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Your own Front Door: The Ethics of Support in a Modular Home Project

Research presentation
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Planning Research



Executive summary

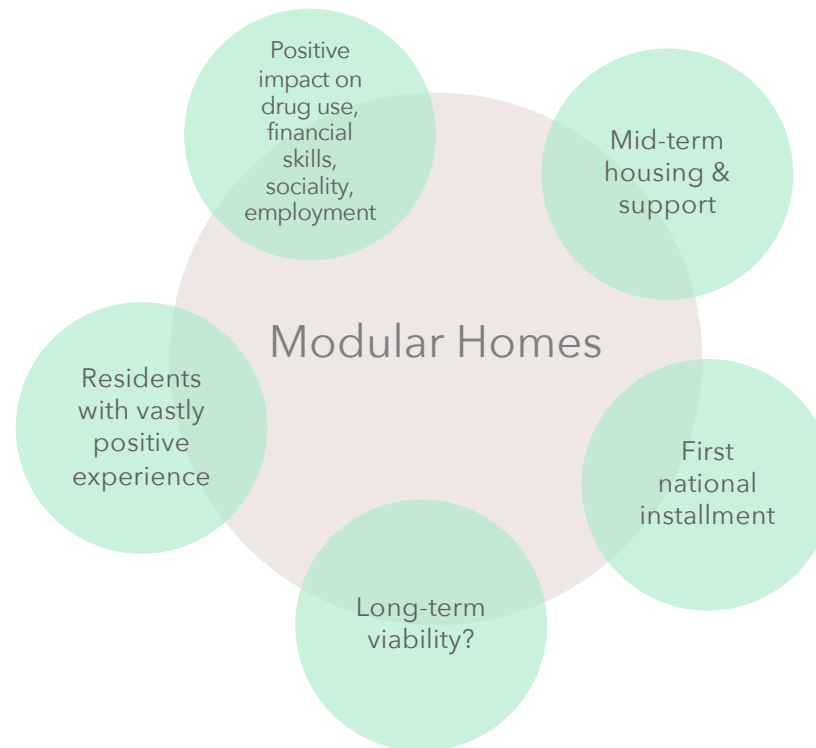
Modular homes are proving to be a viable option in the repertoire of housing for people experiencing homelessness. Having one's front door is not only desirable for residents, it also proves beneficial across outcome parameters.

Where
UK

When
12/2019-8/2021

How
Participant observation,
interviews with stakeholders

Who
Dr Johannes Lenhard
(& team of researchers
around Dr Gemma Burgess)

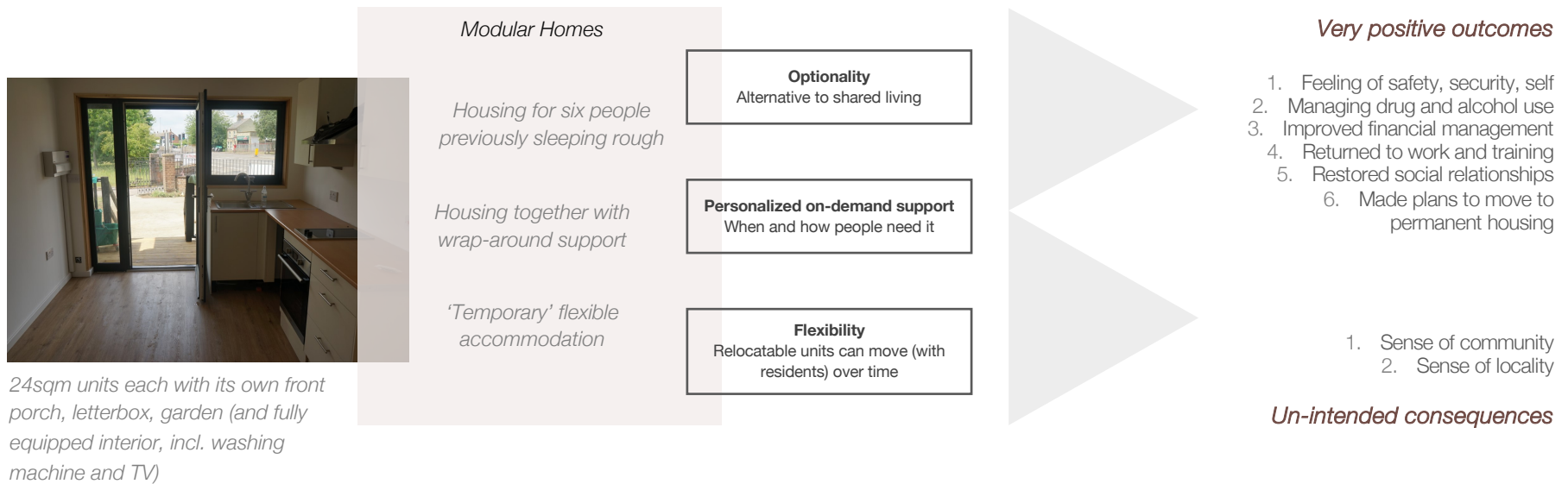


Key takeaways:

- Modular homes work: more than shared housing, 'mods' are a version of *home* with many of the benefits
- Support is crucial, as always: housing alone is not enough; comprehensive wrap-around personalized support key ingredient
- Residents are very happy: having one's own front door provides autonomy, security and self which residents value highly (and miss in other institutions)

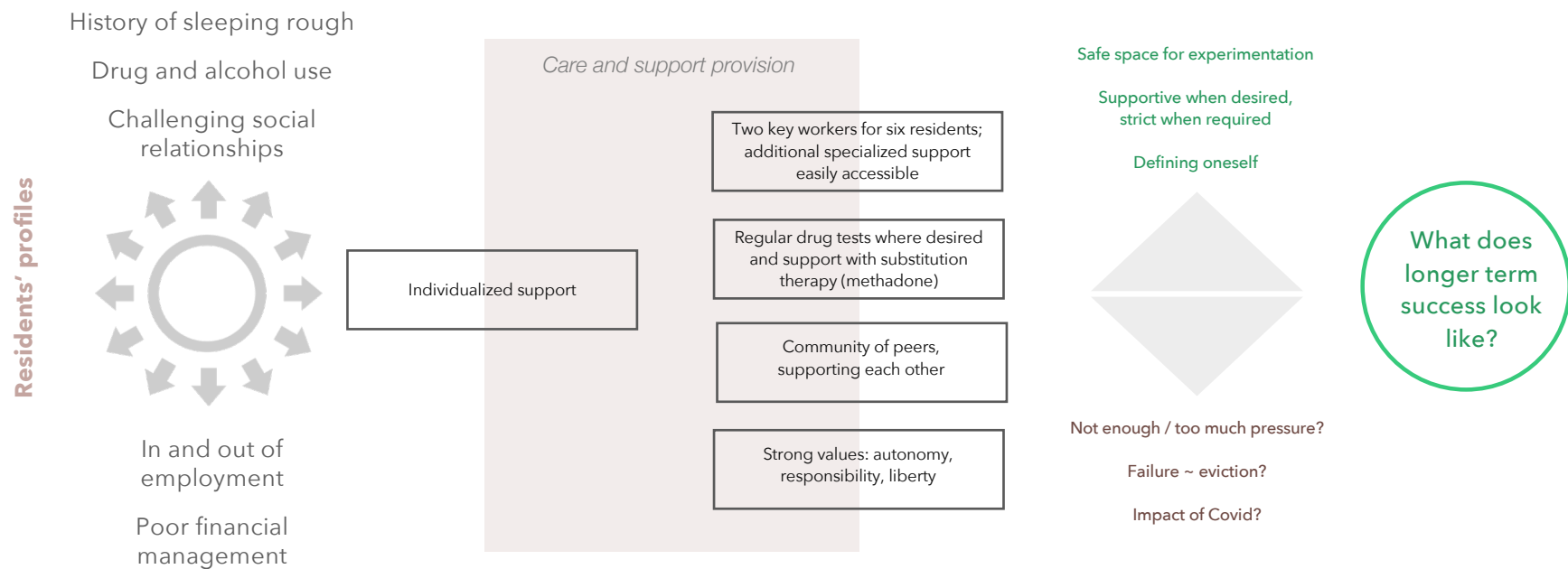
1. Modular homes work

After 12 months, the modular homes project shows fantastic outcomes for residents across a variety of dimensions.



2. What support looks like

The right kind of support helped residents to overcome key challenges – but some questions remain.



3. What do residents say

Residents are overwhelmingly positive about the impact the 'mods' have had on their lives

Reduced drug use

Living here, oh everything is good! I can't say anything bad. **It's got me off me drugs**, got a roof over my head, it's got me back to work... can't say anything bad really. I've stopped using drugs altogether. There's nothing bad about the place. Everything's positive.

*Home
Stability
Space to cope*

Preparing for a job

I've managed to get my sick pay which was back dated. I had a choice to buy a motorbike, which I really did want, or to buy tools because I need them to try and get myself back into some kind of work or whatever. **So, I decided, 'Right, buy the tools'**. I made a commitment, bought the tools. I've bought all of the tools.

*Taking responsibility
Managing money
Managing freedom(s)*

Reconnecting with family

I am doing everything I can **to get back my child**. That place [referring to foster care] is not good for him... So, I am staying clean and I hope in no time, I can get my rented place and get back my child. ... So, luckily for me, I've got [support worker] on my side who can speak up for me.

*Future-focus
Planning and
preparation*

What residents say matters (a note on method)

- As an anthropologist, my work is focused on a bottom-up view onto any issue I examine; my observations start with the opinions from the people at the core of e.g. a service provision like the modular homes.
- As a result, the most important stakeholder, the people that are supported with this kind of offering, are the residents; their opinions matter, the most.

Learnings

Extend the experiment - and possibly make that even easier (regulatorily).

Recommendation 1: Extend the experiment

Given that our observations are based on the first pilot project of modular homes in the UK and given how positive the results are we can report, one recommendation is absolutely to extend the usage of modular homes across the UK (and beyond). They provide a (reasonably cheap) flexible extra option of housing to be offered to people experiencing homelessness. Modular homes come with a variety of advantages which make them preferable for many residents to e.g. shared housing. More and longer term studies are needed to verify our results.

Recommendation 2: Change the regulation...

... and in order to make modular homes of this kind more easy to establish across the country, certain planning regulations might have to shift for the exceptional circumstances the 'mods' are put up in. Requirements around size seem to be secondary, for instance, for many of the residents – trumped by 'having one's own door'. We should listen to these opinions.

Overall, the 'mods' experiment – which is already being rolled out more widely – has brought about promising results across various parameters, and most importantly, for the residents. While the special impact, the Covid pandemic and lockdowns might have had, will need to be seen, we are hopeful that more and more 'mods' will become part of the repertoire to tackle house-lessness in the UK (and beyond).