Launching g15’s Real London Lives year two research to the sector and beyond

Successfully communicated the second year of findings from g15’s three-year longitudinal Real London Lives research at a Breakfast Panel Debate. Hosted by Julie Rugg, University of York to give an insight into the research, Nigel Keohane, Social Market Foundation looking at the impact of the Budget on low paid workers and David Leam, London First talking about the importance of social housing to London as a business city, and chaired by Mark Rogers we secured 47 attendees from across the sector and the Department for Communities and Local Government.

As well as a healthy debate in the room, the findings were also communicated through a press release about the rise of jigsaw jobs, which was covered in 24 Housing from a comment piece from Mark, as well as social media and tweets following the event.

A post-event email survey provided very positive feedback from attendees, praising the quality of the research and debate, the panel participants and how the event was run.

Attendee quotes from post-event email survey

Very interesting summary presentation from the lead researcher. Some interesting points made about people’s instable employment trajectories and motivation to work

The research findings were very interesting particularly the identification of the drivers, such as childcare, that support people’s financial resilience

I found the detail of the research and discussion in the light of policy changes very interesting
Policy:
Jigsaw jobs and employment myths

Mark Rogers
Deputy Chair of the g15 and CEO of Circle Housing

While the sector continues to work through the implications of the government’s summer budget, it is crucial that our residents’ aspirations remain front and centre in future planning.

Our residents have dealt with plenty of turbulence over the past few years and we know the challenges and choices that they face are likely to get much tougher. The latest research findings from the g15’s Real London Lives project are timely as they remind us that regardless of the changes in the external environment, each family has its own goals and ambitions.

We are now two years into a three-year longitudinal study examining the lives of London’s social housing tenants and a clear picture is emerging. Residents’ lives are often very complex, particularly as they relate to a variety of life histories, and difficult-to-explain stories.

But what is absolutely clear is their sheer determination to go out to work and make a better life for themselves and their families.

Three quarters of households are still in work a year on and not one of the 70 families in the latest round of interviews contained ‘generations out of work’, contrary to widely held myths about residents living in social housing.

The emerging trend is not about increasing unemployment, but rather under employment. Many residents have seen their income reduced from a full-time to a part-time wage. For others who were already in part-time work, they have faced the prospect of further squeezed hours, meaning erratic shifts at odd times. Almost everyone who was in part-time work wanted to increase their working hours and some are juggling two poorly paid jobs which fit together in terms of hours, so-called ‘jigsaw jobs’. This is to try and overcome reduced working hours and low pay levels.

Despite being in paid work, jigsaw jobs still never equal full-time employment and often managing the two positions together creates more problems. In reality, jigsaw jobs mean residents are actually worse off financially, often working for below the minimum wage after expenses such as agency fees and travel costs have been deducted.

So, while on the surface residents are continuing to hold down ‘employment’, when you dig under the surface, in reality, their circumstances are fragile and precarious.

Their determination to work – even if this is low paid, with erratic hours and creates childcare problems – shines through, in order to independently provide a better future for themselves and their families.

The value of this research by the Real London Lives project is already clear. The data is helping us to really understand more about the challenges our residents face, so that we can work together to develop solutions for the long term sustainability of this vibrant city and help prepare them for their changing circumstances following government reforms.
London sees rise of ‘jigsaw jobs’

Social housing residents living in London are increasingly juggling two poorly paid jobs which fit together in terms of hours, so called ‘jigsaw jobs’.

This is to try and overcome reduced working hours and low pay experienced during the last year, according to new qualitative research by the g15 group of London’s largest housing associations.

The in-depth interviews with residents revealed that almost everyone who was in part-time work wanted to increase their working hours. However, despite being in paid work, ‘jigsaw jobs’ still never equaled full-time employment for residents and often managing the two positions together lead to more problems.

In addition, ‘jigsaw jobs’ usually resulted in residents being worse off financially, working for below the minimum wage after expenses such as agency fees and travel costs have been deducted.

The latest research from the Real London Lives project – which is now two years into a three-year longitudinal study examining the lives of London’s social housing tenants – revealed the emerging trend was not increasing unemployment, but under-employment, with residents doing everything possible to try and combat a reduction in their working hours. In some cases this had reduced income from a full-time to a part-time wage, but in many others, already part-time hours had been pared away further to leave erratic shifts at odd times.

Making work pay was difficult for many residents, but the availability of tax credit played a substantial role in encouraging people to take work and stay in work. However, social housing residents still believe it is better to be in work rather than rely on benefits, even if work is only slightly more profitable.