

The State of Gloucestershire

Opportunities and housing for disabled people and
people with mental health challenges



Introduction

This executive summary contains key findings and recommendations from research carried out by Barnwood Trust in Gloucestershire in 2021. Over 260 disabled people and people with mental health challenges living in the county took part in an Opportunities and Housing Survey.

The Trust's mission is to make Gloucestershire the best place for disabled people and people with mental health challenges. Ensuring access to opportunities and to suitable housing are essential to achieving this.

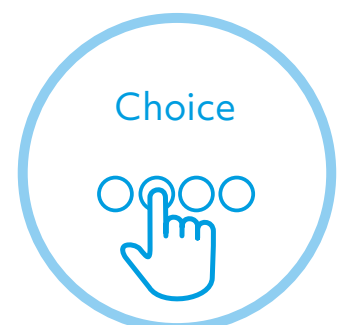
The survey asked about participation in a range of opportunities (including education/training, paid work, volunteering, and leisure activities), as well as the quality and accessibility of people's housing.

Data from a range of national and local sources was collated to add context to the survey findings.

The findings of this research evidence that there are widespread barriers for disabled people and people with mental health challenges in Gloucestershire to participating in meaningful opportunities and to living in suitable and accessible housing.

This impacts not only on the activities, accommodation, and support that individuals can access, but also their life satisfaction, health, and wellbeing. A range of common barriers and challenges to taking part in opportunities and addressing housing problems were identified in the research.

What also emerged was the importance of choice, accessible information provision, and the need for proactive engagement with individuals to generate solutions. The recommendations of this research offer steps that organisations and providers can take in response to these findings to contribute to making change in Gloucestershire.



An everyday reality

Taking a holistic view, the findings of this survey and external sources highlight a daily reality involving navigating multiple barriers for many disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

A combination of financial barriers, transport problems, inaccessible information provision, and lack of inclusive practices exist across many everyday spaces and situations.

At home, people are living in inaccessible accommodation, which they cannot afford to adapt, which may be cold or damp, lack storage space for equipment, and which they cannot find the right support to address.

Within neighbourhoods, people are experiencing a lack of choice in where they can live, the transport and travel options available and affordable to them, and don't always feel they belong.

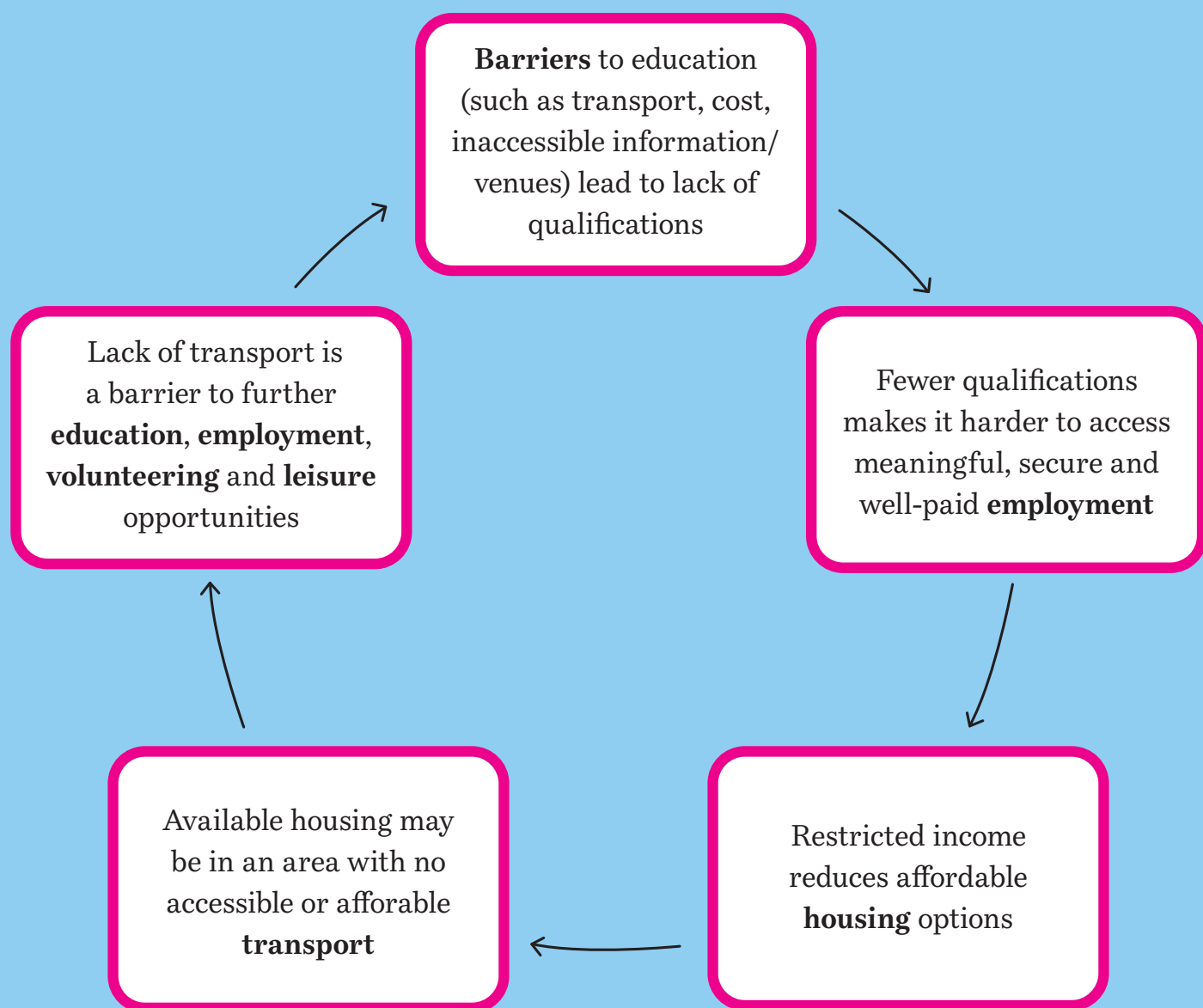
More broadly in places of work, volunteering, education, and leisure, such barriers impact on both whether people know about opportunities that are available and whether they can take them up. In turn, this lack of opportunities impacts on the housing choices people have.

In this reality, these barriers impact on how and where disabled people and people with mental health challenges can live, work, study, spend time, and in how they can enjoy their lives.

Many of these barriers are not new but are long-standing problems, which in some cases have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Previous research by Barnwood Trust at the start of the pandemic captured the impact of these barriers on the lives of disabled people and people with mental health challenges across different domains at home, in getting out and in getting support¹.



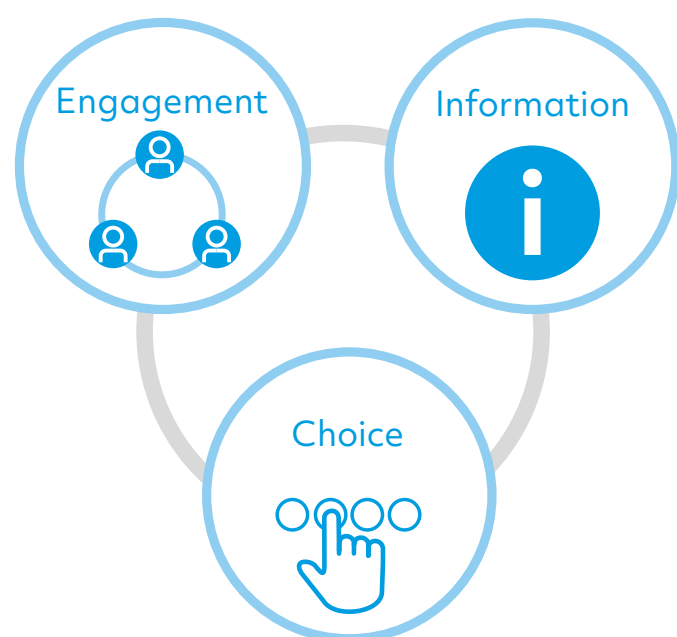
The diagram below illustrates how barriers in one area of a person's life may interrelate to create challenges or exacerbate barriers in another area:



In exploring solutions, it is important to recognise the relationships between different barriers that may be experienced.

Engagement, information and choice

Central to the recommendations of this research are the importance of engaging directly with disabled people and people with mental health challenges, provision of clear and accessible information, and taking proactive steps to enable greater choice.



The diagram below shows the interconnectedness between these three areas, and how better engagement and information provision can facilitate more choice, as well as the importance of continuing to engage.

Ongoing engagement to co-design opportunities, services and support with disabled people and people with mental health challenges

This enables provision of clear, accessible, and relevant information about opportunities, services, and support

Fewer barriers enable more choice in the opportunities, services and support available to disabled people and people with mental health challenges

This executive summary is accompanied by a series of booklets which share more detailed findings and recommendations specific to housing, employment, education/training, and leisure activities.

At Barnwood Trust, we are committed to ensuring that the findings of this research lead to change in the housing and opportunities available to disabled people and people with mental health challenges in Gloucestershire.

We would like to invite people to get in touch with us about collaborating in taking forwards any of the recommendations from this research or in carrying out future research. For more information, please contact the Strategic Development Management Team on **01242 539935** or development@barnwoodtrust.org.

Key survey findings

There were three overarching findings from the Opportunities and Housing Survey.

1

Disabled people and people with mental health challenges are experiencing common barriers to participating in meaningful opportunities and to living in suitable and accessible housing



- **39%** of people reported that generally they can do the things they enjoy and care about and **44%** could not



- Twice as many people said that leisure activities, education/training, and paid work matter to them than can do the activities they want to do



- Common barriers to accessing opportunities included people's health (e.g. my disability means I need a lot of rest), lack of confidence, transport, costs, and needing help with activities



- **63%** had at least one housing problem, such as anti-social behaviour, lack of space to store equipment, or needing adaptations



- Cost was the most frequently reported barrier to solving housing problems and making adaptations

National research has found that:

Around a third of disabled people (**32%**) are living in poverty compared to around a fifth (**20%**) of non-disabled people².

On average, disabled people face extra costs of **£583 a month** as a result of their disability. These extra costs include specialist equipment, additional clothing, extra bedding, and higher energy bills. These extra costs were already in existence before the current cost of living crisis³.

2

Many people's housing circumstances are having a negative impact on their physical and mental health and wellbeing, and there are widespread low levels of overall life satisfaction



- 47% told us that their housing situation has a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing



- 39% told us that their housing situation has a negative impact on their physical health and wellbeing



- 49% of all respondents were not satisfied with their lives overall and 34% were satisfied



- Of those who could generally do the things they enjoy and care about, 57% told us they were satisfied with their lives



- Of those who could not generally do the things they enjoy and care about, 16% told us they were satisfied with their lives

National research has found that:

3 in 10 of those with a housing problem or worry in the last five years (2012 – 2017) said it had negatively impacted their mental health and that they had not had issues with their mental health previously⁴.

Disabled people experience poorer wellbeing than non-disabled people, with lower levels of life satisfaction, happiness, and feelings that things done are worthwhile, and higher levels of anxiety⁵.

3

Greater choice, flexibility, better information provision, and inclusive practices are required to address these common barriers to accessing opportunities and to good quality housing

Greater choice was key to improving both opportunities and housing provision. **36%** told us they felt they had no choice in where they live. People who felt they had a lot of choice about where they live were more likely to tell us they were satisfied with their housing.

Better information provision about available opportunities and housing was also important. One-fifth of respondents didn't know where to find help or information about housing.

Although health was identified as a barrier to taking part in opportunities, respondents reported a range of ways in which they could be more accessible and inclusive.

This reflects the social model of disability which describes how people are not disabled by their impairment or health condition but by barriers in society (for example, inaccessible buildings).

The option to work or volunteer flexibly was highlighted as an enabler to accessing these opportunities. Having the right technology and getting help when doing activities (e.g. support from a personal assistant) was important in accessing education and training opportunities.

National research has found that:

- **92%** of respondents to a survey about disabled people's access to public spaces would try and find access information before visiting somewhere⁶
- **68%** of disabled workers surveyed about flexible working wanted some type of hours-related flexibility (e.g. flexi-time, compressed hours, or part-time working)⁷

Recommendations

Three over-arching recommendations emerged from this research as important in improving access to meaningful opportunities and to good quality and suitable housing.

These recommendations offer an approach that organisations and providers can take to establish what changes may be most impactful

for the disabled people and people with mental health challenges they seek to work with. This approach recognises that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to ensuring greater choice and accessibility for disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

1

Proactively and directly engage with disabled people and people with mental health challenges to understand how to improve access to meaningful opportunities and to high quality and suitable housing. Co-production and co-design can also help ensure information produced about housing and opportunities is accessible

Engaging with individuals who experience barriers to taking part in opportunities and accessing the housing provision and support they need is vital in understanding how to address these issues within a particular context. Working directly with individuals through co-production and co-design has the potential to generate solutions which encompass individuals' expertise about what would help.

Direct engagement can help ensure information that is produced about opportunities and housing is accessible. Incorporating lived experience and new perspectives around what makes communication accessible can ensure that information reaches everyone.

For example:

- Housing providers may seek to develop or strengthen existing tenant participation initiatives in order to ensure that a diversity of voices are included.

- Employers may look to engage with current staff to gain a better understanding of how inclusive and accessible their workplace currently is. This may include use of staff surveys, appointing disability champions, or creating a diversity and inclusion network.
- Engagement activities may identify additional information, which it is important to share as part of any communications about an education or training opportunity. For example, this may include directions to a venue, as well photographs and pictures of the internal layout, showing what the room looks like and where to find different facilities within the venue.

Undertaking engagement activities may be built into regular review processes and organisational policies to become standard practice. In carrying out this engagement, it is also important to consider creating an environment where people feel safe to share both the challenges they face and the support or conditions that could best meet their needs.

2

Provide clear and accessible information about available opportunities and housing support, in a range of formats and via multiple channels, along with the option for in person contact. Accessible information provision should consider all the useful information that might be provided to enable real choice

Clear and accessible information is essential in ensuring that people can take part in the opportunities that matter to them and access housing support and solutions. This includes providing timely information in a range of formats such as: Easy Read, large print, audio, Braille, and via printed versions and digital platforms.

Clear information provision isn't simply about making written communications accessible. Having staff members available to answer questions and plan with someone around their individual preferences and access requirements can make a huge difference to a person's experiences and be invaluable.

For example:

- Engaging with disabled tenants could help housing providers identify what information is needed about the accessibility features of a property, for example on the Homeseekers site or property rental websites.
- Employers may want to explore including information about workplace adjustments and Access to Work at the earliest stages of the recruitment process, including in job adverts and application documents. The option for a conversation to discuss any access requirements prior to making an application or attending an interview may also be offered.
- Online information about and booking systems for leisure activities can be practical for some but aren't always accessible to everyone. Some people may prefer to speak to someone to explain their needs or ask questions before booking or visiting.

3

Take proactive steps to ensure greater choice in the range of accessible opportunities and in housing provision available to disabled people and people with mental health challenges. Choice is more than just a greater range of options, it's about making sure that what's currently on offer is accessible to everyone

Proactive steps to increase choice and variety through better engagement might include looking at current practices and support which thinking about and discussing factors where choice could currently be hindered.

Current, available options might themselves be limiting choice. The conditions and context around an opportunity or a property, such as transport provision, local amenities, and community safety, are of great importance.

For example:

- Housing providers may want to explore how gathering better quality data about the access requirements of tenants, the accessibility features of properties, as well as the surrounding areas could enable greater housing choice.
- For leisure providers who are actively expanding their offer to disabled people, think about the whole experience. Consider how easy it is to reach a venue, the cost to travel there and to attend, and the customer experience when people arrive. There may be options for subsidised travel or membership options.
- Reviewing volunteer roles that are on offer may include considering the range of opportunities available and any scope to broaden the type of roles on offer. Roles may potentially be more flexible and varied according to the availability and enthusiasm of possible volunteers. Offering opportunities at different locations and times, with the option of remote volunteering, may be supportive of a wider range of individuals taking part.

Sources

¹ Barnwood Trust (2020) Our Changing World

² Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2022) UK Poverty 2022: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK

³ Scope (2019) The Disability Price Tag 2019: Policy report

⁴ Shelter (2017) The Impact of Housing Problems on Mental Health

⁵ Office for National Statistics (2022) Outcomes for Disabled People in the UK: 2021

⁶ Euan's Guide (2022) Access Survey 2021

⁷ Trade Unions Congress (2021) Disabled Workers' Access to Flexible Working as a Reasonable Adjustment

Barnwood Trust would like to thank everyone who took part in this research and to partner organisations who supported in developing and distributing the survey.

For more information about this research, including copies in accessible formats please contact Roz Warden on 01242 539935 or roz.warden@barnwoodtrust.org

To get involved in conversations about taking forward the recommendations of this research please contact the Strategic Development Management Team on 01242 539935 or development@barnwoodtrust.org

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