



Draft Report from:

Conversations with People who are Homeless about Housing First

Facilitated July 2018



HOUSING
FIRST
SCOTLAND

About this Report

1.1 The Homeless Network (GHN) facilitated two 'Preparing for Housing First' workshops in order to inform the process to commission the support element of the Housing First Scotland Fund. The Housing First Scotland Fund is managed by the Corra Foundation and GHN with funds invested by Social Bite, Merchants House, and the Scottish Government.

About Housing First

1.2 Housing First provides ordinary, settled housing as a first response for people with complex needs. It recognises a safe and secure home as the best place to address other issues and offers personalised, open-ended, flexible support to maintain that home. The model provides choice and control to tenants and works to the principles of harm reduction.

1.3 Housing First is championed by relevant academic fields, leading foundations and key third sector organisations because it achieves significantly better outcomes. Providing a home within a community as quickly as possible works better than a range of temporary, often congregate, sometimes poor-quality accommodation options. These can in fact prolong people's experiences and exacerbate driving issues such as poverty, trauma, mental and physical wellbeing.

What we did

1.4 GHN collaborated with 14 people currently engaged with homelessness services: 6 people from Glasgow, 1 from Edinburgh, 1 from Stirling, 5 from Dundee and 1 from Aberdeen. Of the fourteen:

- 13 identified as male and 1 identified as *female*;
- 13 identified as Scottish and 1 identified as *other UK*.

1.5 Identifying personal experiences:

- 14 listed experience of '*Homelessness*'
- 10 listed experience of '*Rough sleeping*'
- 10 listed experience of '*Mental health issues*'
- 10 listed experience of '*Addictions*'
- 10 listed experience of '*Involved in criminal justice system*'
- 8 listed experience of '*Had my own home*'

1.6. The workshops were facilitated with an appreciative inquiry approach to create a safe, open, positive space where in people could feedback on their experiences in relation to questions around Housing First and Housing First support.

This report summarises the key emerging themes across the two workshops.

What People Told Us

Direct quotes in italic

2.1 How should services best identify people for Housing First?

People told us that:

- It's important to identify people most **at risk** and to do this, services should get the **care manager's input** where possible;
- **Services need to share** so it's **easier to know who's vulnerable**;
- **Currently engaged services** and **talking to currently engaged staff** can provide good insight into who might benefit from Housing First;
- **There needs to be a promotional element through social media, libraries, the recovery community, CAT/HAT teams, in prison, and by word of mouth.**

2.2 Vulnerability: when exploring participants' experiences, people told us that:

- Some of the most vulnerable moments included times **in hostels, experiencing addictions issues, when young, with no life experience, when young, with no family support, after trauma, experiencing financial stress**;
- Sometimes people were unable to access necessary services **unless they were in stable accommodation** and this was challenging as they might be experiencing **things like trauma, mental health issues, addictions**;
- Artificial barriers were a common challenge when people felt vulnerable e.g. **needing letters or ID or statements** to access services and support;
- Trauma was identified as **the biggest cause of problems**, that **there's always something in the first place**, and that people **can't get trauma counselling until in your home and settled**;
- Money was highlighted in relation to vulnerability as **I don't have enough money to live which makes me vulnerable to being taken advantage of** and **crisis loans shouldn't take 24 hours or need to be accessed by phone as loads of homeless people don't have phones**;
- It was noted that good support workers can **read between the lines** when working with vulnerable people and **are able to challenge** but knowing **when to push and when not.**



“ I don't have enough money to live which makes me vulnerable to being taken advantage of and crisis loans shouldn't take 24 hours or need to be accessed by phone as loads of homeless people don't have phones ”

2.3 How should services engage vulnerable people?

People told us that:

- It was emphasised again and again the importance of feeling **listened to** and feeling like a support worker had a **genuine understanding** of a person – this led to **trust**;
- Having lived experience was regularly highlighted as being beneficial when engaging as **people who have been through it can actually say they understand** and **you can reach people if they know you've been at those destinations and made your way through the slime** and **it helps if a person has been where you're at**;
- The idea of perseverance was highlighted as **keeping going with somebody** and **going the extra mile** makes a difference and builds trust;
- One participant stated he was **always ready to engage** and it just needed **somebody to approach me and tell me the options** and to have patience for him **to try different things before you find the right thing**;
- A number agreed that **ego** and **embarrassment** made it difficult to **open up** which created a barrier to engaging. **Consistency** and **stability** were raised as factors important to engage;
- **There should be more stuff on offer like gym memberships and other opportunities.**

2.4 Feeling Safe and Secure: when exploring participants' experiences, people told us that:

- Staff members/ support workers/ key workers – there should be a **single point of contact** and someone consistent **who knows you**;
- Jail was highlighted as a time people felt safe and secure because **once the door's locked, you're yourself, the door shuts and no one can touch you, it's zero tolerance**;
- In jail you could **put things on the wall, make it yours**, and you had **control** over **who gets in your door**. You **had a routine, a job, friends, a telly** and **when doors shut, it doesn't feel like doing time but when the doors open you need to listen to everyone else's shite**;
- Rehab was mentioned as it provided the **space to regain control**;
- Being **in the loop** in a service and community helped feelings of safety and security. A **good network of nice neighbours** created a feeling of safety;
- Safety and security overlapped with feeling **like you're on top of things** like **all the bills you need to pay**;
- At times had to show people I was angry and put on a front so as to feel safe and not be walked all over.

2.5 Making a House a Home: when exploring participants' experiences, people told us that:

- Having support to furnish a home is **definitely useful**. Going to charity shops **to choose furniture** was important;
- Getting support to **make a basic checklist** of **all the things to do and get** and **what practically you'd need in a flat** – this means you could **tick things off** and feel **control**;
- It was highlighted that to make a house a home there needed to be more than basics:
 - **a full package with a TV, some luxury, more than what you just need**
 - **you can't skimp, like, you can't just sit on the bed, you need actual seats**
 - **you need actual, good furniture**
 - **a welcome mat makes a house a home**
- **Painting and decorating** and **paying your bills** help make your own home.

2.6 Combating Social Isolation: when exploring participants' experiences, people told us that:

- It's helpful to be linked in **with peer groups**, with **people with the same problems and experiences** like **some sort of local area hub**;
- **Things like this workshop are good for word of mouth** and engaging **friends and friends of friends**;
- **Giving people options** and **building confidence towards learning** was desired but required **moving out your comfort zone** and experiencing **fear** – this **depends on the individual**;
- Proactively **taking flyers to homeless people** to **spread the word** about what was available to them was suggested;
- It was important to **find the right type of meeting** and to **try it more than once**;
- **Seeing other folk like you do it and succeed makes you think 'I want a bit of that** and encourages engaging with the community;
- Useful to have a friend or trusted support worker to **try new things** as **the fear factor is huge** and they can offer **encouragement** and help you **progress a little bit at a time**;
- **Knowing where to find things** was raised as an important step to engaging with your community;
- The gym was highlighted as a way to combat isolation.

What matters most?

Direct quotes in italic

3.1 When asked what was most important about support and staff, participants told us that:

Service Design

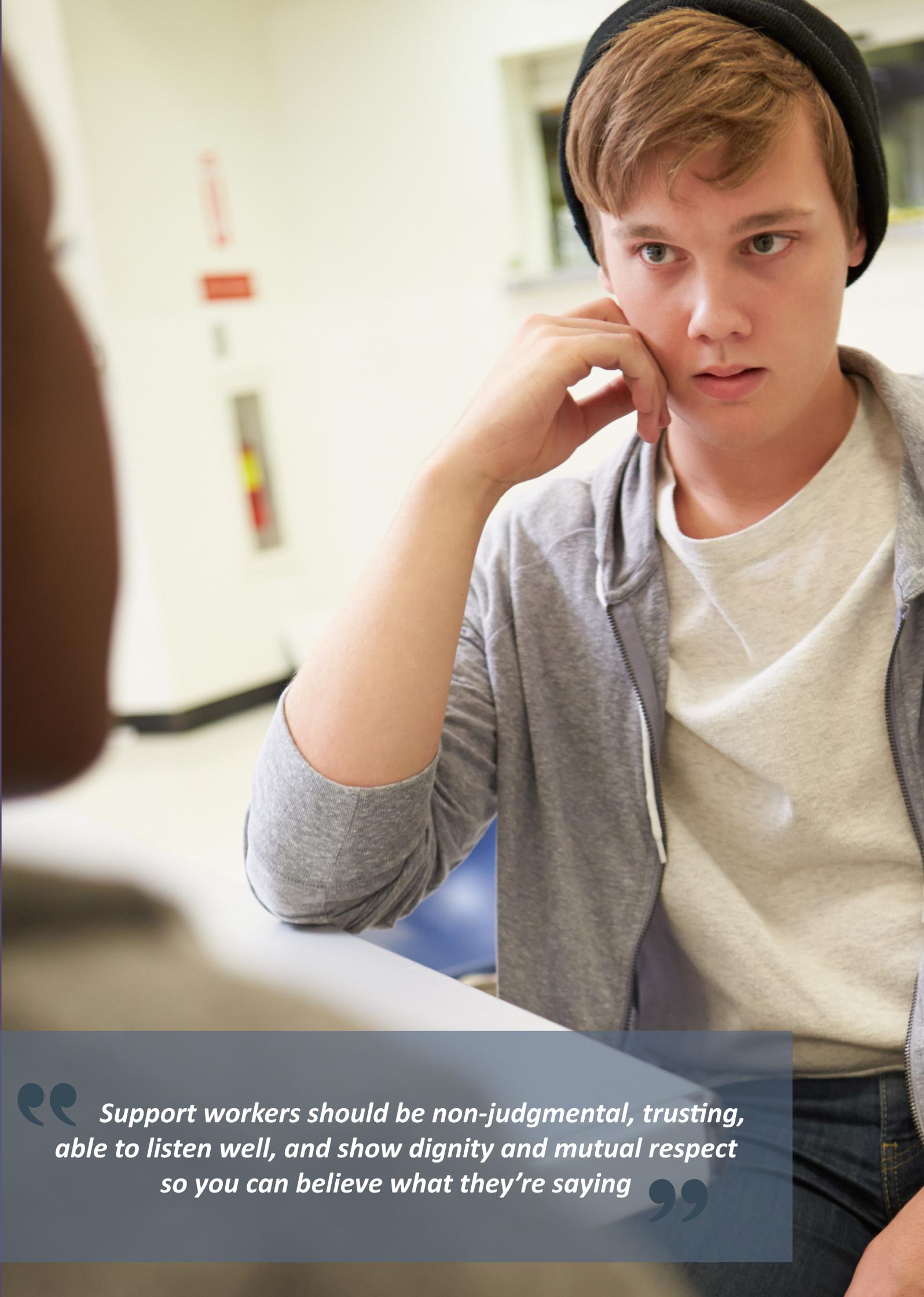
- Support workers should be ***knowledgeable on housing and benefits etc.***;
- ***15-20 as a caseload is far too many***;
- Support should be ***put on hold*** instead of cutting off if someone isn't engaging;
- Support workers should ***help me understand my rights and what I'm entitled to***;
- ***Lived experience*** is beneficial in a support worker;
- Services should ***understand and respond to trauma*** that many people have experienced.

Support Approach

- It's important to ***recognise individual needs, not putting people in the same boat***;
- A support worker should be ***someone who wants to get to the root of the problem***;
- A support worker should be ***someone happy to come with me and advocate for me***;
- Support workers should be ***positive, enthusiastic and can show you how you're progressing***.
- Support workers should ***instill confidence in you*** and should ***be reassuring***;
- Attitudes are important and can ***create an atmosphere of trust***;
- Good support workers seem ***determined*** to help;
- Support workers should ***keep engaging, keep saying hello*** even when someone isn't engaging with them;
- Support workers should have ***honesty and be able to challenge*** individuals as ***lots of it depends on the individual***.

3.2 Participants explored a series of 20 picture cards each representing traits of support workers. It was agreed in both workshops that every one of these traits was important in great support workers, with every smaller group selecting a different set of traits as most important. The traits that were listed more than twice out of the four groups as most important were:

- Show empathy; have lived experience; consistent in approach; listen to what I have to say; are adaptable; work alongside me to build confidence and self-esteem; fully understand and respond to trauma; are patient; are respectful and approachable; are trustworthy; help me to understand my rights; are well trained; are supportive.



Support workers should be non-judgmental, trusting, able to listen well, and show dignity and mutual respect so you can believe what they're saying



TAKEAWAY MESSAGES FOR HOUSING FIRST SCOTLAND

1

A clear mechanism for identifying a 'by-name' list of local people for whom Housing First should be provided. That this goes beyond a professional cross-reference exercise to include enabling 'word-of-mouth' and inviting self-referrals.

2

Reflections on 'non-engagement'. During this (and many other) lived experience sessions, people say they don't deliberately choose not to engage with a service, but that sometimes a service doesn't engage with them in a way that recognises their pride, fear and that listens deeply and acts specifically on what people need and want.

3

Empowering and caring for support workers. This is the most important relationship, the impact that a frontline worker has on someone's confidence and outcomes is significant. Both knowledge and values are important. Recognition of this role could be clarified in the form of training, support, opportunities for frontline workers to discuss and share - and in people's terms and conditions of employment.

4

The importance of control and choice. This includes when providing support, encouraging aspirations and pursuits, creating a routine and integrating happily within a community. Also, very practical control and choices, specifically when furnishing and decorating a home and in addressing financial hardship.

5

People who've 'been there' in a support role. Participants valued this very strongly and while not one of the principles of Housing First, this component is already successfully deployed by Turning Point Scotland who describe clear added value.

6

Staff who provide 'trauma-informed' care. The links between severe trauma, adverse life experiences and homelessness are well known, and people with lived experience can identify the difference between support and services that are mindful of this.



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