

Audio Transcription

Introductory Conversation

Gareth: I'm Gareth Young, I'm Knowledge Exchange and Impact Fellow for the UK Collaborative Center for Housing Evidence, and so my job really is to work in that space between academics and academic research, and policy and practice across the housing sector to build partnerships, network, and basically get our research and evidence and policy and practice but also to learn about how we can be better at engaging with those audiences to make change.

Pedro: And I'm Pedro Cameron I'm the Engagement Coordinator for the Homeless Housing Options Scotland project as part of the wider charity Housing Options Scotland. My role is to engage with the sector as far and wide as possible about the needs of the distinct groups we work with, so, Housing Options Scotland works primarily with people with disabilities, older people, and members of the armed forces community. So, as part of that work I engage with local authorities, with housing providers, with other charities about the needs of those distinct groups and through that work I've also become the Equalities Champion for our organization, which has meant that I am looking more into how equalities as a whole impacts on homeless groups. What interested you in equalities, specifically?

Gareth: I think it came off the back of the pandemic, really, and looking at how that was having disproportionate impacts on certain populations, whether that be sort of through health provision - just the way it was impacting communities, particularly on a geographic scale, and then that coincided in 2020 with what felt like a proliferation of talk on social media around Black Lives Matter, and then it was followed in by Pride Month so it all kind of happened consecutively. It got me to thinking about the work that happens within UK housing studies, and really focuses in on particular challenges of particular groups to access housing across all the different sectors, and then started to have conversations with other professionals and other people in spaces that were like, "actually, I had not thought about these particular barriers for certain people" or, "I identify with a particular characteristic and had not thought that I might also be excluded" and I really think it got people to change thinking-some people to change thinking- about that kind of housing provision, thinking about housing aspirations for all sorts of different people and how complicated that is. So then when I started to look back through some research that was taking place, research that we had done as a centre, I mean we definitely touched on elements of it, its not to say that it doesn't exist because there is really good work happening, but it felt like that needed to be more embedded within the UK housing studies community. Now and going forward is a real commitment to not only the research but also the knowledge exchange engagement, the partnerships that we build and the relationships, and that's what started to motivate me to take some of this work on.

Pedro: Yeah, from my perspective it was more- it was kind of highlighted for me in a couple of ways. So, Housing Options Scotland is not my only role. I work as a freelancer in the arts sector and I had been working on another project, a nationwide festival, where I was sitting on what's called the IDEA panel, so, "IDEA" being an acronym for Inclusion, Diversity, Equalities, and Accessibility. So, I was looking at how they were doing things on this festival, and how they were embedding equalities into their practice, from the scoping of the project to the delivery of the project, and to the monitoring throughout. Everything had to have "IDEA" embedded in that process. So, this started to sort of bleed into my work with Housing Options Scotland. Prior to that I was working in a client facing role, but with the Homeless Housing Options project I was able to sort of have more of a steer on what the project did, and particularly from an engagement standpoint, about looking at the impact of our work and the impact that other services were having on the people that we work with. And so, that

just made me really think about the work that were doing and what we could be doing better, and in turn, thinking about that made me think about- it made me look at the rest of the sector and I was struck by the gaps in equalities being a consideration, I suppose, and in practice, so, that was really why I wanted to do that. And also, I was party to a training session which was around the barriers that LGBTQ people face when accessing services, and I was surprised even then by how accessibility and safeguarding were not built into that training. So I just really wanted to do that. And I also think that it helps, looking at equalities and diversity, inclusion and accessibility on a broader scale than with the groups that we work with as Housing Options Scotland, that that would actually help inform our practice with those groups, with disabled people, with older people, and with the armed forces. So, looking at equalities on a wider scale in terms of race, or sexual orientation, gender identity, domestic violence, things like that, how all these things all feed into how the people that we were working with access services as well, and looking at things much more intersectionally than perhaps I had before. So that was what motivated me.

Gareth: Yeah, and I think there's a similar thing with me as well, in that we recognize we don't have all of the resource, or all of the expertise to take on all of these projects that we know we want to do. But actually, by having conversations and really, you know, this is what some of the aim is, to get that real time, on the ground feedback of what the current contemporary challenges are and the barriers. Just helps to start that conversation going to put a bit of a platform down for other people who might want to take on research or work in this space as well, and it does allow you to start to showcase some of the gaps that need filling from just a whole spectrum of other people that are thinking about this and have that different perspective or expertise as well, which is nice because it brings everyone together collaboratively, which feels like the spirit of what any equality and diversity work should capture, really.

Pedro: Yeah, absolutely, and I think also, identifying those gaps but also identifying the expertise that is there to fill those gaps, so, I think, by speaking to people who either have lived experience or work closely with some of the individual groups that are covered by the Equality Act, or protected characteristics under that act, that we can determine that it doesn't need to be as radical or as huge an undertaking as it might appear, so we talk about the gaps, and there are big gaps, but I think actually, they are pretty easily filled by just asking the questions and having these conversations, and I think small changes can be made, at the recommendations of all sorts of different people, to make things more equal, and more inclusive.

Gareth: Absolutely, and it's definitely not all negative, you know, what we're hearing through these conversations what we're wanting to do is showcase some really good work that is happening, you know, things are happening and it can be a bit of a best practice- a celebration of best practice as well because I'm always really careful when I talk about gaps, to caveat that with "but, good work is happening, we just need to be doing more" and joining forces I guess to share those ideas and learn and help break down some of that nervousness, if there is a nervousness, around getting things wrong which I know is a conversation we've had a lot, that ends up in a lot of the conversations as well. It's ok to make mistakes if we are really trying to do the right thing, and do this work sensitively and meaningfully.

Pedro: From a research perspective, is there anything in particular that you're looking to cover, or want to hear?

Gareth: Definitely, so what I want is, a couple of things really, is to find anything we might have missed, or to find any work that is happening that I know will be of interest to our researcher networks and communities. As I said, that sort of real time insight about what's needed so we can be

inspiring future research projects, collaborations, that will cover some of these topics so we know that the work we're taking on will be relevant to our policy practice, lived experience, audiences that we want to do, but also really hearing about what we can do as a research community to make our work accessible. We've got a real commitment to wanting to make a difference, to have an impact through the work that we do at all levels, whether that be the central government, local government, practice for culture, communities, so, really learning from others who might want to engage with the research to help that practice, how can we be doing, what can we be doing, how can we be publishing and disseminating our findings so that they are accessible, user friendly, and ultimately so that the good research that's being done will be used through our partner networks.

Pedro: I think that's interesting because actually, I think from my perspective, that our work as Housing Options Scotland is very much in the here and now and in the reality of peoples' situations, we have to be reactive to people coming to us for help. And so, a lot of my work is based in - we talk about policy and practice - but its based in right now, what can we do right now to make things better? Rather than, what can we do research on and then give recommendations to, and then make a change down the line. But I think what's interesting about the conversation that we're having is that you look at it from the research perspective and can see in the more long term perspective, whereas what's good for me is to hear what people are saying is happening now, on the ground, you know, we talk about- there's big fixes that need to be made and there's systemic fixes, but also, what are the little things that we can be doing right now to include people and to just make things better in terms of the ways that services are delivered. A lot of my work is based around, I either do training for third sector organizations around homelessness right now, and also I try to build partnerships, or, partnerships is the wrong word because it implies formality, but collaborative sort of feelings (sic) with local authorities and housing providers, and again, that work is based in trying to make things better right now, for the people that are homeless right now, that have housing needs right now. Not the people who are gonna have housing needs in 2040, so I think it's good that we're able to look at these things from diametrically opposed standpoints. I think we're trying to do the same thing, but just from different perspectives.

Gareth: Yeah, definitely, I think that's the nice thing about this collaboration, as well, is that it does help to, for both of us, to work through those different time frames that our respective networks are working, you know, we do sometimes work at different paces and I also think that as people listen to this and listen to these conversations that go forward, there might already be work and existing research that people have done, and if they just hear that that person is talking about this issue right now, they have a chance to just to bring that research back out and make contact. So I think we can also, potentially, talk to some of the issues live as well, like I say, there is lots of really good work that's already taken place, so its not to say that nothing's happened, I think there's a lot of really nice things across policy practice and research.

Pedro: Yeah. I think it's good to shine a light on those voices. We're not seeing it a lot in housing in general, or, not all collected in one place like this. I think we see more sporadic bits of information, bits of research about one specific protected group, or one specific minority group, or one specific incident, or whatever. So I think it's going to be really good to have a range of voices who are intersectional voices, who are all in the one place and all being asked the same thing essentially. I think ultimately, the issues, while they're not the same, I think the very base of each issue is the same and it's maybe a lack of knowledge, a lack of understanding, a lack of training, a lack of whatever, and so if we can ask the same questions to a variety of different people across the whole spectrum of equalities and across protected characteristics, I think it would be a really great thing to have this all sort of compounded into one place.

Gareth: Yes, absolutely.

Pedro: So to finish up, can you tell me one thing that you hope to achieve through this project?

Gareth: Yeah, absolutely, I just hope that through listening to these conversations, that our research network and particularly our future career researchers can be inspired and given the confidence to start to develop more research in the space, and to take on the work and grapple with these issues and really kind of embed it into the work of UK housing studies going forward. How about yourself?

Pedro: I think ultimately, its just about having the conversation. That in itself is an achievement for me. The conversations weren't being had enough, and I think just the virtue of having these conversations and having them recorded, and having them collated in one place is all I can really ask for from the project.

Gareth: That's great. Well, we have already started some recording so we know we've got some really exciting conversations and fascinating conversations to come, so stay tuned for more!

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