



# Voices of Housing First:

## Identifying the keys to success

September 2021



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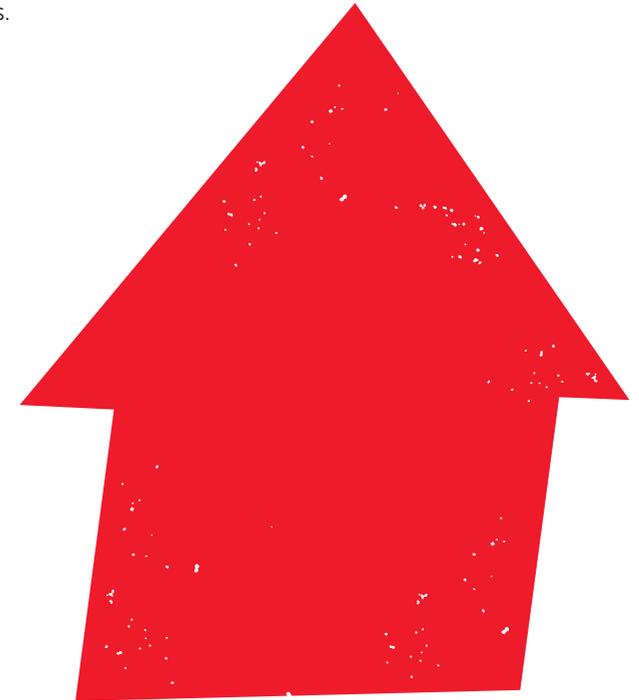
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# Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all those people who participated in focus groups and interviews to share their experiences and thoughts about Housing First. This report would not have been possible without their contributions. Thanks also to a number of staff members across numerous services and organisations who supported Housing First residents to submit their experiences.



# 1 What is Housing First?

Housing First is the most important innovation in tackling homelessness of the last few decades. It has been shown to be an effective means to end homelessness for around 80 per cent of people with high support needs.<sup>1</sup> Housing First is particularly effective for a cohort of homeless people with multiple and complex support needs for whom existing systems of homelessness support have not always worked.

The Housing First model prioritises getting people quickly into stable homes. From this point, any other support needs they might have – such as alcohol and drug dependency, physical and/or mental health problems – are addressed through coordinated and intensive support. Central to the concept of Housing First is that permanent housing is provided without a test of having to be 'housing ready,' as is the case in traditional homelessness pathways of support.

Furthermore, maintaining the tenancy is not dependent on the tenant using support services. Housing First is built upon the principle that housing is a human right, and is essential to someone's safety, wellbeing and dignity. It focuses on first giving someone immediate access to a settled and secure home, from which they can address any other support needs. This is placed above goals such as sobriety or abstinence. The model is specifically tailored for homeless people with complex and multiple needs. It is designed to provide choice and control – it gives rights and responsibilities back to people who may have been repeatedly excluded from other services or accommodation.



1 Housing First Europe Hub <http://housingfirsteurope.eu/guide/what-is-housing-first/introducing-housing-first>

# 2 Scale of Housing First

There has been a remarkable growth in Housing First provision across the country – a tripling of the number of services since 2017 serving six times more people facing multiple disadvantage.

- There are Housing First services in every region of the country, but these are unevenly distributed. The South East has the greatest proportion of services (23%), followed by London (20%). However, the North West supports the highest number of people (453).
- On average, services support 6-20 people, but the range is very wide, from just 1 client to over 250.
- 71% of services have caseloads of 6 or less – an excellent sign that services are adhering to the principles of Housing First.
- 81% of services use social housing for their residents. This has increased significantly since 2017, while use of private rented sector housing has decreased.

- 45% of services use accommodation from more than one source.<sup>2</sup>

The three city-region pilots in Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region and West Midlands Combined Authority have contributed to a significant and growth in numbers since 2017, and between them will provide over 1,100 places once fully rolled out. In London, there has also been an increase in places over the last three years, with just 84 places in 2017 growing to 325 by 2020.

While the recent growth in the number of Housing First places is welcome, it remains far below the scale of the demand, making it difficult to end rough sleeping in England. Evidence prior to the pandemic commissioned by Crisis and Homeless Link found that 16,450 Housing First places were needed across England.<sup>3</sup> It is possible that demand for these services will have increased since this study given the number of people supported throughout the pandemic, and rising levels of homelessness since the research was carried out.<sup>4</sup>

2 The picture of Housing First, Homeless Link <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/picture-housing-first>

3 Blood, I., Goldup, M., Peter, L. and Dulson, S. (2018) *Implementing Housing First across England, Scotland and Wales*. Imogen Blood & Associates. London, Crisis and Homeless Link

4 Albanese, F. (2020) *Homelessness projections in England could drop by a quarter in the next decade with targeted Government action* <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/the-crisis-blog/homelessness-projections-in-england-could-drop-by-a-quarter-in-the-next-decade-with-targeted-government-action>

## 3 About the APPG and this report

For its fifth year the APPG for Ending Homelessness held an inquiry into Housing First, focusing on how it should be scaled up in England.

Housing First is an internationally recognised method of ending homelessness for people with multiple and interlocking needs, such as trauma, mental health needs, addiction or entrenched street homelessness. It has become a key part of the response to homelessness across the world, and is being piloted in England.

The inquiry has been held at a time when the importance of a safe and secure home has been thrown into sharp focus with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and following the Westminster Government's manifesto commitment to expand Housing First provision across England.

The APPG has been keen to better understand the experiences of people who have been homeless and have direct experience of using Housing First services. As such, part of the call for evidence sought to hear the experiences and thoughts of people who have direct current experience of Housing First. The thoughts and experiences of 65

people with first-hand experience of Housing First were collected. These were thematically analysed and data matrix created.

These findings fed into the main APPG report but it was felt that there was important and rich insight in this testimony which deserved its own space and time through a standalone report.

This is what this report seeks to do. The structure of the report is based around the four key principles that strongly came out of speaking to people in Housing First schemes, which also align with the 'official' principles set by practitioners,<sup>5</sup> services and funding bodies. The four key principles people identified are:

- Home
- Support
- Control
- Future

These principles really shone through as the most important and integral to the success of Housing First from those with experience of such schemes.

5 Housing First in England The principles, Homeless Link <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/The%20Principles%20for%20Housing%20First.pdf>

## 4 Importance of having a home

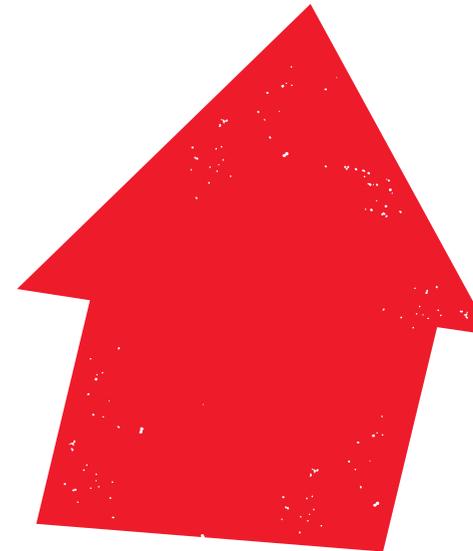
**"I think everyone has the right to a home, it is very important."**

David, Housing First resident<sup>6</sup>

Homelessness is very often thought of as simply not having a roof over one's head. This literal understanding of what homelessness means fails to capture or acknowledge what it means to a person to have a secure and settled place to live and the impact it can have on a person's sense of self. Often referred to as 'ontological security', what having a home and secure form of housing can mean for someone is that they can have, and begin to form, a sense of security and trust in the world around them and their place within it.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, this is an emotional reaction premised upon how one 'feels' in a space rather than one which comes about through a conscious choice or effort. Understood in this way, home can be a base for living a life and a platform from which a future can be planned and oriented towards.

It was these sentiments that came through strongly in the testimonials of those who have experience of Housing First. For example, David explained how, since being housed, he has been able to think about his life and what he wants;

**"I have a place that I am over the moon with. I could not have done it without help from Housing First. I feel safe and secure. I am hoping to spend many years here. I plan to keep this place as my forever home. I am a keen gardener and I will be growing my own veg soon. I also like to cook. I'm going to carry on as I am. I am happy I have this flat after being homeless for so many years; it's like a dream come true."**



6 Names are pseudonyms unless participants gave consent to use their real names.

7 Dupuis, A. and Thorns, D. C. (1998) Home, Home Ownership and the Search for Ontological Security. *The Sociological Review*. 46 (1): 24-47.

Having a secure base is important for thinking about change and moving on with one's life. This came through strongly in the many different testimonies and was described by Simon, who compared how having a stable place to live was so different to his previous experiences;

**"I can just start thinking about moving on with my life and doing things... [starting] a course and that and obviously getting my life sorted out. When you're on the street everything is too hectic, you can't do nothing... time is irrelevant... but it's not when you've got somewhere to live. Because you can have a routine can't ya? Structure. Not when you're out sleeping rough all the time... it's horrible, I wouldn't wish it on anyone."**

The feeling and sense of security and safety – structure – was noted multiple times by respondents. Things taken for granted by most people – such as having your own bed or a fixed address for a bank account – were described as points of notable difference compared to their experience of life before Housing First.

**"I had my own place and I felt safe, it was relief and at first a shock to wake up somewhere that I knew was mine, it was nice. I liked having my own bed."**

Susanne

**"I owe Housing First a lot, they saw something in me and helped me in so many ways. They got me the perfect property, a bank account, a dentist, a doctor; all kinds of things. They phone me every day; their support has been amazing."**

Samantha

Not only were there new and welcome material comforts when people were placed in Housing First schemes, but also a pervasive sense that – for some – being housed had actually been lifesaving.

**"[Getting housed] it meant everything, if it wasn't for Housing First, I would still be in a hostel and probably dead by now. I don't use drugs or socialise with people who do anymore. ...Housing First has been the only service that has really worked for me."**

Teddy

This sentiment was echoed by Paul. Housing First enabled him to address his substance misuse problems and, he believed, saved his life.

**"I want to find things I enjoy doing and use less and less drugs. I want to meet my daughter and be her Dad. I love my flat and don't ever want to lose it. Without Housing First, I would be dead."**

Paul



Both Paul and Teddy's comments show just how important having a home and stability can be for helping a person change and move on with their lives.

It was also very clear and powerfully articulated just how different and important Housing First – having a home – was compared to previous types of housing support that people had experienced. Many spoke of being caught in a cycle of moving from one place to another, encountering different support services and interventions as they went but never having long-term consistency or stability. Often the hostels, supported accommodation or B&Bs they lived in only served to entrench particular support needs they had or contributed to the development of new ones. As Susanne explained,

**"It felt like I was always going round and round in circles from one place to the next, nothing was settled or permanent or stable, which made things worse. I would hear about services from the council or other services. In the end I was put in various temporary B&Bs and had 6 months in a hostel which ended badly due to not getting the right help with my addictions. I always just wanted to settle and have somewhere safe, with support that I could trust, and that people would understand why I behaved the way I had."**

This cycle of moving between places is often referred to as the 'staircase

model' whereby progression onto more independent and long-term accommodation is conditional on the addressing of particular problematic forms of behaviour and/or addictions.<sup>8</sup> One Housing First resident described the 'journey' they had been on before being helped by Housing First,

**"[I had] supported housing but... but I didn't really like that much, [Hostel 1] was better... because when I first went to [Hostel 1] I had a studio flat, but then someone came who was more vulnerable than me... apparently, and then they moved me to a room... and then I ended up meeting someone in the hostel and that's when the domestic violence started... he got evicted from there, I got moved onto [Hostel 2] then we got evicted from... oh no, I got evicted from [Hostel 2], then I was in a squat, and then after that I was in prison again, I think, and then back to the [Temporary Accommodation 1]. But, yeah, I had keyworkers, but not... .. didn't do much really for me."**

Sharon

She explained that she went from 'hostel to hostel for 10 years' but never tried to stop taking drugs until she had her own home.

**"Staff never encouraged me to stop, but would tell me when the needle exchange days were. It wasn't until I found out I was a grandmother**

8 Johnsen, S. and Teixeira, L. (2010) 'Housing First' and Other Housing Models for Homeless People with Complex Support Needs. London: Crisis. [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20499/staircases\\_elevators\\_and\\_cycles\\_of\\_change2010.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20499/staircases_elevators_and_cycles_of_change2010.pdf)

**and my daughter had got clean, then I tried."**

Sharon

Another Housing First resident acknowledged that being caught in the cycle of moving between different forms of accommodation and services did little to help her address the issues she was struggling with.

**"My behaviour wasn't great but I felt like I had been passed round for so many years and was only bad when I drank too much which brought out the trauma. But at the time the alcohol kept me warm, kept me going and didn't understand how it controlled me. I have slept in doorways, old hotels, all over, I became very good at it, I had to shoplift at times to survive. I would live one day to the next. Everyone would seem to take advantage of me, even those that I knew."**

Susanne

Without the security and stability of a place to call home she found that the support that was available was not good enough.

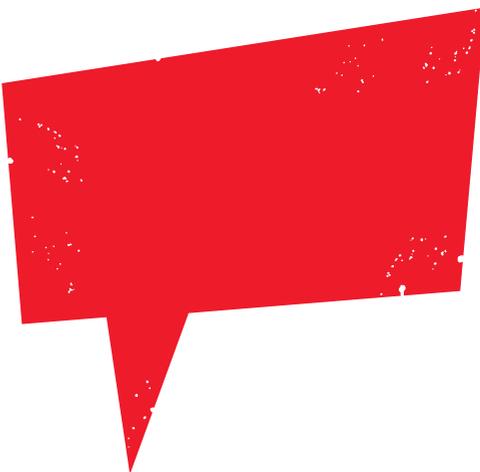
**"At the time I didn't feel the support was very good, it wasn't enough or connected, lots of promises but nothing happened. Some people were nice but they could only do so much it seemed. My addictions got worse."**

Susanne

The problem of poor or insufficient support was echoed by others with experience of Housing First. Common to them was a feeling of being moved from one place to another without consistent support being given and that hostels in particular served to make matters worse. The cycle of movement was for some perpetuated by the criteria required to access particular services.

**"Everywhere I went, every place I got housed in these hostels, my using would get worse because of the environment for me, it was just playing on my anxiety and so I just ended up just not going to these places and living on the streets. And the XX Centre, when I went there, they originally said to me that I didn't meet the criteria because I'm not a prolific offender and I didn't tick the boxes and then they nominated me with another service."**

Tasha



When people spoke about finally finding a home there was real excitement and often an incredulousness about finally having a place they could call home and what it meant for them.

**"I've got somewhere to try and get sorted, just an exciting, it's just exciting really, but and it's just, when you've got, you know when you haven't got anything or you've not, can't really see a way forward it just gives you hope don't it? Hope like you're going to be able to sort yourself out and that. And that's all it was for me really, just exciting and then I started getting hopeful and then I started building little things back in my life."**

Jof

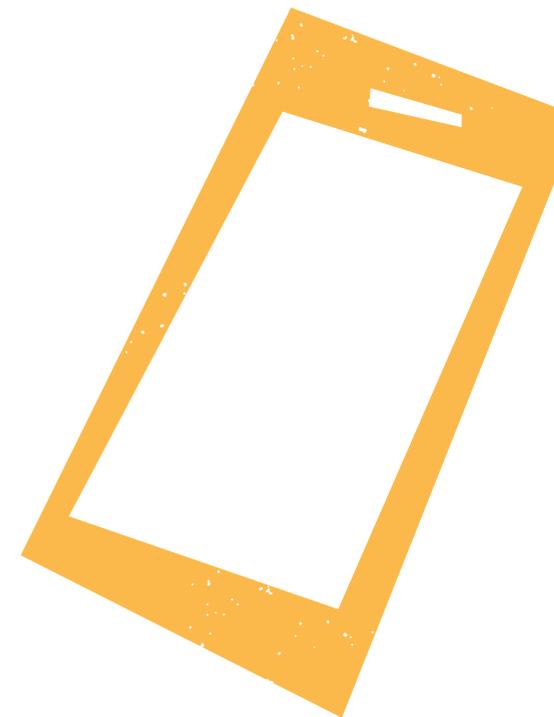
**"The first night in here I may of wept a little. I was wondering around the rooms so much, I did not believe it was mine."**

Ollie

**"My first night in my own place was brilliant, it was a couple of weeks before Christmas and I was very excited about spending my first Christmas in my new home. My five-star palace. It was bloody brilliant it was."**

Chris

What is clear from these experiences is the transformative power that having a secure and stable home can have to end people's homelessness, and what it means emotionally for those living in Housing First schemes.



## 5 The power of support

Having a place to call home and a sense of long-term stability is integral to the success of Housing First. Yet what sits alongside this new found stability is equally important according to those with lived experience. Namely, the support Housing First residents receive was overwhelmingly so markedly different from what they had experienced before. Integral to this was the level of trust and long-term consistency that can develop between residents and the support workers. Whereas before Housing First the support people received was often invariably short-term and intermittent. Being able to build relationships with a single person was important.

**“Over time I felt I could trust and be honest, the amount of time I had of their support meant I could build up this trust. It was ok to get things done as time was not as limited as it had been before with others.”**

Susanne

One respondent explained how she viewed her relationship with her support worker more in terms of a friendship and how the person-centred approach really served to engender trust and a confidence in the support. Unlike previous support she had received, there was an ‘ebb and flow’ to the relationship and an understanding it was not conditional on her doing things at particular points – support responded to her needs, not the other way around.

**“I would say is they actually think about you, they actually care about you, they actually listen to what you want, whatever you ask for they will get you if they can get you that, if you want added support they’ll give you that, if you don’t want no support that week they’ll take that step back and that’s what’s [good] they’re not all up in your face, they’re there when you want it, like so if you’re not having a great day and you didn’t want to engage they won’t sign you off or judge you for**

**it, they’ll leave you to it. That’s why I say it’s person centred and it’s not like a worker person relationship, it’s more like friendship, family and that’s what you need, someone to rely on, someone to trust, someone to build you up, someone to pick you up. And I don’t think had another service been in like I say I would not be here today. And I just don’t think you can find a service like this to be honest with you, I’ve never even come across one like this [before].”**

Susanne

Others explained just how important it was for the support they received to be unconditional, in order for them to begin to address their problems.

**“Staff came to see me most days and although I didn’t stop drinking, I couldn’t, they didn’t judge me and encouraged me to connect with the right services, helped and advised to manage it better. As it was lockdown this was not easy as everyone was changing the way they did things, not many groups. However, Housing First staff were always there and my support worker helped me with anything and everything.”**

Bonnie

The non-judgemental nature and unconditionality of support was appreciated by all those with Housing First experience. It meant they could have faith and trust in the support, secure in the knowledge that the service was not going to reject them or they would be moved on for something deemed to be a misdemeanour.

**“All the other services seemed to just refer to other agencies going round in circles never got anywhere, Housing First I know are there, are not going away, more time, and they don’t judge and don’t give up, I’ve never had help like this before and I am very grateful.”**

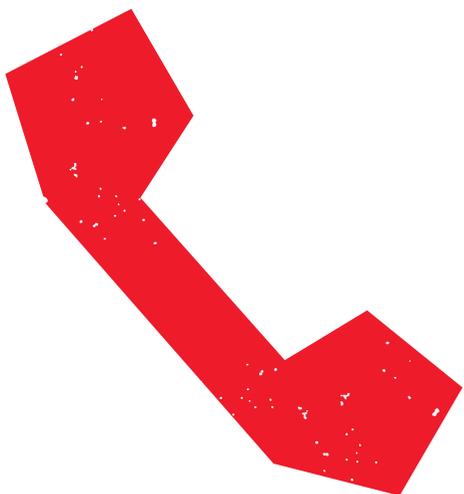
Bonnie

**“I haven’t told anyone except close friends and family where I live. In my previous tenancies I got kicked out for having people in my room. Hostels are dirty and it is also hard trying to get clean from drugs in a hostel. Having my own property has kept me away from using as I am not around other people who are using.”**

Rory

Knowing the support was unconditional and would remain in place despite what happens was vital for those with lived experience to feel at ‘home’ within their new accommodation and have the confidence themselves to start to address their issues.

**“I’d say stability and security and ... basically it’s hard to stop using drugs when it’s around you, it’s really hard, because there are days ... if [you] have a day when you pick up and you use drugs that you don’t get thrown out and end up back on the streets because you made, you slipped, which happens you know? But it’s not like continuous and it’s a process. And having your own space to get that stability and security, that’s essential. And my hopes for the future, well I would say the sky’s the limit, because**



**anything's possible, it feels like that."**

Sharon

One person explained how the support Housing First provided was so different in tone and 'feel' from the support they had received from other services whereby she had felt belittled, talked down to which was in such contrast to the person-centred and individualised support Housing First gave.

**"Before Housing First there's a lot of people that are very condescending. They talk to you like you've got, like you don't, rude, just can be very rude and very like and just dismissive ... some organisations I've worked with, especially with my addiction, they can, they just don't get it and they think just because they've seen you in a certain state that you would like, they don't understand why you would be like that and what would lead you to do that and they just judge you on an experience of when they saw you high."**

Sharon

She went on to explain how rather than provide a caring and nurturing environment to support her, some services made her feel judged;

**"Some of the places I went to, just it felt like I was a criminal in prison. That's what it felt like in some of these hotels the, certain people ...were just taking all the cereal and all the milk right? And so, everybody had to be treated, I don't know it was just weird to be put somewhere to stand in a line**

**to be allocated a certain amount of milk like you can't even be trusted. ...One place I stayed at they had a restaurant and they told us because we come through the council we weren't allowed to go in there and buy food, like we were some kind of lower class citizen. ...we can't mix with other normal people and it just felt belittling. It's hard to move on when you're around that."**

Sharon

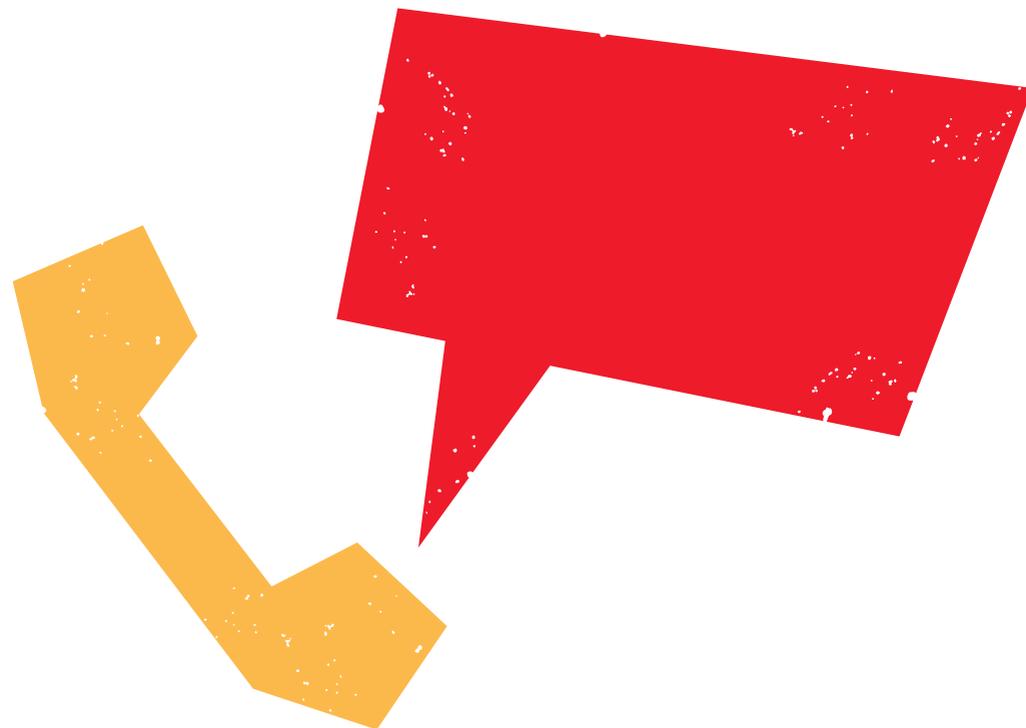
The difference to Housing First support experiences could not be stronger. Another respondent reiterated just how integral the unconditional and consistent support element of Housing First is. Susanne, in expressing concern about what it would mean if her support ended, shows just how important it had been to her and continues to be to enable her manage her life.

**"This is the thing like with me, like so I know if I've come to my own home, it's been great I've got past multiple things in my life and even still like right now, home, I love it, it's great and all that but like I say it's not a home it's the support, when my support goes I'm going to feel like... I feel it right now thinking about it, because even though I've achieved so much in my life I've come to different places and built myself up and everything. My life ain't great, I'm going through my own issues in my life right now, pretty like recent things and that which is affecting my mental health, ...when that support goes I'm going to feel that. It's not just about the house it's the support what comes with it and it's not easy to get that**

**support, hard to find [the] workers that you have."**

Susanne

As Susanne states, Housing First is more than just providing a home for someone; it is the support that goes alongside the accommodation that sticks with a resident through thick and thin. Support that is unconditional, does not judge them and enables them to build trust and rapport with the support workers who prioritise the resident's own wants and needs. Having a stable home and support enabled Housing First residents to take more control and responsibility for addressing their needs and goals for the future.



## 6 Taking control

Another important element to the success of Housing First that came through strongly from people with lived experience was how they had newfound control and responsibility for themselves and their lives.

**“Within weeks I had my own bank account, a live benefit claim, I also started to engage with the local recovery service which hadn’t worked in the past but I felt with the extra support in place from Housing First it may be different this time so I gave it a go. The support was great things were getting done. It didn’t take long at all for things to start moving forward when I came on to Housing First.”**

Paul

What enabled Housing First residents to take responsibility and control was the trust that developed through the supportive relationships they developed with support workers. Decision making and choice was put in their hands, empowering them to take control.

**“What worked for me was the relationship I built with my support worker, it really made a difference having that trust. There was never you must do this or you must do that to get something, only suggestions and encouragement for things that would benefit me and when I**

**made the decision if I wanted to engage with other service I was supported with this. Also having a choice in where I wanted to live and choosing the property was good, I have settled well and haven’t had any problems.”**

Paul

Having control over what they did in their own homes was important too and served to reinforce the fact that they were being treated as responsible adults with their own autonomy and self-determination.

**“I’d say that’s the positive side is the responsibility of not having someone say, well you’re an addict so you don’t deserve that, how do we know you’re going to be all right, how do you know you’re not going to do this, you know? Or you, you can’t have a cigarette at this time and if you do you can’t come back into the building. That is a nightmare and if you smoke in your room, you’re out. And when you have your own house you have a choice, I don’t smoke any more, but at the time having that choice taken from me was not nice.”**

Sharon

One resident explained that they liked the reassurance they received when it came to decision-making and that they knew support was there come what may.

**“What I really like about Housing First is that when they say they are going to do something, they do it. They want me to better myself and they have got my back 110%.”**

Jeff

Others explained that Housing First gave them the time, space and opportunity to focus on themselves – perhaps for the first time – and work out what it was they wanted to do with their lives. As Aron below explains, there was a sense of being ‘liberated’ from homelessness that could act as a catalyst for change.

**“I felt like I was free of the street and I’d been given a chance to kinda start something like start my life again but this time thinking about my life and not everybody else. So being given that opportunity was...it was overwhelming it was amazing. Having my own place was you know, it was...it was wicked. Absolutely wicked.”**

Aron

**“Having a home, means to me that I’m safe, that when I go to sleep I don’t have to worry that somebody’s creeping in my room or that some, you know something like that. Or it’s just, it’s mine and I can do what I want with it, I can put music on, I can watch something, I can do art, I can do whatever I want to do.”**

Sharon

Another explained that Housing First ‘pulled’ them away from negative environments which enabled them to begin the journey towards change.

**“Away from previous negative environments with Housing First you get pulled away from and given your own space, you get pulled away from negative people and people that are going to influence you to take drugs or. So, yeah that**

**was what it was like for me when I was in the last place, I was still around people that were taking drugs, so it was hard for me to try and stay away from drugs."**

Simon

Vital to this ability to contemplate and begin the process of change, is the way in which Housing First empowers people through responsibility and choice. This can begin at the very start in terms of residents choosing where they want to live.

**"I had full choice, she asked me where do I want to live and like she went through my family, my friends, things like that and even though I didn't have any family and friends here it's the choice what I wanted and she supported me through that. Everything she said she would support me no matter what, like she's going to be there regardless and she always has been there."**

Susanne

Choice, responsibility and control extends across other aspects of residents' lives. People with lived experience appreciated the manner in which support and housing was not conditional on achieving or completing something within a given time-frame. Instead, residents can go at their own pace and try what they want to try, knowing the support is there if they need it.

**"With Housing First because you can engage when you want to engage, there's not a set real time, you don't feel forced, you do it in your own time, so whatever help you need things around like, they**

**explain to you, you know? Take a try at this, go to work, take a step back and go back to work. So, it's all in your own time, you have a like, most services say you have a length of time to engage, or they'll pay you from this time, so a lot of the things, they don't understand people with mental health, things like that ain't straightforward. So, they're not ... you do lose the engagement, and I'm not having a more like worker person-based relationship. This isn't like that."**

Susanne

As Susanne comments above, the understanding and close supportive relationship that can develop between a resident and the support worker can be vital in helping residents make choices and take responsibility for their rehabilitation.

**"So yeah, they get to know you really, as who you are, not what people have written about you or judged about you or received from other services, they take you for you and that's what I like about Housing First, they're not judgemental, they get it and ... Someone to relate to, someone to look up to ... and they're respectful and not trying to tell you what to do, what doesn't work."**

Susanne

Having choice over what to do and how means Housing First residents (re)gain control over their lives and the direction it can take. Freed of the often-unnecessary conditions that feature in other support services, they can begin to think about and plan new paths forward.

## 7 Looking to the future

**"And my hopes for the future, well I would say the sky's the limit, because anything's possible, it feels like that, that's how it feels."**

Sharon

The culmination of having a stable and secure home, unconditional support and control over their lives means people can identify future goals and aspirations that they want to work towards. It could mean new jobs, rekindling old relationships or new ones, going back to college, exploring volunteering opportunities and much more. Residents explained what this had meant for them:

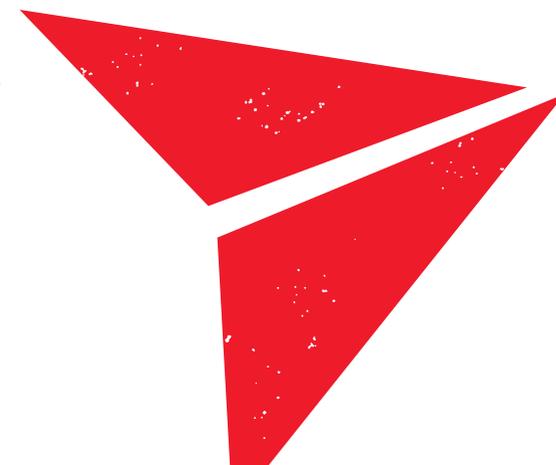
**"I've moved on to starting to get a bit more creative again and I like having my own space, I think for me, with what happened to me in my past and what happened to me on the streets, I needed a house of my own, in order to get myself together to get my confidence back. And I don't think I could get clean without having Housing First and having the space of a house of my own. There have been courses that I've started that I'm interested in. I've been doing voluntary work and I've been doing stuff with the church which helped me with my addiction. It's just helped me to be able to make better choices and I**

**do want to go to college, but, well I want to do music, I'm into music and art so there's a lot of things that I want to do with my time. But ... it's all there I'm just taking it slow, because I think the first year for me was all about getting over everything that had gone on."**

Sharon

**"I am living in my housing flat and have recently been made a secure tenant. I am currently waiting to enrol with college. I speak to my son on a monthly basis. I am also enquiring about letterbox contact with my other two children. I have brought myself a Chihuahua puppy. I am stable on an Espranor script."**

Charlotte



The importance of ongoing security, knowing support was there and having a place to call home, came through clearly in the accounts of those living in Housing First schemes.

**"I have a lovely flat and am hoping that I can keep it, Housing First have been here for me through all of this and I know whatever happens they are going to be here with me. I hope to go to rehab in the near future and come back to my flat, keep building on things and maybe get some voluntary work, a little job. Early days but my life has gone from chaos to a lot more settled thanks to the support of those round me encouraging me to see and be the best of myself. I will get there."**

Ebony

One resident, Graham, explained how he had identified a series of goals to work towards since being in Housing First and how this had helped him orient going forwards with his life.

**"I also now engage with a drug service and I am four weeks off completing my treatment and being drug free which wouldn't of happened if I wasn't on Housing [First]. My plans for the future are to complete my drug treatment and to get employment-self-employment [I am] looking at getting a trader's licence. I have already met most of my goals since being on Housing First and only have those to complete. Once I have completed them, I will then look to set myself some more goals with the help of Housing First if needed."**

These sentiments are in marked contrast to how Graham described how he 'engaged' while sleeping on the streets,

**"I didn't try and get any support from anywhere because I was content being on the streets."**

This transformation is testament to the power and effect of Housing First when someone is given a home unconditionally and provided with consistent support.



**"The support I have had has been brilliant all the way through. Housing First has given me more stability and allowed to move forward with my life, I now attend all my appointments and have new glasses from the opticians, attend all medical appointments and have new dentures from the dentist, things look really positive."**

Graham

Perhaps one of the lasting benefits of Housing First is the way in which it can help formerly homeless people feel normal again and able to engage in things that previously they might have thought were beyond them.

**"I feel like normal. I am off drugs, speaking to my son and family again. I feel like I am now in a place to be able to look into college courses."**

Rory

This power of Housing First is further evidenced by the testament of Simon whose experience shows how it can open doors for people and their futures. All the while giving the space and support to address their own needs.

**"It's just I keep saying, just open[ed] so many doors ain't it, it's just opened, like I said I'm volunteering, I've got mental health help because of my, I have got, I got drug help, I'm going to college and obviously that... just having a place to live and a place to be comfortable and a place to be able to focus on the things that are actually important. It's just amazing ain't it, like you know? I just hope, just like I've said already, I'm hopeful... it's definitely give[n] me a massive start, a massive jump forward."**

Simon



## 8 Conclusion

**“I’ve actually got somewhere with my addiction because I’ve got my own space and I’ve got somewhere with myself and my, with my own personality I’ve been able to build who I want to be, do you know what I mean? Like I’ve been able to practice to be the person that I want to be and that’s obviously just down to me having, I feel it’s down to me having my own space.”**

Simon

Housing First is premised on the principle that housing is a human right. It is then from this platform that everything else proceeds; the support people receive and the changes that come from that. What resonates so strongly through the voices of those with Housing First experience is just what a transformative event and process it can be to have a stable home. What so often characterises the lives of people experiencing homelessness is the inability to have structure, routine and control. Instead, what characterises their lives is uncertainty, insecurity and anxiety. Not having a home to call your own makes it so much harder to address mental health and other support needs.

The people we spoke to show that being in a stable and secure home provided them with something powerful and new. Something that was life changing and affirmative; it brought to an end the cycle of uncertainty and anxiety about where they were going to be next. It afforded people with safety and privacy. It provided time and a safe place, away from negative influence, to stop, to think and reflect on themselves: their own wants and needs. Housing First provided people with hope and excitement about the potential for change to come.

This change materialises through the support provided by Housing First. As these testimonies showed, the support is so different to anything they had received before. The support is persistent, non-judgemental and grounded in respect for the dignity and autonomy of the resident. This in turn meant people could develop trust and faith in their support workers. People could try things out on their own terms, take their time and make mistakes; safe in the knowledge that their home and support would not fall away because there was genuine care and a long-term commitment to helping them.

Control and choice for those in Housing First is paramount to its success and gives people the capacity to grow and live autonomous lives. Their decisions are respected; empowering them to address their own wants and needs. As is clear from the testimonies in this report, this responsibility can be played out in the practicalities of day-to-day life – arranging to see the dentist, what furniture to get – through to more substantial decisions about life ambitions such as going back to college or trying to rebuild relationships. They can choose to go at their own pace and are secure in the knowledge that support is there if, and when, it is needed.

Considered together, the four principles explored – home, support, control and future – help provide a means to generate ontological security: the deep psychological need humans have for constancy and continuity in their surroundings.<sup>9</sup> Having a home provides a person with security and trust in others and the world around them can develop. This can be the basis upon which change and new lives begin. Homelessness is an experience that all too often deprives individuals of these means.

The individuals that contributed to the APPG’s inquiry were in full agreement that Housing First should be invested in as an option for everyone that needs it. Their voices here are a testament to its success and the power not only to change lives but, in some instances, save them too.



9 Giddens, A. (1991) *Self-identity and modernity*. Cambridge. Polity Press.

