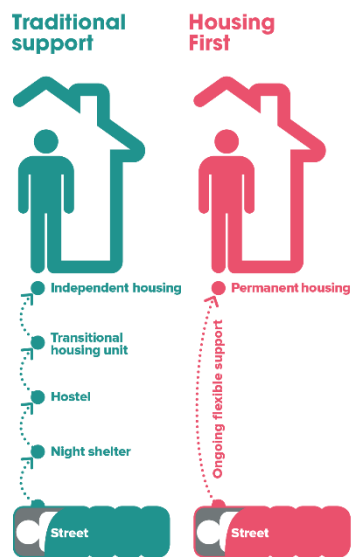


The Westminster VAWG Housing First Project

What is Housing First?



- Housing *and* support model for people who have experienced long term or 'chronic' homelessness, where traditional pathways have not worked.
- These people need a permanent offer of independent, stable housing *first* so they can begin their recovery - housing is prioritised as a human right, not a reward.
- Intensive, person-centred support enables clients to maintain tenancy and meet their support needs.
- Only condition placed on clients is willingness to sustain a tenancy.
- Workers maintain small caseloads, so they have capacity to provide the intensive support.
- Promotes client choice and self-determination.
- Underpinned by set of [7 principles](#) that are crucial for its success.
- Developed in 1992 in New York City and has been widely adopted internationally. There are currently over 100 Housing First projects in England.

¹ Tsemberis, S. et al. (2004). Housing First, Consumer Choice, and Harm Reduction for Homeless Individuals with a Dual Diagnosis. *American Journal of Public Health*;

¹ Bretherton, J. & Pleace, N. (2015). Housing First in England: An Evaluation of Nine Services. *University of York*

- Evidenced as being incredibly successful, with international and national evaluations consistently showing tenancy sustainment rates of between 70% - 90%¹.

The Westminster VAWG Housing First Project:

- Commissioned by Westminster City Council.
- Current partners of the project:

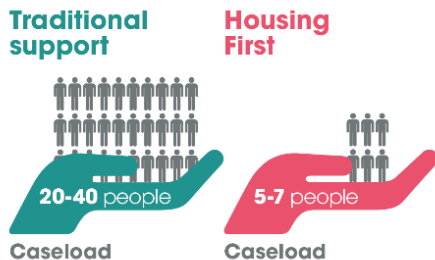
Peabody	L&Q	Southern Housing
Women's Pioneer Housing	Octavia Housing	Solace Women's Aid

- Service delivery commenced August 2019.
- Project specifically for women with experiences of long term/recurrent homelessness, multiple disadvantage and any form of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
- This client group face multiple barriers to accessing housing and support:
 - Often lifelong experience of violence and abuse, such as domestic abuse, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, resulting in more severe impact of trauma on women.
 - Traditional mixed - gender homelessness pathways can be unsafe for them.
 - Domestic abuse support e.g. IDVA services under resourced and often don't have flexibility to support this client group.
 - Bad experiences/stigma and shame from engaging with services in the past – women find it hard to trust/engage with services.

¹ Pleace, N. & Quilgars, D. (2017). The Threshold Housing First Pilot for Women with an Offending History: The First Two Years. Report of the University of York evaluation. *Centre for Housing Policy, University of York*.

¹ Pleace, N. (2018). Using Housing First in Integrated Homelessness Strategies: A Review of the Evidence. *Centre for Housing Policy, University of York*.

Housing First Support:



- Intensive support is provided by Solace Women's Aid.
- Project was originally funded to support 10 women. The project has been so successful it has now expanded to support 30 women.
- Six specialist workers will support a maximum of 5 women at a time. Workers will do pre-engagement work to build trusting, supportive relationships with women, support women into new tenancies, provide intensive support to help them maintain those tenancies and address other needs, and provide specialist risk management and safety planning around VAWG.
- Having their own tenancy gives women a platform to stabilize, be safe, build confidence and address other issues in their lives.

What we need from RSLs:

- Support and a commitment from RSLs to provide units for the women under a Service Level Agreement.
- Social housing tenancies provide the stability and flexibility needed for Housing First to work.
- Single tenancies - studio or 1 bed units needed.
- Stability and security - as permanent as possible.
- A flexible and creative approach – to sign up, number of offers, etc.

What this means for you:

- Only a small number of units needed per year.
- The Housing First support worker assists with housing management such as supporting the client

to understand her rights and responsibilities with the tenancy.

- Rent payment support - rent is generally covered by Housing Benefit or Universal Credit and the support workers help the clients with navigating the benefit system.
- Reducing the risk of expensive evictions by addressing issues as they arise - around 70%-90% of clients maintain their tenancy.
- Corporate social responsibility – the opportunity to offer a home to someone who has historically not been able to end homelessness via the traditional routes.
- Leaders in innovation.
- Links to [Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance \(DAHA\)](#) and supports work towards DAHA accreditation.

Outcomes so far:

- A one-year evaluation of the project was conducted using data and feedback from August 2019 to September 2020. Outcomes achieved include:
 - 87.5% tenancy sustainment rate.
 - 90% of open cases engaging with the project.
 - 64% of women supported to make a report to the police over historical or current incidents of VAWG or DA.
 - 64% of women supported to maximise their income by applying for benefits and other discounts/reductions.
 - 73% of women supported to access support from drug and alcohol services.

For more information, please contact Natalie Wong, Housing First and Homelessness Coordinator at Standing Together: n.wong@standingtogether.org.uk