

Housing and Home in Later Life

Heywood, F., Oldman, C. and Means, R. (2002) Open University Press, £16.99, paperback, 185pp.

This book, in the highly regarded 'Rethinking Ageing' series, looks at housing and home as a significant part of the infrastructure of successful ageing in modern Britain. The book aims among other things to critique the assumptions which underline current practice in housing and care and to consider new approaches which might lead to a more user-centred approach. The authors are well known in gerontology and social policy and they have produced a useful text for anyone interested in the quality of life of older people.

The authors define later life as the period after the mid-point of maximum life expectancy, at around 50 years, and therefore 'older people' includes all those from fifty to over a hundred years. Acknowledging the diversity of life experience and lifestyles within this huge section of the population, the authors nevertheless defend the use of 'age' as an analytic category because of the here-and-now effects of past and present policy and provision.

Part one of the book aims to review the issues of housing and home in later life, beginning with theoretical perspectives of ageing and the effects of those perspectives as played out in the production of forms of housing based on special needs. To elucidate the current pattern of housing and care provision, Chapter 3 considers the differing perspectives of central and local government, working within specific political and economic contexts, explaining, for example, some of the reasoning and pressures behind the allocation of council housing. It also provides a glimpse, at least, of the perspectives of some older people themselves, based on various pieces of research. Chapter 4 then goes into details about health issues. It considers moves to get housing into health and care agendas, and lays out some of the age-related and housing-related illnesses that can affect people at this stage of life.

Part two of the book, entitled 'reporting empirical studies' is arguably more a continuation of the discussion of specific issues, with reference to recent research by the authors and others. It begins with a discussion of moving home in later life, including the 'push' and 'pull' factors of why people move, and the implications of moving at this time. Chapter 5 describes HOOP (Housing Options for Older People), a tool which was co-developed by two of the authors to help older people think about their housing situations and make informed decisions about moving. One of the reasons why people might feel impelled to move home at this stage in life is the physical condition of the housing that some older people occupy. Chapter 6 provides an overview of the work of Home Improvement Agencies and the effects of grants systems relating to repairs and adaptations. But a minority of older people with housing problems, either by choice or necessity, move into accommodation which offers some level of communality, and Chapter 7 discusses issues relating to residential care homes, sheltered housing, and 'very sheltered' housing.

In both mainstream and specialised housing situations, older people may come to have health and care needs that bring them into contact with the statutory authorities, and at that point communication between agencies may be crucial in achieving the level and kind of support that the older individual wants. Chapter 8 goes into detail about joint working between housing, health, and social services, based on Means and Heywood's involvement with a government-

sponsored exercise to encourage effective joint working. Here they concentrate on the knowledge and skills which housing, health, and social services staff require in order to interact effectively. In this they elaborate one of the requirements of managerial flexibility called for by Cameron *et al* (2000) in *Crossing the housing and care divide*, a report on joint working projects in the programme of the same name.

But it is in the final chapter that the book engages with the fundamental problem of ageism which still underlies attitudes to housing and care. Given the history of housing in this country, it is hardly surprising that housing provision for those considered to be vulnerable has carried many connotations over the years – beneficence and welfare, the rationing of resources, means testing and selection criteria, regulation and restriction. As more of the population lives to be older and to remain independent for longer, standards of housing that might have been acceptable for much of the twentieth century are no longer able to support the kinds of lives that older people live – as workers, family members, friends, activists, hobbyists and consumers. The authors of *Housing and Home in Later Life* call for a new mind set on these issues and the involvement in older people in forming it. In proposing a social model of later life to understand future housing needs, the authors make a timely and welcome contribution to thinking on housing policy. A recommended read.

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Cameron, A., Harrison, L., Burton, P. and Marsh, A. (2000) *Crossing the housing and care divide*. Bristol, Policy Press and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation