

Film Three: Living options

Narrator: Human beings need each other to survive and flourish. Relationships with families, friends and strangers can offer support and security through life but growing older can mean losing friends and shared experiences. It can change the ability to form new relationships and can test the ones you have. Just as relationships to people are important to wellbeing, so too is our relationship to our physical environment, our home, neighbourhood and the public spaces that surround us.

Research team discussion

Marian: There's lots of emphasis isn't there in the current policy there is lots of emphasis on keeping people in their own home, you know and that is, is sort of seen as a quite uncontroversial good thing.

Joyce: I've spoken to several people, they've moved from where they were because they felt they didn't have the right food. They wanted different cooking but they didn't want to do it themselves, one moved to a care home and hated it so much she moved right back to her original house.

Commentary:
Beatrice Gahagan *One of the major themes that came out of our research was about living options. It's clear that this is such an enormous decision. It's quite probably the most important decision that people are going to make. They are not decisions that we rehearse, they are not decisions that we necessarily even want to have to make. We find that we are having to deal with anxieties about the future. We are not sure what the future's going to hold. We are also facing uncertainties about how much care we are going to need, what is going to be the best option, how we might have mixed feelings about the impact of that decision on other people, on relationships. It really isn't a matter of logically going through a range of options and choosing the most sensible one. It is a profound and significant decision that people are facing.*

Francis: We want to be independent you know and it can become isolation, it can be a problem.

Marian: I mean I think that's a really important point that people want to sustain their sense of I can still do things but surely not at the expense of that means you know that I have got to be on my own, you know, I never see anybody so actually balancing that sense of independence with a you know, a network.

Bunty: Neighbours were a very important part of their network. If they had

good neighbours or in sheltered accommodation the hope that they would make friends.

Liz: And transport loomed very large in the research and could they get about.

Marian: So it, it's home in connection, can I go visit people, can I control what food I eat, do I feel safe?

Jack: I think one thing I am fairly certain about is I wouldn't really wish to go into a village for older people. I actually rather like the fact that my next door neighbour's got two small girls and the next one down has got two small boys and you are hearing the sound of children and so on and so forth.

Bea: We like to think of our home as somewhere that brings us comfort and security and so on but then other things can happen and it actually makes us feel more vulnerable because we realise we haven't got the same people around us or it's more difficult to get out.

Diana: Basically it's how confident you feel about yourself and if you feel that you are not capable of keeping a property up to the standard that you are used to you feel then that you are failing and you are losing confidence you become vulnerable

Narrator: In this next scene we meet Patrick who's in his nineties. His wife Gillian is currently in hospital following a recent fall and he's increasingly becoming aware that where he and his wife are living is not meeting their needs. With this in mind he's rung Paul, a voluntary sector worker who he has met before to discuss the situation

Acted Scenario

Patrick: It's good of you to come

Paul: It's good to see you Patrick although I wish it were under happier circumstances. Well, how is Gillian?

Patrick: She is better, thank you. She's eating which is good.

Paul: When did you see her last?

Patrick: Yesterday, it is only 15 minutes on the bus. I will be there this afternoon too,

Paul: So let me get this right. When you called me on Tuesday she had been in there for one night. Have I got that right?

- Patrick: She fell on Monday afternoon. She slipped in the kitchen. Stupid mat. I meant to move it, stupid. Anyway I called 999 yes that was Monday afternoon.
- Paul: It must have been very distressing for you.
- Patrick: And then I called you. I don't know if that was the right thing to do or not but I was a bit shaken up and I didn't want to call social services.
- Paul: Well it was absolutely fine to call me. I mean you know I know both of you, makes sense. I am curious though, why didn't you want to call social services?
- Patrick: I was all ... I thought they were going to say she has to go into care or something, Gillian doesn't want that and neither do I.
- Paul: I can understand this must be distressing for you both. Can I assure you no one is going to make a decision for Gillian without her being involved. This is for you and her to discuss together.
- Patrick: Right.
- Paul: How's the hospital trips? I mean it must be a bit tiring?
- Patrick: Happy to get on the bus. I quite like the route.
- Paul: Well it's lovely countryside round there isn't it?
- Patrick: Yes we used to get about quite a lot on the bus. I need to make a decision about how, since the fall...
- Paul: You said on the phone you felt there was more of an urgency to come to a decision about living arrangements since the fall.
- Patrick: I'm happy to care for her but I do it all I mean it probably sounds old fashioned, I am fine being the man of the house but there is so much more to do and there are some things it seems I just can't do anymore. We barely made it out of the house last winter.
- Paul: What do you mean?
- Patrick: Do you want some tea?
- Paul: Yes, thanks, that would be great Patrick. Would you like a hand?

Patrick: I can manage

Commentary
Marian Barnes:

It is often the case that decisions about where's the best place for me to live will be made on more than one occasion. They are rarely easy decisions. They are often really quite emotional decisions because people are giving up something that's familiar, it may be an indication, a confirmation of their ageing and their reduced capacities and it often moving into a situation that they are scared of.

Patrick: Last winter, terrible wasn't it?

Paul: Yes freezing.

Patrick: It was after that we decided we needed to look into other options I mean every time I cleared the driveway it froze over again, we were stuck, it was ridiculous.

Paul: There's no one you can call on for help?

Commentary
Marian Barnes

Because those decisions are not simply about what are the options which one am I going to choose then it is important to recognise that people need time to come to those conclusions.

Paul: Correct me if I'm wrong here but I seem to remember you and Gillian being put off by the last place?

Patrick: That last place we tried. Not for us.

Paul: I seem to remember Gillian telling me that it was a bit depressing.

Patrick: It was.

Paul: So didn't you have a stay at another place before that? A short stay?

Patrick: Well that was nice. It was the second place put us right off the idea altogether.

Paul: So how do you feel about residential care now? Is it still not an option for you?

Patrick: I am not taking Gillian somewhere she'll be unhappy.

Paul: I completely understand that.

Patrick: But we've got to do something I mean what if she comes home and has another... and I'm not here ... well if I'm at the shops and she falls, I can't be here all the time.

Paul: No, I do understand. And there are other options we can discuss.

Patrick: I am not sending her away.

Paul: No, no.

Patrick: What other options?

Paul: Well, when Gillian comes home we are going to need to establish what her needs are and then look at the possibility of getting you some help for her.

Patrick: Go on.

Paul: I mean it could be that you just need a carer to come in and assist Gillian when you want to go out.

Patrick: I am not bothered about going.

Paul: Don't you like to go out sometimes?

*Commentary
Lizzie Ward:* You might see as a practitioner that somebody you are going to be working with could actually really benefit from help and support. The difficulty is they might not recognise that they need it and they might be unwilling to accept it. It's actually about exploring options with people and saying, well you know, it's up to you but this is, this is what there is, this is what it does, this is what could help you, have a think about it.

Beatrice Gahagan: If somebody comes in and makes suggestions it's easy to think "they want me to do this, should I do it because they want me to do it, is that what everyone else does?" "Perhaps I am not good because I am not doing it". But actually for it to really contribute to your wellbeing it's really important that you think about "well do I want that, what does it mean for me?" "how it would life be different?" "is that something that is going be enjoyable for me or are there other things that I care about more?" Really helping the person to think about how they feel about their life and what's going on for them. It is the starting point, it is the grounding for anything else that follows.

Paul: I did notice that there was a golf bag as I was coming in.

Patrick: Oh that, I should pack that away really.

Paul: Well how long have you been playing?

Patrick: I don't really. I used to years ago. Do you play?

- Paul: No, no, I am a football man myself.
- Patrick: Do you play?
- Paul: No I watch. So, are you still a member?
- Patrick: For what it's worth, nowadays it's ten minutes on the putting green and then a glass or two in the club house with some of the oldies.
- Paul: Well it doesn't sound too bad to me.
- Patrick: Well they've got a nice open fireplace, views across the course, it's not a bad way to unwind, we have all got to make sacrifices somewhere and Gillian is my priority now.
- Paul: I understand she's your priority, and that's OK, but I am not sure sacrificing the things that you like is good for either of you and if you are open to considering outside help for when you go shopping or when you need to go to a doctor, maybe this is a good opportunity for you to enjoy some social activity, so I mean after all you did say it's a great way for you to unwind.
- Patrick: Maybe.
- Paul: And that's why I think you would benefit from the assessment. It might help you both understand that with a little help well you know your life doesn't have to be so difficult.
- Patrick: It certainly didn't used to be but I mean this last year it's been, things change. One minute you seem to be coping well enough, plodding along OK and something happens and you don't feel secure I mean we have enjoyed our retirement choosing not to work anymore is great, we had great fun, we didn't choose for all this though.
- Paul: Maybe this is the way for you to get some of that back again.
- Patrick: It's not that we haven't got money. We have got our savings but if we stay here and pay for care, we don't know how long we are going to live, or how long the money has to last.
- Paul: It's a lot for you to think about.

*Commentary
Marian Barnes:*

One of the things that people talked about in the interviews in relation to well-being was the uncertainty about how long they were going to live. They didn't know whether they were going to have to buy care.

They didn't know whether they were going to have to move into residential accommodation. They didn't know how much money they were likely to need. So when people are doing the financial assessments that they have to do it's important for them to be aware of that. The sort of quite challenging and difficult assessments that older people are making themselves about their own financial resources, how long they have got to last, what they might need to be useful.