

Richard Blanco:

Hello and welcome to Listen Up Landlords. I'm Richard Blanco. The NHS website defines a hoarding disorder as acquiring an excessive number of items and storing them in a chaotic manner, usually resulting in unmanageable amounts of clutter. It's estimated that hoarding is a problem for around six percent of people. Now, what happens if your tenant has the disorder? Especially if they're in a shared house. How would you broach the issue? What help and support can you get? And what might be the potential hazards? I will be joined by Jo Cooke from Hoarding Disorders, UK and Jack Moore who runs Respect My Stuff and is a national trainer on hoarding. He's also going to be running a new course for the NRLA on the topic. We will also be catching up with Dan Cumming the latest issues testing his colleagues on the NRLA advice line.

Richard Blanco:

But first the government is funding a scheme to welcome and house up to 20,000 refugees from Afghanistan with 5,000 expected in the first year. The scheme is administered by participating local authorities, but they are dependent on properties provided for them by private landlords and each local authority involved has slightly different terms. Let's talk to Krish Kandiah who is Director of Afghan Welcome, a coalition of charities and civil society groups. Krish, thanks very much for joining us.

Krish Kandiah:

Nice to see you Richard.

Richard Blanco:

Now, tell us first of all, Krish, which Afghans are actually already here in the UK, 'cause there's this ARAP scheme I think isn't there, that's precedes the scheme that I just mentioned.

Krish Kandiah:

Yes, that's right Richard. So the Afghan Resettlement Assistance Programme is the one that's in motion at the moment. That's around eight to 10,000 Afghans. They're normally the people that were serving with our armed forces or our embassy. So a lot of them are translators or security staff or drivers, and they've come to the UK because they couldn't live anymore in Afghanistan, because they'd be labelled traitors. Often it was the men that were the workers. They were allowed to bring their wives and dependent children under 18. And that under 18 bit really scares me, because imagine that you were a person that had a 19 year old daughter, you weren't allowed to bring her. And if you didn't come, the rest of your family couldn't come. So some terrible decisions were made.

Krish Kandiah:

These were the people that we saw on our television screens trying to get into Kabul airport. Many people hanging onto the outside of aeroplanes or crammed into the cargo holds. Because of this lack of available housing, the government's had to put them into temporary accommodation, into motels and hotels. And one of the hotels I'm actually on my way to visit now has around 250 Afghans in them and about 175 of them have children, normally primary school age, because the average Afghan family size is two adults and six children.

Krish Kandiah:

So we're really desperate to find landlords who are willing to step up and be benevolent to their local authority, to help these families begin to rebuild their lives. Can you imagine the trauma they've been through leaving behind their brothers and their sisters, their aunties, their uncles, their grandparents, and their parents in order to escape? And then having nowhere to really call home at the moment, a hotel or a motel. It's very difficult to begin the healing process to begin to get your kids into school or begin to find a job. So this housing piece is what's really needed in order to help them rebuild their lives.

Richard Blanco:

Yes, and this is an opportunity for landlords to really transform people's lives, isn't it Kris? By offering homes. And there are various schemes that enable them to do that. So if a landlord is interested in getting involved, what can they do? Who do they need to approach?

Krish Kandiah:

Best thing to do is to approach your local authority. As you say Richard, some are offering amazing schemes, you might want to be equipped with knowing some of them. Wolverhampton has a particularly powerful scheme where they will give you four months rent up front, they'll redecorate your house so it's ready to receive an Afghan family, and when the family move on, they'll redecorate it so you can get it back on the market. So there's some really innovative schemes. And if your local authority isn't on board, then name drop Wolverhampton and say, look, some local authorities are doing a brilliant job, why wouldn't you want to get on board too?

Richard Blanco:

Yes. And I've looked at some of the schemes and often they're for two years. Some of them might be for one year, initially. There is a concern in London and the Southeast that the local housing allowance rates will not pay the market rent. So a lot of local authorities offer an initial incentive. And so you need to kind of look at how much rent you're getting over the 12 month or 24 month period. So it's important to budget in that way.

Krish Kandiah:

The government has offered something Richard as well, some top up funding available centrally. Some local authorities are not quite sure how to access that yet, but there's hope there as well, that some of the gap between the market rate and what the LA would normally be able to afford can be met as well. So don't let that put you off from coming forward and encouraging your local authority to take Afghan refugees.

Richard Blanco:

And the other thing that landlords need to know is that these people are refugees, not asylum seekers. So they will actually have a biometric residence card and they will be allowed to work. So a lot of people are actually very skilled professionals aren't they, who will be looking to get jobs as soon as possible.

Krish Kandiah:

That's right. Many of the Afghan families receive their biometric residency card as soon they enter the quarantine hotel. They have a national insurance number. They do have the right to work immediately and full recourse to public funds. Other than that, all sorts of incredible Afghan families, including people that used to run the social media, people that were in charge of logistics, people that were

translators. My daughter came with me on a kind of picnic with an Afghan family. She's got special needs. She's our foster daughter, she's been in our family a long time.

Krish Kandiah:

And we were worried how she was going to communicate, because lots of the children don't speak any English. But somehow at the end of this little picnic, after about an hour, she'd become best friends with a Afghan little girl. And it's an incredible privilege to get to know people.

Krish Kandiah:

Don't write them off because of headlines you've read about other kind of forms of social housing. Don't write them off because you've never met anyone from Afghanistan, but just meet them on their own terms. They will melt your hearts and just imagine yourself in their shoes. They cannot go home because the Taliban will seek them out and murder them. I've got a huge heart for veterans and these guys should be considered as veterans because they served our troops. But unlike our veterans, they are never going to be able to get to come home again. And so we need to make Britain their new home and be great neighbours and great colleagues and landlords to them.

Richard Blanco:

Something that landlords need to be aware of, perhaps a cultural difference that many of the Afghans on the scheme are coming in larger families aren't they, so Afghans will often live with extended family, or may have more children than is common in the UK. I just flag that up because that's something to point out.

Krish Kandiah:

Yeah, that's important. They've not been able to bring elderly dependent relatives. So they've only been able to bring husband or wife and their children, but you're right. The average Afghan family size is six children. I have six children too, mainly through fostering and adoption so I can relate to it. So it does mean that some of the properties that some landlords are making available, won't be large enough. There are some smaller families. They tend to be younger families who just haven't had that many kids yet. And those properties are going really quickly and people are transitioning out of the temporary accommodation into them. And it can be anywhere in the UK. We've heard of people going to Scotland and Wales and anywhere those properties are available, they can be resettled. And there's a lot of public interest in offering practical support to them once they do come to a new area. So hopefully as a landlord, you won't be on your own. You'll get that support from the local authority and other civic society groups.

Richard Blanco:

I'd like to bring in Surrey based landlord Jo Sherring into our discussion. Jo, you have first-hand experience of letting to refugees. I know you've led to a Syrian family. Can you tell us a little bit about the experience? What was your initial thinking? Why did you want to help a Syrian family?

Jo Sherring:

Hi Richard. Well, I actually do work with refugees. I'm involved in refugee charities, but funny enough, I didn't actually think about using the properties that my husband and I have until that time. So working with refugee families, I see how important that is. As Kris has just said, these are people who are

displaced, cannot go home, they've lost everything. And just through the support that I was offering with the charities, I was seeing how important that fresh start is. When you've lost everything, you need a chance to rebuild your life.

Jo Sherring:

Also visiting in their homes and thinking, wow, they really look after these properties. And then also understanding how as a landlord, you can still get your rent. So having seen all of that, that's what first got me thinking, well, maybe this is something we could do.

Richard Blanco:

And how did you make it happen, Jo?

Jo Sherring:

So it's probably a couple of years into working with refugees. One of our properties became available. It's a four bedroom flat. And I said to my husband, how about offering it to a refugee family?

Jo Sherring:

His initial reaction was you can't give it away. We need money to live on. So I said no, I explained to him again how it worked. There's two routes actually, families can be resettled through the government. One is through local authorities, but the other one is through community sponsorship. And that's when a community group comes together and says well, we will welcome a family. We put all the mechanisms in place ourselves. So my first call was to Reset, who are an organisation coordinating community sponsorship. So I phoned them first and said, do you have any sponsorship groups in this area? They didn't. But then I tried the local council who were resettling Syrian families. So that's where the first connection was made. They come and view the property, see if it's suitable. And that's where we went from.

Richard Blanco:

And how did it go with your initial tenants, Jo?

Jo Sherring:

Well, they're still there. They've been there two years. They are just amazing tenants. I mean, we had students in the flat before. No sweeping generalisations, but as landlords, I think we all know the challenges that can come with some students.

Richard Blanco:

Higher maintenance.

Jo Sherring:

Yes. And we now have a family of six and they just, they look after the property beautifully. I suspect when the children get out of bed, that mum might be ironing the duvets in the morning, they are just immaculate. Very house proud, very hospitable. So if you go and do a maintenance call, you'll be showered with coffee and treats and welcomed in. They're great neighbours. So just yes, lovely tenants to have really. And we've had our rent paid every month, on time. So yeah, very happy.

Richard Blanco:

Fantastic. Now Kris, I want to talk to you about some of the anxieties that landlords might have. And a lot of this is built on stereotypes and misunderstanding really, I think, isn't it? First of all some landlords might think, oh my God, six kids, they're going to wreck the house. It's just going to be too much wear and tear. I don't want a larger family. But we've heard from Jo that, actually, and I suspect it's similar with Afghan people. There's an issue about really taking care of the home and cleanliness and so on isn't there Kris. So there's some cultural differences that people need to understand.

Krish Kandiah:

Yeah, that's right. It's so lovely to hear what Jo was saying there. And that's been my experience. Even visiting someone in a transition hotel, I've been given gifts. I'm thinking hang on, you are a refugee and you want to give me a gift. This seems really inappropriate, but there's incredible generosity there. Again, speaking to Wolverhampton local authority and they were trying to be as objective as they could be, but they said, actually it is our refugee tenants that look after the houses better than everybody else. The stereotypes are exactly the wrong way round, so let's get rid of that.

Krish Kandiah:

And again, I want to encourage people to empathise with people that have lost everything. If you've lost everything, you tend to be very careful with what you do have. And so we've noticed that in the way that people are treating the gifts we've been able to give. We're providing people with brand new pushchairs and prams and stuff so that they're safe for families to move around. And again, it's met with an incredible sense of gratitude and a real sense of honour, and they want to make sure they look after what they've been given.

Richard Blanco:

And another anxiety might be around tenants recovering from trauma. We've talked about that needing specialist support, that people may develop mental health issues, or the landlord may have fears that they're not going to get that specialist support perhaps around translation, et cetera, not being able to communicate very easily with tenants. How can you allay some fears around that?

Krish Kandiah:

You know, those are legitimate concerns. People have been in a war zone. Even just the last few days, there was a bomb that went off and killed many people. And some of the people that are arriving here were witnesses to that. So of course we should expect them to have trauma. I think as a nation, we're becoming more trauma aware. We recognise that one in six of our children in school are facing a mental health problem. So there's a greater sense that this is actually just a normal part of life now. So we shouldn't stigmatise it.

Krish Kandiah:

The local authorities do have a budget to support Afghan refugees with. And so they should be able to get hold of those services. But to be honest with you, that is a major challenge across the UK. As a foster parent, I know that access to CAMs services is tricky. So I can't paint a rose tinted glasses picture for you, but what I can tell you is the people that I've met who have been through incredible trauma are still incredibly generous, very calm, very grateful to be here, even though at the moment they're facing some real challenges.

Richard Blanco:

And there are strategic migration partnerships, aren't there? Between groups of local authorities and they can provide specialist help. So again, that's something to ask the local authority about.

Krish Kandiah:

Yes, that's right.

Richard Blanco:

Another anxiety that sometimes landlords have is they may have had experiences sort of tearing their hair out with local authorities, 'cause they've been a bit inefficient or bureaucratic and don't do what they say they're going to do. You know, that is always a bit of an anxiety for landlords.

Krish Kandiah:

It is. And I understand that and you know, I'm a local authority foster carer. So I know the pros and cons of local authority administration. What I've experienced with local authorities, I'm on my way to visit one now, they've just rolled out as best they can the red carpet. There is such a sense of wanting to do right by this group of people that they are trying their hardest. That there's a bigger political question about whether they're getting the support and the funding they need, but basically to have a job at the moment in a local authority, you've got to be driven more than just earning money. You normally want to make a difference in people's lives. And that's what I'm finding.

Richard Blanco:

Jo, what would you say to landlords who might have some of these anxieties? You've had your own personal experience.

Jo Sherring:

Yeah. I think one quite practical thing is that they come, as you said, they get the biometric cards, they have a right to be here and a right to work. If they do need to claim benefits for a time to learn English, you can elect to have the rent paid direct to you. So that helps with any anxiety over payment, it cuts the local authority out of the rent payment, which has worked well for us.

Jo Sherring:

And yeah, they do have issues. But as Kris said, everyone that I work with is gracious, is appreciative. And it's just, it's not just win-win, it's win, win, win, win, win for us. You get your rent. You're helping a family, that they're lovely. You're involved with them, that you're seeing them move forward. You see the kids progress. It's just, it's a wonderful thing to do on so many levels.

Jo Sherring:

And you get a return on your investment as a landlord. I just couldn't think of anything better to do with those investments that we have, than use those to transform people's lives. I feel like a grandmother to so many families now. The kids, you watch that journey with them. We've got a little boy who's in our property whose got very poor sight and we've been helping him with some lessons just through volunteers and that little boy, just every volunteer thanks me for the chance to be part of his journey. The landlord is the starting point for that resettlement. You are the one that enables that fresh start for that family.

Richard Blanco:

Now, you've begun the process for housing an Afghan refugee family Jo. Can you tell us about the process so far? Just briefly?

Jo Sherring:

Well again, it's slightly arms length. So the first property that worked really well, we have another property came up a couple of months ago and I knew there was a community sponsorship group in that area. And they have been waiting a long time to find a suitable property. It's a four- bed property. And so they came over, had a look at it. Everything was great. So two weeks ago they signed the rental agreement temporarily. They signed it, and covered the rent until the family are moved in. So yeah, I'm waiting to hear who's going to move in, the property's ready to go. They're busy putting bedding in and doing the little bits and pieces to make it ready for that family. But yeah, we're eagerly waiting to hear what the family's going to be, but I anticipated it'll be one of the families that are currently here and in hotels and hopefully with the four bedrooms, it can accommodate a good size family.

Richard Blanco:

It's fantastic to hear how successful your values-driven business is Jo, and how you are really doing a lot of social good as well. And it's very beneficial for you too. I hope it will inspire a lot of landlords. Kris, I wanted to just come back again to this question. How can landlord express an interest in helping? And basically they need to contact the housing department in their local authority. Is that right?

Krish Kandiah:

Yes. That's the best way. The Reset scheme that Joe talked about is excellent, but isn't needed particularly for this group, because it's not a community sponsorship programme. So you can go direct to your local authority, make the offer. If you have any issues, I'd love for people to be able to reach out to me. If we hear lots of people are being turned down, that's something we can do something about as well at a national level. So really inspiring to hear Jo's story. I've heard stories like that echoed around the country. And as she said, what a win, win, win, that you get to do something really good to help people absolutely transform their lives and you get paid for it. I mean that's a privilege. So I really want to encourage as many landlords as possible to step forward. We look forward to hearing the good news of Afghan families getting the homes they need.

Richard Blanco:

And if you want to contact Kris, you can google Afghan Welcome. And it's part of Welcome Churches, isn't it Kris as well?

Krish Kandiah:

Yeah, that's right.

Richard Blanco:

Well Kris Kandiah and Jo Sherring, thank you so much for joining us. It's time to join NRLA advice line compliance specialist, Dan Cumming for our monthly update on calls from landlords. Welcome back, Dan. What topics are zinging down the lines this month?

Dan Cumming:



With it being this time of year, lots of landlords calling about starting tenancies, whether that be student landlords for next year or people moving on around this time of year, it's quite common. Things like referencing, what do I need at the start of the tenancy, cleaning, inventories, students, that kind of thing.

Richard Blanco:

Okay. And I understand that routine inspections are coming up quite a lot. You're getting quite a lot of calls on that and can be quite tricky, can't they Dan? I mean, I try and do them sort of every six months, but sometimes I feel like I'm invading people's privacy. And in order to go into every room, I say I need to check all the electrical sockets visually to check their aren't any problems. And generally my tenants are very compliant, but a lot of people can have tricky moments, can't they with these inspections?

Dan Cumming:

Yeah, I definitely agree with that. So there's all sorts of various different ways people could perform inspections or how often they might like to do them. It sounds quite simple. You know, you just go and have a look around the property, see what's going on. The main point is you want to keep an eye on what's happening at the property in terms of its condition. Also to an extent how things are getting on with tenants. You know, if you have a HMO property, there can be interpersonal disputes. It might be keeping an eye on that. Obviously we're not here to parent people, you know, it can help to have an eye on it. Some landlords will pay for cleaners as part of the rent. They might give you a hint that oh, actually, it was a bit of a mess or two tenants were arguing and you can keep an eye on it and manage it effectively that way.

Dan Cumming:

Like you said, six monthly, that could be a timeframe. With HMOs, you might want to do it a bit more frequently. If you're aware there's been an issue in the past, or maybe you've just fixed something you want to make sure that it stays fixed, you might maybe say monthly, just to look at that one thing. There's a lot of different ways you can handle it.

Richard Blanco:

And it is so important to carry out regular inspections, isn't it Dan? I mean sometimes we see TV shows where the landlord goes around to the property and they had no idea there was some mega amount of damp in there and it's like, why haven't you been inspecting? And also of course, there could be a cannabis factory going on there without you knowing. It's just really important, isn't it?

Dan Cumming:

Yeah. I would definitely agree with that. And in terms of, for any property or especially a HMO property, if you've got that record of here's when I went to the property, here's what I found, here's what I did. If you did need to do anything, then if there's ever a complaint further down the line, you can show, well, look, I've been a good landlord all this time. I do inspect. So if suddenly there is a cannabis factory in your house, it wasn't your fault because you've been keeping an eye on it. And it's certainly the fault of someone else at that point.

Richard Blanco:

And having that paper trail in case issues come up later is important too, isn't it?



Dan Cumming:

Definitely.

Richard Blanco:

Okay. Well, it's great to hear from you again, Dan. Until next time, many thanks.

Dan Cumming:

Great, thanks.

Richard Blanco:

Most tenancies run smoothly, but landlords and agents usually face challenging situations with tenants at some point. A tenant with a hoarding disorder may be putting themselves and other occupants at risk. Landlords need to show understanding. They may need to be tactful and set realistic goals and boundaries. I'm joined by Jo Cooke from Hoarding Disorders UK and Jack Moore who runs Respect My Stuff and is a national trainer on hoarding. Jo, welcome to the programme. Can you tell us, first of all, a bit about hoarding? What do people tend to hoard? Where do they put it? How does it tend to develop?

Jo Cooke:

There's all types of items people can hoard. Some of the general items can be newspapers, books are a big thing, clothes, magazines, food, more unusually maybe fishing rods, mattresses, toenail clippings. Hoarding is very complex and understanding the reasons why someone may hoard varies. Each case is unique, but we do know that trauma and loss, grief and bereavement are certainly huge contributors towards hoarding. And I'm receiving more and more phone calls in the last year as a result of COVID and the pandemic, people's homes have begun to become quite unsafe in certain situations. And hoarding is very much an anxiety based disorder. So we hoard to keep ourselves safe. We hoard for the 'just in case' reasons. We hoard as a form of insurance, as a form of security, as emotional installation. The world may hurt me, but my stuff doesn't.

Richard Blanco:

I find it incredibly interesting actually, Jo, and I'm still sort of reeling from the toenail clippings and fishing rods hoards. It's incredible the things that people will hoard and this idea that people might hoard to protect themselves, to almost cocoon themselves. And also the idea that it's to do with something from the past. I have a neighbour actually to one of my properties who is hoarding and his parents died in the property and he's kind of had the property ever since. My feeling is that it's just got stuck in that moment from when his parents died. And does that sound like a fairly typical scenario?

Jo Cooke:

Oh yes. I've worked and I know many people hoarding behaviours that are still living in their parents' house. That's what they've known. And then you've got the grief over losing the parent. And sometimes typically, you've got that lack of life skills. So for many, we need to be a bit of a detective. Now, how has that environment become hoarded? Is it hoarding from an emotional attachment point of view? Is it also to do with lack of life skills? Is it to do with the fact that they really don't know how to manage an environment? You know, we are not given a manual, so we might not know that it's a good idea to put our rubbish out each week. It's about finding the meaning in the mess as to how is this situation presented as a hoarded home.

Richard Blanco:

Now, what are the first signs, Jo, of hoarding? What should landlords be looking out for?

Jo Cooke:

I think if we can capture it earlier rather than later, someone may well sort of say, oh, I just haven't got round to tidying it up, if it appears to be quite cluttered and unsafe. And if a landlord was going to do a revisit and it was still in the condition that it was, then you may well want to question, is this person hanging onto it because they have an emotional attachment? Or is it situational? Or just understanding what's going on in that person's life. So we always talk about looking at the person first, the stuff is secondary. To have some conversations around what has impacted on that person, that their environment has become unusually cluttered.

Richard Blanco:

It really is about taking a holistic view, isn't it, of the person and their history and their life. Jack, let me bring you in here. I wanted to ask, are we as likely to find hoarding in social and private sector housing or indeed in the owner occupiers sector, or do we tend to see it in one or other of the sectors?

Jack Moore:

Hi Richard, the answer to that is yes. You're going to find it everywhere. You're going to find it in social housing. You're going to find it in private rented. You're going to find it in incredibly expensive properties. Only recently spoke to an environmental health officer who I had worked with a few years ago in South Kensington. There is a woman he is trying to deal with with, with great difficulty, who owns two properties in South Kensington. They are both full to the extreme and he's not even sure where she is sleeping. Now she's a retired Criminal Barrister, incredibly intelligent, bit eccentric, but knows her stuff. And then we get the other extreme. Most of the work that I would do would tend to be in social housing.

Richard Blanco:

Okay, now what's the way for landlord to broach this subject with tenants Jack?

Jack Moore:

Definitely making sure you're not being judgemental. You know, we all live to a certain standard and it's been really important that you're not being judgemental. You are aware of hoarding, that it can happen. You may come across it and it may be when you're at least expecting it. You know, maybe when you're doing routine inspection.

Jack Moore:

But also the tenants, the person hoarding may come over as being quite defensive, sometimes quite rude. They don't want you there. Sometimes they can be maybe quite tearful, but no matter what way they come over to you they will be embarrassed, ashamed. They may not say that, but later down the line. So I think it's trying to put yourself into their shoes and the way that I would go about it is looking initially at, as Jo said, looking at the individual, but also their safety. Their safety and the safety of others so that your concern is not that they've got all this stuff, but just look, there's so much stuff here that that could impede if there is a fire risk. But you know, trying to organise, trying to make it safer for them and other people coming in.

Richard Blanco:

And Jo, I saw you nodding there. Can you offer any guidelines? Any sort of dos and don'ts really around how to approach people around hoarding.

Jo Cooke:

I think you are more likely for that person to engage in looking in their environment if they know that you are coming from the point of view of their safety, rather from the point of view of judgement, discrimination and feelings of punishment, because they're waiting to be judged. And I think we always start small. So I work very closely with the fire services to help understand the implications of the fire risks. We come from the point of view of addressing safety. And even for starters, making sure that the front door can fully open and shut. So that in the event of a fire, we're looking at exit routes, fire escape plans, minimising the risks of fire. I always start by taking the recommendations of the fire services, but also looking at their quality of life, you know, have they got running water? Is the boiler working? I think that's really where we would start. It may well be that they might want to change their environment, so it might be that we look at their agenda as well.

Richard Blanco:

We don't want to be judgemental, but you know, there are actually some serious hazards there aren't there. Can you tell us a bit more about the hazards and how local authorities or fire services might assist and what areas you cover on the course?

Jack Moore:

The biggest risk is definitely fire. One in four household fire deaths are typically due to hoarding. An unhoarded property fire in 90% of the cases, the fire and rescue can contain the fire to the room of origin. In 90% of cases. If it's a hoarded property, that reduces to 40%, so there is 60% chance of that fire escaping from that room to other rooms, maybe communal areas if it's flat.

Jack Moore:

For people who hoard, many of them are incredibly intelligent, incredibly smart. I think it's important that they're given those sort of statistics. Structural damage as well. The weight. I also run Dehoarding South West, it's a community interest company. So it's de-hoarding, going in and working over months and months with people who hoard. And we are taking out, and I mean tonnes of stuff regularly from properties, sometimes above ground floor, maybe in a flat. And if you just think of the weight of that as well. Other things that can be difficult is avalanche, stuff just literally falling on either them or someone visiting. Maybe you do an inspection, a landlord do an inspection, or if there's a fireman or paramedic coming in, that thing as well. So every person who hoards is unique, totally unique. So it's very, very difficult to say, oh, this is, you know, what to do this, what we must do with the training it's for the landlords, just to have that bit of knowledge. Knowledge is confidence as well, in dealing with the person who is hoarding.

Richard Blanco:

Jo, the World Health Organisation has classified hoarding as a mental health disorder. I just wondered what impact is the option of getting a diagnosis having for people who find themselves in this situation?

Jo Cooke:

I think it's quite difficult at the moment because it is a newly diagnosed disorder. I know very few people that fit the criteria under the five diagnostic criteria. It's quite hard to get a diagnosis because actually even now, many people are still regarding hoarding as a lifestyle choice. There's still so much in terms of educating people that this is a mental health disorder. And like Jack, the appetite for training and getting to understand it has trebled in the last year and people are going right, well, I need to understand it and how to work with it. So actually going down the NHS route to get a diagnosis is only just one small part of supporting someone with hoarding behaviours because they not only need the practical help, but they also need the psychological help.

Jo Cooke:

But it's also understanding that probably 60 to 70% of people with hoarding have other co-occurring mental health issues. And it's like well, let's understand what's triggered the hoarding in the first place. So you are looking at condition, you know, we've got depression, we've got psychosis, we've got compulsive acquiring, ADHD, aquired brain injury. PTSD is huge and I think we are not yet seeing the fallout of COVID and how, people's response to COVID, some people are traumatised by that. And hoarding is a way of coping with trauma. So I think all of that needs to be factored in, in being able to support someone with those behaviours.

Richard Blanco:

Jack, when might you need to consider evicting the tenant and how might you use, say, Section 8 if you can't use Section 21?

Jack Moore:

If, when it comes to them not engaging, maybe in doing stuff in between, you know, when I come back next week I really want to try to sort this little area out. Or if they're not doing that, they're not engaging, then when it comes down to it, you've got responsibilities and you have to think of others, especially if you're in a block of flats. Neighbours, maybe, if in a terrace. And the problem with Section 8 is that you would've had to absolutely dot the Is and cross the Ts, because of course they can launch a defence on that Section 8.

Jack Moore:

I have done so much work with courts over the years to do with hoarding. The judges, the courts are getting extremely hot now on the whole side around mental illness and including the hoarding as well and understanding that, and will very often come down on the side of the tenant, which leaves the landlord in that same situation.

Jack Moore:

The thing is, where does that person go? That person is still an individual, that person has still got, and this may not be the mental illness of hoarding disorder. It may be depression. It may be anxiety. It may be post traumatic stress disorder. People think, oh yeah, there's mental health teams, there's the social services, there's the safeguarding teams. What they are only looking at the most extreme, extreme cases. The vast majority of cases that can be done too, certainly from a social landlord side, it's down to the social landlords to try and deal with, with the help maybe of people, Jo, myself, and people to train them.

Richard Blanco:

Jo, can you finish us off on an optimistic note with a situation, perhaps that has really turned around for someone and where their housing situation has improved and gone forward positively?

Jo Cooke:

What I love to do is to delve into people's motivation. I think if we can find the motivation, whether that's to to reclaim our space, whether that's to lose weight, or- I think you can really work with someone. So we are more likely to be able to help someone. If we treat it with curiosity, compassion and kindness, we look at rather than getting rid of stuff, we look at reclaiming space. And how you use that space, and how that feels for people. That can go a long way. And I'm working with one chap and we use the clutter image ratings, which are a way of measuring clutter. And I would say that his home was probably the worst that environmental health have seen in Berkshire, but his motivation is now to cook a stir fry. So his wok is in the middle of his hallway because that's his reminder about, yes, it might be difficult letting go, but I want to use my kitchen to cook a stir fry.

Richard Blanco:

I find all of this stuff amazing. I'm all in favour of emotionally intelligent landlords, which is what we're saying we need to be. And I find taking a psychodynamic perspective really of what's happening with your tenants and what's going on for them really interesting. So Jo Cooke and Jack Moore, thank you so much for joining us.

Richard Blanco:

Well that's it for this episode, thank you to all of our guests and to our producer Sally Walmsley. Listen Up Landlords is brought to you by the National Residential Landlords Association. There's lots of information on the topics we have covered today and more at [NRLA.org.uk](http://NRLA.org.uk), Including information on the hoarding course that we have discussed. Don't forget to follow the NRLA on social media for the very latest on all things PRS. Join us again next month. Thank you for listening.