

Disabled young adults and the parental home

Community care policy strongly supports the right of disabled people to live in their own homes. For many young people, leaving the parental home is a key marker of adulthood. A study by Jo Dean at the University of Glasgow considered the housing aspirations and careers of young disabled people. It found that:



Young disabled people had similar aspirations to their non-disabled peers. Most wanted to leave the parental home and most did not regard their first house as a home for life. They expected eventually to form a new household with a partner and/or children and to seek housing to suit.



Disabled people and their non-disabled peers took similar routes to leaving home, whether they had left the parental home to pursue education, had left with family support in a planned way, or had left following a crisis in the family.



Some young adults did not want to leave the parental home. For some, this was a positive choice. For others it was because they could not conceive of other options, often because of reliance on parents for care and support.



Their attitudes to housing were related to: a sense of independence and control; access to local amenities; feeling safe or unsafe in the neighbourhood; features of the property (including accessible design); possessions in the home; and relationships with household members and neighbours.



Most parents expected their adult offspring to leave the parental home at some stage. Those most committed to supporting a future move saw leaving home as a normal part of adult life. Those most opposed to a move saw housing and care as inextricably linked and considered care by the family to be best for their adult child.



Aspirations were limited by what individuals considered possible. Many knew little about the housing system. This directly related to their aspirations and actions. They relied on parents and care professionals for advice and guidance, but often these advisers knew little about the housing and support choices available.

The study

Becoming an adult is a transition over several years. Living away from the parental home is a key marker for many young people.

This study explored the housing aspirations and experiences of thirty young disabled people in Scotland who had a physical or sensory impairment or a learning difficulty. Thirteen parents were also interviewed.

Three groups of young people were identified, those who:

- had left the parental home;
- lived with their family but were aspiring to leave; or
- lived with their family and were not aspiring to leave.

People in the three groups did not differ in terms of the type and severity of impairment, age distribution, daytime occupation, family income, educational achievement, gender or other characteristics. These characteristics did not appear to predict patterns of housing aspiration or experience.

People who had left the parental home

Ten young people were interviewed who were living away from the parental home. One was an owner-occupier and nine were living in rented accommodation. Half aspired to owner-occupation in the future, which they considered made financial sense. The others saw owner-occupation as unaffordable or too much responsibility or they did not understand mortgages.

This group had taken one of three 'pathways' to leaving their parents' home.

- **Planned (not student).** Young adults who had left with the support of parents. The moves were carefully planned, and people continued to live in this first home. They were generally older when they left than those in the other two groups.
- **Student.** People who had left to gain education, with parental support. Their first move was softened by moving to university accommodation and by repeated returns to the parental home. Students made several moves in the first few years but this was understood to be a normal part of student living.

Warren left his parental home aged 17 to go to university. His first year was in catered halls of residence, followed by several university-owned and private rented flats which he shared with friends. He decided not to return to the parental home, and applied for local authority housing. He moved into a two-bedroom flat and sublet one room to a friend to help with the rent. Warren did not expect to move in the near future.

- **Unplanned.** Young adults who had left in a crisis and made several moves in the first few years of independent housing. This group had most contact with formal support services and least control over the house moves that they made.

Young people who aspired to leave the parental home

Nine young people living in the parental home aspired to leave. Four had already lived away from their parents and returned after their course of study finished or because they had experienced problems in their independent home.

A desire for independence was the main reason for seeking to leave the family home. A number of more specific factors were also identified. 'Push' factors included tensions within the family, restrictions which parents placed on behaviour, a lack of privacy, and encouragement by parents or siblings to move away. 'Pull' factors were the desire for independence, the belief that leaving home is an indicator of adulthood, and a desire to be like peers.

The majority had applied for social rented housing, with the active support of parents and professionals. The young people had found it difficult to find out about the range of choices available to them, and most had restricted their consideration to one or two potential housing providers. There was confusion about the processes used by social landlords to allocate housing and few knew how long they would be likely to wait for an offer.

None had considered private rented housing. Some aspired to owner-occupation eventually but saw it as unaffordable at present. For both young adults who aspired to leave and those who had already left, future owner-occupation was linked with the expectation of forming a new household with a partner and/or children.

Young people who did not aspire to leave the parental home

Eleven young people did not intend to leave the parental home. Staying in the parental home was a positive choice for a minority but for most it was the default position. None had ever lived away from the family home and, prior to interview, they had not thought about what they wanted. Four expected to live in the parental home forever. The remainder aspired to leave at some time in the future, although the timescale and conditions for doing so were not clear.

Most gave several reasons for staying in the family home. No one reason predominated. They included: the importance of their relationship with family; the need for care and support provided by parents; satisfaction with home comforts; and a fear of alternatives. No one was in receipt of care services in their parents' home and they did not know that they could have support to live away from their family. A few were concerned about the effect that their leaving might have on remaining family members.

Nathan lived with his mother and siblings in a local authority flat. The building was due to be demolished in the next few years. He had thought about where he might live in the future, but had not formed aspirations to live separately from his family. When his mother is rehoused, he will move with her. Nathan really enjoyed the company of his family and could not imagine living away from them.

Parents' perspectives

Thirteen parents - mostly mothers - participated in the research. All had a young disabled adult living with them at the time of the interview. The parents fell into three groups:

- Active supporters of independent housing. These parents had acted to support their adult child to seek alternative living arrangements, and expected and preferred that they would live away from the parental home in the future.
- Passive supporters of independent housing. These were willing to support the adult child to leave the parental home in the future and expected this to happen. Some were positive about this future move, while others preferred that their son/daughter lived in the parental home for life.
- Rejecters of independent housing. This group preferred and expected their adult child to live in the parental home for life.

Apart from those parents who had taken action to support their adult child to leave home, most were unclear about the housing and care options available to young disabled adults. Those who had discussed future housing with care professionals were little clearer about the range of potential options or what actions to take to help their son/daughter access housing. No one was considering tenures other than social renting and not all knew that care and support could be arranged separately from housing provision.

Talking about the future

The study distinguished between expectation, aspiration and preference in the following ways:

- **expectation** - the individual's belief about what will happen, regardless of what they would like to happen;
- **aspiration** - choice which is not restricted by availability or accessibility; and
- **preference** - choice between the various options thought to be available.

Most of the young people expressed preference: that is, they referred to what they would like, but restricted their options to what they believed to be attainable. Desire and actions were being shaped by young people's beliefs about housing. Often these beliefs were inaccurate or, at best, partial. Parents largely expressed their expectations. Again, these were often based on inaccurate or partial understandings of housing and care options.

Advice and support

The existence of appropriately designed and affordable housing in the right location and the availability of support are key. But young people and parents indicated that a lack of information about local housing options, not knowing who could help and not having the opportunity to voice aspirations, were the main barriers they faced.

The researcher believes that four stages of information and support could be addressed. These are:

- awareness of what is possible;
- information about all local options;
- advice about what might best suit an individual and how this can be accessed; and

- advocacy to support particular individuals where there is conflict between them and funders, providers or parents.

Conclusions

The study has shown that housing experiences and aspirations of young disabled people are similar to their non-disabled peers. The majority wanted to live away from parents when they were in their twenties. Participants noted that independence could be achieved while living within the parental home, but most felt that they were already or would be more independent living away from parents. Living away from parents was generally felt to signify adult status.

The majority of parents also supported the aspiration to leave. This implies that housing providers, social work authorities and social care agencies should focus on supporting young people to achieve their aspirations, while accepting that some young adults may choose to stay living with parents.

The study has shown that for young disabled people housing means more than bricks and mortar. It signifies adulthood and is a site of independence. The rhetoric of community care has for years supported the right of disabled people to live independently. Yet the evidence from this research suggests that much more is needed to inform and advise young disabled people of the housing options that are available to them if this rhetoric is to be a reality.

About the project

The research was carried out by Jo Dean at the University of Glasgow. It comprised interviews with thirty young disabled adults who had a physical or sensory impairment or a learning difficulty. Thirteen parents of young disabled adults were also interviewed. Research was conducted in two cities and one rural area of Scotland.

How to get further information

The full report, **Unaddressed: The housing aspirations of young disabled people in Scotland** by Jo Dean, is published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (ISBN 1 85935 145 X, price £13.95).