



Relationships First?

The initial two years of Haringey Housing First
Project for Care Leavers

Final Report

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Executive Summary

In 2019, the London Borough of Haringey commissioned Centrepoint to establish and deliver a two year Housing First for Care Leavers pilot project. Centrepoint managed and delivered the project, employing two full-time Housing First officers, as well as a part-time Service Manager and supporting up to 10 young people at one time.

The Housing First project was set up in a multi-agency team working setting. Funding for the project was part of the Haringey Young Adults Service allocation (leaving care provision), and Homes for Haringey signed up to provide up to 10 homes for young people over the life of the project.

The University of York was commissioned by Centrepoint to undertake an independent evaluation of the early stage of the project. The research included a literature review, project monitoring, qualitative interviews with five young people and 10 staff and other key stakeholders involved in commissioning and delivery of the project.

Referrals

The project was aimed at young people leaving care who needed a high level of support, above the usual support available through the Young Adults Service (YAS) pathway to independence.

All referrals came via Haringey YAS. A total of 15 young people were referred and accepted onto the pilot project. At the end of June 2021, nine young people were utilising the service (and had been for an average of 12 months). Six young people had left the project (having used the project for an average of 13 months).

Although there was a good demand for the service, it took some time for the agencies to agree on the operation of the eligibility criteria, reflecting different cultural differences in the working practices of partner agencies. In particular, there were different perspectives on whether care leavers with high needs should qualify for support when they had 'failed' in other placements and where the provision of housing might be seen as a reward. It was also a challenge to set up information sharing protocols including the sharing of risk assessments.

By the end of the pilot period, key agencies had developed confidence in the role and purpose of the Housing First model, especially in providing critical support for the Local Authority's most vulnerable care leavers. Time and effort was needed to build a relationship of trust between the diverse professional groups.

Profile of the young people using the service

Project monitoring showed that the Housing First project was mainly supporting local young men from London from a mix of ethnic backgrounds.

These young people had spent many years in care, had unstable accommodation histories and experience of the criminal justice system, including being victims of crimes.

Most young people were struggling with their mental health and/or substance misuse issues. Three people had physical health problems. Three young people were autistic; and four of the young people had ADHD/ADD. One young person had a learning disability.

All but one of the young people were homeless at the point of referral, with most staying in local authority or other forms of temporary accommodation. Three young people were staying with family or friends; one young person was in prison. One young person was already in independent accommodation but required support to make this sustainable. The majority of young people were not in education, employment or training at referral.

Delivering housing

The project offered both direct housing offers and choice-based lettings for the young people over the course of the pilot. By the end of the project, six young people had been allocated properties, all under the direct offer policy.

The biggest challenge for the project was finding suitable accommodation for the young people. All young people faced a wait of several months, as a minimum, before rehousing. It was recognised that the lack of housing availability reflected an overall housing crisis, with particular acute housing shortages in London, including Haringey.

In some cases, the long waits for housing led to detrimental impacts on young people's well-being whilst they were living in unsuitable temporary living situations (for example, re-engaging with drug use and worsening mental health). Project workers explained it was difficult to keep young people engaged with the project when housing was not available.

There were also some misunderstandings about the role of 'Housing First'. This included some professional groups emphasising the need for young people to be 'housing ready' before they were provided with permanent housing when this is not a requirement of the Housing First approach. This, coupled with the difficulties in accessing housing, was felt by many key players to undermine the principles upon which the Haringey Housing First model was developed.

Delivering support

The project was set up to provide ongoing, intensive support to young people. The evaluation highlighted several features that appeared to be particularly instrumental in supporting positive outcomes for young people.

- *Stickability*: One key factor of this support, common to many other successful Housing First services, was persistence and ‘never giv[ing] up’ on young people, including through phases of disengagement.
- *Trauma informed approach*: Trauma-informed principles underpinned the approach. Workers would seek to understand behaviour and the triggers to people’s behaviour, understanding what was driving their needs, rather than judging and being reactive to behaviour.
- *Flexibility*: The project could vary support on a daily and weekly basis to respond to the needs of young people.
- *Advocacy/broker*: As well as being able to broker in wider services, key workers often acted as a powerful advocate, taking a proactive role on the young person’s behalf across a wide range of agencies.
- *Continuity of support*: The support was offered on an ongoing, open-ended basis. This included project workers supporting young people over a sustained period of time, even when they may have formally ‘aged out’ of young people’s services (i.e. reached the age of 25).
- *Relationship based approach/dedicated support worker*: At the core of the support model was the provision of a reliable, consistent role model for the young person, which helped young people to feel safe and secure. This was often in contrast to the instability and unpredictability of their previous experiences.

Small caseloads enabled the delivery of this intensive support model. Professionals acknowledged that the caseloads were unique when compared to other provision that young people would typically encounter and that this approach allowed for more individualised and meaningful relationships of trust to develop.

Project outcomes

High rates of tenancy sustainment were recorded, reflecting the experience of other Housing First projects at the national, European and international level. Whilst only six of the 15 accepted referrals were housed by the end of the pilot period, five of these young people were maintaining their tenancies and still engaged in the project, representing an 83% success rate.

The properties were let to the young people unfurnished. Although they tended to be poorly decorated, they had new kitchens and bathrooms and young people received a £2,000 care leavers’ ‘bursary’ enabling flooring and white goods to be purchased. The young people stated they were generally happy with where they were living.

There were a number of other positive outcomes in young people’s lives:

- *Reductions in reoffending rates*: Five of the six young people rehoused permanently by the project had been involved in the criminal justice system at the point of

referral. At the end of the pilot, five out of six young people were not involved in the criminal justice system.

- *Improved mental health:* There were reports of improved mental health, reductions in substance misuse, as well as positive impacts on broader well-being including feelings of self-worth and improved confidence levels.
- *Education, employment and training:* A number of positive activities were undertaken including: 2 full-time retail positions; 1 part-time hospitality position; 2 training placements, and one Level 2 qualification obtained.
- *Family reconnection and improved relations:* Some young people were supported to enjoy improved family relationships with parents, foster carers, or siblings. Some were also supported to navigate complex or less positive relationships.

Everyone involved in the project considered that the project was having a positive impact on young care leavers' lives in Haringey. This was particularly the case for the young people who were now living in their own homes, some of whom had made remarkable progress across many areas of their lives.

Conclusion

The evaluation shows that the Housing First project was successfully supporting a highly vulnerable group of young care leavers to sustain their tenancies in the local community.

Key learning points from the project included:

- The need to set up formal, and close, inter-agency working relationships from the outset of the project, including a joint understanding of the overall philosophy of Housing First;
- Making housing available as soon as possible after referral to enable young people's lives to be stabilised as soon as possible and for the project to operate as 'Housing' rather than 'Relationships' First;
- The importance of a needs-led, relational approach and dedicated staff in engaging and supporting complex and vulnerable young people;
- Extending the project to more young people, and extending the support available on education, training and employment, other health and therapeutic interventions and leisure/group activities.

Given the high level of need of this group of young people, and despite the challenges of the pandemic and limited housing availability, the achievements with respect to tenancy sustainment and improving lives strongly indicates that a Housing First model for care leavers is worthy of replication in other settings.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Housing First for Care Leavers project

In 2019, the London Borough of Haringey commissioned Centrepoint to establish and deliver a two year Housing First for Care Leavers pilot project. The project was set up in May 2019 and began accepting clients from summer 2019. As the project is a pilot, Centrepoint commissioned the University of York to conduct an evaluation of the project.

This report presents findings from the first two years of the project. It is worth noting that over half of the project's operational lifetime was during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the project and evaluation were impacted in a number of ways and overall findings may have been different, with likely further positive achievements, under a steady state of policy and practice delivery.

This chapter introduces the project, and describes the research aims and methods and the context regarding care leavers in Haringey. Chapter 2 looks at the project referrals. Chapter 3 describes the delivery of the housing and intensive support. This is followed by an examination of the outcomes from the project (Chapter 4). Finally, Chapter 5 outlines the conclusions and key learning points from the study.

Introducing the project

Housing First

Housing First is now internationally recognised as an effective response to homelessness for people who have experienced long-term homelessness and have ongoing high support needs¹. Housing First provides immediate access to housing and delivers intensive, ongoing, one-to-one support to help people to live in the community and minimise the risk of future homelessness. Internationally, there is consistent evidence that Housing First achieves 80-90% tenancy sustainment rates, compared to only about 40-60% of people who use 'staircase', traditional services where people are expected to move through hostel-type provision, first demonstrating they are 'housing-ready' before being allocated housing. Interim evaluation of the UK Housing First pilots showed an 87% tenancy sustainment rate; however significant challenges existed with finding housing in the first place². Homeless

¹ All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Ending Homelessness (2021) *'It's like a dream come true': An enquiry into scaling up Housing First in England*, <https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/245348/appg-housing-first-report-2021.pdf> (Accessed 2 September 2021)

² Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2021) *Evaluation of the Housing First pilots: Second Process Evaluation Report*, London: MHCLG; https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005888/Housing_First_Second_Process_Report.pdf

Link identified seven *key principles* of Housing First for England³:

1. People have a right to a home
2. Flexible support is provided for as long as needed
3. Housing and support are separated
4. Individuals have choice and control
5. An active engagement approach is used
6. The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations
7. A harm reduction approach is used.

More recently, Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) services have been developed in Canada and now across Europe⁴, designed to adapt Housing First to the needs of young people. These services are in their relative infancy in the UK although an evaluation of the first Scottish project showed promising results for delivering Housing First to care leavers, particularly in terms of tenancy sustainment but also some positive outcomes associated with broader well-being⁵. The core principles of Housing First for Youth are slightly different to the existing principles, with a greater emphasis on youth-work recognising the transitional nature of young people's lives:

1. Immediate access to housing with no preconditions
2. Youth choice and self-determination
3. Positive youth development orientation
4. Individualised and client-driven supports
5. Social inclusion and community integration.

The Housing First Europe Hub has developed these working principles, an introductory guide⁶ to HF4Y, training events and a monitoring framework. The Hub has also recently established a Community of Practice to share learning from new projects across Europe.

³ Homeless Link (2016) *Housing First England: The principles* London: Homeless Link.

⁴ Gaetz, S. (2019) *THIS is Housing First for Youth: Europe. A Program Model Guide*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press

⁵ Blood, I., Alden, S. and Quilgars, D. (2020) *Rock Trust Housing First for Youth Pilot: Evaluation Report*, Edinburgh: Rock Trust/ Brussels: Housing First Europe Hub.

⁶ <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/assets/files/2021/07/HousingFirst4YouthFinalPrint.pdf>

The Haringey Centrepont Project

The current project was commissioned by Haringey local authority in 2018/19. Funding for the project was part of the Haringey Young Adults Service (YAS) allocation. Homes for Haringey⁷ were a partner in the project as the housing provider, providing 10 homes for young people over the life of the project through choice based lettings and/or direct offers⁸.

The project was set up in a multi-agency team working setting. It was envisaged that Centrepont would work closely with other agencies to deliver a full package of services for the young people, and contribute to the delivery of the five key outcomes of Haringey's Young People's Support Housing Pathway:

- Timely and fair access to services, and consultation on these services
- Improved health and wellbeing across emotional mental and physical health
- Safety from harm and support to address risks, including of criminal involvement
- Access and engagement with education and/or employment
- Development of financial resilience.

Since September 2020, the project has employed two full-time Housing First officers, as well as a part-time Service Manager (and support with Operations centrally)⁹. Staff usually work between 9 and 5 but there is some flexibility built in, particularly at the end of the day and it is not uncommon for staff to work until 6 or 7pm when needed. There is also a system of weekend welfare checks if there is a risk or concern about the circumstances of a young person.

During the pandemic, the project has continued to operate on a face-to-face basis as far as possible. They have a PPE stock for both staff and young people. This decision was taken as often the young people do not feel comfortable with (and some had limited or no access to) virtual communication and it would have risked disengagement at an extremely socially isolating and vulnerable time.

7 Homes for Haringey is a management organisation, set up in 2006, which has responsibility for day to day management of council housing owned by Haringey. Services include managing over 16,000 tenanted homes and 4,500 leasehold properties, providing housing advice, housing repairs, tenant involvement, assessing homelessness applications and managing temporary accommodation on behalf of Haringey council.

8 Choice based lettings schemes allows people on the housing waiting list to bid for council and housing association properties that the council advertises. A direct offers system means people wait for the council to offer a home, with properties offered to those with most priority on the waiting list. Some councils use a combination of choice based lettings schemes and direct offers.

(https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/council_housing_association/choice_based_lettings)

9 Before this, there were two project workers, one of whom carried a reduced caseload of 3 and also management responsibility. This proved unsustainable as numbers of young people being supported increased.

Research aims and methods

The overall aim of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Centrepoint Housing First approach for care leavers in providing appropriate and stable accommodation and the extent to which the service enhances young people's health and well-being across Haringey Young People's Support Housing Pathway key outcomes (see above).

The evaluation included:

- **A literature review**

A 'state of the nation' review, carried out in late 2019, considered both Housing First for young people and housing-led services for care leavers¹⁰. This informed the development of Centrepoint services and the evaluation.

- **Project monitoring over the pilot project**

A monitoring system was designed by the project to collect both entry data (on the characteristics of young people starting the project) and activities and outcomes over time. The data was collected on Google forms. In addition, the research team had access to anonymised data from Centrepoint's central administrative system, Inform, for the project

- **Qualitative interviews with young people**

All young people who were part of the first Housing First cohort were invited to take part in a one-to-one interview with a researcher. These were initially designed to be face-to-face, however, due to lockdown restrictions this changed to telephone and online interviews. Follow-up interviews were due to take place six months and 12 months after the first interview.

Table 1.1 summarises the progress of interviewing the eight young people who were referred to the evaluation. In total, five of the eight young people were interviewed between August 2020 and July 2021. This involved a considerable number of contacts over a period of many months to secure these interviews. For example, three young people were unable to be interviewed initially due to the complexity of their circumstances and these were placed 'on hold' for several months. The evaluation team checked in regularly with the project to review whether they could be contacted for an interview. One of these young people subsequently left the project and contact was lost. Two of these young people were interviewed, though both took place some six months or so later than planned.

¹⁰ Unpublished report to Centrepoint.

Despite efforts to contact the young people who had disengaged from the project, we were unable to secure interviews to explore the reasons for leaving and their current circumstances.

The extended timescale for securing these initial interviews meant that young people took part at different stages of their Housing First journeys. It also resulted in limited time during the evaluation for follow-up interviews to take place. Follow-up interviews were sought with two young people who had first been interviewed more than six months prior to the end of the evaluation. Only one was in contact with the project team at this point. They did not respond to invitations to be interviewed again.

- **Interviews with staff and key stakeholders involved in commissioning and delivery of the project**

A total of 10 key staff and stakeholders were interviewed either by telephone or online:

- Three Centrepoint workers were interviewed on two occasions (February and June/July 2021) to ensure that operational structures and issues were understood. In addition, researchers were able to review the progress of young people with the project key workers to provide staff perspective of engagement where interviews were not possible.
- Two local authority strategic stakeholders involved in the commissioning of the service (June 2021).
- Three local authority operational stakeholders in the Young Adult Service (April 2021).
- Two representatives of other agencies: Housing Support Worker (April 2021); substance misuse worker (Feb 2021).

It is important to note, that similar with the young people interviews, it was not possible to interview all key stakeholders involved in the project. Key contacts were approached at least three times but some were unable to respond to this request. The reasons for this are unknown but obviously the evaluation was taking place at a particularly pressurised time of the pandemic.

Table 1.1: Evaluation referrals and interview status of young people

YP	Date referred to evaluation	Interview 1 date	Interview 1 status	Interview 2 due date (> 6months)	Interview 2 status
1	August 2020	August 2020	Completed	Due February 2021	Not in contact with project
2	August 2020	October 2020	Completed	Due March 2021	Contacted but no response
3	October 2020	No response	Left project, no response to evaluation	N/A	N/A
4	October 2020	No response	Initially agreed/ placed on hold. Left project, no response to evaluation	N/A	N/A
5	December 2020	March 2021	Completed	Due September 2021	Post-evaluation
6	December 2020	July 2021	Completed	Due January 2022	Post- evaluation
7	December 2020	June 2021	Completed	Due December 2021	Post-evaluation
8	December 2020	No response	Left project, no response to evaluation.	N/A	N/A
9	No referral	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
10	No referral - for emergency placement	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Limitations of the evaluation

Existing research on the implementation and evaluation of new approaches in complex settings such as local authorities, particularly those requiring multi-agency buy-in, suggests a period of around five years post-implementation before impact can be accurately measure¹¹. This evaluation explores the relatively early stages of implementing the Housing First project within the local authority and for a relatively new target population, care-experienced young people. Findings therefore relate mainly to the process phase of the project (bedding in and early operation) and the emerging impact on the experiences and outcomes for the young people involved.

As noted above, the evaluation took place during the initial 18 months of the Covid pandemic and therefore, the intended methods were adapted to using remote online and telephone interviews to ensure that data could continue to be gathered safely. It is possible that this affected interview take-up and the overall depth of the data collected.

While overall, a broad range of views was gathered, there were significant delays and difficulties in collecting data. The reasons for this lie with the impact of Covid19, the complexities of young people's lives and the competing demands on busy professionals - all of which was exacerbated by lockdown.

In particular, regarding young people, the priority for project staff was stabilising young people's situations and supporting them to engage with the project. The timing of initial interviews tended to coincide with this process and in a number of cases recruitment to interview was put on hold for several months. Key workers helpfully facilitated contact with young people, however, even after agreement to interview, it could take several weeks of phone calls and texts to secure a completed interview with young people due to their circumstance and wider commitments. For example, the number of missed interviews with individual young people ranged from two to seven. That said, once interviews were underway, young people were open and engaged with the discussion.

Context for the Housing First project

The statutory leaving care service for young people leaving care aged 16 and over in Haringey is delivered by Young Adult's Service (YAS). Young people usually continue to receive support from their social worker until the age of 18 after which a personal adviser (PA) will become their key support worker. As is the case nationally, most care leavers are able to access leaving care support from their local authority up to the age of 25.

The service was working with approximately 323 care leavers in 2019 and 307 in 2020 (Table 1.2).

¹¹ Ruch, G. and Maglajlic, R.A. (2020) [Partners in Practice: Practice Review Report](#). London: Department for Education

Table 1.2: Number of care leavers in contact with Haringey, 2019 & 2020

Number of care leavers in Haringey	2019	2020
Aged 17 to 18	82	74
Aged 19 to 21	241	233

Source DfE 2020

The annual snapshot published by the Department for Education (DfE) provides national and local authority data on key characteristics of the care population, along with data on accommodation types and participation in education, employment and training (EET) for care leavers aged 17 to 21. Data for Haringey is broadly representative of the national picture.

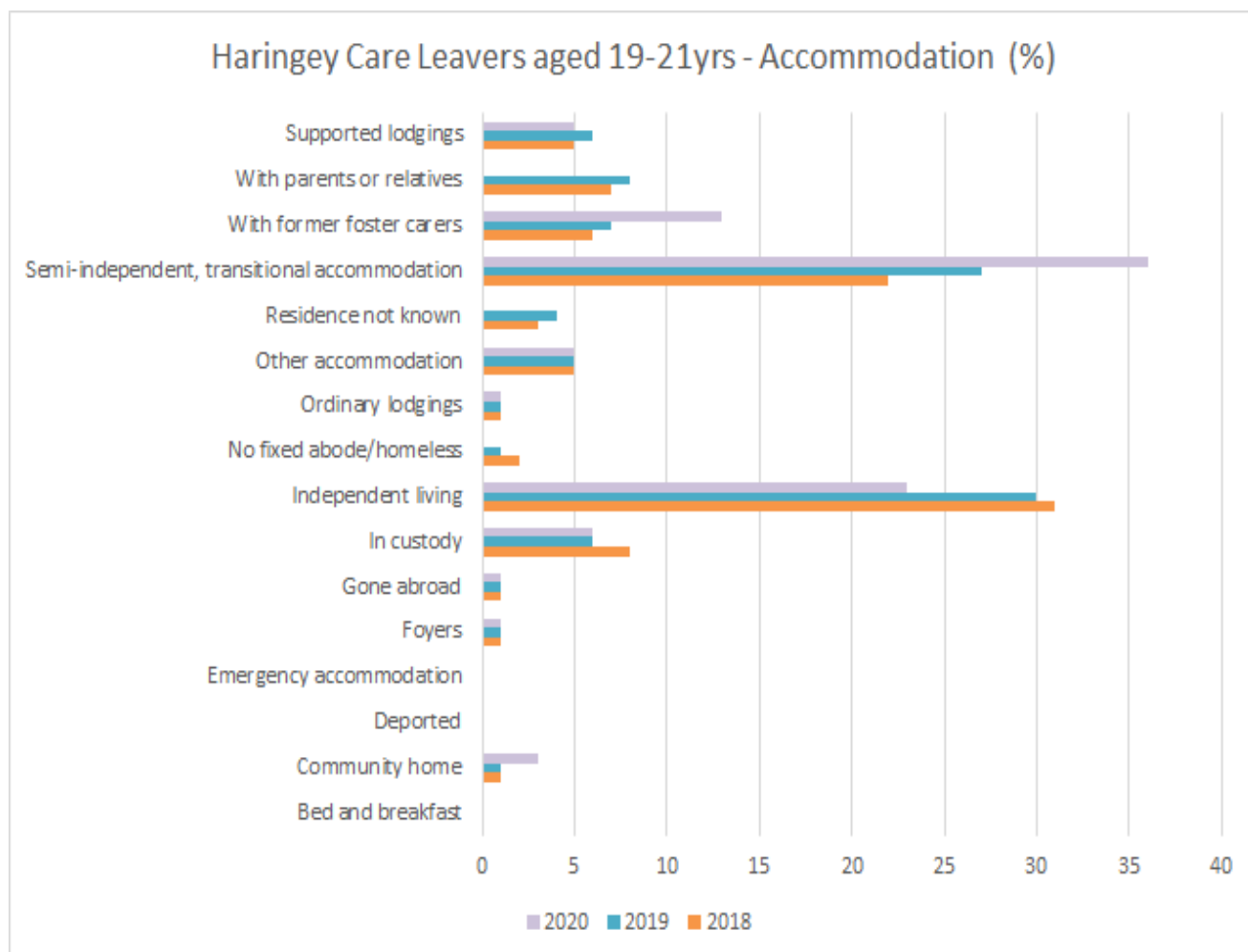
The majority of young people in care are aged 10 and over (10-15 year olds make up 41% of the care population in Haringey and 32% are aged 16-17yrs). There has been an increase nationally, in the age that young people enter care over the past decade. This is in part due to a change in legislation (Southwark Judgement) whereby young people aged 16-17 at risk of homelessness are included in the care population, and also the increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC), the majority of whom are older teenagers.

As is the case nationally, care leavers aged 19-21 in Haringey most commonly live in semi-independent or independent accommodation (see Figure 1.1). Over the past three years, there has been an increase in the percentage remaining with former foster carers post-18 through staying put provision and in semi-independent transitional options. At the same time, there has been a reduction in the percentage of young people living in independent tenancies. Snapshot data for 2018 and 2019 indicated that 2% and 1% respectively of care leavers were homeless. Although evident in previous years, no care leavers in Haringey were reported homeless at the time of the snapshot in 2020.

Wider research evidence¹², including that of Gill (2017), suggests a level of post-care accommodation movement and disruption that is not readily accessible within the government data on the care and leaving care populations. Gill's research found that 26% of care leavers had sofa surfed, 14% had slept rough and, in the first year after leaving care, 35% had subsequently moved house.

¹² Around one-third of care leavers experience homelessness in the early years after care (Dixon & Stein 2005, Stein & Morris 2010, Dixon et al 2015, Gill 2017).

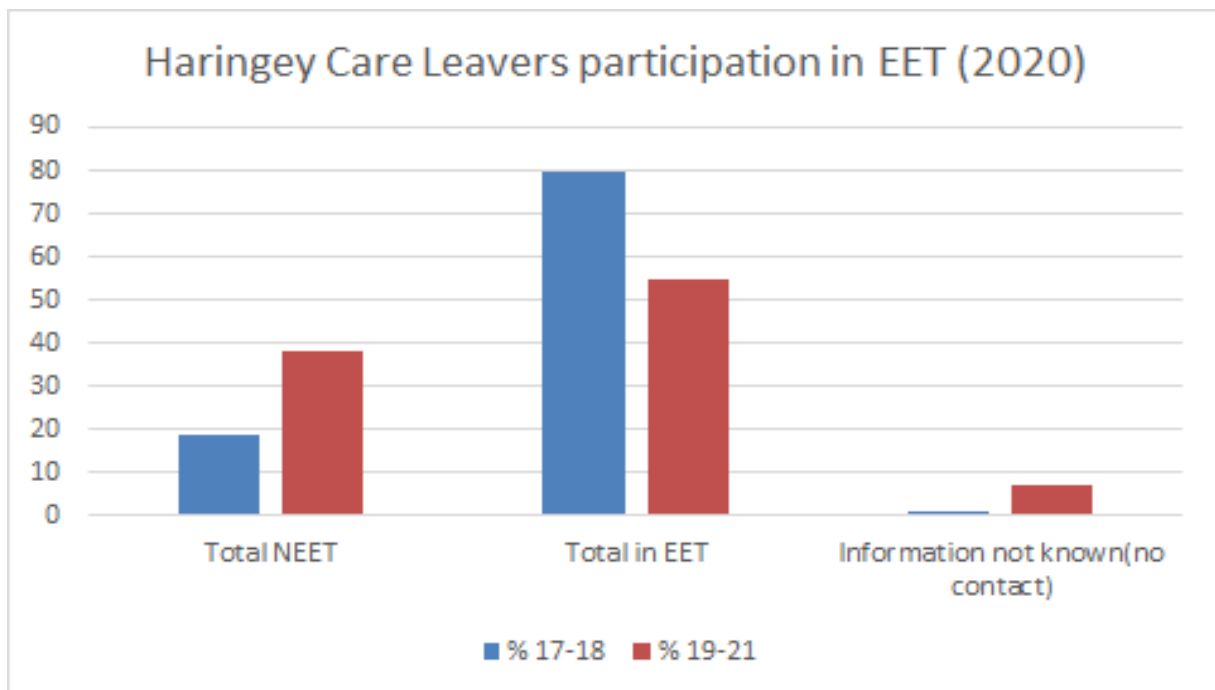
Figure 1.1: Haringey Care Leavers aged 19-21yrs - Accommodation



(Nb. 1% has been used to represent options where % was too low to report in DfE data) *Source DfE 2020*

Levels of participation in education, employment and training (EET) again reflect data for care leavers nationally. The percentage of those not participating in EET (NEET) after age 18 tends to increase, as compulsory education ends, which is similar to national data for care leavers (38% in Haringey compared with 39% nationally) (Figure 1.2). This is, however, around three times higher than that of young people aged 19 - 24 in the general population (13%) (DfE 2020).

Figure 1.2: Haringey Care Leavers: EET status, 2020



Source DfE 2020

Reasons for this are located in the difficulties and trauma that brought young people into care, disrupted care and education experiences during their childhood, and leaving school with low or no qualifications. Research evidence also shows that many care-experienced young people tend to delay access to EET in the early years post-care, whilst they attend to more pressing needs, including finding a stable and settled home and receiving support to address emotional, behaviour, and mental wellbeing needs.^{13 14} For most, finding a home is the priority aftercare, however for some, this can be difficult to achieve due to earlier experiences, a history of placement instability, ongoing risk or challenging circumstances, and leaving care at an early age without the life skills and support networks to live independently¹⁵.

It is into this context that the Housing First project was introduced.

13 Dixon et al 2021

14 Harrison et al 2020

15 Dixon and Baker 2016

Chapter 2: Referrals to the project

Chapter 2 examines the referrals to the Housing First for Care Leavers project. It starts by outlining the project eligibility criteria and discusses the referral process. It then moves on to examine the profile of these young people. This chapter draws on two information sources: first, project monitoring records collected specifically for the evaluation, and second, central Centrepoin In-form data on referrals (see Chapter 1 for details). These data were collected on an anonymised basis. In addition, young people interviewed also provided some basic information on their accommodation and health status.

Project eligibility and referrals

As a commissioned service, all referrals came via Haringey Young Adult's Service (YAS). The intended client group was young people leaving care who needed a high level of support, above the usual support available through the YAS pathway to independence. The Chaos Index¹⁶ was used to assess a young person's level of need.

The project was able to support and provide accommodation for 10 young people at any one time. The project's caseload was built up over the first six to nine months, supporting nine people on average as the working capacity (with one place available for emergencies).

There was a healthy demand for the service from the outset. A total of 15 young people were referred and accepted onto the project from its inception until June 2021.

At the end of June 2021, nine young people were still utilising the service. They had been using the service for an average of 12 months - with four people being supported for between 18-24 months; two for between 12-18 months; one for between 6-12 months; and two for under six months.

Six people had left the project by the end of June 2021. They had utilised the project for an average of 13 months, with a range of eight to 21 months. It was reported that the six people left for the project in following situations:

- Tragically, one young person died.
- Another young person moved into supported accommodation and engagement was lost.
- Two young people left, moving in with family members.

¹⁶ The Chaos Index, originally known as the New Directions Team Assessment, was developed by South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust to identify risk factors for people with multiple needs. See: <http://www.meam.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/NDT-Assessment-process-summary-April-2008.pdf>

- One young person moved to take up a council tenancy outside of Haringey.
- For one person 'floating support ended whilst in move through'.

The above demonstrated that the project was working with young people for extended periods of time before they moved on.

Views of key stakeholders on eligibility and referral process

Although there was a good demand for the service, it took some time for the agencies to agree on the operation of the eligibility criteria. At the start, a number of young people were referred with lower support needs than stated in the formal project eligibility criteria, and later some referrals were questioned as to whether the young person was ready for rehousing. One Centrepoint worker illustrated the challenges in receiving referrals with young people who had high support needs as their involvement could be seen as a reward for previous poor engagement with services or provision. The following quotes highlight cultural differences in the working practices between different agencies and the challenges this posed for effective partnership working:

Most were rejected [early on] as they only smoked a bit of weed, it wasn't really the service for them... some [PAs] wouldn't refer their more challenging cases... it was seen as a reward being referred into us because of the whole premise that they would get housing. The PAs would say they haven't engaged in any groups, any classes.... [we said] let's flip that, house them first, make them safe and then work on other things.

(Project worker)

I was slightly frustrated after a meeting the other day - it was a referral meeting. A very appropriate young person, in terms of they had really off-the-scale complex needs: poly drug use, mental health, challenging behaviour... Basically, there was a manager within social services who was saying, 'Well they're not ready for their permanent housing.' I was like, 'Well, that's kind of - Housing First - it's the housing that comes first! Not you have to jump through these hoops.' So I think there still is a bit of an understanding in social services that young people need to be tenancy-ready before they get given their permanent housing. This was a perfect example of somebody where the system has not worked. No placements have held them.

(Project worker)

...there's always some tension about whether or not someone's risks are as high or as low as they said they are, and whether the information was shared appropriately, etc. I've worked in homelessness for nearly 20 years, and it's been like that since forever.

(Key player)

At the outset, the referral mechanisms were set up to involve limited paperwork to avoid putting the young people through an additional assessment process, and also avoid additional work for PAs. It was envisaged that relevant information would be provided at the time and as needed. However, it was reported that information was not always available, in particular detailed risk assessments, which were required to safeguard young people and staff. At the same time, project workers were keen to emphasise how information sharing needed to be conducted in a sensitive manner so that young people were not unnecessarily subjected to recounting traumatic experiences or put in situations where they felt they were being judged:

It was important to take away that formal sitting down and going through a full assessment where they discuss their most in-depth traumatic experiences. We get insight of that from the social workers and then develop an understanding of that in a different way with the young person over the course of a long time, where they can talk openly about it rather than in a formal, awkward situation where they get a bad feeling towards you and they feel that you're getting a judgement towards them. I like that aspect of it, but certainly, getting full risk assessments and full history and picture of the young person from whoever's worked with them the most and knows them the best is helpful but not always an easy thing to do, because obviously, a lot of young people have had many different social workers, sometimes they're not on top of the paperwork... It's not as easy to get that.

(Project worker)

Project workers also referred to assessments or information on young people being partial or incomplete:

I had requested a bit more detail from the [agency] which never came... the [agency] did do some digging and information came out from there which would have been quite helpful to have known at the beginning when I was working with him. For example, some quite specific information around the nature of their learning disability... That's really helpful to know, as a worker, as a practitioner working with somebody, that's crucial information, really. That would have been helpful to have had that.

(Project worker)

A new system is currently being put into place to ensure that full information is available when needed. Evaluating the service over a two-year period also allowed for key changes over time to be evidenced. This showed the importance of allowing time for different professional groups to understand the various remits and protocols of different service provision, and how through “trial and error” better systems of effective information sharing, and referrals took place. Allowing time to build a relationship of trust between various professional groups was integral to effective information sharing and referral processes:

As people become and understand the services better then yes, it has (referral process) been resolved, it just takes a bit of time and a bit of trial and error to get to a point where people understand the remits of the service a little bit better, so I think it has improved. I've not received any further information regarding inappropriate referrals.

(Key player)

From the perspectives of the young people who were interviewed, the referral process had not been experienced as onerous and had appeared to happen behind the scenes. Some young people were not fully aware of how they had come to be referred, but did remember having the project explained to them. Two young people described how they had been introduced to the project when a project worker came to meet them to talk about the project and ask if they would be interested in working with them:

When I was in [supported accommodation] that was when I met [housing first worker], they just turned up. I don't really know how I got involved, it just popped up and I didn't really know, not understanding, but since I had it explained to me, that they can help with whatever I need.

(Young person)

It seemed like a really good opportunity, and not a lot of people get this sort of help, and people like me, we need this sort of help to stay on the right path so I thought why not... Yeh, go for it, I'll do it.

(Young person)

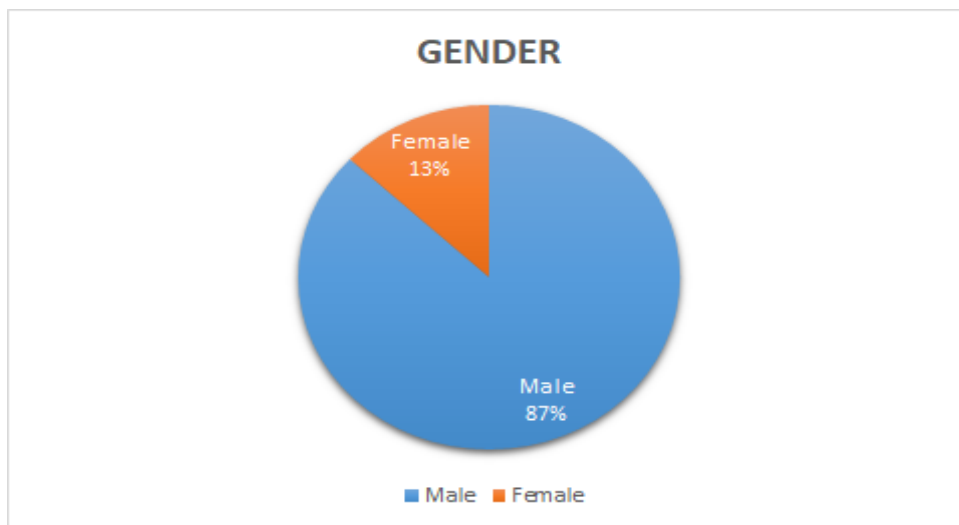
Profile of the young people using the service

As outlined earlier, project data was available on an anonymised basis and provided key details of young people's profile, accommodation and health situation. This section draws on both In-form data (available for all 15 referrals) and project monitoring (available for 11 referrals).

Key demographic characteristics

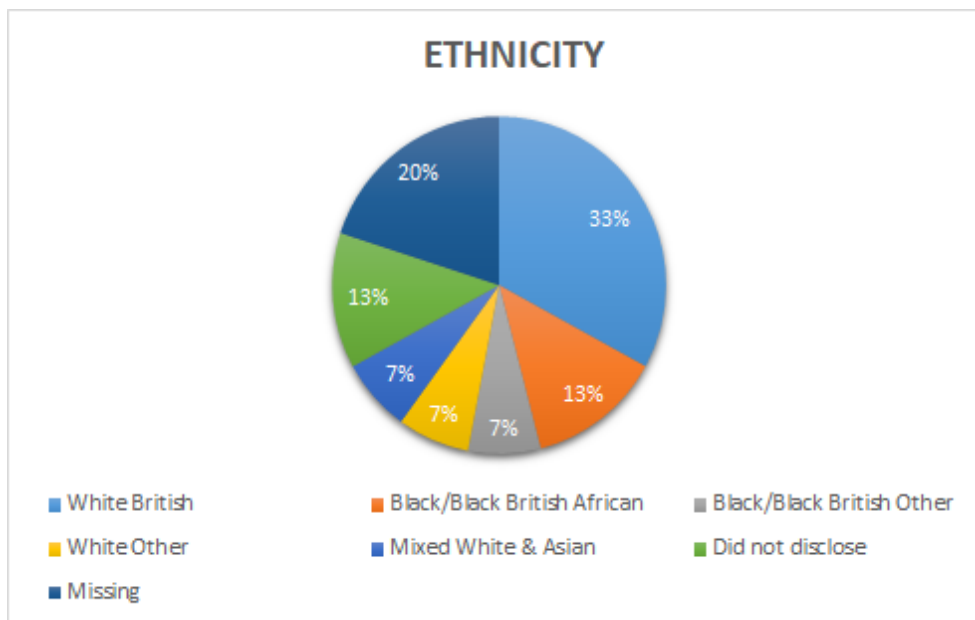
Most of the young people who accessed the project were young men: 13 (87%) were male, with only two (13%) young women (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Gender of young people referred to the project



Data on ethnic origin was available for 10 people (Figure 2.2). Five young people identified as 'White: British' and one person as 'White: Other'. A further five young people identified as originating from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds (2 - 'Black/ Black British: African'; 1 - Black/Black British: Other'; 1 - 'Mixed: White and Asian').

Figure 2.2: Ethnicity of young people referred to the project



The project was supporting young people across the age range 18-25. Just over one third (36%) of young people were aged under 21 at referral, another 36% were aged 21 or 22, and the remaining young people were aged 24 or 25 on referral.

Regarding nationality, all but one young person was British, with one person having indefinite leave to remain in the UK. For all, English was their preferred language.

Fourteen of the young people declared that their sexual orientation was heterosexual, with one young person preferring not to disclose this information.

Household status

The majority (82%) of young people were single. Three of the young people had children although only one young person was living with their children and partner during their time with the project.

Accommodation status and history

The majority of young people were from the referring Borough, Haringey. Two young people had been living in other parts of London: Enfield and Southwark.

Table 2.1 shows the accommodation status of young people at the time of referral. All but one of the young people were homeless at the point of referral, with most young people staying in local authority or other forms of temporary accommodation. Three young people were staying with family or friends; one young person was in prison. One young person was already in independent accommodation but required support to make this sustainable.

Table 2.1: Accommodation status of young people referred to project

Type of accommodation	Number of young people
Staying with family/ friends	3
Local authority temporary accommodation	3
Shared housing (short-term)	2
Independent accommodation	1
Rough sleeping	1
Prison	1
Total	11

The young people had been looked after in the care system for very varying periods of time. First age of entry into care ranged from age six to 16. Most young people had also experienced multiple residential and/or foster care placements whilst being looked after. There were examples of care placement breakdowns in young people’s earlier lives.

Economic status

The majority (82%) of young people were not in education, training or employment at the time of referral. One person was in full-time employment; and one person was in education.

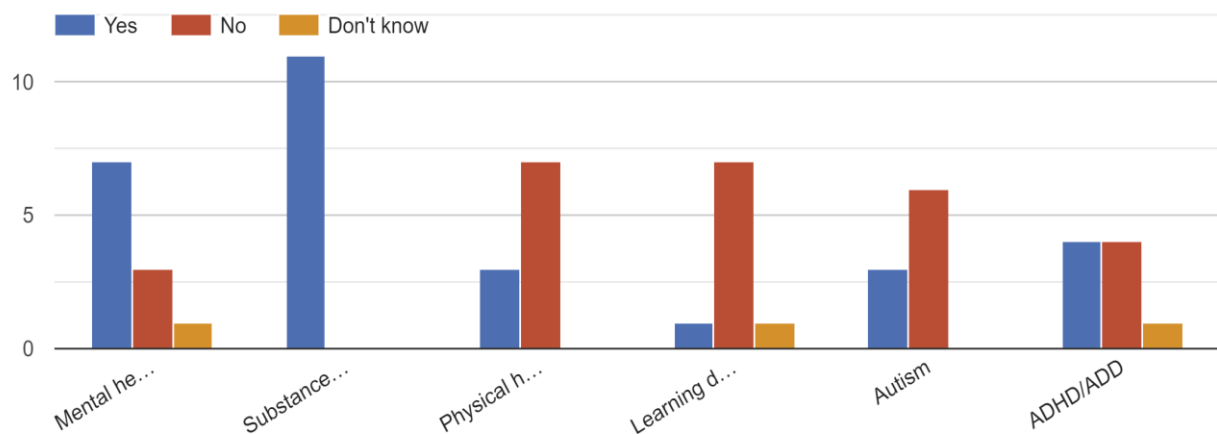
Health and disability status

Information was available on 11 referrals with respect to health and disability status (Figure 2.3). Seven (64%) of the young people referred were recorded as having mental health problems (including anxiety and depression). All 11 referrals had substance misuse issues. Three (27%) people had physical health problems.

Three of the young people were recorded as autistic; and four of the young people had ADHD/ ADD. One young person had a learning disability. Two young people had their day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability that has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months.

Figure 2.3: Health and disability status

Does the young person have any of the following:



Profile of the five young people interviewed in the study

At the time of interview, four of the young people were living in their own flat (one of whom had only moved the week prior to interview) and one was still in shared temporary

accommodation. Three young people mentioned past episodes of homelessness. All the young people spoke about mental health difficulties and three mentioned difficulties with drugs and/or alcohol. Three young people had also previously been in prison. All were NEET at the time of interview, with two looking for work or a course. The young people were aged between 20 and 25.

Chapter 3: Delivering the housing and support

This chapter explores the housing and support delivered by the Housing First for Care Leavers project to young people. In particular, it examines the availability and suitability of the housing, the type and intensity of support provided and the nature of inter-agency working. The chapter draws on the views and experiences of project workers, other key stakeholders and young people gathered during the research interviews.

Housing

Accessing housing

At the start of the project, there were two main routes into housing via Homes for Haringey. First, young people could apply via choice based lettings, whereby the local authority placed them into Band A (the highest priority) and young people bid for properties that they were interested in. Second, direct offers of housing were also explored, whereby properties could be allocated by the local authority directly to young people without them having to bid. This policy was later changed to one direct offer only for a period of time. Finally, choice based lettings was reintroduced as the main route for housing for young people in the project towards the end of the project. It was understood that the local authority used an existing quota of flats ear-marked for care leavers in the borough.

Over the course of the project, six of the fifteen young people referred to the project were found properties and these were all under the direct offer policy. All young people faced a wait of several months, as a minimum, before rehousing.

The evaluation highlighted some confusion or misunderstandings amongst some stakeholders as to the eligibility of young people for housing in the project, particularly at the start of the project. Both project workers and some stakeholders had presumed that housing would be available almost immediately for young people but this was not the case:

For some reason, everybody had thought that there were ten properties that were just sitting there, and it wasn't. So I think there was a confusion around that at the beginning.

(Key player)

It was recognised that the lack of housing availability reflected an overall housing crisis, with particular acute housing shortages in London, including Haringey. One key professional emphasised the distinctiveness of the local housing context and what this might mean for the implementation of the 'Housing First' model. This draws attention to the significance of geographical place when considering how local authorities can respond to the housing support needs of vulnerable care leavers:

Ultimately, there's no local authority in London that has social housing available or even temporary accommodation often available... We move between having the second and the fourth highest instances of homelessness in London, and in the country. I think the stat is one in every 29 households in Haringey are homeless. It doesn't mean that they're not living somewhere, but they're living in temporary accommodation... This was a test in a very high pressured, in terms of housing, urban environment. It may well be that actually, if this - it would be really interesting to see if this was a really different service, in a different place. If it was in a rural setting, would it be more effective or less? Is there something different about those things?

(Key player)

Nonetheless this major challenge for the service was considered to be undermining the whole concept of 'Housing First':

The housing has been the hardest hurdle the project has faced... The [choice based] bidding has been pointless – there are no properties to bid on in Haringey for our client group... In terms of our service, we are failing to provide the service that was sold to these young people in the first place. It is called Housing First and that is not there...we are basically a floating support service.

(Key player)

The main point of the service is that somebody has their housing first, and they don't have to earn it. That they're given that and that's just a solid foundation on which they can then build those relationships. I guess that's the part that's been missing, is the absence of that, has meant that's not been as possible.

(Project worker)

Project workers explained that young people sometimes had to stay in accommodation that they considered inappropriate for many months whilst awaiting rehousing. They explained that young people were frustrated at the pace of the project and it was difficult to sustain their engagement when they were living in temporary accommodation or sleeping rough. Importantly, project workers explained that young people's situations had sometimes deteriorated whilst waiting for housing. For example, one young person was temporarily staying with their family members but this had subsequently broken down and led to them sleeping rough and reengaging with heavy drug use and resultant poor mental health. A project worker explained the impact on a recent referral:

It's very stressful for young people going from placement to placement, and almost doesn't give them a reason to try, I don't know. Yes, young people find placements very difficult, I've got a new case that I've recently taken on and she tries to constantly self-sabotage her placements because she's so unhappy in them...She just feels that she needs her own space and her own home...it's making it harder to gain

that rapport with her as well, and it does affect us as a service because we obviously can't promise when they'll get the housing so we kind of feel a bit helpless in that department.

(Project worker)

Whilst many professionals were invested in the core principles surrounding 'Housing First', others placed emphasis on the need for key workers to build a relationship with the young people before they are provided with permanent housing:

If we'd have just given them a chaotic young person with a key, who they didn't know, and the care leaver didn't know them. They would've had that key and there would've been no way Housing First could've got through that door if the tenant didn't want them to. So it's important that they had that period of, okay, we identified them. They're on a waiting list, 'We are going to walk with you, talk with you, support you, until you get your flat. Then when you get your flat, hey presto, I'm here.' Yes.

(Key player)

These differing viewpoints on how best to support young people's housing needs, draws attention to the complexity of the issues at hand when trying to devise and implement a model of support that relies upon multi-agency working. As the following quote highlights, the 'Housing First' model aims to move away from the "status quo" when supporting young people's housing needs. It is unsurprising that this can create tensions, or a sense of unease, if such ways of working challenge what is regarded as 'good practice' within more dominant or mainstream frameworks of practice:

You become very accepting of the status quo, don't you? So we expect that young people will go and live in supported housing first, and then they will eventually go and get their own tenancies. Actually, that's just because it's what's accepted. It doesn't mean it's necessarily what we should be doing. I think what we'd hoped would come from this contract is starting to really learn about that. Who does it work the best for? What kinds of young people really thrive when receiving this kind of support? What kinds of young people don't respond as well to it? ...

(Key player)

At the time of the first interview with young people, four had moved into their own flat, one of these having done so the previous week. One was still in temporary shared accommodation whilst waiting for a flat. One young person was living independently but was bidding for a permanent flat. Other young people on the scheme were in the process of bidding for a property. Young people were supported by social workers, leaving care workers and their Housing First workers:

Basically I bid [sic] it from Homes for Haringey. I was bidding for homes. My [ex] social worker is the one that found me this place... so I can have a look at it. I actually found it all right. So I actually bid.

(Young person in independent accommodation)

...because you see the current flat that I'm in is not my permanent flat yet. I've already received my bidding number and everything, so I'm right at the beginning of the process of bidding for my property.

(Young person in independent accommodation)

One young person in particular, who had found the bidding process 'upsetting', talked of the significant level of support they had received from their Housing First worker to bid for their flat:

I was bidding on flats and I wasn't getting any response... and then I put it on pause. [HF worker] was really good, I'm not going to lie, literally I think within a week or two weeks, she'd sorted out all my housing, like the forms and that and got me signed up for the bidding, and got me registered for it...the logins and that, that was all pretty quick.she used to call me most days and she'd see what's going on and if I've had any calls for viewings or whatever....and then literally I got, I bid on this one, [she] called me up in the morning, and was just like, "yes, you've got a viewing today" went to it, and yes, signed the paperwork two weeks later.

(Young person in independent accommodation)

Satisfaction with the accommodation

As properties were allocated via the local authority, the five properties let to the young people were all unfurnished. Key players noted that the properties tended to be poorly decorated but they had new kitchens and bathrooms and young people received a £2,000 care leavers' bursary (including a £500 top-up by Centrepoint) which 'made quite a difference' enabling flooring and white goods to be purchased.

The five young people who were interviewed were generally happy with where they were living:

It's a really nice flat. I would say it's a fairly fresh house. It's renovated. The spaces are pretty big. Yes, it's got a garden too, so that's pretty nice. Big kitchen. Yes, that's one of the main positive things about it is it's really big.

(Young person in independent accommodation)

I think it's absolutely terrific. My neighbours are absolutely wonderful: I don't get any complaints; they don't get any complaints from me either.

(Young person in independent accommodation)

I actually feel safe. Every neighbour is kind. They're all respectful. It's also very quiet. So it's very nice.

(Young person in independent accommodation)

Some issues were raised including poor insulation, which had made it difficult to keep their home warm:

Overall, it is very nice. Just sometimes I get a lot of coldness in the house. I don't know what's up with the windows and everything, I always keep them closed, so I don't know where the air draught is coming from. So my house is mainly cold every time. Overall though, it's actually all right here, it's actually nice.

(Young person in independent accommodation)

For another young person, though their flat was good, their preference was to live in another area, which impacted on their ability to feel settled. Two other young people noted that their accommodation was located in problem neighbourhoods:

Only the area that's bad, there's a lot of problems that go on.

(Young person in Independent accommodation)

...so the area might have a little bit of a notorious reputation, but I grew up in the area.

For a couple of the young people, the main thing was:

It's my own space, my own place... a step up from what I'm used to having.

(Young person in independent accommodation)

It's a roof over my head and I get to cook. I have my room, I have a bathroom and I have a little kitchen all in one space. It's all good.

(Young person in temporary shared accommodation)

Support

The project was set up to provide ongoing, intensive support to young people, with the aim of helping young people enjoy, in the words of one key player, a 'comfortable, fruitful, independent life'. Many professionals referred to the small caseloads in setting apart the 'Housing First' model to other types of provision the young people would encounter:

One of the things that quite attracted me to Housing First was having a small caseload and having that scope to really give each young person as much time as possible.

(Project worker)

The beauty of having such a small caseload is that I can offer up that time to really work on a one-to-one basis and put intensive support in place.

(Project worker)

Data gathered during the evaluation suggest that the support provided by the project was characterised by several features:

Stickability

One key factor of this support, common to many other successful Housing First services, was persistence and ‘never giv[ing] up’ on young people. For example, one young person fled to another city twice, and both times, the worker travelled to the other city and helped them to return to London. As one worker explained, the service will ‘keep on offering; [will keep] being present...’. Indeed, a strong theme across all stakeholder interviews was the distinct way in which ‘Housing First’ key workers would persevere, “walk by their side” or “not let go” of the young people they were working with. This stood in stark contrast to other forms of provision where there was limited capacity to work so intensely with young people. An added benefit of working this way was the ability for workers to prioritise what was important to the young person at any given point of time; in effect working on the young person’s terms and at a pace they felt comfortable with:

It is the relationship which is important. The consistency, the support, the ability to walk alongside the young person regardless of where they're going, and to provide them with, I say, another head. To make best choices for them. That's what I see when I talk to young people. They know them... (they are) someone that they can relate to and someone who is on their side, walking beside them. With Housing First, they go at a pace that is suitable for the young person, in discussion with the young person.

(Key player)

I'm demonstrating that I will be persistent and keep coming back; if you have a relapse, that's fine, we can work through it.

(Project worker)

A sense of “never giving up” was also evident amongst young people’s comments, where workers were described as ‘always there for me’:

they're always there if I need anything: I can text them, I can ring them.

(Young person)

This was even when young people had initially disengaged from the project:

... well, they was in contact with me but I wasn't in contact with them.

(Young person)

Key workers also described the feedback they received from young people on the support provided:

A comment that another young person made the other day... somebody with a really chronic alcohol and drug problem...he was like... '[key workers name], the thing that's good is that you'll keep calling me even if I don't answer you for a whole week, but you'll keep calling me and I actually appreciate that.' I think he was saying there's so much stuff going on in my life that just... He's living hour by hour.

(Project worker)

Trauma informed approach

Trauma-informed principles underpinned the approach. A clinical psychologist provided support to the team as part of the psychologically informed environment (PIE) to ensure that young people's individual experiences and needs were central to the support they received. Workers would seek to understand behaviour and triggers to people's behaviour, understanding what is driving their needs, rather than judging and being reactive to behaviour. As one key worker stated:

It's about opening that floor and being very open and having that trauma-informed, but charismatic, and sensitive approach to what you're saying. It's understanding their background, where they come from...sometimes we don't always know the information or the cause behind what's actually going on with the individual.

(Key player)

Flexibility

Flexibility was another feature of the support. The project could vary support on a daily and weekly basis to respond to the needs of young people. For example, they were able to spend 20 hours a week for one person for one month when their needs were very high. On the other hand, when young people were managing well, a worker might just talk on the telephone every few days:

Quite simply, the starting point is having a real flexibility... I have the time to really follow their transitions... I can really follow their progression.

(Key player)

The frequency of contact and the flexibility in availability and the type of support provided through the Housing First workers was valued by the young people, who talked of being able to make direct contact with their worker as and when needed:

We just call each other. We've got our phone numbers; we text each other and WhatsApp.

(Young person)

This was often in contrast to contact with their leaving care workers, which the young people described as less frequent or having come to an end, 'it's non-existent':

Oh, no, Centrepoint was much more better, because the social worker that I had previously, he's actually a lovely guy, he helps me, but sometimes he doesn't get back to me. Sometimes he will not contact me. I don't really see him a lot, my social worker. Obviously, Centrepoint has really helped me a lot, because they always come, they come on a specific date.

(Young person)

Whilst the young people were appreciative of the help from their leaving care workers, others were critical of the level of support 'it's not much help'. One young person described the support as mainly involving paperwork. Some explained the lack of contact and low levels of support from their leaving care workers was as a result of higher caseloads:

Not much [contact]... Honestly, even if they do come around, they just come around to fill out paperwork. I think this is the reason they gave me [HF worker], my [leaving care worker] was like, 'Well, you know, I've got 24 people. You're not my only person. We can give you [HF worker] and they can give you a bit more support.' That's what you need.... and yes, he's much, much more involved.

(Young person)

It is possible that once young people entered the Housing First project their leaving care workers restricted their focus to statutory duties whilst the more individualised support was transferred to the Housing First workers.

Relationship based approach

An important feature of the support was the relational-based approach where trust could be built-up over time. Emerging findings seems to suggest that Housing First workers were available and had time to communicate with their young people often and were available to accompany them and advocate for them, as well as practical support with setting up and maintaining their home, which helped to build a positive relationship and a sense that they had someone to turn to:

Yes, like if I want help or anything I will ring [Housing First worker] straight away and [they] will arrange, and be able to discuss about it...[they] can tell when I'm stressed ...understands where I'm coming from.

(Young person)

They'll help with anything...always there to ring.

(Young person)

I can't think of any better support, coz they've done a really good job.

(Young person)

Housing First are really good... if I didn't want to work with them, I wouldn't work with them coz I'm a very independent person, I don't really talk to people about my problems and what goes on it was hard for me to trust them.

(Young person)

They're just there. They are always there to help you, they've made a huge difference.

(Young person)

Dedicated support worker

Young people were happy with their Housing First worker and clearly valued the one to one support they were receiving:

[HF worker] said she's just going to help work with me basically, I think that's what appealed to me... literally "I'm going to work with you and if you need anything you can just call my phone"...knowing you've always got that direct contact, like she'll call me, text me, emails me, knowing that that contact was always there was good, even all through quarantine.

(Young person)

This was evident both in their comments about their workers. For example, one young person noted that they were happy with the level of contact but would 'love' to see their Housing First worker more often:

Sometimes I see them every week, [Housing First worker] comes see me, or [they] contact me to say, OK can we reschedule it. I'd love to see them more often, that would be awesome.

(Young person)

Having regular and consistent contact with the small team of Housing First workers was often in contrast to young earlier people's past experiences of support, where there

appeared to have been high turnover in the professionals working with them. This young person's account was similar to that of others:

I had a lot of different social workers throughout the four years, because... going to jail, they kept giving me different social workers. Then I had my last social worker for a couple of years and then I got my [PA]. I'm pretty sure I had a different [PA] and then I went to prison and then I came out and I got my [probation worker].

(Young person)

Staff reported that engagement with the support was good (with the exception of one case). However, even the one young person who wasn't engaging was placed on pause rather than dropped from the project, with the worker explaining that they would be ready to support when the young person was ready:

She just wouldn't engage at all. We have tried for nearly going on a year and a half now. She's on pause now. When she's ready to engage with us, we are here.

(Project worker)

Wider accounts provided by professionals also reinforced the importance of being able to build a relationship of trust within the 'Housing First' model:

We focus on a caseload. They focus on the individual... They can respond swiftly to the needs of that individual, and they have time to talk with them. That's really important, rather than just going in and saying, 'You've got to do benefits.' You can actually say, 'What did you do last night? Where are you going today? What are you going to do over the weekend?'

(Key player)

Professionals went on to emphasise how this related to the importance of care leavers being able to see that "someone cares" for them:

You can have a conversation that shows that you care. A lot of care leavers want to believe that someone cares for them, and that's down to us as practitioners. We're not always brilliant at it, but I think Housing First have the time to show them there's someone that cares.

(Key player)

Advocacy/broker

As well as being able to broker in wider services, key workers often acted as a powerful advocate, taking a proactive role on the young person's behalf across a wide range of agencies. This is particularly important for vulnerable young people in cases where agencies are not fulfilling their responsibilities:

[Housing First Worker] would organise the GP appointments for me and stuff like that. There are many things, really. There's a lot of stuff. He would help me out with DWP things. Any sort of clerical stuff, I would say, he helps me out with.

(Young person)

It makes a huge difference... they have been in care since aged 6 or 7 years old, they have worked with a myriad of professionals; the constant willingness from us to fight their corner... they have all expressed a real thank you having us there, working with them.

(Project worker)

They go beyond their call of duty.... [they are] caring and compassionate.

(Key player)

Services exist and they're everywhere, but you have to know how to access them, you have to have the tools and resources. I'm kind of that...help access resources and encouragement and, like I say, that ongoing intensified support that I can help to access the numerous resources that are out there, and create opportunities.

(Project worker)

Continuity of support

Finally, the support was offered on an ongoing, open-ended basis. This is in contrast to other young person services, including the YAS where young people 'age out' of the service when they are 25 years old. Two of the young people reached 25 and the project continued to work with them. This feature was felt to be very important by project workers:

Working with YAS they age-out...when they're 25. So, we have two that have aged-out...we won't just stop because they are of this age. They have bought into this scheme, so we carry on...We aren't stopping it, just leaving them.

(Project worker)

Delivering the project in a multi-agency setting

Delivering a project in a multi-agency setting presents opportunities and challenges, particularly in a context of constrained resources.¹⁷ Some key players felt that inter-agency working between key project partners would have benefited from more upfront planning for a project of such a complex nature. As identified in Chapter 2, a greater joint understanding of the role of the project and criteria for assistance for housing would have been helpful. Communication could have been improved across all parties, as well as better

¹⁷ See Sebba et al 2017 and FitzSimons and McCracken 2021 for a discussion of the enablers and barriers associated with implementing new approaches in children and young people's services.

ongoing dialogue to ensure any arising issues are addressed. The context of the pandemic did not assist with this process, including Housing First staff not being able to co-locate and/or liaise face-to-face with YAS staff after March 2020.

Key professionals reflected on the trials and tribulations surrounding effective interagency working, and how with hindsight, agencies struggled to fully appreciate the distinct role and remit of 'Housing First' from the outset. Once again, the following quote draws attention to the importance of time in developing trust and respect between professional groups, especially when working with the "most vulnerable young people":

We struggled in the beginning communicating service-to-service over the welfare of the care leaver. We struggled with that. Like I said, we were operating quite separately and what we felt we needed was, we needed to understand what was happening with the care leaver. What is their progression? How are they managing? They're asking for our most vulnerable young people. We were quite reserved and quite worried about letting go, in that sense. So we needed to build a better dialogue between us because they're (HF) asking for our most vulnerable care leavers. I think, out of that, we then started to build in review meetings and reports, regular reports. That's how we shared the information about the welfare or the progress of the care leaver. It was quite difficult in the beginning to build that trust between even services, never mind the young person. To trust each service, letting us all do what we're good at doing. We needed to speak to one another, which we've got much better at.

(Key player)

I think there have been teething issues from what I've heard regarding some of the communication, maybe some of the understanding between the agencies...maybe in terms of just understanding people's remits, the roles and responsibilities, maybe has changed. That could be because of staff change over, people not fully understanding what each service is responsible for and coming to that agreement. Communication, maybe not being as prevalent as what you need it to be in some of these kinds of services.

(Key player)

What you want is a relationship where everybody trusts each other... Centrepoint were new to the borough when this service was commissioned. They were a brand-new organisation. So that trust and that relationship takes time to build. I think that in some ways that seems to have worked quite well.

(Key player)

As alluded to above, the introduction of certain mechanisms to aid partnership working, such as regular review meetings, appeared to be integral to some of the positive developments surrounding effective communication, referrals, and interagency working:

I'm very, very impressed with the level of knowledge and expertise those (HF) practitioners have. Feedback on each individual was really, really thorough, which was really pleasing to see that level of knowledge and insight into the issues of those young people. The journeys that they have actually travelled, and where they're going, and what future support they need. So we are building on that. We're in the process of making this a regular review. So that we look at the progress of young people and the journey that they're making. Exit plans, we discussed at the last meeting, of the ones who had exited or are about to exit the project. Looking at potential new referrals, as well.

(Key player)

There was also some excellent joint working reported, particularly at the service delivery end, for example, with other specialist health workers and Probation. One key player was hugely supportive of the project:

Where would we be without Centrepoin't's services in our Borough? I know where we'd be - we'd be up the creek without a paddle, that's where we'd be, because we wouldn't have all these amazing team members who reach out to me, facilitate the amazing work they do, and being able to co-partnership work and support each other, we'd really be in trouble without the service, it's a major needed service within the Borough.

(Key player)

Despite these positive developments in partnership working, systemic barriers also existed in terms of liaising with, and getting support from, some statutory agencies, for example, DWP. There were also indications that obstacles remained to successful partnership working between agencies, which were exacerbated by a range of complex factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the housing crisis:

Ultimately, there's no local authority in London that has social housing available or even temporary accommodation often available, and the tension that creates between the people and the organisations that are looking to find that, or secure that for people, is really common. I also think that one of the things that the housing crisis has done, has also encouraged or enabled the return to working more in silo, because there's a lot of saying no and accepting no's all the time. I think that can be quite disheartening for people interaction. I think in some ways partnerships have been really damaged because of that, the lack of availability of the housing people need. (Key player)

Other professionals discussed the wider structural context, including the impact of social security systems that also exacerbated the issues young people were facing:

I think Housing Benefit, well the whole approach to welfare reform over the last decade has been horrendous... I think for young people, especially for young people who find themselves homeless or who are care leavers and need accommodation, the local housing allowance rates can be really detrimental...the previous model of Housing Benefit was much more effective, because it just paid the rent you had to pay. Now it pays a certain amount of rent based on market rents and whatever, which isn't accurate, and in London is just nowhere near. We know they're more likely to be unemployed. Young people in general, are more likely to be in insecure employment. So that just adds to this massive pressure to their lives, as well as the admin burden of constantly filling forms in and stuff like that.

(Key player)

Over time, it was apparent that key agencies had developed confidence in the role and purpose of the 'Housing First' model, especially in providing critical support for the Local Authority's most vulnerable care leavers:

It's a service that we are beginning to rely on in keeping our children safe, in understanding of keeping our children safe. Even though they're working with high risk, they have a measure of safety within that, and we feel confident of. We're quite happy when we know Housing First are involved, because we know it's a very responsive approach that they give to our care leavers. So we do work with them jointly and in partnership to provide a good outcome for our young people, as best we can.

(Key player)

I think partnership working has been strengthened in that now our partners are seeing that we have made a difference over the course of the last few years. Obviously in the beginning there was a little bit of reluctance and fallback because the evidence wasn't there but I feel like now we're getting a good name for ourself in the borough and people are respecting Housing First as a service... I think that helps and just we have more meetings now which is very helpful, I think, and more team meetings with our partners which we didn't do initially and I think that just reassures everybody where we are. So yes, I think the communication and understanding has improved.

(Project worker)

Chapter 4: Outcomes for young people

This fourth chapter considers the recorded outcomes for young people during and following their involvement with the project. It draws on both qualitative interviews with staff, key players and young people, as well as project monitoring. It needs to be remembered that the project had been established for only two years – and over half of this time was during a pandemic where normal operations were not possible. The young people utilising the project had, in the main, a lifetime of disrupted and often harmful backgrounds: their progress also needs to be appraised within this context. One project worker summed this slow but steady approach to progress for the young people:

I've realised that's quite an important part of the job, is not rushing things. I think sometimes as well, particularly in social services, it's very much like an outcome-focused thing...It might not be as quick as social services would like, but those outcomes, they do come - I think - if it's at the right pace.

(Project worker)

Housing outcomes

As outlined in Chapter 2, only six of the 15 accepted referrals were housed by June 2021. However, of the six housing placements, all were still active at the end of February 2021. Five of the young people were maintaining their tenancies and still engaged in the project. In one case, the property was at serious risk due to substance misuse and street begging. This young person had disengaged from the project. In summary, success with finding housing was low; however, 83% of tenancies were successful which represented a huge success in the context of supporting care leavers for whom often multiple placements had failed in the past.

In the case of one young person, who struggled with substance misuse problems, their property had been 'cuckooed' – but the project managed to get it back for the young person. The other four had been actively living in the properties since allocation.

Project workers considered that tenancy sustainment in the majority of cases represented a huge success:

What it shows is when young people have their home, they treat it as such... they are still dealing with a lot of trauma and tragedy but their properties are being retained because it is their home.

(Project worker)

All the other young people on the scheme were living in temporary accommodation.

From young people's perspectives, all talked positively of their accommodation at the time of interview. Those that had moved to their independent accommodation particularly valued having their own space and their support from Housing First workers to acquire the skills needed to manage the tenancy, particularly in terms of budgeting and managing on a limited income:

It's not a lot of money, but you can still live on it. If I'm struggling one week, they'll bring me some food or they'll come shopping with me to get food and stuff. Now over the last couple of weeks now I've always gone and bought food...after I've bought food I buy whatever and I always have a tenner in the drawer, just in case I run out of food.

(Young person)

One young person in particular, welcomed the practical strategies and support to manage their money:

I was really struggling with my budgeting. [Housing First Worker] came to see me and he said, 'Do you want to work on your budgeting?' I said, 'Okay, cool, I will actually give it a try. I will actually do it with you.' He said, 'Okay, no problem.' I've been starting it about a week ago, I've been filling out a paper sheet, like what I've bought. Every time I go to the shop and I come back, I have to write it down, the amount that I've bought it for, and then calculate how much I've got left and stuff like that. I hope I'm doing well.

(Young person)

For the young people who had been provided with permanent housing, 'Housing First' key workers were keen to emphasise the difference that "having your own home" could make for young people they were working with:

They haven't broken down. The rents are being paid still. That is a huge outcome. From our five properties, none have been closed or any evictions. We have no ASBs so far, touch wood, which are the main concerns, but I think, for me, what it just shows is the young people, when having their home, they treat it as such and not as a TA, say. They are still dealing with quite a lot of traumas and challenges but their properties are maintained because it's their home. Apart from one, he is entrenched homeless so him coming around to seeing any flat as his home is some way off.

(Project worker)

With a project time frame that allowed for key individuals to be re-interviewed, we were able to capture professional perspectives on how young people thrived within the 'Housing First' model:

A key thing in that, in terms of their progress, has been developing their flat. When they first moved in, it was a shell. So getting the carpets down, getting all the white

goods in, making it nice. I think that sense of having a home has been really probably the biggest reason, I think, that they've progressed so much. I find it really frustrating where somebody's in a placement and yes - I think you can only progress so much in that scenario.

(Project worker)

There's a clear difference of the engagement, say - when it's their own property they need help from us of course. We let them lead on it and then just have a little, gentle reminder that, 'Right, your rent's due soon. Is your shopping done?' Just those things at first so it's not too heavy but when they are in a TA, say, they aren't paying rent or bills... They have trashed their property yet those that have been housed, not one of them have trashed their home.

(Project worker)

Re-offending rates

There was evidence that the project was impacting positively on reoffending rates. Eight of the 15 young people referred to the project were involved in the criminal justice system at the time of referral. This included 5 out of 6 of the young people rehoused permanently by the project.

Of those rehoused, five out of six young people were not involved in the criminal justice system by end of the project, strongly suggesting that the stability of the tenancy along with support had helped young people to disengage from criminal activity. Three of these young people had been on Probation Orders that had ended. The one young person who was involved at low levels was the young person who had disengaged from the project and whose tenancy was under serious threat.

A further two young people were involved in the criminal justice system at referral. These young people were still in temporary accommodation and engaged with Probation.

This was seen as a 'massive' achievement by project workers, which was not easily achieved either. For example, one person nearly breached their pre-existing Probation order but was able to pull this back with the support of the project. Another young person served a sentence but the project's support enabled them to return to their tenancy and avoid further offending.

Improved mental health

Key players considered that the project was having a positive impact on young people's overall mental health. This both encompassed lessening severity of existing mental health

problems, as well as positive impacts on broader well-being including feelings of self-worth and improved confidence levels:

They have gone through so much learning, they are learning self-worth and self-care, which they have never had, and they are all taking pride in their homes... in terms of mental health, their mental health has improved across the board.

(Key player)

Young people also talked of being supported with their mental health from their Housing First worker. Some talked of being able to open up about their difficulties and worries for the first time:

{Housing first worker} sees me stressing, he knows that I'm stressing and everything. I have talked to [him] about my health. I'm very concerned... in emotional turmoil. I didn't want to do that, but it just came out. I was just concerned. It brings me down a lot. Sometimes I don't like to talk about that. He actually understands where I'm coming from.

(Young person)

For others, just having someone they could phone for a chat was helpful:

I can ring them up if I'm down and lonely and they can just talk to me and they give me advice.

(Young person)

Linked to improvements in health and wellbeing was a reduction in alcohol and drug use for some of the young people:

I've just started to change my life...I've only just sorted my life out and I've been being good now. I'm not going out doing drugs, getting drunk. I'm staying in...buying shopping. I'm doing really good now.

(Young person)

I did have some support with drugs and alcohol [from Housing First Worker and drugs and alcohol service] about two or three months ago. I've managed my drugs and alcohol myself, I just had it in my head that I would be ready when I'm ready. As it happens I just stopped.

(Young person)

Education, employment and training

Interviews took place during Covid 19 lockdown and all those interviewed said they were NEET, one having lost his job due to lockdown. For at least two of the young people

interviewed, there was a sense that they were not yet ready to undertake participation in education, employment or training. Obstacles included low confidence, negative past experiences with education or training, mental or physical health difficulties and focusing on finding a settled home and developing life skills informally. One young person explained that their priority had been finding somewhere to live:

I pretty much just focused everything on getting a place to live. Now that I'm housed, I will be looking for work. Whatever comes along at the right time... well, there's nothing that I won't do.

(Young person)

Two young people who were interviewed several months after moving into their accommodation, were keen to find a training course or a job as soon as possible. One also mentioned the need to get a job that enabled them to pay for accommodation, which could mean taking something that didn't necessarily fit their goals:

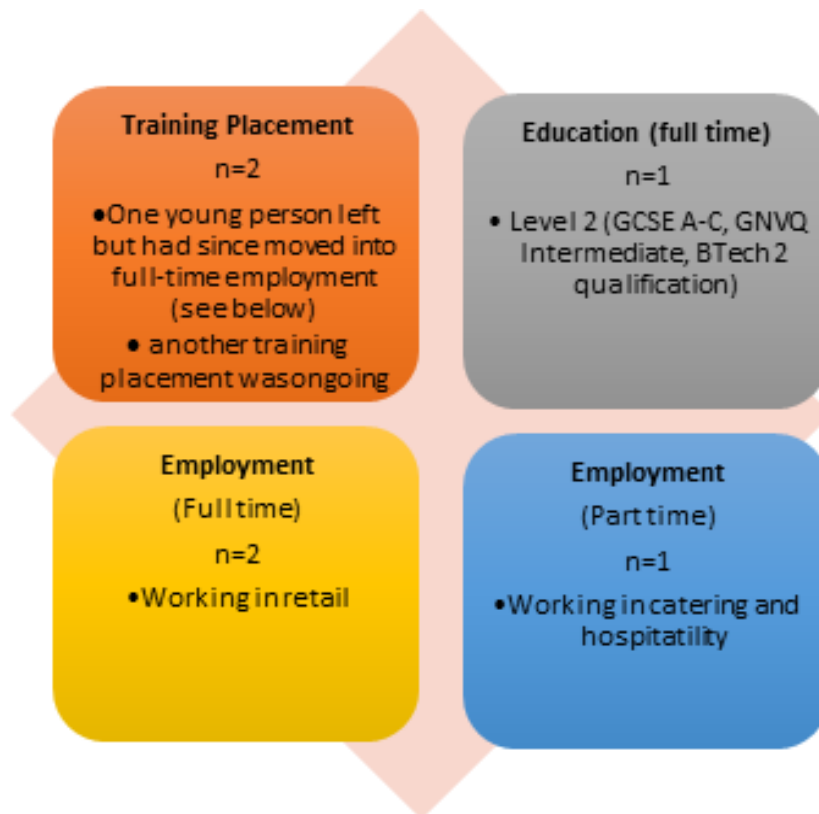
I have had some jobs, I'll have to pay for my flat now, coz my rent gets paid for me at the minute on universal credit, so really, I need a job that I can still live on the amount of money. I have to work it out, budget it out, coz I still have loans to pay out. I'm happy with where I'm living, I'm just not happy that I haven't got a job.

(Young person)

Project workers also explained how this was an area where progress took time, but 'now the young people are settled' and how this represented 'the cherry on the cake'.

Despite these important caveats, data gathered via the In-Form monitoring system showed that there were a number of positive outcomes in education, employment and training by the end of the evaluation. Six young people were recorded as being engaged in a range of opportunities as shown in figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Participation in education, employment and training



Being able to reflect back on young people’s engagement with the project over a longer time period allowed for greater purchase on the progress young people had made:

With all the young people, it's definitely - with each one, there's been some progress where I'm like, wow! Wouldn't have seen that coming! I just had a call yesterday, somebody's just got a job, pretty much off [their] own back as well.

(Project worker)

Family reconnection and improved relations

Project workers also highlighted that some young people were now enjoying improved family relationships with parents, foster carers, or siblings. For example, one young person was living with their brother. This represented an indirect outcome from the project. Workers explained that young people were making these relationships work, now that their own lives were more settled. There was also evidence from young people that they were being supported to navigate complex or less positive relationships. Support included emotional support with relationships as well as practical support and advice such as

planning bus routes to visit family or liaising with family members to arrange meetings or share information:

[Housing Support Worker] gets a bit involved with my mum...they will have their little chat if you know what I mean.

(Young person)

The power of a 'relationship'

When asked about the types of support that had been most useful, most young people were unable to identify a particular area, instead explaining that just having someone they could rely on to talk to and get help whenever and with whatever was needed, had the greatest impact on their lives. For young people who had often broken attachments within the family, and then often multiple service interventions/workers supporting them, having one special person to help them potentially had the greatest transformative power for them:

It would be bad for me to say one thing's better than the other, because everything he does is 100 per cent. He's just all round; he's just there. I couldn't think of anything good that the guy does, because everything he does is good. [He's] there straightaway.

(Young person)

Overall impact

Overall, all parties interviewed considered that the project was having a positive impact on young people's lives in Haringey. Young people explained how the project had helped them with all aspects of their lives:

Centrepoint was much more better, [PA] helps me but doesn't get back to me, I'll contact them and it is sometimes 3 weeks before they get back to me, I don't really see them a lot, but Centrepoint has really helped me a lot, they always come on a specific date they say and they will help me with my problems and I am really thankful.

(Young person)

They help me all round with different things... they help you get a flat, if you are struggling in situations where you've got no food, they can give you vouchers, also they come with you to meetings, you can ring them up whenever you want if you are in a bad situation, they help you all around, it's all really good.

(Young person)

All 'Housing First' key workers were interviewed towards the end of the evaluation to allow for more meaningful reflections on key changes and outcomes over time. They highlighted that outcomes could be small to begin with, but still meaningful, and built up to larger outcomes over time:

I think particularly the beginning of the journey with these young people, sometimes you're calling them, and they're not answering. Having a conversation is an outcome, because a lot of the time, they were just completely disengaged...a lot of the work, I've found in Housing First, is around that kind of engagement, particularly at the beginning. I think later, down the line, you can then look at the bigger picture, and the bigger or the harder outcomes.

(Project worker)

For the young people allocated tenancies, some had made remarkable progress across their lives, surpassing the expectations of professionals:

I was just mentioning a particular young person who, over the course of the period of engagement, has massively reduced their substance misuse, and alcohol consumption. Has successfully sustained their tenancy and... They'd never really sustained a tenancy before. Lots of placements breaking down and suchlike. A prolific offender, very chaotic, and has over the course of the year - I went round to his flat a couple of weeks ago, and he's painted the front room. He's got a nice sofa in there, and he's managing the tenancy really well. He's got massively reduced substance misuse. Hopefully he'll be starting a CSCS course in a couple of weeks... I wouldn't have thought we'd be here, where we are now, a year down the line. I thought it... I think everybody was expecting his tenancy to fail - not us, but I think [other agencies]...were sceptical.

(Project worker)

The main group, we've maintained work with that have as well been given housing, they've excelled... the difference in those that have been housed and it's rocky at first, the first three or four months is rocky. We're sorting out their bills, their rent arrears, their Universal Credit, it's a minefield for them, but then once we've got them past that bit now, they're just doing great.

(Project worker)

I've basically worked with him since the start and he's just come such a long way...since working together he's just completely flourished, he's come from a difficult background ... having negative influences in his life and a lot of uncertainty. Now he's managing his tenancy he doesn't need my help at all

(Project worker)

When reflecting upon outcomes, key workers made the distinction between 'soft' and 'hard' outcomes. The importance of capturing the less tangible dimensions to social life, such as the development of 'self-esteem' or 'confidence', was seen as integral to understanding young people's journeys and overall well-being:

I think that's one of the things in Housing First that it does make it difficult to evidence that you're meeting targets, certainly in the initial stages because it can take a long time to meet any of the hard outcomes....when you see somebody that can make that phone call to a professional, that confidence starts to build that you can do this, or you can do that. ...they're less noticeable for people that aren't working with them.

(Project worker)

When we first met (him), he had no self-worth at all. Now, yes, he's really proud of himself. He holds himself to a standard now and that he doesn't view himself as a burden, more of a part of our society... once they are housed and they're feeling safe then you see it change, be it their self-care, their presentation, their manners.

(Project worker)

The project, however, was not a panacea. It was explained that young people's backgrounds and lives were very complex and it took a great deal of time and healing for young people to move forward into a more positive future. One worker explained how young people would often take '*two steps forward and then one back again*'. Another explained that the project was '*creating opportunities*' and '*breaking down barriers*'.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations

This final chapter provides an overall assessment of the progress of the Centrepoint and Haringey Housing First for Care Leavers project over its first two years of operation. As identified in Chapter 1, research on the implementation of new models in complex multi-agency settings suggests that about five years is needed before the impact of a new project or intervention can be adequately assessed. This means that the conclusions from this evaluation reflect the relatively early stages of the Haringey Housing First for Care Leavers project. This is all the more the case given the context of the pandemic. Nonetheless, the evaluation provides important information on the direction of travel for the young people assisted by the project and highlights the potential of Housing First services to transform young people's lives.

Young people's progress over the two year pilot

Project monitoring showed that Housing First was mainly supporting local young men from London from a mix of ethnic backgrounds. These young people had spent many years in care, had unstable accommodation histories and poor health status, with particular struggles and additional needs connected to mental health and/or substance misuse issues. Some young people had also become caught up with antisocial or criminal activities at an early age, including some who were victims of criminal exploitation.

Existing evidence from research and practice shows that, without appropriate support, vulnerable care leavers often have very poor outcomes going forward with their lives. This includes continuing precarity in housing situations (Dixon and Stein 2005; Stein and Morris 2010; Gill 2017), involvement in the criminal justice system (Prison Reform Trust 2016; Ministry of Justice 2012), unemployment (DfE 2020; National Audit Office 2015; Wade and Dixon 2006) and poor physical and mental health (Smith 2017; Braden et al. 2017; Matthews and Sykes 2012; Dixon 2008; Meltzer et al. 2003).

The overall outcomes for the young people housed by the project, within this context, represent significant progress on a positive trajectory for these young people. This research evidences several positive developments within young people's lives over the course of the two year pilot. Positive outcomes included engagement with education, employment or training opportunities, improved mental health and reductions in re-offending rates. Additionally, there was evidence of positive progress across a range of soft outcomes such as feeling safe and building trust in the professionals around them.

Where young people had been provided with permanent accommodation, all tenancies were still in place, with only one tenancy at risk at the end of the project. Project workers described how young people thrived when provided with permanent housing and how it

could therefore be difficult to disentangle the broader positive outcomes (i.e. looking for employment) with the stability and security associated with this type of accommodation. The most positive outcomes were associated with the provision of ongoing intensive support alongside young people being provided with more secure and permanent forms of housing.

Project workers were also keen to place emphasis on the less tangible dimensions to social life, such as the development of 'self-esteem' or 'confidence' that were deemed integral to understanding young people's journeys and overall well-being. It was also believed to be important to recognize that young people's journeys should be seen as non-linear and that any attempt to measure outcomes needs to appreciate the complexity of young people's lives, or as one professional explained, how young people can take *'two steps forward and then one back again'*. This reinforces the need to take account of the wider context of young people's lives, as Stein 2012 observes, the 'journey travelled', and importantly, what can be realistically achieved in the short, medium and long term. Despite such complexities, all parties, including young people who were interviewed, considered that the project was having a positive impact on young people's lives in Haringey. Taken together, the progress underway was contributing to a firmer foundation from which young people could begin to build a more secure and positive future. This was despite the context of the pandemic, and might suggest that results would have been even better in a steady state environment.

Key features of the 'success' of the project

Housing First or Second?

The availability of appropriate housing that aligns to the core principles of 'Housing First' was a key area of concern for professionals and young people. The lack of housing was felt to undermine the principles upon which the 'Housing First' model was developed. Project workers talked of young people becoming frustrated with waiting for suitable accommodation and how this could undermine the trust and rapport they had developed with them. In some cases, unsuitable accommodation, including the use of temporary accommodation, had detrimental impacts on the young people's well-being. This included some young people re-engaging with heavy drug use and resultant poor mental health.

Managing the core principles of 'Housing First' with the reality of accommodation availability was further complicated by misunderstandings of what 'Housing First' actually was. This included some professional groups emphasising the need for young people to be 'housing ready' before they were provided with permanent housing. Again, this could create tensions for project workers as it was felt to go against the grain of what the 'Housing First' model was about. These differing viewpoints on how best to support young people's housing needs illustrate the complexity of the issues at hand when trying to devise and implement a model of support that relies upon multi-agency working. It also highlights the

need for greater clarity amongst different professional groups on the distinctiveness of 'Housing First' and how this model can be embedded as an alternative form of housing support for young people. Examples of other intensive housing support projects for care leavers, such as the national House Project¹⁸, show that whilst pre-move support and preparation are important, the provision of a secure housing base and continued and tailored tenancy and independent living support, allows the young person to practice independent living skills in real time and to feel more invested in creating a home for themselves.

'Relationship first'?

Providing ongoing and intensive support was a core feature of the Haringey Housing First model. The evaluation highlighted several features that stood out as being particularly instrumental in supporting positive outcomes for young people.

These included the principle of 'stickability' whereby project workers would endeavour to "never let go" or "give up" on the young people they were working with, including through phases of prolonged disengagement that might be a result of their personal circumstances deteriorating (i.e., heavy drug use). Many of the young people spoke retrospectively of how they valued this support and the difference it made knowing that "someone cared" for them. Adhering to the principle of 'stickability', being flexible when responding to young people's changing needs and circumstances, and providing advocacy to ensure young people's needs were responded to holistically, were all common features of the support provided to young people in the project. Forming good relationships involved taking the time to get to know young people and respecting the choices and pace at which young people wanted to work. This pace was crucial in developing young people's trust and confidence in their workers, particularly where past encounters with support services had been experienced as less than positive.

Integral to being able to deliver such support were the small caseloads that the project workers held. There was recognition amongst all the professional groups interviewed that such small caseloads were unique when compared to wider forms of support and provision that young people would typically encounter and that this approach allowed for more individualised and meaningful relationships of trust to develop. The impact of caseloads on the frequency and accessibility of support was also apparent to some young people who noted that in comparison to the Housing First workers, their leaving care workers tended to have less availability due to the number of 'other young people' they were working with.

¹⁸ See <https://thehouseproject.org/> and https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/931985/House_Project_Final_evaluation_report.pdf

Other key features that were highly valued included the continuity of support provided to young people. This included project workers supporting young people over a sustained period of time, even when they may have formally 'aged out' of young people's services (i.e. reached the age of 25).

At the core of the support model was the provision of a reliable, consistent role model for the young person, which helped young people to feel safe and secure rather than their previous unpredictable life. In this way, the Housing First model for care leavers could be understood to be helping young people develop positive attachments in their lives - where people can shift their working understanding of the world around them from one of riskiness to safety. This enables trust to build in others and themselves, providing the building blocks for moving forward in life:

They're just there. They are always there to help you, they've made a huge difference.

(Young person)

...so many traumas from a young age, they haven't had a home – how can they be expected to change when they have never felt safe?... There are some serious traumas there – to get any real work done they need to feel safe first and not that this home is going to end in a year... at the start they are anxious and scared but then they calm down. I stand by this [model], definitely.

(Project worker)

Overall, the Haringey Housing First project demonstrated high fidelity to the principles of Housing First (as outlined in Chapter 1) – with the exception of being able to provide housing as a first support (although the project was trying to do this).

[An effective inter-agency approach](#)

Over the course of the research, we were able to note key factors that strengthened the implementation of the Housing First model. This included strengthening protocols on information sharing and referrals. The introduction of regular review meetings also helped aid more effective communication, referrals and interagency working. It is also important to note the time that is needed to develop trust and respect amongst professional groups to strengthen the delivery of the project. This is particularly the case when bringing together different agencies or disciplines, where opportunities to adapt to different ways of working are required. Towards the end of the evaluation, it was apparent that key agencies had developed confidence in the role and purpose of the 'Housing First' model, especially in providing critical support for the Local Authority's most vulnerable care leavers.

Some of the young people were aware of the cooperative approach amongst their various support workers that was happening on their behalf, as one explained:

...my social worker, my [PA], my probation worker, she's good as well...she goes above and beyond when they're helping me and that, my housing worker and [Housing First Worker], they all have meetings...I think must be mixed with my probation meetings, I think they all just do it together...yes, make sure they're all on the same page.

(Young person)

Improvements to the project

Overall, there was a high level of satisfaction with the service. Young people were particularly complementary about the role of the project and did not identify any specific areas for improvement. Key players were also very positive about the support available for care leavers, however they did identify a number of possible improvements to service delivery. Some of these related to the pandemic, regarding not being able to go places with young people, but most were structural or related to joint working more generally. Examining the evidence to date, including the monitoring data, the following areas of the project could usefully be reviewed. Similarly, these are important learning points that other potential Housing Projects might like to consider.

Housing:

- There is a clear need for the housing element of the project to be available as soon as possible after referral to prevent young people's situations deteriorating further.
- With the heavy resource constraints of local authorities, the allocation of housing via housing associations and (managed) private rented sector options needs investigation.
- It would be helpful to have better links with or availability of appropriate temporary supported accommodation for young people (including safe accommodation for LGBTQ young people) for the very short-term until longer-term housing is available. This reflects a wider need for more pan-London emergency accommodation.
- Wider issues may have affected housing provision during the course of the project (including restrictions on housing moves during the pandemic and ongoing developments in the use of unregulated accommodation for care-experienced young people).

Staffing and structures:

- There is scope for the introduction of mentors or volunteers for the project, including a mentor in gang related issue (male lead coach).

- It would be helpful to have access to a physical space to meet with young people in Centrepont (or another suitable location).

Types of support:

At the heart of successful intervention with young people was having the time and resources to build a relationship of trust and respect. Whilst project workers established themselves as trusted professionals who provided stability and ongoing support, the availability of wider provision could have strengthened opportunities for young people. This included the need for:

- a greater emphasis on education, training and employment opportunities (including the development of life-skills)
- additional opportunities for leisure e.g. gym membership
- greater access to therapeutic interventions
- access to legal advice
- access to a healthy living services (e.g. healthy relationship worker/physical health check-ups)
- group work/social opportunities for young people to come together.

Inter-agency working:

- Considering the distinctiveness of Centrepont's Housing First model in Haringey, the vision of this model could be shared usefully with other organisations and agencies. This is especially the case concerning the core principles that underpin Housing First and how this may have implications for how housing support is understood within this context.
- Building stronger links and establishing channels of communication with the wider Corporate Parenting body, based on the shared goals of improving outcomes for care-experienced young people, can aid more efficient cooperation and buy-in from a range of agencies.
- Joint working agreements and training on eligibility criteria for referrals. Raising awareness of the aims of the project and target group amongst social workers and leaving care workers (e.g. by attending a team meeting) can assist with identifying suitable referrals.
- Despite improvements to various processes, there is room for referral routes and mechanisms to be enhanced. Professionals also discussed the need for more detailed risk assessments to ensure effective safeguarding of young people and staff.
- There were examples where information on young people was deemed to be partial or incomplete. The model would be strengthened by having clearer protocols or

formal agreements with respect to information sharing between key agencies. A standardised pro-forma for gathering and recording essential information could prove useful.

- Having greater clarity on the definition and coordination of roles and responsibilities can assist with joint working and ease processes for embedding and delivering the service.
- Having a specific or named contact within housing providers to link in with the project could assist with accommodation planning and provision.
- Named contacts within other key agencies, including DWP, adult mental health, drug and alcohol services and education providers.
- Linking with education and employment support projects for care-experienced young people (e.g. Catch22 Bright Light apprenticeship scheme for care leavers in London (up to 25 years of age) <https://www.catch-22.org.uk/services/bright-light/>)

Operational capacity:

- Increase the number of young people that the project can accept – at the same time as increasing the Housing First staff team to ensure that each worker continues to carry a small caseload.
- Replicate the project in other London boroughs.

Conclusion: Is Housing First for Care Leavers a good model?

It is generally acknowledged that in comparison to young adults generally, most care-experienced young people begin their housing journeys much sooner, often with a legacy of accommodation instability and without access to the usual support networks. There is a need, therefore, for a range of post-care housing options that meet the various needs of care leavers. Some will require high levels of support to make a successful transition to independent living, particularly where previous attempts have failed. There was unanimous agreement amongst key players and young people that a Housing First model that aimed to provide individualised support from the security of a home base worked well for these care leavers. The offer of both housing (with no upfront obligations) and intensive, ongoing support was seen as what young people really needed to help them begin to stabilise their lives. The project recognised that for most care leavers, the priority after care is finding somewhere to live, often taking precedence over other areas such as finding education or employment, and addressing other issues including health, wellbeing, risk behaviour and establishing social and support networks. Ultimately, having a place to call home could provide the foundation for pursuing and engaging with the support they needed in other areas of their lives.

The evaluation shows that the Housing First project was successfully supporting a highly vulnerable group of young people, who had disadvantaged and traumatic childhood experiences, and whose needs were complex and multi-faceted. It was acknowledged that young people were on a long journey and lives could not be totally transformed in 12-18 months, but that they were making significant progress when permanent housing could be secured. In essence, the Housing First service was providing a safe and secure base from which young people could start to build a future for themselves, supported by professionals that they could trust and, crucially, that they could rely on to stick with them on their ongoing journey. Given the high level of need of this group of young people, and the challenges of the pandemic and limited housing availability, the achievements with respect to tenancy sustainment and improving lives strongly indicates that a Housing First model for care leavers is worthy of replication in other settings.

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