ALL IN FOR CHANGE

MAPPING JOURNEYS
THROUGH HOMELESSNESS

About All in For Change

All in for Change unites the lived experience and practitioner insight of homelessness in Scotland to enable decision-makers to drive real change.

All in for Change works through a 'Change Team' of around 30 experts supported by Homeless Network Scotland and Cyrenians and funded by the Scottish Government and St Martin-in-the-Fields.

The Change Team works together each year to engage and mobilise their own networks and more widely with people affected by homelessness and those working to resolve it across Scotland.

Foreword

I very much enjoyed this piece of work. It gave me a fresh insight into experiences involving people at the receiving end of homelessness – and about the services who helped them through difficult times. For the best part of the stories people gave of their journey they were mostly positive – come the other end of their experiences.

They all seemed to lean towards one worker involved in each case seeing it through from start to end – a "sticky person." A lot of trust had to be built in each case to progress any way forward in a positive manner.

And from a personal point of view, as to how fortunate I am the way my journey has transpired up to today.

Duncan Easton
Peer Researcher

Participating in peer research is always a unique and rewarding experience, and a project as wide-ranging as this – drawing upon the lived experience of so many people from a diverse range of backgrounds – presents an array of challenges. For me, the aim is always to ensure that we do justice to the stories that have been shared with us, going through hours of interview recordings to tease out the common themes that carry across people's experiences regardless of where they came from or where they ended up. My hope is that these insights will continue to help us influence change across Scotland. The passing of new prevention duties in the Housing (Scotland) Bill shows what can be achieved when the voices of lived experience are placed at the forefront of shaping policy and practice. This research, undertaken by, with, and for those with lived experience, will continue to build on that important work, highlighting the positive impact that having a person-centred and truly upstream approach to prevention can have on someone's journey.'

Shea Moran
Peer Researcher
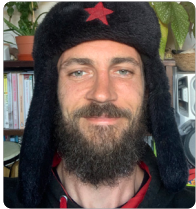
I found the process of constructing a research project really interesting. As we have experienced how challenging homelessness can be, we considered the impact of the way we engaged people; placing that in the forefront of how we constructed the study. I know it can be cathartic to share your story in a safe way, and it was great to provide the opportunity for people to do that.

Something that was evident everywhere we went resonated with my story, everywhere had one worker that went above and beyond. I will never forget that one worker that done that for me. The journey mapping tool really made the process smooth and non-intrusive. It was an emotional but rewarding experience.

James Stampfer
Peer Researcher

This research programme has been transformative for our team. Building from a strong foundation of annual consultations with people with lived experience to create a peer research programme grounded in empathy and prioritising people's right to control their own narrative makes me incredibly proud of the team. The research itself has been in a challenge but to see the growth of the researchers as they stepped into this role, coupled with the way they captures people's journeys with respect and dignity has made every challenging moment worthwhile.

Facilitating this process has pushed me out of my comfort zone in the best ways. We've seen people uncover skills and talents and watched participants reflect on what needed to change to help them, not what they have done "wrong". This is critical reading for anyone with an interest in transforming how we respond to homelessness in Scotland.

**Michelle Major**
Facilitator

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1. Introduction

All in for Change presents compelling findings from its first peer-led research, exploring personal experiences of homelessness services across five areas of Scotland. Grounded in personal testimonies, the research uncovers a diverse range of experiences, marked by inconsistent journeys, a reliance on individual support workers who go above and beyond, and a system fraught with persistent barriers that harm people's wellbeing and delay their access to the support they need.

The journeys of those with lived experience reveal a system under strain – but rich with potential for transformation.

By prioritising trauma-informed, person-centred and preventative approaches, Scotland can move toward a future where everyone has a home. All in for Change calls for targeted policy shifts, increased investment, and a commitment to relational support to end the housing emergency and ensure dignity, safety and stability for everyone.
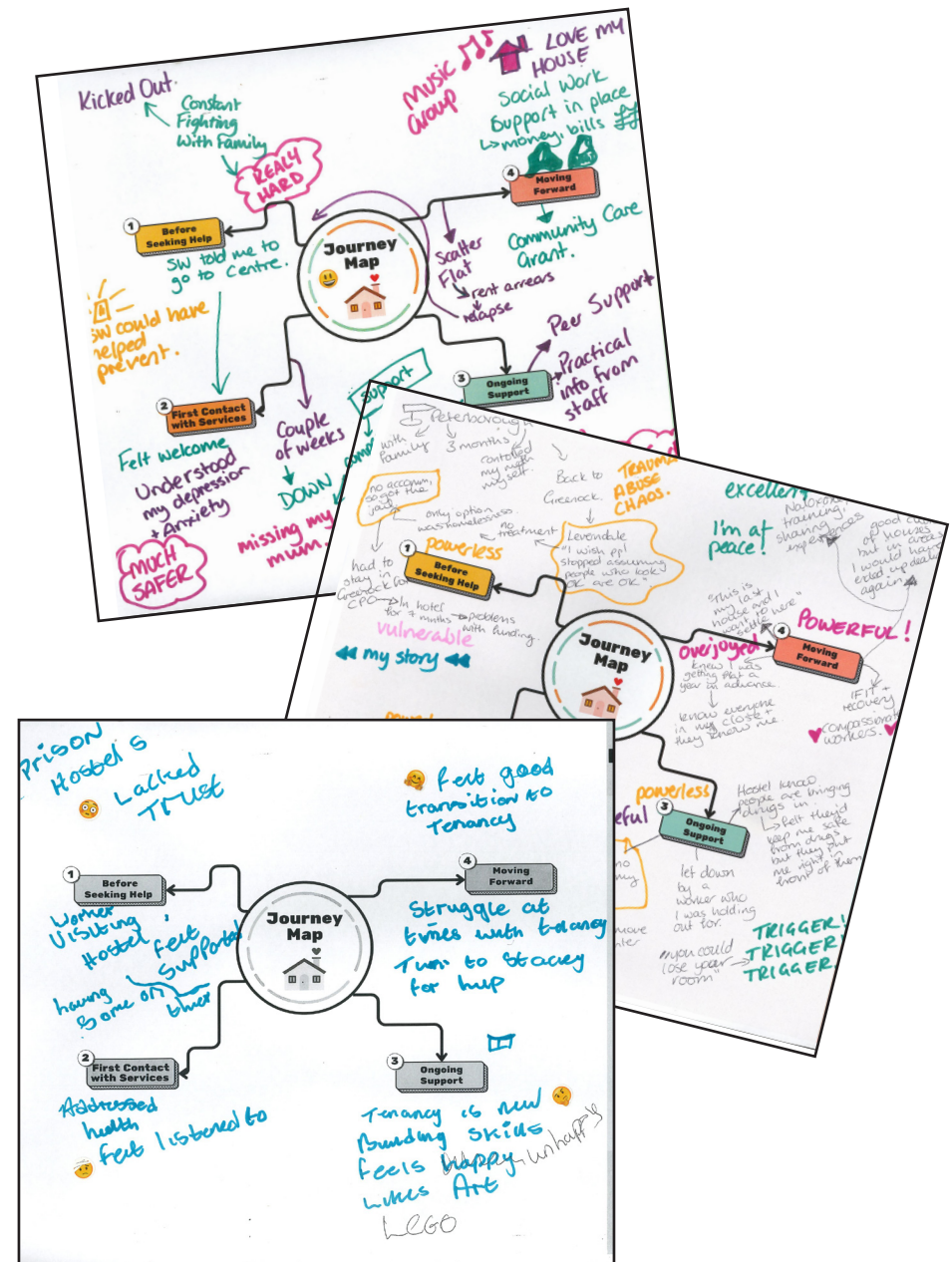
2. Methodology

Since 2019, All in For Change has coordinated a 'feedback loop' between people who experience homelessness and those that work to support, advise and advocate for them — with those that make policy and budget decisions about housing and homelessness.

In 2025, the Change Team collaborated with academics to enhance this feedback loop for future phases, shifting from traditional consultation to peer-led research.

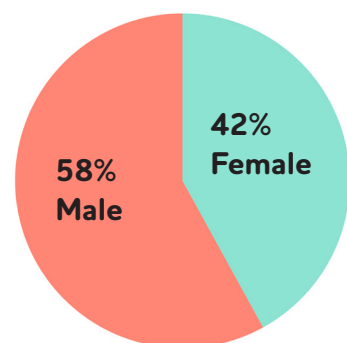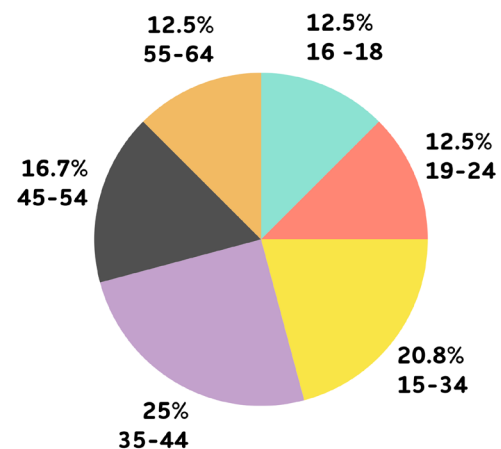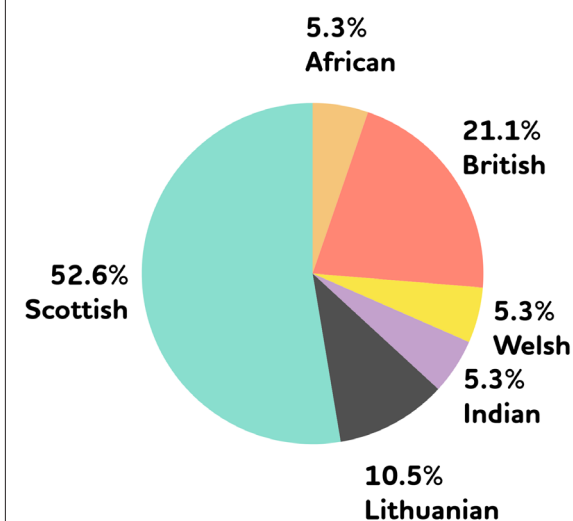**A summary of each part is as follows:**

- **Peer Research:** enables people with personal experience to drive the research process, ensuring authentic, inclusive insights that prioritise their perspectives over conventional, less participatory methods. Eleven members of the Change Team became peer researchers and prepared for this new role by undergoing an intensive training programme to learn about peer research, practice research skills and ensure that all their work and findings were unbiased by personal experience. The Peer Research Network supported this process by delivering research training, working with the Change Team to create the research questions and developing a methodology. Homeless Network Scotland supported the peer researchers through coaching, reaching out to services to identify research participants and supporting the data analysis and reporting.

- **Journey Mapping:** The Change Team used journey mapping as a way to guide conversations with people experiencing homelessness, an approach which emphasises trust, lived expertise and participatory analysis. People's testimonies have been supplemented by stakeholder interviews across the five areas the research focused on.

- **Fieldwork:** the peer researchers carried out interviews with 24 people experiencing homelessness across five local authority areas, which included a mixture of urban and rural. The peer researchers opted to conduct their fieldwork in places where homelessness figures had changed significantly from the previous year, indicating an improving or worsening situation, based on Scottish Government homelessness statistics 2023/24.[1]

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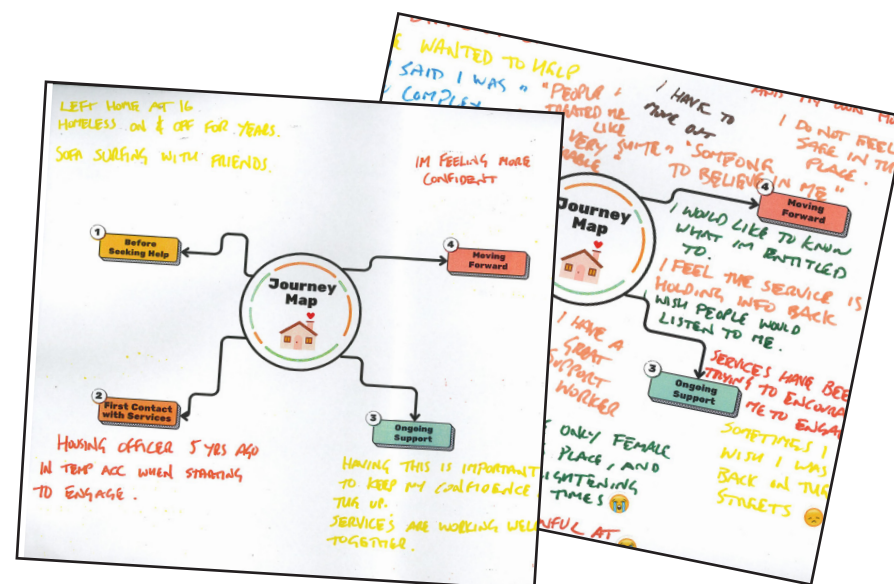
1. The Scottish Governement, *Homelessness Statistics, 2023-24*
   Available at: https://www.gov.scot/news/homelessness-statistics-2023-24 (Accessed: October 2025)

Housing Options Hub	Area (% change in homelessness figures from previous year)
North	Aberdeenshire (-18%)
West	East Dunbartonshire (-24%)
Edinburgh, Lothian & Borders	Midlothian (+21%)
Ayrshire & South	Inverclyde (+27%)
Tayside, Fife & Central	Perth (+23%)

42% Female

58% Male

Gender

12.5% 55-64

12.5% 16 -18

12.5% 19-24

16.7% 45-54

20.8% 15-34

25% 35-44

Age

5.3% African

21.1% British

52.6% Scottish

5.3% Welsh

5.3% Indian

10.5% Lithuanian

Nationality

3. Mapping The Journey

Researchers worked alongside people to help them map their personal experiences of the homelessness system, framing the conversation in **four parts:**

No Same Journey

The data reveals a wide range of experiences with homelessness services, reinforcing that there is no single or standard journey. Each path is shaped by individual needs, circumstances and the availability of support in different areas. These journeys are often complex and non-linear, marked by both challenges and moments of stability.

At the beginning of the process, researchers had the ambition to be able to show differences between the journeys in different parts of Scotland, having chosen places where at the time, showed the largest increases and decreases in homelessness. As the research developed, it became clear that personal journeys, although individual and varied, showed no great difference from area to area, and challenges and enablers remained consistent from place to place.

But Many Shared Encounters

But there are clear and recurring themes that people experiencing homelessness in Scotland encounter. Six themes were the most often repeated issues experienced across most or **all four stages:**

i.   **Practitioner:** the pivotal role

ii. **Trauma**: a central, not sideline, issue

iii. **Access to support:** fragmented and reactive

iv. **Navigating the system:** unclear and confusing

v.   **Prevention:** a system of missed opportunities

vi. **Housing:** a mixed experience

4. Common Themes

i. Practitioner: the pivotal role

A consistent theme across participants' journeys is the transformative role of support workers. Despite systemic shortcomings, positive experiences were frequently tied to trusted, responsive workers who provided consistent, respectful and person-centred support. These relationships, built on trust, active listening and continuity, were pivotal to better outcomes. Those without consistent or compatible support reported fewer benefits, underscoring the need for a relational approach embedded throughout the system:

"She saved my life essentially. So now they're perfect. I've been put into art therapy with them, and I meet [support worker] like once a week. And she's been the most helpful."
– a young woman from Midlothian.

"The housing first worker has made me trust people again. Trusting people is a massive step in the right direction for me"
– a man in Aberdeenshire

"Once I got the worker that I was able to engage with then the relationship started to get better. My confidence started to grow, and my trust came back."
– a woman in Aberdeenshire

ii. Trauma: a central, not sideline, issue

Homelessness is always a housing issue, but for many it is characterised by trauma. Homelessness is inherently traumatic but is also often preceded by other life-altering traumas such as bereavement, family breakdown, incarceration and mental health struggles. The peer research shows that the current system too often fails to recognise this, and in some cases, actively deepens that trauma:

> "I just wanted to die, and I was actually like what is the point in me being here. It was just so sad."
> **– a woman from Inverclyde**

While many participants encountered a system that felt cold, bureaucratic and unsafe. For example:

- **A woman placed in an all-male accommodation setting:**

> "I'm the only female in this place and it's frightening at times."

- **A 16-year-old housed in a chaotic, mixed-age environment:**

> "There was just so much random stuff. Being 16, I didn't even want to leave the room."

Gaps in Practice: Despite Scotland's National Trauma Transformation Programme, only 39% of surveyed individuals felt confident in applying trauma-informed approaches.[2] Our findings show that individual workers were often the only trauma-informed touchpoint in someone's journey. Trauma-informed practice must be embedded across the entire system not left to chance .

What's needed: A trauma-informed approach means designing services and policies that understand the impact of trauma and avoid re-traumatisation. It prioritises safety, dignity and person-centred care at every stage, from assessment and housing offers to communication and decision-making.

2.. In the National Trauma Transformation Programme: workforce survey 2024. The proportion of respondents who were very confident or extremely confident "applying the principles of trauma-informed practice" increased by 12 percentage points from 27 percent of respondents in 2021 to 39 percent in 2024. https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-trauma-transformation-programme-workforce-survey-2024/pages/4

iii. Access to support: fragmented and reactive

Local Authority Support:

For many, their first contact with services was via the local authority as they tried to access their housing rights and make a homelessness application. Some people felt "fobbed off" or told to come back when they were at crisis point. Others, though not many, were able to access a service quickly. This was not specific to any one place in Scotland. People talked about their needs being assessed, and for many people this assessment did not feel personal and didn't take their actual needs into account:

> "I tried to tell council I was struggling and contacted them a number of times and that I can't afford the rent and was told if I give up the tenancy, I was making myself intentionally homeless."
> *— a man in Midlothian*

Joined Up Support Across Sectors:

Little evidence emerged of coordination; support was described as fragmented and reactive. Participants rarely described services working together in a joined-up or planned way, particularly in the early stages of their experience. Where coordination did occur, it was typically the result of individual effort rather than systemic design.

Positive examples of multi-agency working emerged mainly once individuals were already in more stable housing situations. In these cases, trusted key workers played a crucial role in linking participants to other forms of support:

> "I had no ID; I didn't claim benefits at all I lived with nothing. She helped me get my paperwork together, get phone calls, forms, appointments, go to the doctors"
> *— a man in East Dunbartonshire*

Participants consistently talked about needing support not just with homelessness but other areas. Mental health was raised as a key area of unmet need, especially for those also managing addiction. Third sector organisations, notably Scottish Women's Aid, were highlighted as examples of more integrated practice. However, these organisations are under significant pressure financially and are not equally available across regions, resulting in a postcode lottery.

iv. Navigating the system: unclear and confusing

Participants described significant challenges in navigating the homelessness system, often feeling confused, unsupported and unsure of what help they were entitled to. Rather than being guided through a clear and accessible process, many felt left in the dark, relying on their own persistence or informal knowledge to access even basic support.

Challenges already discussed in this report — around prevention and coordination between services — often exacerbate a complex system, with people not being offered support to know their rights. There were even incidents where services themselves seemed unaware of current policies:

a) One participant had reported domestic violence they faced in their home to their school but reported not receiving any support as they didn't want to report the incident. In contrast to the statutory obligation of the school.

> "The night I got kicked out. My dad, like, dragged me across the road. And I was covered like head to toe in bruises. It was not the first time he hit me or anything.
>
> They were already aware. They were like, do you want to report him? And I went, what's that going to gain me? I'm not going to get a place of living out of that.
>
> I was like, no. So that was the only thing they ever tried to really help with."
> **— a young woman in Midlothian**

b) One participant reported being turned away from homelessness support due to the service being unaware of changes to the policy on local connection.

> "They said that wasn't, you know, because I'm not from this community, you know, like I forget what the word is, but you're not like a familiar to the area. So you're not from this area. So go to your own actual local [area]. But then I read up that had been abolished two years ago."
> **— a young man in East Dunbartonshire**

Other people described evidence of systems that prioritise process over people. For example, being made homeless due to administrative oversights or inefficient bureaucracy, like a Discretionary Housing Payment not being transferred.

v. Prevention: a system of missed opportunities

Each person's journey was individual and varied, but a constant was the number of opportunities for homelessness prevention, especially upstream prevention and changes to local policy:

c) One participant shared that her journey could have been avoided altogether if she had been able to transfer a tenancy to her own name after the death of her partner.

d) Young people spoke about already being involved with many services, who if they had a homelessness prevention lens, would have been able to prevent much of their trauma and upheaval when their housing situation became unstable.

Of the 24 participants, only two experienced homelessness after being a homeowner. One man told researchers about a lifechanging accident at work which led to substance use and a marriage breakdown, and subsequently to homelessness. Another man shared that he was in mortgage arrears and had been offered support from the local authority to buy his property. However, lockdown then hit and when he revisited the offer it no longer stood. All other participants were in rented accommodation either private or social, or within their family home before seeking help.

> "They said I housed myself knowing I couldn't afford the rent increase, but I had to move because the landlord was selling the house. If I'd known the council would put me into temporary accommodation, I'd have got in touch, but you aren't given information or the right pathway"
> **— a man in Midlothian**

People described only receiving help once they had already reached a crisis point. Preventative support was often ineffective in key systems, including education, criminal justice, health and social care. Participants identified multiple examples where better prevention could have made a difference:

• A participant described how all five of their siblings had followed the same path into homelessness, with clear warning signs and repeated points of contact along the way. Despite this pattern, when the participant themselves experienced homelessness, their school failed to identify the risk or provide sufficient support, representing a missed opportunity for early and effective intervention.

> "I told my school. And they had no clue what to do…They weren't really any help. But my school got me in contact with [third sector organisation]. But I didn't like the woman that I met up with… at the time I had two jobs, and I was at school, and I was living with my sister, who was two hours away from my school on a bus. And she's talking about budgeting. And I was like, "that's not really a concern." I have more than enough money. I was like, what the hell? So I just kind of was like, this is a big sham. And I was like; I can do it by myself"
> **— a young woman in Midlothian**

A person who was in touch with the police to escape a situation of domestic violence was not provided with homelessness support by the police:

"Obviously when I was like, they were like have you got anywhere to stay, they told me they would contact me back, but they never contacted me back. They just wanted me to go stay at my pals or something. They didn't really... not understand, but they didn't really... they were just there to help me escape, they weren't really there to help find somewhere...Like obviously I was going through court and they were offering me help like with the situation, like what I went through with my ex, but they didn't really help with what was going to come next, after everything."
— *a young man in Midlothian*

- A bereavement-led eviction went unchallenged due to inconsistent local authority procedures.

"It hadn't been evident that had actually been living there for eight years. It's a care of, it was just a care of, so they wouldn't let me keep it. I was left sitting outside the front door with my bags"
— *a woman in Inverclyde*

vi. Housing: a mixed experience

Housing outcomes are deeply shaped by system constraints, but how these are managed and how choices are communicated can make a significant difference to people's experience. A more person-centred, transparent approach, even within current limitations, improves both experience and outcome.

Frequent moves were a feature of many journeys. This could be a positive, when driven by the individual and aligned with their goals particularly for younger people seeking independence. But when moves were forced or frequent due to system failure, they had destabilising and traumatic effects.

Experiences of housing among participants were split almost evenly.

- For those who had **positive experiences**, housing created a sense of stability, autonomy, and home. These participants typically felt heard in the process and were more likely to describe staff who worked with, rather than around, their preferences.

  Some participants were able to negotiate housing solutions that better fit their needs for example, being offered a low-floor flat as an alternative to a high-rise. However, this negotiation required a knowledge of rights, which is not clearly available to everyone, and relies on an individual's advocacy abilities.

  What emerged clearly was that there is no single definition of "good housing" — what works depends heavily on people's individual needs, preferences, and personal circumstances:

- For those who had **negative experiences**, accommodation was offered with little or no choice over type, location or suitability. In several cases, the first housing offer did not meet basic needs, requiring further moves that were disruptive or even traumatic, leaving people feeling *"passed from pillar to post."* This was especially challenging in areas with limited housing stock.

Systemic rigidity was also a theme. Participants cited barriers to common-sense solutions such as the inability to convert temporary accommodation into permanent housing even when this was clearly the most stable and cost-effective option. These rules, intended to ensure fairness, often had the opposite effect: denying people long-term stability in the name of procedure.

In this research, most participants journeys ended with an offer of a settled tenancy. Six participants were housed in supported accommodation, which suited their needs. For five participants, at the time of their interview they remained in temporary accommodation, waiting for an end to their journey through homelessness. For one of those five, their future remains uncertain. This person has no recourse to public funds due to their immigration status, and painted a dire picture of how this policy decision has affected their wellbeing:

> "I feel like a criminal. I'm always waiting on the door to go and it's my asylum removal. I have lost the support I had because they told me I was doing too much stuff with the hub and I'm too independent today."
> — *Participant with no recourse to public funds*

6. Professional Insights

Peer researchers worked with support workers and managers across the five areas included in the research project. In total, 9 professionals took part in a semi-structured interview.

The common challenge in every area was the need for more social housing to relieve the pressure on the system and to end the housing emergency. Interviews highlighted further challenges and opportunities that can be summarised as follows:

Challenges:

- Funding cuts and cycles that lead to smaller teams while the caseload continues to increase.
- Demotivation when people lose their tenancies due to preventable circumstances.
- The need for more trauma-informed settings to conduct their work.
- Services that operate Monday – Friday when the need can arise for the service at any time.
- In rural areas, staff face challenges with managing time and caseloads where people are housed further afield

Opportunities:

- Creating impact by spending time with the people they support informally with a focus on building a trusting relationship.
- Collaborating with other services to enable people an easier transition from one service to another.
- Taking a novel approach to reaching people who need help, like Aberdeenshire's 'days of action':
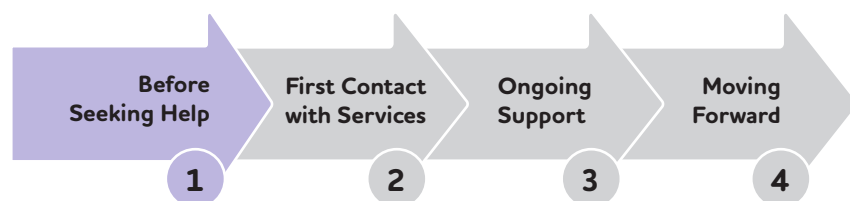
Practice Point:

'Days of Action' in Aberdeenshire

Frontline workers and managers shared their positive experiences with Days of Action, where many staff base themselves in the city centre for the day, including housing, police, substance use services and mental health services. The staff told us people find accessing services much easier in this environment and are able to use the city centre location as a one stop shop to progress lots of different things in one place.

7. Roadmap for Change

Building on our comprehensive mapping of lived experiences across Scotland, this peer-led research pinpoints key priorities to strengthen national and local plans, by focusing on the issues which occur most frequently. This is aligned with the four stages of people's real-world homelessness journeys as summarised below:

Firstly, the research highlights a stark gap between the ambition of homelessness prevention and its practical delivery. Many participants' stories pointed to clear missed opportunities for earlier intervention across sectors like education, criminal justice, health, and social care:

a) **Ensure full costing of 'Ask and Act' duties:** Prevention must extend beyond the homelessness sector. Undertake a full cost analysis to implement the new duties.

b) **Provide guidance and training for each relevant body:** Provide sector-specific guidance and training so relevant bodies can prepare ahead for the new duties. Ensure materials are informed by lived experience and practitioner insights.

c) **Monitor compliance and outcomes:** Develop a national framework now to monitor how relevant bodies will comply with and report on Ask and Act duties.

d) **Focus on every young person:** Ensure access to expert youth specific services to assist them to avoid, survive and move on from homelessness.

e) **Prevent homelessness in communities:** All homelessness starts in a community, but not all communities are at equal risk – local outcome improvement plans are the framework to prevent homelessness closer to home.

f) **Require local authorities to adapt housing options and rapid rehousing approaches:** To ensure a greater focus on earlier, more effective prevention and create a pathway for relevant bodies who have not been able to prevent homelessness upstream.

Before Seeking Help 1 — **First Contact with Services** 2 — **Ongoing Support** 3 — **Moving Forward** 4
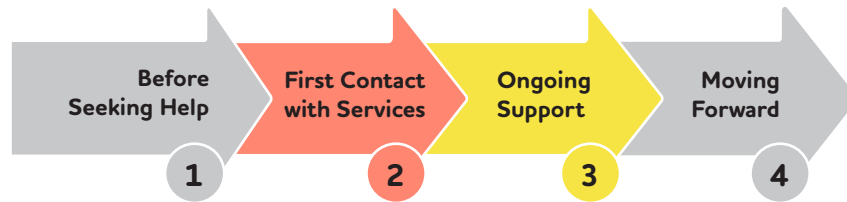
Support was often described as fragmented, reactive and reliant on individual workers rather than systemic coordination. Positive experiences typically stemmed from proactive key workers, not designed multi-agency collaboration:

g) **Adopt a 'No Wrong Door' principle across services:**
A no wrong door approach, clear care pathways and routine follow-up on referrals to ensure no one slips through the cracks – including housing, health, social care, criminal justice.

h) **More navigators or advocates who can walk with people through the system:** In a fast-changing sector, services sometimes lacked knowledge of current policies, such as changes to local connection rules. Fund peer navigators or advocates to guide people through the system, ensuring clear communication and rights awareness.

i) **Trauma informed practice:** Trauma-informed practice must be embedded across the entire system not left to chance . Policy should drive a cultural shift to make trauma awareness foundational, not optional.

j) **Relationships, not just services:**
Across the research, participants consistently described the kind of support that made the biggest difference in their lives. What they wanted was not complex or resource-intensive, it was human, relational and consistent. Participants' journeys highlighted that having someone they could rely on who listened, respected them, and genuinely cared was often the turning point in their homelessness journey. Key features of effective support included:

- **Trust –** built through reliability, honesty, and time.

- **Being listened to –** feeling heard and understood, not judged.

- **Respect –** being treated as a person, not a case or a problem.

- **Safety –** both physical and emotional.

- **Choice and control –** including the choice to delegate decisions to someone trusted.

- **Recognition of strengths –** support that helps people move forward, e.g. through job applications, CV support or skills development.

- **Rights awareness –** especially valued by older people, who wanted to understand what they were entitled to and how to claim it.

- **Clear communication –** knowing who their worker is, what to expect, and what is or isn't possible.

- **A sense of certainty –** stability in relationships, housing, and planning.

- **Support beyond housing –** help setting up a home and managing other aspects of life, from benefits to mental health.

Before Seeking Help	First Contact with Services	Ongoing Support	Moving Forward
1	2	3	4
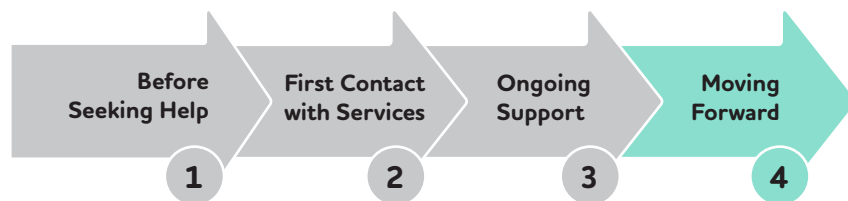
Satisfaction with housing outcomes varied in this research. Positive experiences were tied to stability, autonomy and feeling heard, while negative ones stemmed from unsuitable offers, frequent moves, or rigid rules:

k) **Enable more 'flipping' from temporary to settled housing:** Using mechanisms that are being deployed for families in temporary furnished flats, allow any temporary tenancy to convert into settled ones, where stability is demonstrated removing administrative barriers that prevent this despite practical benefits.

l) **Increase the allocated funding for more social homes:** The housing emergency action plan outlines a budget for more social homes. All in for Change believe this funding should be increased in line with the Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post 2026 research.[3]

3.. Michael Marshall, Craig Watkins, Berna Keskin (University of Sheffield); Richard Dunning (University of Liverpool); Ed Ferrari (Sheffield Hallam University) September 2025. *Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post-2026*. Shelter Scotland, CIH Scotland and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations.https://downloads.ctfassets.net/6sqqfrl11sfj/6lIKiRhZ9QlyWAMLeiAGvi/d5672c586c26fdf4c8f691ec073d21fa/Affordable_Housing_Need_2025_-_Full_report.pdf