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Stronger together

How women are empowering each other to succeed

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Chantelle Dietz finds out how women are coming together to support and empower each other to succeed in the property sector

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ed up with being spun the same old story there's not enough women to speak at property events, Angharad Trueman took matters into her own hands.

She put a post on LinkedIn at the end of last year asking people to nominate brilliant women speakers in the property industry who were experts in their field and happy to talk on their subject.

"It wasn't really a planned post, it was just off the hoof," says Angharad who is group lettings director of Andrews Property Group and president elect of The Association of Residential Lettings Agents (ARLA).

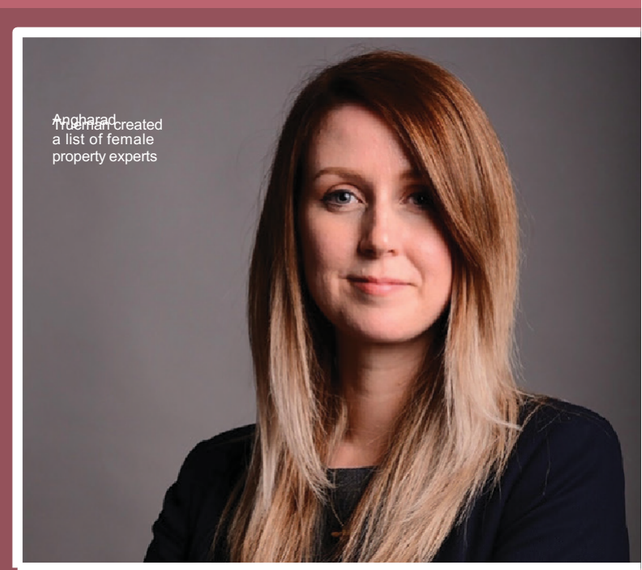
"I often hear the same excuse about podcasts and online events. I've started asking who else has been invited to speak on panels when asked, and if it turns out its mostly male, explaining I won't be on the panel until they work to balance it up."

The post went viral and attracted hundreds of likes and comments. "There were brilliant women being tagged left right and centre, it was so wonderful to see."

From the recommendations she put together a list of 80 names from all different areas of the industry. "Some of them I didn't even know, so it's been great to learn about them."

She categorised them all into sections (one for lettings, one for investments, one for proptech and so on) and added a photo and a bio of each person. Once she had a draft, she contacted all 80 women to make sure they were happy to be included. It took a lot of time and effort, but it was worth it.

"The response has been fantastic. I've already had one podcast host contact me to say they've invited more women on as a result, and someone else contacted me to say she'd been approached after she was spotted on the list."



Angharad Trueman created a list of female property experts

Angharad's story is just one example of how women are finding ways to support and empower each other in the property sector. She hopes the list will ensure more women's voices are represented at events, on podcasts and in the media: "Our valuable viewpoint is different to our male counterparts, it's important we have a chance to provide it," she says.

Raising representation

Female representation in the property sector has improved dramatically in recent years, particularly in the buy-to-let (BTL) space where women are thought to now make up almost half (44%) of all landlords in the UK, according to the English Private Landlord Survey 2021. Yet – as Angharad's story illustrates – they still find themselves marginalised by historic gender biases that can influence perceptions and limit their access to opportunities.

It wasn't until The Sex Discrimination Act levelled the playing field in 1975 that working women could get a mortgage in their own right. Before that they had to get a male guarantor to be accepted. And they've been in a game of catch-up ever since.

Alison Houghton-Corfield is a passionate diversity and inclusion advocate. She's worked in financial services for over 25 years and has witnessed first-hand how women have fought hard to establish their presence in the BTL market.

"Because property has traditionally been such a male-dominated industry, women have faced many challenges in accessing the same opportunities as their male counterparts. They've not had the same exposure to financial and investment education or the same networking opportunities to build connections and access mentorship," she says.

"Women usually have to juggle family responsibilities too. Then there's the financial constraints. A lot of women still earn less than men so that limits their ability to save for a deposit or qualify for a BTL mortgage."

Once women do become landlords, they often thrive because they naturally possess many of the skills needed to do a good job Alison says. "A lot of women possess a keen attention to detail, which is good for evaluating potential deals and overall property performance. They won't just rush into anything, but they are adaptable and open to new ideas.

"They tend to have a balanced approach to risk, which leads to prudent decision making and helps them navigate the ups and down to the market. They are good at organising, which contributes to efficient property management, financial management and the overall success of a property portfolio.

"Many women also have a collaborative, team-orientated approach and strong communication skills, which facilitates positive interactions with tenants, contractors and stakeholders."

It is this collaborative, team-oriented approach that makes women good a lifting each other up too. "When you reach out to other women, you'll find most of them are keen to help and share their knowledge," Alison says.

"Because property has traditionally been a male-dominated industry, women have faced many challenges in accessing the same opportunities as their male counterparts"

Alison Houghton-Corfield advocates for women in property

Changing the narrative

Sharing knowledge is something landlord Suzanne Smith is passionate about. She set up a website – theindependentlandlord.com – publishing advice on how to successfully navigate the challenges of being a landlord 18 months ago.

Suzanne was late to the world of property investment. She bought her first intentional BTL in her early 50s after she left her career as a corporate lawyer. Prior to that she'd rented out an apartment that she originally bought for herself as a mid-week crash-pad near work.

She struggled to find reliable content about self-managing properties online, which gave her the inspiration to set up the site. "Most landlords want to do the right thing by their tenants, but there's so much conflicting advice out there, particularly when you venture into the Facebook groups. There's all sorts of rubbish being shared.

"I thought why don't I start sharing what I've learned? I'd spent my whole career advising people. I was always problem solving, reading lots of complicated laws weighing up the risks then coming up with a practical solution, so it was using the same skills."

The site isn't specifically for women, but Suzanne wanted it to be female friendly. "So much of the narrative about landlords is centred around 'him'. Even the images are always of men. If there is one of a woman, she's usually in a sexy outfit wearing stilettos and taking notes.

"I wanted my female readers to read about and see people that look like them. I use pictures of women of all ages and ethnicities, it's all very deliberate."

Off the back of the website Suzanne set up a private Facebook group where landlords can ask questions, offer advice, and share their experiences in a supportive environment and started publishing a weekly newsletter.

Through helping others, Suzanne has grown her own support network. "I've had a huge amount of support from women – there's a group of us now that all support each other quietly behind the scenes.

"We all have different strategies – some do serviced accommodation, some do HMOs, and some do commercial, then there's me doing BTL. We all help one another out and go to

Suzanne Smith is changing the narrative around landlords

events together. There was a whole row of us at the National Residential Landlords Association Conference in October last year. It's really lovely and I value them enormously."

Creating a safe space

Attending property events can feel daunting for women. "Going back about five or six years if you went to a networking event, you'd probably be the only woman there and it was intimidating, even for me who was used to working with 100 rowdy men on a trading floor," says former investment banker turned property investor Helen Chorley.

"I knew if I could be intimidated, then other women would be feeling it too."

At the time Helen, who now lives in Malta, had a group of female property investor friends she met with for birthday lunches. "A few of us used to have an informal lunch at the start of the year because all our birthdays are in January.

"We started thinking: how can we connect with more women and provide a safe space to ask the questions that women are very often too intimidated to put their hand up and ask in front of men."

One year they decided to open the lunch invite out to lots of other women in property, and Property Sisters was born. "It's non-profit, we don't charge for membership," says Helen.

The group gives experienced property developers the opportunity to come together and share experiences and insights. It came into its own in lockdown. "We were having weekly meetings because obviously everybody was isolated and missing that human contact. So we did a lot of calls where someone would present on their specialist subject – whether it be to do with property or broader topics like mental health, resilience or speaking skills.

"Since lockdown, we've taken a step back and it has become more of a social thing now. We still have the community with the WhatsApp group which is a great for keeping connected and asking questions. It has had a really big impact. We're really, really proud of it."

The intention behind Property Sisters isn't to be divisive – as someone once accused it of being – it's to make women feel more competent and to give them the confidence to shout about what they do. "If you listen to what we're doing,

Helen Chorley co-founded Property Sisters

we're not saying 'down with men', 'women's rights', we're saying 'there's room at the table for all of us, so could we get a seat at the table, please because we deserve one'. We've not had one before because we've not spoken up for ourselves, and it's time we do."

Helen is passionate about raising the visibility of women in property and does so through her other work as public speaker, angel investor on Property Elevator TV, and a judge for several national and international awards.

"Women in particular suffer from impostor syndrome and hold themselves back more than men. In the corporate world women won't apply for a job unless they meet 100% of the criteria, whereas men will apply if they can fulfil 60%. They just think I'll wing it and work it out. That's why women need to give each other encouragement and cheer each other on."

She wants to see more women put themselves forward for awards. "Even the process of applying for an award brings confidence because you have to look back and justify why you're worthy of the award. When women look back at what they've done they realise, you know what, I'm better than I thought.

"It's really important we give the next generation of female investors some positive role models to look up to. Seeing women achieving things in the property sector gives other women the belief they can do it too."

Taking a different approach

Someone else on a mission to help other women succeed in a traditionally male dominated industry is HMO landlord and founder of Beespace Jade McNeil.

For the past four years she's been mentoring women of all backgrounds and levels of experience to become confident, capable property investors.

Because most women have busy lives looking after children, elderly relatives, running the house, and holding down jobs she says they need a different approach to men.

"When I reflected on becoming a mentor and where I would be able to add the most value to someone it was through my own personal experience of having young kids, being on building sites, feeling knackered, being sleep deprived but doing it anyway.

"So that's what I've harnessed. I know how hard it can be, but I'm living proof it can be done. I teach my mentees how to use their time effectively and build systems that can support them."

She had to miss out on networking events when her kids were younger because she couldn't get childcare, so she made her events baby-friendly. "I didn't have much of a support system around to look after my kids when they were little – like pre-nursery age – so members can bring their under ones along as its important to me that kids and family are part of the process of building a property business too.

"We can talk about breastfeeding and hormones and building an investment portfolio – all those conversations can happen at the same time."

If there's one thing she's learned from mentoring women, it's that confidence – or rather the lack of it – has a big part to play.

"Guys will think 'I'll give it a go, what's the worst that can happen?' whereas women tend to think of all the things that could go wrong. It's my job to arm them with the knowledge they need, because once they've got the knowledge, they build confidence and can make well informed decisions to go forward."

Succeeding together

The collaborative efforts of women like Angharad, Alison, Suzanne, Helen, and Jade are reshaping the industry for the better and making it more inclusive.

Between them they've helped countless women by removing the barriers that stop them reaching their full potential and have set the stage for other women to follow in their footsteps.

"We all want to be successful, but it's hard doing it on your own," says Helen. "If we can surround ourselves with supportive women and all help each other out, then we call all grow together. Isn't that a better world to live in?"

Jade McNeil mentors female property investors