



In sickness and in health - Extra Care Housing works especially well for couples.

This case study is about taking on board the views of people living in extra care housing. The Orders of St John Care Trust (OSJCT) is a large not for profit provider of care homes and extra care housing (ECH). Asking our customers what they think about their support seems an obvious way to improve the services that we provide at OSJCT. Every year we carry out a survey of people living in our extra care housing to get their feedback and to check out if they are happy with their support.

This year we decided to go a bit deeper and talk to people face to face about their experience of ECH. We found that a real benefit, one that is often understated, is that ECH keeps couples together when one of them needs care. It means that the carer can still maintain an active lifestyle, in the knowledge that their partner is safe and supported. Supporting couples enables Councils



to meet their new obligations to informal carers under the Care Act 2014, it avoids unnecessary care home admission and it has obvious beneficial outcomes for couples who want to stay together. People were pleased to be asked for their views and we will take account of what residents tell us as we shape services for the future.

Written for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network by **Sara Livadeas**, Strategy Director, The Orders of St John Care Trust.

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Introduction

It's well established that the involvement of older people themselves is crucial to developing effective services. Asking our customers what they think about their support seems an obvious way to improve the services that we provide at the Orders of St John Care Trust (OSJCT). OSJCT is a large not for profit provider of care homes and extra care housing, providing domiciliary care services in extra care housing schemes (ECH).

Taking on board the views of people living in extra care housing

Every year we carry out a survey of people living in our extra care housing to get their feedback and to check out if they are happy with their support. This year we decided to go a bit deeper and talk to people face to face about their experience of ECH. OSJCT has an ambition to expand its housing with care so we took the opportunity to talk to people about their reasons for choosing to move to ECH in the first place. We found that a real benefit, one that is often understated, is that ECH keeps couples together when one of them needs care. Supporting couples enables Councils to meet their new obligations to informal carers under the Care Act 2014, it avoids unnecessary care home admission and it has obvious beneficial outcomes for people who want to stay together.

We talked to over 60 people in three of our ECH facilities, Florence Court in Trowbridge, Shotover View in Oxford and Oxlip House, Bury St. Edmunds. The ECH ranged from 40 to 55 flats, with couples taking the numbers up to 58 residents in the largest. We hijacked coffee mornings and residents' meetings to hold a "structured conversation" using a number of pre-determined questions. We also gave residents the opportunity to talk to us in private and held individual conversations with people who didn't fancy attending the group.



Shotover View, Oxford

What they said

The results were very encouraging. Residents were overwhelmingly positive about their experience of extra care housing. We found a strong correlation between what people were telling us and the (limited) literature on people's views about ECH. The key messages were:

- People are happy living in extra care. They especially value the physical environment and the quality of the staff support on site.
- Although people generally didn't want to leave their family home, reluctantly moving because of a health event or loss of a partner, they still regarded their move to ECH as a positive choice, securing their future as they age.
- It's difficult to create a sense of community with relatively small numbers (50 flats), meaning organised activities are hard to sustain.
- ECH works particularly well for couples, enabling them to stay together in sickness and in health!

Positive aspects highlighted were the quality of the physical environment, both private and communal space. People with limited mobility could navigate within their flats and to store their equipment, for example saying:

“Apartments are nice, spacious and light with space for my future needs”.

The location of the ECH facilities had an impact and being within walking distance of a shop was really important, as was access to a bus stop. Most people did their own shopping and maintained an active social life outside of their home, including welcoming visitors. Feeling safe was rated very highly. Praise for the staff was consistently high across all the three services:

“The staff are all helpful and kind and very eager to please us.”

More variable comments related to the quality of the catering. Some people did enjoy the food but others declined to use the restaurant at all. There was a positive attitude to neighbours from the community using the facilities, with recognition that the restaurant would not be viable without the additional income.

The only real source of dissatisfaction, also echoed in our ECH survey, was with aspects of the social life. Despite obvious friendships between residents and one person commenting:

“There’s always someone to talk to when you walk out of your door.”

Many people felt that there was not enough in the way of organised activities and they expressed great frustration that many things had been tried but had quickly become unsustainable due to low numbers of participants. These ranged from exercise classes (which everyone seemed to want) to cinema clubs. The relatively low numbers of residents meant that there simply weren’t enough people to generate demand for a range of activities on a regular basis. Interestingly, people who had purchased their own apartments were most likely to express disappointment in the lack of activity and had a higher expectation of an active lifestyle following a move to ECH.

When we talked about reasons for moving into ECH, as expected, for the majority the move was prompted by a negative health event, such as a fall or early stages of dementia. We found this was particularly true of couples, who really valued the opportunity to be able to stay together when one of them had become unwell. It meant that the ‘carer’ could still maintain an active lifestyle, in the knowledge that their partner was safe and supported. One man said:

“My wife had Alzheimer’s, we lived a long way from the hospital and my wife was deteriorating but since moving here she’s now on the way up!”

Other reasons for moving included loss of a spouse or inability to maintain their former house or garden. While everyone said they missed their family home, people recognised that they might need more support in the future and that ECH was the best way of securing it without another move. Approximately a third of those we talked to had been persuaded to move by their offspring, some of them relocating significant distances without even viewing the property! The lack of information about housing with care was remarked upon everywhere.

Conclusion

In summary, it was very encouraging to find that people living within OSJCT extra care housing were satisfied with their services. They were happy with the choice that they had made, and willing to recommend a similar move to a friend. The positive impact on couples came across very strongly with carers enabled to carry on leading an active life and to avoid separation even when their spouse was requiring very high levels of care.

The feedback tells us we need to give further consideration to optimum size and location of ECH and the marketing of the concept to couples. It may go without saying, but a lot of people said they were pleased to be asked for their views. We will make sure we take account of what people tell us as we shape our future plans for housing with care at OSJCT.

See more in this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQLxuZ9xUBU>

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

Cover photo is of Eric Lewis-Leaning, Chairman of the Residents Association at Shotover View and his wife Jackie Lewis-Leaning speaking to the author.

About Orders of St John Care Trust

OSJCT is a large not for profit provider of care homes and extra care housing (ECH). We currently provide the care into 10 ECH schemes working in partnership with housing providers and local authorities, in Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, Suffolk and Gloucestershire.



About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 40,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England and Wales to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population.

Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'knowledge hub' on specialist housing, our online and regional networked activities:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing choices that enable older and disabled people to live independently
- provide intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice developments, and
- raise the profile of specialist housing with developers, commissioners and providers to plan, design and deliver aspirational housing for an ageing population

For information about the Housing LIN's comprehensive list of online resources on extra care housing, visit: www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingExtraCare

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