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Depaul

HOUSING FIRST



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FOREWORD

Homelessness continues to be a significant challenge in Northern Ireland and a problem that afflicts the lives of many of our citizens. There are numerous reasons for homelessness; family dispute, breakdown in living arrangements, addiction, mental ill health, debt and tenancy breakdown or a combination of several of these factors.

We currently provide a continuum of services for homeless clients ranging from street outreach, crisis beds, temporary supported accommodation and floating support delivered in a range of tenures. Through the implementation of NIHE’s Homelessness and Supporting People strategies we have identified the need to develop services that are focused on achieving tenancy sustainment through early intervention and crisis prevention.

The Housing First model is effective in getting people into permanent and sustained tenancies through a customer orientated approach. This is particularly the case for people with addictions and complex support needs.

I welcome this opportunity to develop this innovative housing option for our most vulnerable customers in Northern Ireland through engagement with key partners such as Depaul Ireland and look forward to achieving our common goal of preventing homelessness.

Mags Lightbody

**Chief Executive
Northern Ireland Housing Executive**

INTRODUCTION

At Depaul we believe homelessness has no place and are committed to seeing an end to long-term homelessness. We are fully committed to a Housing First approach and have been delighted to pilot this in Belfast over the last 18 months. We will continue with our commitment and look forward to our expansion of this approach into Londonderry/Derry in the coming months.

At Depaul, one of our core values is that we believe in the potential of people.

Of those that we have worked with over recent months through our Housing First Initiative, many would have been classified as unable to live independently. However, by believing in their potential, and by working collaboratively with others, we have been able to demonstrate that this is not the case. Since May 2013 a very small team of workers have co-ordinated this work and supported 36 people into accommodation in the community. This is something we can all be proud of.

At Depaul we believe that in order to end homelessness it is not enough to accommodate people in emergency services for long periods of time. We believe that emergency accommodation should be just that – a short-term placement to assist a person through and out of homelessness. Homelessness should not define a person – it should only ever be a point in time. We need to find housing solutions and affordable housing options for people, and then ensure we can put intensive supports in place for those who need them in order to maintain their home, and their place in the community.

I would like to thank the team who have been working in this demonstration period – Debbie, Pamela and Toni – as a small team they have achieved a great deal and have in true Depaul style gone above and beyond the call of duty to support the people in this Initiative.

However, we know that this is a collaborative form of working and no single agency can provide a Housing First Initiative on their own; it requires interagency collaboration and co-ordination. With this in mind, we want to thank those other agencies who have worked tirelessly and taken risks in order to make the Initiative a success. Additionally, we would like to thank our funder of this service, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, not only for providing funding but for supporting the Initiative and championing this approach for Northern Ireland.

We look forward to supporting many more people into stable accommodation with supports, enabling them to leave behind the label of homelessness, and to look forward to a more positive future.

Kerry Anthony MBE
Chief Executive



ABOUT DEPAUL

At Depaul we work with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Established in the Republic of Ireland in 2002 and in Northern Ireland in 2005, we have grown to be a leading provider in both jurisdictions, delivering 20 specialist services. We employ over 350 staff and have a similar number of volunteers. Depaul is part of an international group of charities working to end homelessness in Ireland, the UK, Slovakia, France, Ukraine and the United States.

The work of Depaul in Ireland falls under 4 pillars:

- **Homelessness prevention**
- **Homelessness and vulnerable families**
- **Homelessness and addiction**
- **Homelessness and criminal justice & mental health**

Our ethos focuses on the provision of a low threshold environment, which promotes the principles of harm reduction. Since coming to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland we have committed ourselves to working with those who are most in need. Many of the services we have opened have been the first of their kind. We are keen to promote innovation that serves the best interest of people who have found themselves multiply excluded.

Depaul exists because we support those who deserve help to rebuild their lives and progress to a positive future. We approach this with:

- Compassion and a willingness to do whatever it takes, no matter what
- Expertise and professionalism so the most excluded people experiencing homelessness get the help they deserve and are not overlooked or ignored
- Innovation, creativity and flexibility in our service delivery
- Advocacy for hard-to-reach groups.

We are willing to take risks to make sure that our services are delivered in a way that meets the needs of those people who come to us for support.

We want to end homelessness and change lives.

HOUSING FIRST - THE CONCEPT

Housing First as a concept has been accepted and recognised across countries for some years now. Originating in the USA, the Housing First model has demonstrated that those often considered as being unable to live in their own accommodation, actually can with the intensive 'wrap around' supports in place that they need. Additionally, Housing First has demonstrated incredible value for money and cost savings.

The basic premise of Housing First is the need to move away from a process of making people 'housing ready' by accommodating them in hostels for many years. The traditional 'staircase' or 'ladder' model, which has been adopted in Northern Ireland for many years, is rarely a smooth process for service users - more often, it is a continuously changing experience of progression and regression. In this model, people who find themselves homeless must first address their issues before moving to the next stage of a series of steps towards independent housing. Permanent Housing is then seen as a reward for maintaining sobriety and compliance with treatment and support plans.

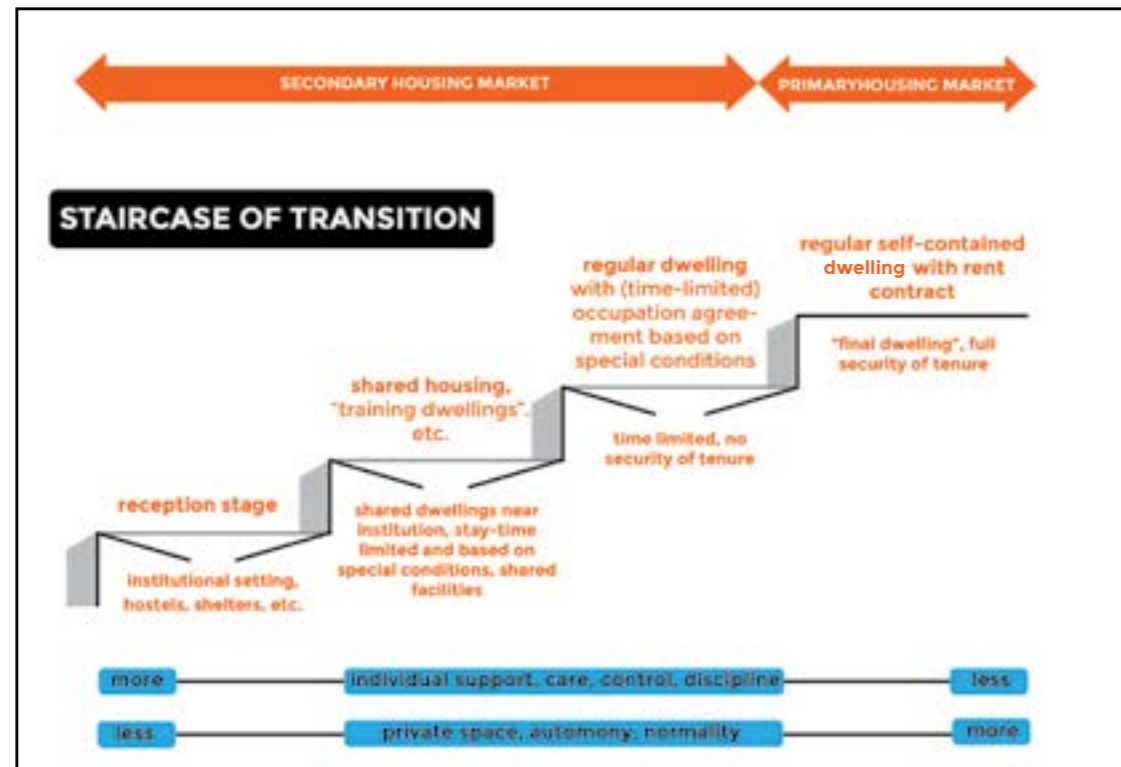


Fig.1 Staircase of Transition

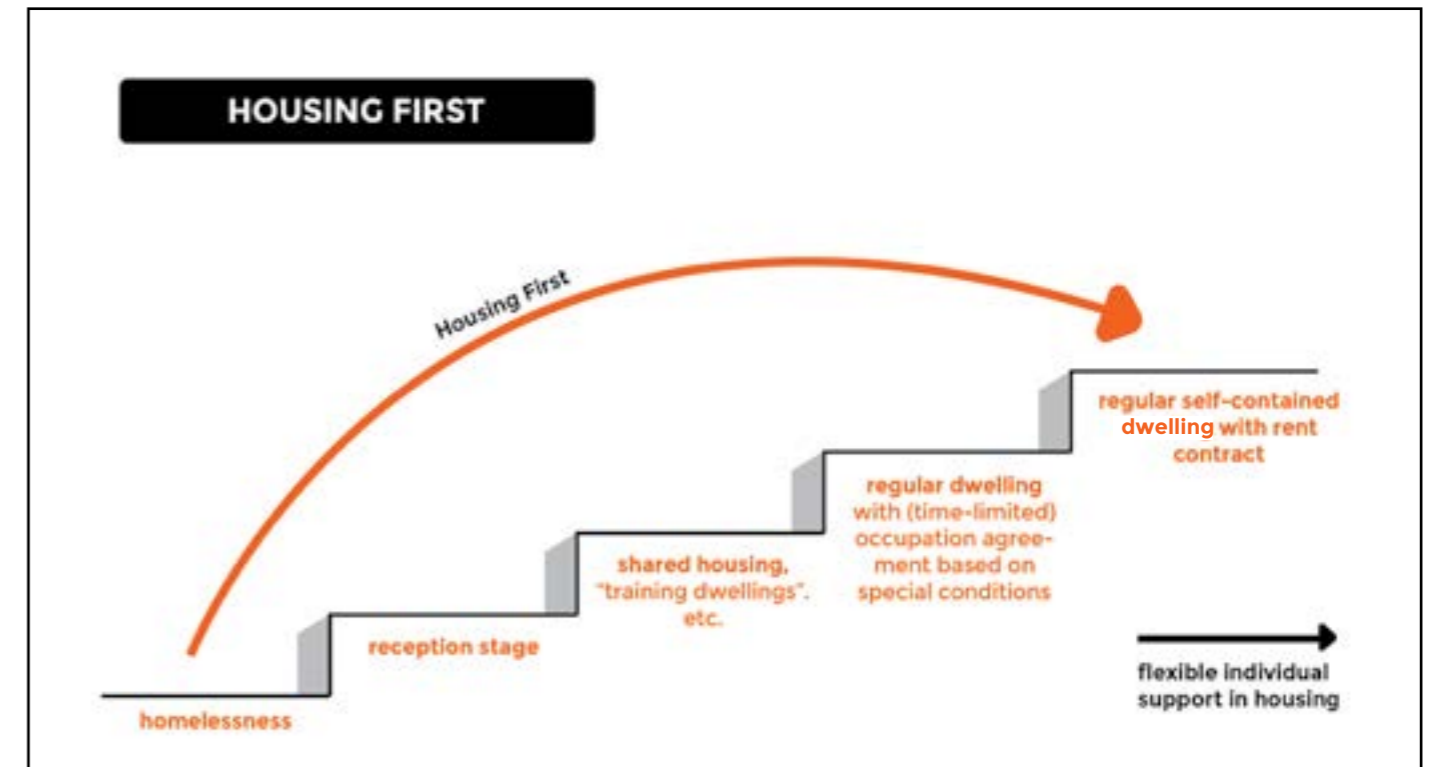
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Housing First, by contrast, promotes the idea of moving people directly into houses and providing a stable environment with 'wrap around' supports to ensure that the individual is able to sustain their new home in the community. In this model, housing is made available even if the individual refuses treatment and this housing is permanent unless there is a breach of normal tenancy conditions, for example, failure to pay rent. Housing First services advocate a harm reduction approach in relation to problematic drug and alcohol use.

The two key principles in the Housing First model are:

1. **Housing is a basic right, not a reward for clinical success, and**
2. **Once the instability of homelessness has been addressed through housing, clinical and social stability occur at a faster pace and in a much more stable and enduring manner.**

Fig.2 The Housing First Model





Adopting these principles in Northern Ireland has resulted in Depaul's Housing First Initiative making strides in securing and maintaining housing FIRST...not housing secondary to treatment.

DEPAUL'S HOUSING FIRST INITIATIVE

Housing First as a model has developed and changed in many different countries depending on the systems and structures that are in place. Northern Ireland is fortunate to have legislation to deal with homelessness and a statutory commitment to fund services for people experiencing homelessness. Northern Ireland also benefits from a well-equipped and collaborative voluntary sector environment. These factors have been instrumental in making Depaul's Housing First Pilot Initiative a success.

The objectives agreed with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for the Belfast pilot were as follows:

- To obtain long-term housing solutions for 15 households with high needs over an 18-month period
- To learn more about what makes these tenancies work
- To test the model of service delivery
- To inform the strategic and operational development of the Housing First approach.

The focus of Depaul's Housing First Initiative in Belfast has been to target those most in need, and people often in active addiction. In this model, the assumption is that people can live with some level of independence if the correct response and support is provided. Therefore, the Depaul Housing First Team work to ensure there is provision of a housing package where accommodation and services can be organised according to each individual's needs and abilities.

DEPAUL'S HOUSING FIRST INITIATIVE

The main elements of the Housing First Pilot Initiative in Belfast are:

- Providing secure permanent accommodation with a tenancy agreement with the landlord
- Reducing the use of conventional homeless hostels as the only long-term option for people with acute alcohol addiction issues
- Preventing homelessness and loss of tenancies by means of housing advice and ongoing support services
- Assessing an individual's needs and developing support plans to meet these needs
- Identifying and accessing the relevant agencies required to provide the support, and working to co-ordinate the response
- Providing ongoing case management support to the individual and the other agencies as required
- Regular reviews of changing needs and modification of the support package required
- Working with the other agencies involved to assess and manage risk
- Providing a 24/7 crisis response service when needed and also weekend call-outs as and when necessary
- Providing Floating Support services for 3-6 weeks until the complete support package is in place
- When a service user has been stable for over 3 months, a decision can be taken to close the Housing First case following a review of needs, providing the relevant supports are in place. There is always a reassurance to the service user and the external agencies that re-referral is possible.

The Housing First Team has formed very strong relationships with other providers and this cannot be underestimated in contributing to the success of the Pilot Initiative. Housing First cannot be delivered by one organisation in isolation. The team have forged strong links with both statutory and voluntary sector providers. This has helped in sustaining the support package, as at times, the team have acted in an advisory role on particular cases due to their expertise in low threshold working, and in managing risk with a client group with more complex needs.

The organisations involved in the Belfast pilot to date are:

- Housing Rights - Maghaberry
- Adult Safeguard Team
- Adult and Physical Disability Team North/West Belfast
- Adult and Physical Disability Team South/East Belfast
- Grove Wellbeing Centre
- Community Addictions Team
- Homecare Floating Support Service
- GPs and local chemists
- East Belfast Mission Floating Supports
- YMCA Floating Support Services
- Drug Outreach
- Foodbanks - North Belfast and South Belfast
- NIHE
- Helm Housing
- PSNI
- Community Support Service (Chaplaincy in Maghaberry)
- NIACRO
- Offender Management Team - Maghaberry
- Probation - Maghaberry
- Newington Housing Association
- Women's Aid
- Adult Day Centres
- Benefits Agencies - Employment and Support Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance and Housing Benefits

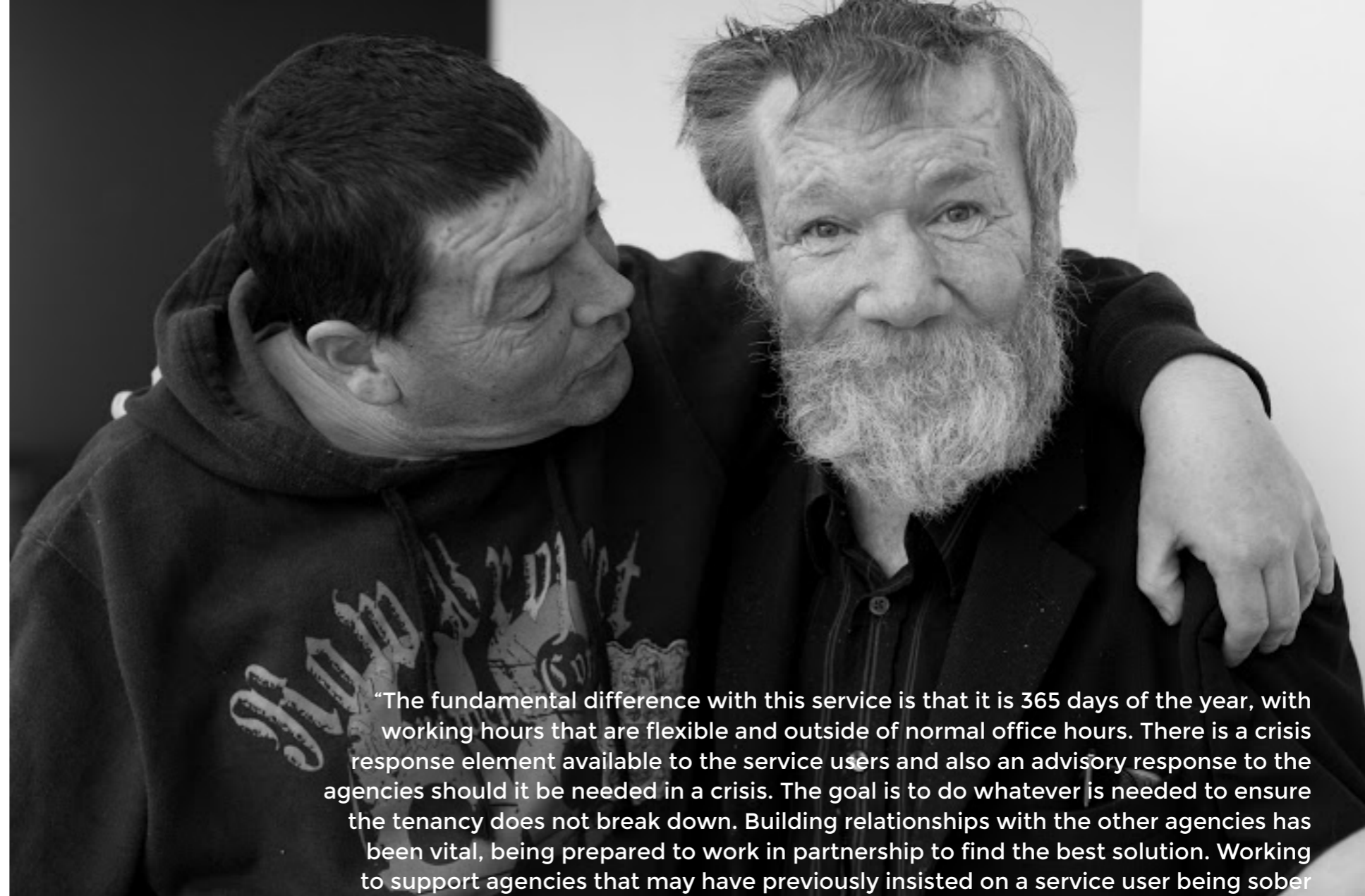
THE IMPACT

During the 18 months of the pilot project, the team consisted of one full-time staff member and one part-time staff member, with management support from the Project Group Manager from Depaul Stella Maris.

Both members of the team had previously worked for Depaul in the Stella Maris project and fully embraced the culture and ethos of the organisation. Applying a low threshold approach to the Housing First Initiative has been vital. Low threshold working ensures that the service offered is flexible, meets the needs of the individual and embraces the principles of harm reduction. The low threshold approach ensured that links were maintained with the other agencies and the service users, through effective case management. Despite sometimes demonstrating challenging behaviour, the services users received continual support from the Housing First Team.

In the pilot phase a great number of those referred to the Housing First Team came from Depaul's Stella Maris service for people with a history of long-term alcohol misuse and homelessness. This has been advantageous in that the staff members involved already had established relationships in place with the service users.

In order for the model to work most effectively, the responsibilities and partnership commitments of each agency is essential. Each agency, along with the Housing First staff, agree the level of support required for the individual. A multi-agency approach is adopted in undertaking case reviews with each service user on a regular basis, to ensure that the package in place is working effectively. Each service user signs an agreement that stipulates involvement and responsibilities between the service user and the Housing First staff. This also enables liaison on the service user's behalf with other agencies.



“The fundamental difference with this service is that it is 365 days of the year, with working hours that are flexible and outside of normal office hours. There is a crisis response element available to the service users and also an advisory response to the agencies should it be needed in a crisis. The goal is to do whatever is needed to ensure the tenancy does not break down. Building relationships with the other agencies has been vital, being prepared to work in partnership to find the best solution. Working to support agencies that may have previously insisted on a service user being sober before engaging has brought about change, and there has been a greater recognition of working within the principles of harm reduction.”

Debbie Worthington
Project Group Manager, Depaul

REFERRALS

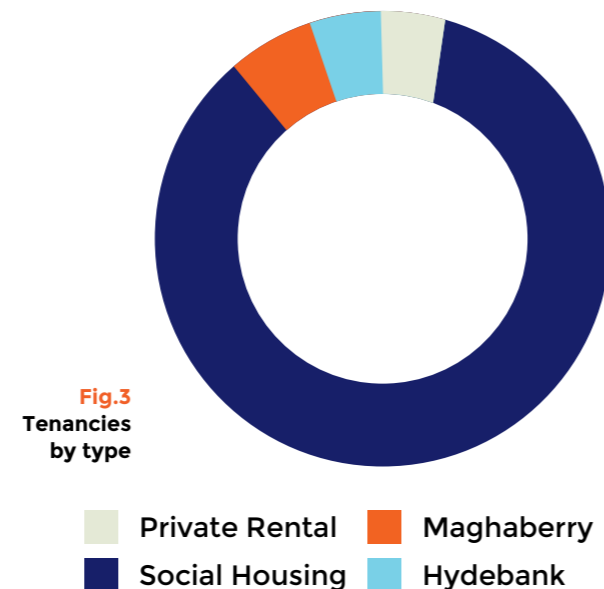
Initially the service was targeted at those living within Depaul's Stella Maris as these are considered some of the most in need in the homeless sector in Belfast. In the pilot phase it was important to demonstrate that Housing First really can work to support those who may have previously been considered less able to live in an independent setting.

- Since January 2013 there have been 39 referrals (including some who already had tenancies but needed support services).
- There have been 36 unique individuals in Housing First since January 2013, with 4 re-referrals after a tenancy breakdown.
- 28 referrals came from Depaul's Stella Maris, 7 new referrals from Housing Rights/Maghaberry and 1 referral from the Drug Outreach Team signifying new pathways for referral.

Currently, there are 12 people being actively supported by the teams; of these, 2 have been with the service from its inception and 1 is a re-referral.

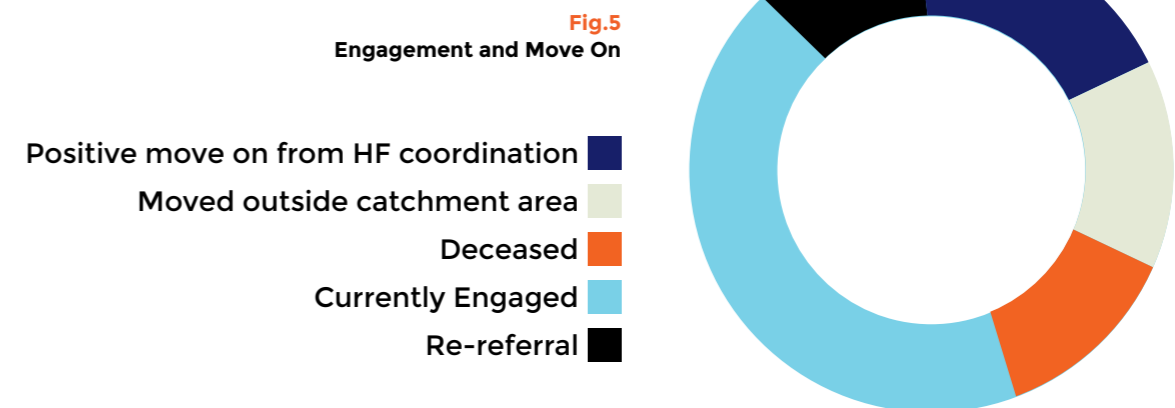
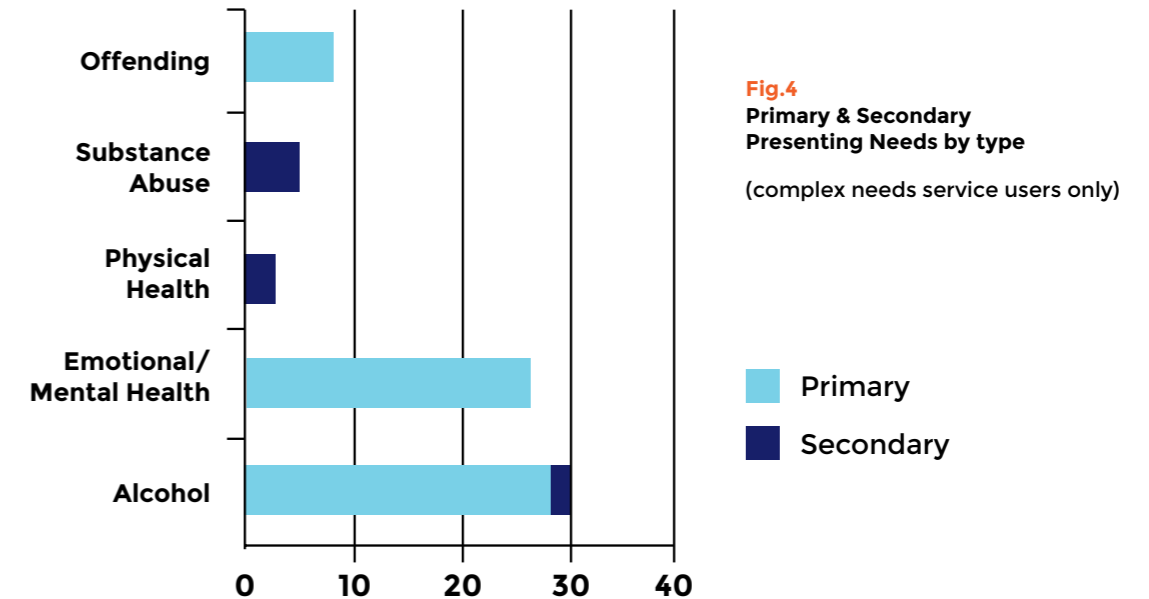
TENANCIES

A challenge for the Pilot Initiative has been accessing appropriate housing options for the service users being referred. To date there has been a strong reliance on Social Housing solutions, primarily through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. It would be desirable to have a wider variety of housing options available, particularly within the Private Rented Sector. Fig.3 shows the tenancies that have been made available:



PRESENTING NEEDS

100% of the service users referred to the service have complex needs, and it was this client group that the Initiative was established to support. Fig.4 below provides the details of people's primary and secondary presenting support needs.



“They have been a very valuable support to me. Without them I don’t think I would have maintained this home that I have been in for almost 2 years now”

Depaul Housing First Service User



DAVID'S STORY

David is a 59-year-old man originally from County Tyrone, who has a history of homelessness spanning over 20 years. He has a long history of alcohol and drug use and has presented for some time with chaotic and disruptive behaviour. David did not have a happy childhood and suffered from physical and emotional abuse from his father, who himself had an issue with alcohol.

David has complex needs and experiences memory loss, severe sleep disturbance and dizziness caused by a brain injury he sustained after a vicious assault approximately 15 years ago. As a result, he also has noise sensitivity and finds it difficult to cope in meetings with too many people talking at once. In the past he would have left meetings, and then in turn would have been accused of non-engagement. David also suffers from anxiety and depression and is an extremely vulnerable adult.

Over the years David has had various hostel accommodation, including two stays in Depaul's Stella Maris. He has had a long history of rough sleeping when not in hostel accommodation. David has also had tenancies over the years that have broken down. He was rehoused from Stella Maris for the second time in February 2013 but ended up in intensive care on life support following an assault. He was discharged from hospital a month later and the Housing First (HF) staff team took him on as a referral.

The HF team completed assessments and put in place a risk management plan to assist him with current problems. Following a few months of crisis intervention from HF, the team were able to get him involved with the Adult Safeguard Team and the Public Protection Unit (PSNI) in relation to financial abuse (it transpired that a local 24-year-old man had been taking David's money from the Post Office, giving David a small portion and then keeping the rest). This became apparent when David was increasingly distressed and agitated and had no food in his cupboards. Social Services came on board following a meeting with HF staff and the Adult Safeguard Team. David also had floating support workers who visited him - 3 daily visits and 2 evening visits per week.

David continued to engage well with HF and spoke to them about the possibility of moving to sheltered accommodation as "at his time of life he should be slowing down". The HF team approached the NIHE and David had an assessment for sheltered accommodation. Within the last 8 weeks he has moved into his new tenancy and appears to be settling in well and making new friends of his own age.

David's brother lives in Stella Maris and the HF team arrange for the brothers to have dinner together on a regular basis. He also attends trips with Volunteer Now for over 55's, which widens his social network and keeps him busy.

David now attends all of his appointments regularly and his alcohol intake has decreased. His drug use is sporadic but has also decreased, and his mental health has improved. David takes great pride in improving his home and to date has not only sustained his tenancy, but has moved to a more appropriate housing option for his age and is looking forward to making his new flat his home.

SANDRA'S STORY

Sandra is 50 years old and has been alcohol dependant for approximately 25 years. She has had a number of tenancies but has been in and out of homelessness over the years due to tenancy breakdown as a result of alcohol misuse and chaotic behaviours.

Sandra lived in Depaul's Stella Maris but has been in her own tenancy since January 2013. From time to time staff in Stella Maris had given her support when she was in a crisis, as prior to the establishment of HF, this was not available in the sector. She was referred to HF in May 2013, and within two days her initial needs assessment, risk assessment and service user agreement had been completed.

Sandra had suffered domestic violence from a number of partners for most of her adult life and suffered a serious assault in July 2013. At this time the HF team implemented a crisis intervention strategy and reported this assault to the Adult Safeguard Team. The Public Protection Unit (PSNI) and social services have recognised her as a vulnerable adult and have been working with the HF team to put in place measures to protect her in the community. After the assault, an urgent referral was made to Home Care floating support and HF facilitated the first meeting between Sandra and her new floating support worker. She now receives visits mornings and evenings for a total of 15 hours per week.

Sandra recognises that a lot of her issues with alcohol stem from events in her past and in particular from when her first husband and cousin committed suicide. Sadly, her son also tried to commit suicide. When drinking vodka Sandra's behaviour can become challenging and abusive and this has been a pattern for many years. Also when drinking vodka she tends to become involved in abusive relationships with males. Sandra says that she wants to address some of her issues around alcohol and the HF team are working with her in a harm reduction capacity. The HF team work closely with the Home Care team and with social services to promote this harm reduction approach.

Since HF have become involved, Sandra has stabilised and has reduced her alcohol intake from a bottle of vodka a day, at least, to a bottle of rosé wine or a bottle of cider. This has made a very positive impact on her life. She has attended appointments with the floating support team and HF. She has maintained good levels of cleanliness in her flat, and when she receives her benefits she has gone food shopping, purchased electricity for her flat and has even at times "treated herself to something nice".

Sandra has also taken part in a service user involvement group and has given a lot of input into the year plan for the HF team. She is aware of the importance of her input, and following her involvement in this group and her engagement with floating support her alcohol intake has reduced and her mental health has improved. Sandra's family do not live in Northern Ireland and recently her son moved to be her family, as their relationship has not been stable. However, having recently received a visit from her sister, she is now planning to save up to be able to buy a flight and visit them.

Sandra has had previous tenancies, all of which ended prematurely due to issues that are now being addressed by the HF team, who are sourcing external agencies to provide a 'wrap around' support for her. She has now sustained her tenancy for almost 2 years, when previously she struggled to maintain a tenancy for more than a few months. Sandra has also made the decision in the last few weeks to stop drinking and is focusing on the redecoration of her home. She has been attending a day centre once a week over the last four weeks, which was put in place by her social worker, and she hopes to increase this to twice a week to reduce her social isolation and help her to remain abstinent.

CHALLENGES INCURRED IN THE PILOT PHASE

As with any new service there were challenges and teething problems in the early stages of the Initiative, but a great many opportunities also presented themselves. Some of the key challenges incurred included:

- Access to rent deposit and the first month's rent. This will become more problematic as we move to a greater focus on the use of the private rented sector
- Accessing sympathetic landlords who will take the risk and be prepared to rent to this client group
- Having a very small team who have exceeded the initial targets set for the service but who would be able to achieve much more with a greater investment in the team
- Having an office space and an area where people can call into the office for appointments, when appropriate, for support
- As with many services, it continues to be a challenge to access Mental Health Services, and after alcohol this is the most significant presenting issue from those who have accessed the service.





THE WAY FORWARD

We have been delighted with the pilot phase and are pleased that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has chosen to support a Regional Housing First Initiative going forward.

In the coming months we will prioritise our work in the following ways:

- By continuing with the work of the Strategic Steering group, compiled of representatives from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Depaul and the Councils for the Homeless NI.
- By continuing to forge relationships at a local level in Belfast and to have an operational group on the ground with the relevant agencies invoked to ensure the success of the service at a local level.
- We will be recruiting 2.5 new staff members in Belfast bringing the team up to 5, and will examine further the roles and functions of the team in line with the partner agencies. We will consider the split of time in case co-ordination and in direct service provision.
- We will launch the service in Londonderry/Derry, recruiting 4 staff members. We will work closely with other service providers in the area to ensure that we have all the correct partners around the table and work collaboratively to make the service a success.
- We will seek to formalise relationships with others to look at access to the Private Rented Sector for this service.
- We will also seek to work with other providers to widen the housing options for this client group.
- We will continue to explore locally how we can engage with priority services, especially Mental Health Services.
- We will work closely with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to develop clear referral pathways into the service.
- We will work with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and an independent evaluator to review the service to date, and seek to improve this moving forward, with a view to providing an end to homelessness.



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