

BACKGROUND

'Housing First' is a novel, recovery oriented approach to ending homelessness which focuses on the importance of access to safe, secure accommodation and the role it can play in allowing people to move forward in their lives with the security of housing. It differs from the current traditional model of tackling homelessness which take a more linear approach with people working through a series of accommodation until deemed suitable to be discharged into permanent accommodation and normally the ending of support. Housing first differs in that housing is offered first with support then offered to help sustain the tenancy and tackle mental and physical health, drug and alcohol abuse and other complex issues which need specialist support and intervention.

The housing first approach is underpinned by a series of key principles:

- *Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements.*
- *Client Choice and self determination*
- *Recovery orientation*
- *Client driven support*
- *Social and community integration*
- *Active engagement approach*

Application outside of the UK

Though a relatively novel approach in England, it was popularised in the 1990's in New York who sought a radical solution to tackling the cities growing homelessness problem. It has since been trialled in Europe with the largest '*Un Chez-soi d'abord*' in France being the largest in Europe. Of the 353 people housed through this programme, 85% were still housed after two years and many reported improvements in their general well-being. Further to this, Spain ran a programme in 2014 which targeted chronically homeless people with mental health problems and drug and alcohol abuse problems with floating support offered to the clients. After 6 months of the trial it had a 100% retention rate and again clients noted an increase in other areas of their lives.

In 2008 Finland took the Housing First approach at a National level and incorporated the different models which had been trialled prior. The strategy (*Paavo*) has been widely acclaimed for its success and has been credited for a reduction in long-term homelessness by 28% in 2011.

Different models for Housing First:

Pathways Housing first (PHF)

PHF is intended to support those clients who are characterised by severe mental health issues, problematic drug and alcohol abuse and nuisance behaviour. Frequently, the clients which are offered this accommodation sustained unemployment and extensive periods of living in homeless shelters and on the streets. PHF offers independent housing with security of tenure as soon as possible and provides on going low-level support which will aim to promote housing stability and ensure successful sustainment of tenancy.

Communal Housing First (CHF)

CHF services aim to house chronically homeless people by offering communal and shared accommodation with security of tenure in a building which is solely occupied by service users. On-going support services are offered to clients throughout and are run frequently either within the building or nearby.

Housing First Light (HFL)

HFL can support chronically homeless people but also those with lower support needs and those at greatest risk of becoming homeless. This approach works by re-housing in both the private rented and social housing and offers independent housing with security of tenure. However, the support level offered is lower and is aimed at ensuring sustainment of tenancy and promoting housing stability.

Application in the UK

There are currently 75 Housing First services across England but it is difficult to gauge the total capacity. It is noted that services are unevenly distributed and the majority of the services are in London and the South East. The East Midlands and the East of England have a total of 6 combined services. The vast majority of the services support between 4-12 clients at one time, notably smaller than the 48 clients we currently are supporting in temporary accommodation indicating that numerous services will need to be operational to successfully support the individuals.

Momentum and appetite for the Housing First approach is growing and most recently a government backed housing first pilot helped 200 rough sleepers as of December 2019 further supporting the adoption of the approach in Stevenage.

Source:

National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS)