

06. Housing First

Overview

- Housing First is a **client-centred approach** to addressing homelessness that is **not conditional** on beneficiaries first addressing problematic behaviours.
- Most evaluations reviewed report a **high level of tenancy sustainment** amongst Housing First beneficiaries. Two partnerships had 100 per cent sustainment.
- Other benefits of Housing First for beneficiaries include improvements in **community integration, physical health** and **mental health** and reductions in substance misuse, anti-social behaviour and offending.
- All partnerships that evaluated their Housing First programme felt it was having a **positive impact on wider systems**, reporting changes in the local housing processes and impact on regional housing strategies.
- The most significant challenge to the successful implementation of Housing First partnerships is the **lack of affordable, suitable housing in the right areas**.

What is it about?

Housing First is arguably “the most significant innovation in service response to homelessness, among people with high and complex needs, that has occurred in the last three decades”.¹ In contrast to treatment-led models most commonly used in England, Housing First is a client-centred model which aims to house individuals, in independent housing on long-term tenancies, and provide intensive support throughout. Crucially, access to housing is not conditional on changing behaviours.

Homeless Link are leading the Housing First England project², and building on American and European guidance, have identified the following seven principles of a Housing First approach:³

- People have a right to a home
- Flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed
- Housing and support are separated
- Individuals have choice and control
- The service is based on people’s strengths, goals and aspirations
- An active engagement approach is used
- A harm reduction approach is used.

How are Fulfilling Lives partnerships delivering this?

Over 70 per cent of beneficiaries of the Fulfilling Lives programme have experienced homelessness, many over a long period of time. Many Fulfilling Lives partnerships have or plan to implement Housing First in some form. Four have already published evaluations – which form the basis for most of this chapter. Table 2 summarises key features of these Housing First schemes.

Partnerships have generally implemented Housing First for a relatively small number of beneficiaries. This is often necessary due to difficulties finding suitable

¹ Pleace and Quilgars (2017) *The Inspiring Change Manchester Housing First Pilot: Interim Report* University of York.

² For more information see <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/>

³ Homeless Link (2016) *Housing First England: The principles*. London: Homeless Link.

accommodation, as well as enabling workers to maintain small caseloads and offer the intensity of support required. Camden and Stoke-on-Trent had already piloted Housing First in their areas, so the Fulfilling Lives teams had a model to build on. Although ideally Housing First placements come from the private sector, all partnerships used a mixture of social and private housing stock.

Partnership	Time in use	No. of beneficiaries	Target group	Staffing model
Islington & Camden (FLIC)	4 years	10 ⁴	Fulfilling Lives beneficiaries	PRS ⁵ access officer, support worker
Manchester	2 years (pilot)	19 ⁶	Fulfilling Lives beneficiaries, then broadened out to city	Housing development officer, support worker and peer mentor
Stoke-on-Trent (VOICES)	3 years	20 (plus a further 13 in supported accommodation) ⁷	Not stated	Engage and work with PRS landlords
West Yorkshire (WY-FI)	12 months initially, extended	6 places	Female sex workers	HF support worker, housing management worker, co-production worker

Table 1: Summary of Housing First partnerships evaluated as part of Fulfilling Lives

⁴ As of 2017 evaluation report

⁵ Private Rental Sector

⁶ As of April 2018

⁷ 20 beneficiaries had Housing First tenancies in the private rented sector. A further 13 were placed in supported accommodation. This does not fit the Housing First principle that accommodation and support should be separated. VOICES only considered tenancies in supported housing to be Housing First where the person has a self-contained unit and has moved into this directly from rough sleeping rather than through the hostel pathway.

Inspiring Change Manchester: Housing First Model

In April 2016 Manchester started a two-year pilot of Housing First, as the model was perceived to be highly compatible with the needs of their beneficiaries. The aim was to provide intensive support to up to 20 people with a history of homelessness and high complex needs. The pilot was designed to follow the core principles of the Housing First model.

Housing First support was originally based within the Inspiring Change Manchester service, but soon moved to become a dedicated service with a team leader, Housing First development officer, two Housing First engagement (support) workers and a lived-experience trainee. Caseloads were set at six per worker. Housing was secured from a mixture of private and social rentals, and beneficiaries could visit the accommodation to assess it before moving in. A personal budget of around £1,500 was available to each beneficiary to help with deposit/rent and to buy furniture.

A panel was created to take referrals from Fulfilling Lives beneficiaries. Once this group had been exhausted, referrals were taken from outside of the Fulfilling Lives beneficiary group. As of October 2017, 16 people had been housed through the Housing First project, all with high and complex needs. All had maintained their tenancies at this time.

The Manchester Housing First pilot is part of a larger programme that includes an adult education service, a user-led mental health support service and a mentoring, training and consultancy service led by and for former offenders. Inspiring Change Manchester are due to publish a full report on the two year Housing First pilot this year.

What do the evaluations tell us?

The evaluations provide good evidence of the impact of Housing First on homelessness, beneficiaries and wider systems, as well as highlighting challenges with implementing the model. Evidence is drawn from a range of sourcing including interviews with beneficiaries, partnership workers and representatives from external agencies where appropriate, case notes and monitoring data.

What is the evidence of impact?

Evaluations suggest a number of positive impacts of the Housing First model for beneficiaries and wider systems of support.

The impact of Housing First on...

...homelessness

All partnerships reported great success with the **sustainment of tenancies**

...beneficiaries

Improvements in **physical health**, with a reduction in hospital admissions

Substantial improvements in mental health and greater willingness to access support

Reductions in **substance misuse**

Increased **community integration**

Reduced **anti-social behaviour and offending**

In West Yorkshire, a **reduction in sex-working** and safer working practices

...wider systems

Affecting **allocation approaches** in wider local housing systems

Encouraging landlords to consider people with multiple needs, to make **more housing available**

Demonstrating the value of Housing First as part of **wider homelessness strategies**

Manchester, Islington and Camden and West Yorkshire all report a 100 per cent success rate in sustained tenancies, although two initial placements in West Yorkshire failed. Stoke-on-Trent report 20 of 33 tenancies sustained.

Key Learning

All Fulfilling Lives Housing First evaluations report similar challenges. By far the most significant appears to be locating appropriate housing in the beneficiaries' choice of area. The cost and availability of housing stock has made this very difficult. This is particularly the case in London; all Islington and Camden Housing First beneficiaries were housed in neighbouring boroughs. Evaluations provide key learning on addressing this and other things to consider when implementing Housing First.

- Limitations in housing stock are generally beyond the influence of the partnership, but partnerships did report that additional properties could be secured by **engaging with landlords** and **challenging stigma and prejudices** they may have towards people with multiple needs
- Where large amounts of appropriate housing is not available, Housing First could be **targeted at particular at-risk groups**
- **Consistency of support** throughout the housing process is crucial
- Beneficiaries often have difficulty meeting the cost of independent living. **Personal budgets** to cover deposits, rent and furnishings have been vital in enabling Housing First beneficiaries cover increased living costs (See Chapter 4).

How might this contribute to systems change?

As Fulfilling Lives partnerships are designed to work across and co-ordinate support from a range of sectors, they are well placed to deliver Housing First, where holistic and flexible support is key. Further, Housing First in Fulfilling Lives has the potential to affect wider systems, services and attitudes. The success that West Yorkshire have had with their small Housing First pilot for female sex workers suggests that even if suitable housing is not available on a large scale, focussing on supporting a specific at-risk target group through this model might be more realistically achievable.

Housing First involves working alongside local housing providers, services and landlords to find appropriate housing for beneficiaries. This has brought about an opportunity to challenge appraisal and allocation systems. For example, whilst their Housing First approach has not yet been fully evaluated, Newcastle and Gateshead report how they have encouraged Oasis Aquila Housing to consider people with multiple and complex needs for their dispersed housing properties. A year after being housed, their first multiple needs client “walked into our centre in a suit on his way back from a job interview”. After that success, Oasis Aquila now specifically target people with multiple and complex needs for their dispersed housing.⁸

What next?

Partnerships currently implementing or planning to start implementing Housing First should continue to monitor the impact of this on beneficiaries. Existing evidence could

⁸ Hough, J (2017) Changing systems for people with multiple and complex needs: Evaluation of Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead 2017.

be strengthened through a more systematic approach to analysing benefits, such as assessing Housing First beneficiaries' progress and combining this with in-depth interviews to highlight the various benefits of the model. Partnerships should also continue publishing evidence of how Housing First pilots have challenged existing systems in the housing and other support sectors and changed processes or ways of working to better support people with multiple and complex needs.

There is a significant evidence base on the effectiveness of Housing First outside of Fulfilling Lives, including controlled studies from the United States of America and Europe. In addition, the government has recently launched three regional Housing First pilots in Liverpool, Birmingham and Greater Manchester.⁹ These are all be subject to in-depth evaluations. Therefore, we suggest the national Fulfilling Lives evaluation does not conduct further evaluation of Housing First pilots.

Further reading

Bimpson, E. (2018) *An evaluation of Basis Yorkshire's Housing First pilot*. Leeds Social Sciences Institute.

Fulfilling Lives Islington and Camden (2017) *Housing First: An evaluation of the FLIC model* FLIC

Pleace and Quilgars (2017) *The Inspiring Change Manchester Housing First Pilot: Interim Report* University of York.

Rice, B. (2017) *Independent evaluation of VOICES: Systems change report*. BR Research.

⁹ <https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/news/2018/may/09/government-launches-its-three-regional-housing-first-pilots>