



HOUSING FIRST HOW TO

Tips from frontline
professionals



**Involving people
with lived experience**

We held a series of events, bringing together frontline Housing First teams from across the country to share learning and best practice around a range of prevalent issues, and help the development of Housing First services. The discussions informed this series of practical information, which outlines common experiences and recommended approaches.

Aims of this document

Importantly, many Housing First projects in England involve people with experience of homelessness or multiple disadvantage in providing support to service beneficiaries. Based on the experience of staff, including those with lived experience and peer mentors, this document aims to explain why this is valuable and to share good practice.

Who is it for?

- Housing First managers and staff teams
- Peer mentors and people with lived experience
- Commissioners.

“ In my role as a peer mentor I have a deeper understanding of the women and some of their presenting issues, and the women see that as well and they engage better, differently ... It’s in this empathic relationship that I’m able to provide for the women that they eventually learn their own boundaries and learn to grow.”

Linda, Housing First peer mentor

Why involve people with lived experience?

There is a strong sense that the knowledge and experience of individuals with lived experience is really beneficial to Housing First services, helping both clients and staff. Not only can they provide additional capacity within the service (if involvement is on a voluntary basis), but those with lived experience have a shared experience with those being supported, enabling clients to identify with them. This can improve engagement, break down communication barriers, and help new clients to understand the support on offer, the issues they are facing and what they can expect from Housing First.

Housing First workers also advise that involving people with lived experience is inspirational and offers hope to their clients and their teams. Peers act as role models, reinforcing recovery and showing what is possible. It is felt that the practice benefits all involved and should be embedded within the service and not merely tokenistic.

How to involve people with lived experience

People with lived experience are involved in Housing First projects on a voluntary and paid basis, in a number of ways. Housing First workers suggest that apprenticeships might be a good way of involving people and feel that individuals should be given responsibility, not just menial tasks. Those with lived experience can also be involved in staff and volunteer recruitment, and co-designing new service ideas and funding proposals alongside the staff.

Those with lived experience can be effectively involved to support individuals through accommodation referral or sign-up processes, in addition to giving practical advice and assistance to help individuals progress with their tenancies (e.g. DIY skills).

Involving those with lived experience can also foster a sense of community and assist community integration; establishing peer support groups and involving peers from the same local area were mentioned as a good ways of encouraging this.

Considerations around those being involved

Whilst involving those with lived experience is seen as a positive thing, a number of issues have been highlighted as important to consider, for the sake of the individuals.

Firstly, it is felt that people should have a recovery period themselves before becoming a peer mentor to prevent relapse, and ensure they are able to offer support, rather than focusing so much on their own needs. One service recommends that this recovery period should be at least three years. Projects should also set a manageable level of mentoring for people undergoing their own recovery to prevent either party developing dependence or an unhealthy emotional attachment.

Many feel that systems, supervision and support need to be well planned, implemented and managed to ensure successful involvement of people with lived experience in services. Training peer mentors and offering residents a mentor from the outset were seen as ways to ensure the relationships established between the two were positive. Ensuring clarity around personal and professional boundaries – what is and isn't included in the role of a mentor, and what is appropriate to disclose about their own experience – is also important.

Housing First teams also have advice around the recruitment and retention of involving people with lived experience. They warn that some may drop out if there are lengthy recruitment processes (e.g. waiting for DBS check for example) and that there can be a high turnover of staff with lived experience. It is also important to consider that those with lived experience may have been known in the past to the Housing First clients.

Further information

Housing First England

www.hfe.homeless.org.uk

Involving peer mentors:

[Threshold Housing First for women webinar](#) 



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness agencies and the wider housing with health, care and support sector. We work to improve services through research, training and guidance, and to promote policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link
Minories House
2-5 Minories
London EC3N 1BJ
020 7840 4430

www.homeless.org.uk

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