

**Discrimination and Inequality in the PRS - Case Study**

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| Name or pseudonym: | Penny and Gareth |
| Location: | Wales |
| Date (or from-to): | Throughout 2022 |

Gareth and Penny are a couple with 3 children. They both have Visual Impairments and Gareth has a Guide Dog. During the time of the incident, Penny was pregnant with their third child.

In 2022, Penny and Gareth rented a house through a letting agency. The landlords were a couple who had lived in the house previously and had moved abroad for work. They responded quickly to Penny and Gareth’s emails, but correspondence was mainly with the letting agency.

From day one of moving in, it became clear that the house was in a state of advanced disrepair. This had not been clear when Penny and Gareth did the viewing, as the landlords had done a good job of painting over things and spraying Febreze around (they later found the cans of Febreze in a cupboard).

The problems were in every room and with virtually all aspects of the house: faulty electrics (couldn’t have more than one appliance on in the kitchen at the same time); issues with the heating (couldn’t switch the hot water on without having full heating system on at the same time – a nightmare in summer); damp problems throughout the house, and a bath that didn’t work for 7 months. Another problem was that the door handles didn’t open from the inside, so the couple’s children would sometimes get locked inside bedrooms. This was not just inconvenient, but downright unsafe.

“The place that you should be able to come back to in the evening and let go of your worries, if felt very unsafe. It’s not just a house, is it? It’s your home.”

Penny and Gareth reported all these problems promptly to the letting agent. However, they had the impression that the agent was not passing things on to the landlord – or if they were, the landlord was simply ignoring it. Penny and Gareth asked for updates, but nothing happened. They took videos and pictures of everything and sent these to the letting agent as proof.

“We were made to feel like such a nuisance. The letting agents were saying things like “If they’ve broken the door handles” – but we had been reporting these things since the beginning of our tenancy. As opposed to feeling mortified that we were living in such conditions, they ignored us.”

Penny and Gareth continued to report and complain politely, and eventually began to insist that the issues were dealt with. Finally, their email of complaint was forwarded to the landlords and by 7pm that day they had received a Section 21 eviction notice. On this notice, it said that the landlord could not afford to do all the necessary repairs and they therefore had their notice to leave.

It was ‘hellish’ – Penny and Gareth now had 6 months to find somewhere else to live, but this coincided with Penny’s due date, meaning that their eviction notice ended when she was 40 weeks pregnant. Despite this, Penny and Gareth received another email asking if they would be out ‘this week’.

They began in earnest to look for another place to live. At first, they approached every single letting agent in the area for another house to rent. They found one place which was suitable, but when they told the letting agency that they have a Guide Dog, the agents said that the house was no longer available.

Shockingly, every single application that Penny and Gareth made was refused. Penny was phoning up and asking letting agents about available properties, explaining that they have a guide dog. Each agent would say “we will speak to the landlord” and then they would get back to Penny and say, “the landlord says no dogs”. When Penny pointed out that a Guide Dog does not count as a pet and they can’t refuse this, the agent said there was nothing they could do as ‘it’s the landlord’s decision’.

“We were so careful about how we approached the agencies, but even when we said, ‘you’re breaking the law’, we had an awful response. The letting agent only seemed concerned with taking care of the landlords’ needs.”

In desperation, Penny and Gareth spoke to Shelter. However, since the landlords were registered with Rent Smart Wales and had served the eviction notice lawfully, there was nothing they could do.

“But we know this was a revenge eviction - we just can never prove it. It felt very personal – we are two people with a disability, and I was pregnant – it felt as if we were nothing. We were beneath them and they could do what they wanted.”

Penny and Gareth eventually managed to get onto the Council’s housing wait list, as they could not find anywhere else to rent and were at risk of becoming homeless. However, they were classed as ‘Band B’ as they were not actually homeless. Their eviction date was the same week as Penny’s due date, and they were informed by the council that it was likely they would be moved into Temporary Accommodation until a house became available.

Terrified and devastated at the prospect of giving birth whilst living in a Premier Inn, Penny and Gareth turned to their local MP and Councillor. “If they hadn’t helped, I don’t know what would have happened”.

Penny and Gareth’s MP and local Councillor were able to apply for Special Circumstances for the family. This meant that they didn’t have to bid on a property but were instead contacted promptly by the housing team and ultimately offered a property in a new development. Within a few weeks, Penny and Gareth had a house allocated to them, and were able to move out 3 weeks after Penny gave birth to their son.

“We weren’t even met at the house on the day we were evicted – they said drop off the keys on a Sunday night. We had to move out with a 3-week-old baby. The cost of moving is substantial; we never want to move again. But for the second time in 12 months, we had to move. We left the house in pristine condition – and then received an email from the agents saying there were issues we needed to pay for! They tried to pin needing new woodwork throughout the house on us, and new paving in the garden – even after everything we had been through.”

Fortunately, we were awarded back every single penny of our deposit that we were owed because I had documented everything – photos etc – and they could see that we had not done the damage.

“The house we’re living in now, it’s something we could only have dreamt of a few months back.”