THIS WAS
TOMORROW

DANIELLE

Calder Valley CLT tenant

In conversation with Enrico Policardo
Calder Valley CLT, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire
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Edited from the recorded conversation.

01 How did you get into this house?

DANIELLE: My name's Danielle. Basically, I was on the waiting list with Pennine since 2012. I was sleeping in my mum's living room all that time […] and I got offered this in 2024. I'd been bidding on properties but never got offered any, even though I came second, and even though I was classed as high priority […], with me and my daughter in the living room. I must have had six or seven supporting letters saying we were in desperate need of a house. […] And the minute I bid on this one, I got offered it. I bid on the Sunday night and got offered it the Thursday after.

02 How did the Land Trust come to own it?

PAUL: The man who owned it loved the house, but it was absolutely freezing - lots of windows, all single-glazed sashes. He wanted to stay, but he didn't want to put the money in to do it up. He was a member of the Land Trust, so he came to us and said, do you want to buy it? We put it through our calculator and it didn't work - we were miles off being able to afford it and charge a social rent. So he said, how about I sell it to you for what I paid for it? That still didn't work. We got some funding from Homes England, and in the end the only thing that made it work was that he offered us a mortgage over 20 years, at no interest, as well as selling at cost. His passion was: I want this to be community-owned. I don't want it on the market, it'll become an Airbnb. With us, it's protected. Then we put in a lot of internal wall insulation, new doors and windows, insulation in the roof. And along came Danielle - you'd been twelve years on the housing list, hadn't you?

DANIELLE: A long time. And they've done a brilliant job with the windows and doors. I saw the house before and after.

03 What does this house mean to you?

DANIELLE: They've basically given me a home - a roof over mine and my daughter's head. My daughter loves it. She's got her own room, because she's never had her own bedroom - she's always lived in a living room. Now I hardly see her because she's always up in her bedroom! She looks after it as well. We're both happy here. […] I thank them a lot for that. And we love the neighbours, we all get on. Couldn't ask for better, to be honest. I absolutely love it.

04 Why has it got harder to live round here?

DANIELLE: Prices. Private rents in Hebden are a lot of money, even for a one-bedroom. When I was looking for me and my daughter, some were £800 a month. It's a lot, isn't it? […] Here the rent has just gone up […], which is okay, it's not bad.

PAUL: That's probably half what a typical rent is here.

05 Would rent control help?

PAUL: I'm not sure about rent control. Why don't we just build some houses? If a local authority can find the land and partner with a social landlord and just build houses, you take the private sector out of the equation and everybody gets the protection and the security. And affordable rents for the long term - that's what we do, and what social landlords do. The government sets the rent increase every year and we stick to it. That looks after everybody.

DANIELLE: Why don't you get some land and just build some?

06 What does living here allow you to do?

DANIELLE: I feel safe on this street. I felt safe on my mum's street because everyone was together, and now I've met everyone here, it's the same. […] But I've been here nearly two years now and I love it. Doesn't bother me at all. And my daughter's not bothered either.

07 What's a typical day?

[…]

DANIELLE: […] I just keep myself to myself, really.

PAUL: I thought your hobby was films?

DANIELLE: Oh yeah, I watch films, but it's rare at the minute. […]

08 You clearly know each other. How much does it matter to have a relationship with your landlord?

DANIELLE: I get on really well with Paul. He's sound. Since day one he's been brilliant - couldn't ask for anyone better. If you're good with them, they're good with you, and you look after their property. They've spent a lot of money on this house, so of course they want it looked after. I told him, when it's all done, come and have a look round so you know it's looked after. I promised him from day one. From the day I got offered it I was so happy and excited […] I was shocked.

09 What happened the day you got the call?

DANIELLE: I was first in the bidding queue, and I watched it all the way from Sunday night till it closed. I was still first, and I thought, I've got a chance here. Then I didn't hear anything till Thursday, around twelve, when they rang me: I'm just ringing about the house you've bid on. And I thought

he was going to say, you're not getting it, it's gone to the next one. And then he said, well, we can offer it. I was like, can you? And I said, don't you dare let that house go to anyone else! He said, have you even been to see it? I said no, but I'm taking it, because I'm in desperate need of a house. I wasn't bothered what it looked like. At that time I really needed a house, and it was a shock to even get offered one.

PAUL: The Land Trust has only one employee, and I don't want Danielle in a situation where she's ringing me in the middle of the night about a leak. I want her to get good service. So we contract another social landlord, Connect Housing, to manage our tenancies, and they do it really well. But we know them well and I know Danielle well - it's a team effort. As I said yesterday at Ferney Lee: it's a Community Land Trust, and community matters to us. It's about people. If your rent's affordable and your tenancy's secure, you've got peace of mind. That lets you make plans, put some roots down, become part of a community. Whereas if you don't know what's happening in six months' time -

DANIELLE: I feel like I've known them for ages.

10 Are you making plans for the future?

DANIELLE: I've told him he's not having it back till I die! We're staying here. It was hard to get a house in Hebden Bridge. […] Then two or three months later I bid on this one and got it straight away. It's in Hebden, […] near the shops, near my daughter's school. It's just right.

PAUL: And we have peace of mind too, because Danielle's a really good tenant. She looks after the place. There's a lot of work and time and money invested.

DANIELLE: You don't want someone coming in and wrecking it three or four months down the line.

11 Is this the future you were dreaming of?

DANIELLE: Well, really I needed a house, so yeah, probably. The main thing I needed was a house, and I got it.

12 And what's next, now that's secure?

DANIELLE: I haven't really thought that far ahead. […] In my spare time I'm doing the house. I'm keeping myself to myself. That's what I like.

13 What makes you really happy?

DANIELLE: Oh God. Spending time with my daughter, taking her out, things like that. And I'm happy now I've got the house. It's all peace and quiet, a lot happier, a lot better. I thank them a lot. Honestly, you don't know how much, for letting me have it.

And films - horror films. Halloween, Friday the 13th, Scream, things like that. But if I had to sit and watch one on my own, there's no hope!

14 Anything you'd like to say to the country?

DANIELLE: I'd say for these guys to buy more land and build more houses. Not a little bit - a big bit. Build a load of houses on it. Because they've been brilliant with me. Paul's brilliant. It's good what they do, giving people homes. […] I wouldn't have this if it weren't for them. I'd still be waiting, bidding.

15 How can there be more of this across the country?

PAUL: At the Ferney Lee project, the council leased us the land, so it cost us nothing. We got it for 999 years, and because we've got that security we were able to plan. We created 19 houses in partnership with Connect Housing - we're small, so it's hard for us to deliver big projects, but it wouldn't have happened without us. So, more of that.

And the other unique thing is that people can come to us and offer their house. If they've had it twenty years and have the equity, they can give a bit back by dropping the price, and that helps us make it happen. It's a team effort between the owner and us. You go through the calculator, and either it's never going to work, or it does work - and you create this.

This Was Tomorrow – Is This the Future We Were Dreaming Of?
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