



# ROCK TRUST HOUSING FIRST FOR YOUTH PILOT

## EVALUATION REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BY

IMOGEN BLOOD, SARAH ALDEN AND  
DEBORAH QUILGARS

JULY 2020

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

The Rock Trust Housing First project supports care leavers aged 16- 25 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in West Lothian. The Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) project operated as a 31-month pilot, starting in September 2017. It aimed to offer access to appropriate independent housing, provided through Almond Housing Association and West Lothian Council, alongside intensive, on-going support from project workers.

This evaluation was commissioned and funded by the Housing First Europe Hub. It was undertaken by Imogen Blood & Associates, with the University of York.

## Referrals to the project

A total of 12 young men and women (aged between 17 and 20) were supported by the project over the pilot period. All young people had experienced some level of childhood trauma and most had experienced domestic or institutional abuse. All were care experienced; some had also had experiences of homelessness. Most had past or current issues with alcohol and/or drugs. Over half of the young people presented with mental health issues, and four were at risk of self-harming.

## Impact and outcomes for young people

All service users achieved positive changes to their lives as a direct result of project support.

### Tenancy sustainment:

All except one young person maintained their tenancies successfully over the pilot period, some with planned moves. One person chose to leave their tenancy but continued to engage with the project. Most of the young people explained that the project provided them with much needed support to live independently. Only one of the eight young people surveyed said they worried about losing their home after living there for six months. Once settled, all bar one said their home made them feel like they were "doing well in life".

### Relationships:

Reflecting that Housing First is a relationship-based model, all young people described ways in which the relationship they had with their worker had led to positive change in their lives. Young people described a different kind of relationship with HF4Y workers. They valued the 'stickability', recognising that the relationship was not time-limited or attached to where they lived. Many spoke of trusting the worker, and feeling they were on their side. The workers were seen as being flexible and caring, more like a friend. This caring role seemed to make the young people more receptive to making positive changes themselves.

Young people also reported other improved personal relationships. Of the eight survey respondents, three reported a better relationship with their family; with the remainder reporting no change.

### Health and well-being

Most of the young people had some form of mental health issue, reporting social anxiety, depression, borderline personality disorder, PTSD, self-harm and paranoia. Of those who responded to the survey:

- Six out of seven said their mental health [1] and satisfaction with life had improved.
- A third said they were eating healthier and exercising more.
- 2 out of 8 said drugs and alcohol were causing less problems in their lives; the others reported that it was the same.

The workers helped some young people engage better with services and develop coping strategies. Though most young people had ongoing issues, there was evidence of harm reduction resulting from Rock Trust's support, for example in much reduced self-harming or decreased/ ending drug use. It was recognised that change was likely to be a long-term, cyclical process where issues were multiple and rooted in traumatic histories.

### Meaningful activity

Rock Trust workers supported young people to get involved in meaningful activities, tailored to their needs and interests. Examples included: accompanying the young person to an exercise class; supporting them to learn to drive; go to a 'mums' group'; or join a gym, which promoted social integration as well as improved mood.

Three out of eight survey respondents said they had begun to access education or training since being involved with the service. This could be a long-term process for many young people, with workers supporting them with interim steps towards education or employment.

### Fidelity to Housing First model

Overall, the Rock Trust Housing First project had high fidelity to the core HF4Y principles, as developed in Canada.

### Immediate access to housing with no preconditions

'Immediate' access to housing was not always possible due to constraints in accommodation supply, however separation of housing and support meant that the relationship between the worker and the young person began before the tenancy. This support was given with no preconditions and the staff worked closely with other agencies to ensure that any issues were tackled in a positive way. Movement between tenancies was viewed as a natural part of young adulthood.

---

[1] Measured via the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

### Youth choice and self-determination

All the young people acknowledged a sense of control and choice and having the space to make decisions and mistakes within this. Workers recognised that change in some areas was a gradual process, and that their role was to empower people to make decisions themselves. Whilst choice was often bounded, the project tried to increase choice where possible (for example, working with more than one housing provider) and offered maximum choice where possible (for example, choice of furniture).

### Positive youth development orientation

The project worked from an understanding of both youth development and the impact of trauma. By placing their faith in young people who had previously been dismissed or even demonised by services, the project challenged the labelling of people as 'deserving/ undeserving' or 'high risk'. Young people, staff and housing workers sometimes spoke of an unconditional 'parent-like' relationship between them, using terms such as "tough love".

### Individualised and client-driven supports

Staff and stakeholders explained that the project was first and foremost a model of support - relationship-based, unconditional and 'portable', and crucially, 'person-led, not system-led': flexing to deliver what people want, not what processes demand. Young people recognised and valued the 'stickability' of the offer. Workers explained how the sense of permanence impacted on the quality of the support: friendship, trust and attachments grew, whereas young people could be 're-traumatised' in a staircase model, with people losing relationships and having to build new ones continually.

### Social and community integration

Utilising a trauma informed approach, project workers helped to reduce young people's barriers to social integration: supporting them to overcome social anxiety, or try out local groups or services. Where appropriate, young people were supported to move to areas where they were closer to support networks, to help rebuild relationships. Where neighbour nuisance issues threatened young people's tenancies, the project and housing provider had been able to work with neighbours, to prevent problems from escalating.

### Wider context and future direction

The pilot was successful at identifying appropriate referrals, building relationships with young people, and working with them to achieve a range of positive outcomes. The project was highly thought of by young people and also external stakeholders.

West Lothian Council have agreed to fund the project for a further year, extending it to March 2021 and including a further 5 homeless young people (who do not need to be care leavers).

The values and objectives of the HF4Y project seem to align well with the wider strategic context, including the Care Review Scotland (2020) report. However, some concerns were raised that traditional commissioning structures would not provide secure, ongoing funding. There is also a need to address the question of upper age limits, as the current cohort 'ages in place' so the project can support people into much later adulthood.

There was evidence of the positive impact of the HF4Y principles rippling out from the project to mainstream services. However, some in wider services still felt that additional conditions should be met to qualify for the ongoing service, indicating that more work was needed to ensure other services understood Housing First. There was also an urgent need to ensure mental health services were accessible for care leavers.

There were three main future areas for consideration:

- A greater involvement of young people in service design and delivery: This could take a number of formats, from peer mentoring or a lived experience advisory forum to routine feedback mechanisms.
- Education, Training and Employment (ETE): Whilst a trauma informed approach is paramount, strengthening strategic partnerships with colleges, employers and local job centres could be an area for future development.
- Wider system change: There remained a need for more strategic work to challenge mental health and other statutory providers and system-led processes which often stigmatise and exclude care leavers and other young people with complex needs.

### **About the research**

The evaluation involved three main elements:

- Firstly, detailed monitoring data was completed by project workers for nine young people, at two points in time: on moving into accommodation, and six months later.
- Secondly, in-depth interviews were conducted with six young people about their experience of the project.
- Thirdly, interviews (16 individual and 1 focus group) were conducted with project staff, the housing provider and other key professional stakeholders.

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

### Housing First Europe Hub

The Housing First Europe Hub is home to a European network of organisations, housing providers, foundations, governments, cities, and experts working together to promote the scaling up of Housing First as an effective systemic response to homelessness across Europe. The Hub supports this effort through training, research, knowledge exchange via work clusters and a community of practice, as well as engaging our wider network around the world.

For questions, or more information about joining the Hub, please feel free to reach out to one of our Programme Coordinators, Samara Jones ([samara.jones@feantsa.org](mailto:samara.jones@feantsa.org)) or Taina Hytönen ([taina.hytonen@ysaatio.fi](mailto:taina.hytonen@ysaatio.fi)).



[housingfirsteurope.eu](https://housingfirsteurope.eu)



[@HousingFirstHub](https://twitter.com/HousingFirstHub)

### Rock Trust

Rock Trust are Scotland's youth-specific homelessness charity. Their aim is to end youth homelessness in Scotland by ensuring that every young person has access to expert youth specific services to assist them to avoid, survive and move on from homelessness. They advise, educate and support young people to enable them to build the personal skills and resources required to make a positive and healthy transition to adulthood. They also work to ensure that the public, policy makers, commissioners and practitioners understand the issues, make decisions and take action which will end youth homelessness.

For questions, or more information on Housing First for Youth West Lothian or Housing First for Youth Edinburgh, contact Alistair MacDermid ([Alistair.MacDermid@rocktrust.org](mailto:Alistair.MacDermid@rocktrust.org))



[rocktrust.org](https://rocktrust.org)



[@Rocktrust\\_tweet](https://twitter.com/Rocktrust_tweet)





**Housing**  
Europe  
Hub **First**

**rock trust**  
ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Imogen Blood &  
Associates

**CH** CENTRE FOR  
HOUSING POLICY

**ALMOND**  
HOUSING ASSOCIATION