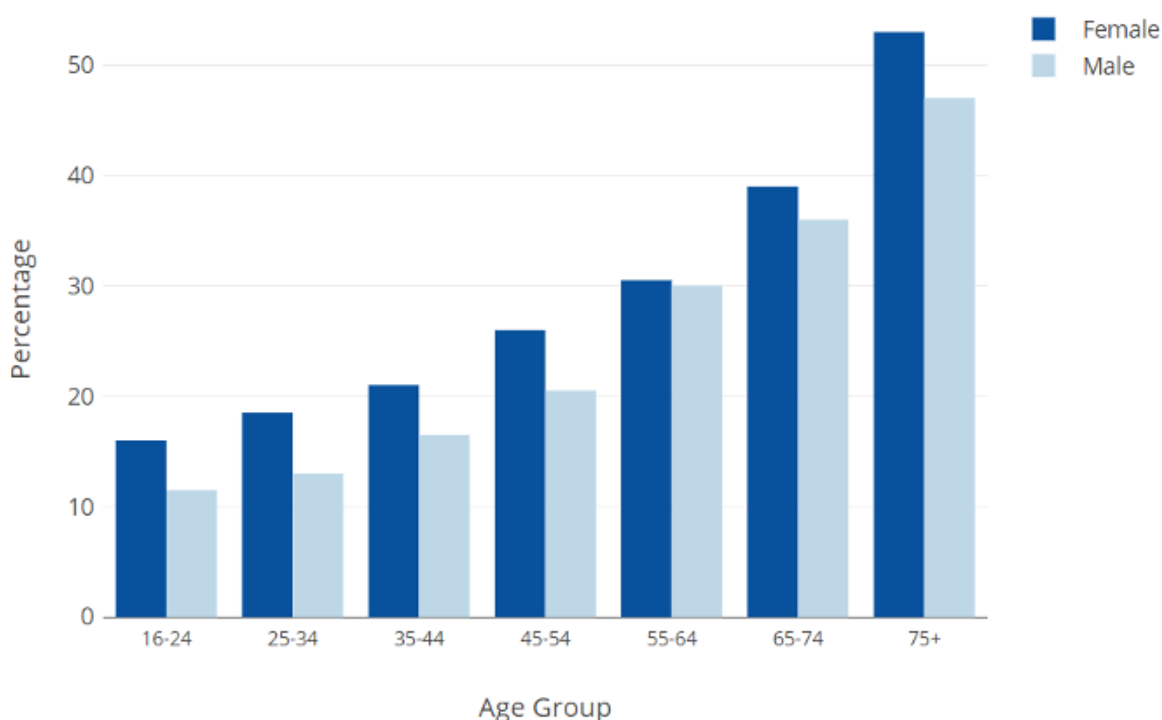


Figure 4: Prevalence of Adults with limiting long-term conditions, by age and gender (Scottish Health Survey, 2019)

Looking Forward...

Accessibility needs to be a bigger priority, a much bigger priority for the Scottish Government. People say just now that the disabled are being de-prioritized. Well, I would disagree with that, because we've never been a priority in the first place. We understand that we're living in difficult financial times, but, the political will is here, stuff can happen. Why isn't there an enhanced grant for accessible housing like there is for sustainable housing? The demand is there, and the need is there.

The Scottish Government need to start listening to the disability movement and to the other stakeholders involved. We want to see action... We don't want warm words. Let someone disabled access the toilet, or the shower, or get in and out of the home with ease. Unfortunately, in 21st Century Scotland there's far too many people who are prisoners in their own homes and their only crime is having an impairment. That's just not acceptable in 21st century Scotland. Things need to change, and they need to change quickly.

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Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) Project

The ISPA project is an ambitious 5-year participatory mixed method study that will explore and understand how the stigma attached to where people live can intersect with experiences of disability and ageing. This will provide nuanced insights into the structures and systems that drive exclusion and allow us to tackle the inequalities experienced by older disabled adults. Do visit <https://www.youtube.com/@ispaproject> for an audio and visual overview.

We aim to develop interventions related to home and environmental modifications that encourage interventions for inclusive approaches within housing, health and social care delivery. This in turn supports people to age well within homes and communities across England, Scotland, and Wales. The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Ref: ES/W012677/1) and runs from September 2022 to September 2027.

The Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) Project is a collaboration between the University of Stirling and the University of St Andrews, Newcastle University and University of Bristol. We are also partnered with the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (Housing LIN) and Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA).

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