



# **Housing First for Women: A five year evaluation of the Manchester Jigsaw Support project**

**University of York, Centre for Housing Policy**

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# 1 Introduction

In 2015, Threshold, now Jigsaw Support<sup>1</sup> (part of Jigsaw Homes), a leading housing provider in Manchester, UK, developed the first Housing First service specifically for homeless women with involvement in the criminal justice system<sup>2</sup>. An early evaluation of the first two years<sup>3</sup>, by the University of York, highlighted the success of the model in breaking both cycles of homelessness and reoffending for women supported by the project. Subsequently, after four years, the evaluation demonstrated the importance of Housing First projects delivering an intensive, gender-specific and trauma-informed service<sup>4</sup>.

This report presents the final evaluation of the Jigsaw Support Housing First Service, looking across five years of service delivery. It draws on data and experiences from the first two reports, supplemented with updated data and interviews with women utilising the project. This first chapter introduces Housing First and a gendered approach to homelessness services. Chapter 2 outlines the Jigsaw Housing First project and profiles the women who used the service. The third chapter looks at the delivery of the project in some detail, with a particular focus on the features that worked well for participants. Chapter 4 looks at the outcomes from the project, whilst the fifth chapter examines cost effectiveness. The final chapter considers the lessons learnt from the project.

## Housing First in national homelessness strategy

Housing first has become integral to the homelessness strategies of many local authorities in England and is increasingly looked to as the most effective response to homelessness among people with high and complex needs. In recent years, there has been a marked increase in Housing First service provision. A national pilot programme in England funded by central government supported large Housing First services in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and the West Midlands<sup>5</sup> and Housing First services have increased from 37 in 2017 to 105 active services in 2020.<sup>6</sup> In Scotland<sup>7</sup>, the Housing First mode has become central to the national homelessness strategy and Housing First also features heavily in the Welsh and Northern Ireland's homelessness strategies. The UK has seen significant developments in Housing First in the last five years and while it is still behind some other

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<sup>1</sup> <https://support.jigsawhomes.org.uk/information-article/housing-first/>

<sup>2</sup> Jigsaw Support also delivers gender specific Housing First projects for domestic abuse survivors and rough sleepers, as well as being part of the partnership delivering the Greater Manchester Housing First pilot.

<sup>3</sup> Quilgars, D. and Pleace, N. (2017) *The Threshold Housing First Pilot for Women with an Offending History: The First Two Years*, Centre for Housing Policy: University of York.

<sup>4</sup> Quilgars, D., Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2019) *How to Deliver Housing First for Women: Learning from Threshold Housing First, Four Years On*, Centre for Housing Policy: University of York.

<sup>5</sup> ICF Consulting et al (2021) *Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots Second Process Evaluation Report* London: MHCLG.

<sup>6</sup> Homeless Link (2020) *The picture of Housing First in England 2020* London: Homeless Link.

<sup>7</sup> <https://homelessnetwork.scot/housing-first/>

European countries, such as Denmark, Finland and France<sup>8</sup>, the use of Housing First has become increasingly common in England and the rest of the UK.

Experimentation with new forms of Housing First has also started to occur. The Threshold Housing First service (now Jigsaw Support) was one of the first in the World to be designed for and run by women, but two current Housing First projects, Bench Outreach<sup>9</sup> in London and Turning Lives Around in Leeds<sup>10</sup> are running women-focused Housing First services within larger projects. In 2020, Housing First England reported six-women-only Housing First services were in operation.<sup>11</sup> Alongside Canada, the UK has been among the first to experiment with another form of Housing First, services that are designed specifically for young people, including young people leaving care.<sup>12</sup> Canada has also been among the other countries to explore building Housing First services for women.<sup>13</sup>

Housing First is a model that is designed to end homelessness among people with high and complex needs, often including but not restricted to severe mental illness, addiction, poor physical health, experience of stigmatisation, experience of abuse and deep, sustained socio-economic exclusion. Earlier models of homelessness service for people with complex needs try to make someone 'housing ready' before providing them with a settled home, which means that these services try to stop addiction, ensure someone is receiving treatment for any mental health problems, and to stop behaviours that might jeopardise someone living successfully in their own home. Housing First houses someone immediately, or at least as quickly as possible, and then provides intensive, flexible, user-led support to them, at home, on an open-ended basis.

Over time, it has become clear that Housing First is not a single form of service. This is because Housing First has been implemented in different ways in different places, often being adapted to suit local circumstances. There can be considerable variations in how much money is available to Housing First services. In countries like the UK and Italy, many Housing First services tend to have relatively modest budgets and to follow an intensive case management (ICM) approach, with workers supporting between three to seven people (sometimes more) at any one time, providing practical help, emotional support and helping them access the mental health, health, addiction or other services they may decide they want to use. Other examples, such as the French *Un chez-soi d'abord* national Housing First programme have been allocated significant budgets by the central government and they operate an intensive case management/assertive community treatment model (ICM/ACT). An ACT Housing First service has its own multidisciplinary team, including addiction specialists, social workers, clinicians and mental health professionals, including a

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<sup>8</sup> Pleace, N.; Baptista, I. and Knutagård, M. (2019) *Housing First in Europe: An Overview of Implementation, Strategy and Fidelity* Brussels: Housing First Hub Europe.

<sup>9</sup> <https://benchoutreach.com>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.turninglivesaround.co.uk>

<sup>11</sup> Homeless Link (2020) *The picture of Housing First in England 2020* London: Homeless Link.

<sup>12</sup> Blood, I.; Alden, S. and Quilgars, D. (2020) *Rock Trust Housing First for Youth: Evaluation Report* Rock Trust/Housing First Hub Europe.

<sup>13</sup> Oudshoorn, A., Forchuck, C., Hall., Smith-Carrier, T. and Van Berkum, A. (2018) An evaluation of a Housing First program for chronically homeless women, *Journal of Social Inclusion*, 9 (2), pp.34-50.

psychiatrist. Services that have ICM and ACT can change support for the people they work with, but because they are relatively high cost, they are not really in use in the UK.

While definitions of Housing First vary in their details, the definitions used by Housing First England have provided a framework for the English and wider UK homelessness sectors. The Housing First England 'key principles' for Housing First<sup>14</sup> include:

- People have a right to a home.
- Housing First provides flexible support to people for as long as it is needed.
- Housing and support are separated, someone retains the housing arranged via Housing First, even if they stop using the support offered by Housing First.
- Individuals have choice and control, they actively shape the nature and extent of support they receive, the provision of support is a collaborative process.
- Housing First is strength-based, it reflects and responds to people's goals, strengths and aspirations.
- Housing First uses active engagement, staff are persistent and proactive, they maintain contact and support even if housing arrangements break down, working within a framework that fits the service to the individual, rather than the individual to the service.
- Housing First uses harm reduction, it works with people to minimise the harms from addiction, but does not require abstinence from drugs or alcohol.

More recently, Housing First England have also issued a set of what it terms 'non-negotiables' that a Housing First service must have:<sup>15</sup>

- Housing First is designed to work with people experiencing homelessness who are characterised by multiple disadvantage.
- Housing First makes a permanent offer of support.
- There is non-conditional access to housing.
- Stability of tenure is offered (people using Housing First have their own tenancies).
- Small caseload size (workers have caseloads of seven people or less).

Housing First is becoming integral to UK homelessness policy in ways that closely reflect the core ideas of the original services, albeit that the UK services do not work in quite the same ways as the original US services did in the 1990s, although this was to some degree inevitable because of the differences in context. While there are many positive developments, a number of challenges have arisen around the implementation of Housing First in England that also relate to the experience of developing and running the Jigsaw Support Housing First service. These challenges can be summarised as follows:

- Insufficient and insecure funding, with some Housing First services finding it difficult to meet their full operating costs while, in a more common experience, many Housing First services have only short-term (one year or less) contracts with

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<sup>14</sup><https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/principles-housing-first>

<sup>15</sup> <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Housing%20First%20non-negotiables.pdf>

commissioning local authorities, while those local authorities experience repeated cuts to their budgets.<sup>16</sup>

- Issues around strategic integration, with some Housing First services still being smaller pilot programmes that are not yet fully integrated into wider homelessness and social care, health and addiction strategies. This can create issues when a strategically 'isolated' Housing First service has to refer someone using their service to another service because their needs have changed, i.e. they no longer need Housing First or they have reached a point where they require residential or nursing care.<sup>17</sup>
- Issues with accessing a sufficient level of adequate and affordable housing supply offering people reasonable security of tenure continue to be a problem in many areas of the UK. Some Housing First services, like Jigsaw Support Housing First, are able to access social housing, but others are not, or face long waits, while alongside this, there are often issues with the quality, security of tenure and affordability of private rented sector housing.
- At the time of writing there are calls for a national Housing First strategy that is properly and sustainably resourced.

## **Taking a gendered-approach to the delivery of homelessness services**

Until recently, homelessness was largely examined on the basis that it was an experience that was highly skewed towards lone adult men. Until quite recently, homelessness was thought to be mainly a male experience, often involving lone men living rough or in an emergency shelter, who were likely to be characterised by high support needs that were likely to include problematic drug and alcohol use and severe mental illness.<sup>18</sup> In reality, a high proportion of homelessness in England and across the wider UK involves women, women whose experience has been undercounted because of what have been called a mix of spatial, administrative and methodological flaws.<sup>19</sup>

Spatial errors occur because women can be more likely to experience 'hidden' forms of homelessness, i.e. they may not have service options available where they feel safe, because those services are mixed gender and their experience of homelessness will often be associated with domestic abuse. Equally, women living rough are likely to secrete themselves, rather than sleep out in the open where they are likely to face risks to their

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<sup>16</sup> Blood, I.; Pleace, N.; Alden, S. and Dulson, S. (2020) *A Traumatized System: Research into the commissioning of homelessness services in the last 10 years* Leicester: Riverside.

<sup>17</sup> Blood, I.; Birchill, A. and Pleace, N. (2021) *Reducing, changing or ending Housing First support* London: Homeless Link/Housing First England.

<sup>18</sup> Pleace, N. (2016) Exclusion by Definition: The Under-Representation of Women in European Homelessness Statistics in Mayock, P. and Bretherton, J. *Women's Homelessness in Europe*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 105-126.

<sup>19</sup> Bretherton, J. and Mayock, P. (2021) *Women's Homelessness: European Evidence Review* Brussels: FEANTSA.



safety.<sup>20</sup> This means that women will often take different trajectories through homelessness, because they are more likely to rely on informal arrangements, staying with family, friends and acquaintances, in often precarious and sometimes unsafe situations, in which they have no space of their own, may have little privacy and lack security in terms of tenure and in relation to their physical safety.

Administrative errors have occurred because women who are homeless can be classified as someone who is at threat from, or escaping from domestic abuse, rather than being recorded as homeless. This means a woman who is at risk of domestic abuse and becomes homeless, whose first contact is with a housing options team/preventative services run by a local authority will be classified as 'homeless' and recorded as such, but if the same woman initially approaches a refuge, she will be recorded as someone escaping domestic abuse and not necessarily as homeless. This is a pan-European issue, as well as existing in the UK and reflects broader issues around the need for greater integration between domestic abuse and homelessness services.<sup>21</sup> In England, much of what is categorised as 'family' homelessness is actually households with dependent children with a lone woman parent, with lone women parents being a much larger group than two parent households. The scale of family homelessness and the number of families in temporary accommodation at any one point in England, given the very high proportion of these households that are actually lone women parents, means that, in reality, homelessness is very often experienced by women at a level equivalent to and, in some respects, beyond the level experienced by men.

Finally, methodological flaws in existing data have also led to women being undercounted. This is part of a wider issue with how certain forms of homelessness have been counted. Surveys and counts of homeless people that are carried out over one or two days are more likely to count particular populations, i.e. people who are long-term or repeatedly homeless will be more likely to be experiencing homelessness when a count is happening. In the past, this has led to over-representation of men with high and complex needs in some survey and homeless count data. Surveys and counts also tend to miss women because they cover populations in emergency shelters, living rough and sometimes in supported housing, but do not attempt to enumerate women in situations of hidden homelessness. This is important, because growing evidence around women's experience of homelessness is, as said, indicating that women are more likely to respond to homelessness by entering into precarious and often unsuitable situations of hidden homelessness by staying with relatives, friends and acquaintances.<sup>22</sup>

Where homeless women are visible, they are often heavily 'judged'. Historically, dominant constructions have depicted homeless women as deviant: lacking the ability to live and function 'as women'. Traditional constructions of women's roles, as wives, mothers and/or carers continue to result in the 'othering' of homeless women who do not follow these

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<sup>20</sup> Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2018) *Women and Rough Sleeping: A Critical Review of Current Research and Methodology* London: St Mungo's.

<sup>21</sup> Bretherton, J. and Mayock, P. (2021) op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Bretherton, J. and Mayock, P. (2021) op. cit.

strictures. Homeless single women are often mothers, but no longer live with their children, and this has produced a stigma of 'spoilt' motherhood. The trauma of separation from children and shame associated with this remains largely unrecognised at the policy and practice level. These dimensions of women's homelessness add further complexities to their experiences with services and, some research suggests, create a clear need for services developed, managed and delivered by women, within the broader move towards non-judgemental, strength-based and co-productive ways of working with people with lived experience of homelessness, including but not confined to the Housing First movement.

Services that prejudge, that attempt to modify behaviour in set ways, that use sanctions or eject people for non-compliance, rather than listening to people and respecting their opinions are generally less effective. This has been one of the key reasons for the greater success of the Housing First model in reducing the levels of recurrent and sustained homelessness among people with high and complex needs.<sup>23</sup>

Earlier reports from this research on Housing First for women with complex needs form part of a growing evidence base supporting the idea that women's homelessness is often distinct and can have dimensions of need that differ from those of most men, particularly around the strong associations between domestic abuse and women's homelessness. Women whose homelessness becomes sustained or recurrent, including women who experience primarily or solely 'hidden' forms of homelessness may also have higher, more complex needs and a greater level of vulnerability than is typical among highly vulnerable lone men in situations of recurrent and sustained homelessness.<sup>24</sup>

This creates a case for building new strategies, new services and remodelling existing homelessness prevention and reduction strategies to fully allow for and respond to the gender dynamics of homelessness. Recent research in London indicates the presence of a significant group of lone homeless women with complex needs who are not able to sustainably exit homelessness through existing service options and pathways, emphasising the need for services like Housing First that are specifically modified for women, i.e. designed by and run by women within a co-productive framework.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Pleace, N. (2018) *Using Housing First in Integrated Homelessness Strategies* London: St Mungo's.

<sup>24</sup> Pleace, N.; Bretherton, J. and Mayock, P. (2016) *Long-term and Recurrent Homelessness Among Women in London*, P. and Bretherton, J. *Women's Homelessness in Europe*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 209-234.

<sup>25</sup> Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2021) *Women's Homelessness in Camden: Improving data, strategy and outcomes* London: Fulfilling Lives Islington and Camden.

## 2 Jigsaw Support Housing First: An overview and profile of women using the service

This chapter introduces the Jigsaw Housing First service, briefly describing the main parameters of the service before then profiling the women who used the service over its first five years (April 2015 – April 2020), across demographic characteristics, housing situation and history, support needs and previous involvement with the criminal justice system.

### The Jigsaw Support Housing First service

Jigsaw Support Housing First, at the time of set-up known as Threshold Housing First, was the first specialist form of Housing First for homeless women with a history of offending in the UK.

The service was set up as a pilot project for two years in 2015, across three local authority areas (Tameside, Stockport and Oldham) in Greater Manchester Combined Authority, a major conurbation in the North West of England. After the successful pilot, the service received charitable funding for a further three years (2017-20).

The project was developed through a collaboration of Threshold (now Jigsaw Support) and the Cheshire and Greater Manchester Community Rehabilitation Company, which was looking for a new and effective service that could meet the needs of women with a history of offending, high and complex needs and who also had a history of homelessness.

Jigsaw Support Housing First was designed to support 12 women at a time, using a team of two full-time workers and a part-time manager for the service. There was close collaboration with the Women's Centres in Greater Manchester, which are designed to offer practical and peer support to women with a history of offending.

Women aged 18 and over, both those with and without children, were eligible for the service. People referred to the project were expected to have needs related to both homelessness and experience of involvement in the criminal justice system. The target group for the project was women with complex support needs that also ranged across drug issues, mental health problems, physical health problems and offending behaviour, including those that had been turned away by multiple services.

The Chaos Index<sup>26</sup>, a complex needs assessment scoring system, was used to assess people's eligibility for the service as part of the formal assessment process. The scoring

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<sup>26</sup> Also known as New Directions Team Assessment.

system focuses on a range of areas: engagement with frontline services; self-harm; risk to and from others; stress and anxiety; social effectiveness; alcohol/drug abuse; impulse control, and; housing. A high score in any of these areas denotes a serious problem and support need<sup>27</sup>. Criticisms have been directed at scoring models that attempt to summarise what can be complex and nuanced patterns of need in a short series of questions – and also how this system ignores the strengths and talents of people<sup>28</sup>. However, here the complex needs scoring system was employed as a standardised, initial, proxy measure of support and treatment needs which was followed by detailed assessment with the clear emphasis on personalisation (consumer choice) that defines the Housing First model.

At referral, the women using Jigsaw Housing First tended to score fairly highly. The average score was 31, which was 65% of the theoretical maximum (a score of 48). The minimum score reported was 24 (50% of the theoretical maximum and the minimum required for acceptance onto the service), while the highest was 46 (96% of the theoretical maximum).

## **Referrals to the project**

Over the five year evaluation period (April 2015 to April 2020), a total of 41 women were referred and accepted onto the project. Twelve women were still being supported in April 2020.

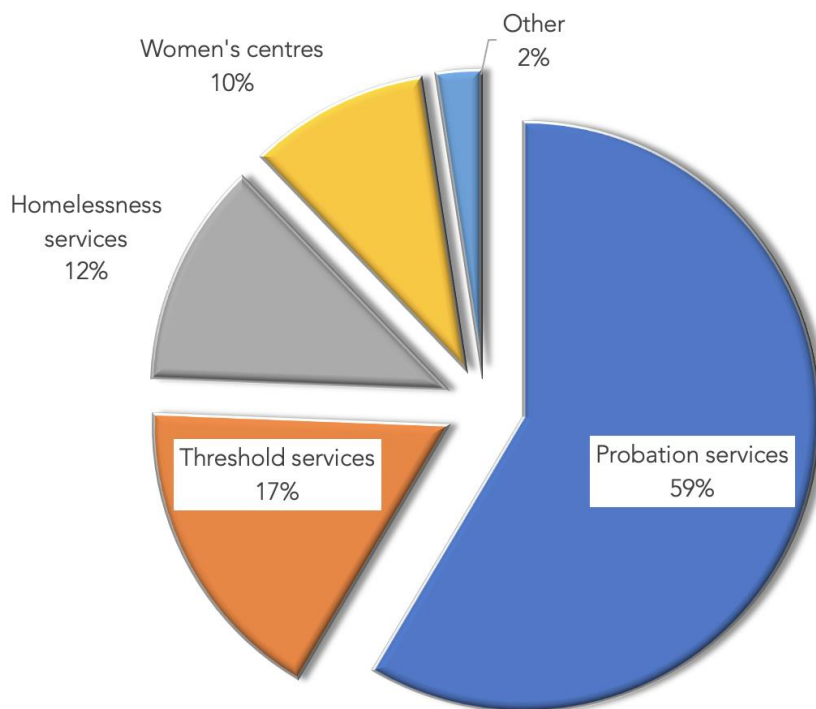
Following the project steering group and referral criteria, nearly six in 10 referrals (59%) were from Probation (including one from a Youth Offender Team). One in six referrals (17%) were from Jigsaw Support's own services, including housing, support and domestic violence services. One in ten (10%) referrals were from women's centres (who worked with women involved in the criminal justice service and experiencing domestic violence). Homelessness and other housing agencies accounted for a further one in eight (12%) referrals (Figure 2.1).

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<sup>27</sup> Data were not collected for one woman using the Jigsaw Support Housing First service.

<sup>28</sup> Johnson, G. and Pleace, N. (2016) 'How Do We Measure Success in Homelessness Services? Critically Assessing the Rise of the Homelessness Outcomes Star' *European Journal of Homelessness* 10.1, pp. 35-55.

**Figure 2.1 Referrals to Jigsaw Support Housing First**



## Profile of women using the service

### Demographic characteristics

Overall, customers were relatively young, with an average age of 32.5. Women using the service were aged between 18 and 52 on referral.

Almost all the women using the service (95%) were of British nationality and all had English as their first language.

The women were mainly single at the point of referral (80%) and the small number with current partners usually lived separately from them (15%), with only two women living with a partner at referral (5%).

Nearly three quarters of women (73%) were parents, having a total of 40 children between them. However, none of these 30 women had any of their children living with them at the point of referral. Further information was available for most of the women, showing that half of the children had been permanently removed, whilst the other half were temporarily in foster care or living with extended family:

- 7 children living with wider family
- 11 children in foster care
- 17 children adopted

Although information was partial, it was known that six women had direct contact with 17 of their children and another three women had indirect contact with seven children.

## Housing situation

At referral, all the women were homeless or at risk of homelessness. The majority of women were recorded as homeless at point of referral (24 women, 59%), with the next largest group being women about to leave prison with no home to go to (13 women, 32%). A small group of women were at risk of homelessness, two with their tenancy at risk, one person living in an unsuitable property and one person fleeing domestic violence (4 women, 10%).

The women were living in a wide range of settings when referred to the service. Table 2.1 shows that nearly a third of women (32%) were staying temporarily with either friends or family at the time of referral. One in five (20%) were in prison, and a further 3 women (7%) had just left prison and were resident in a bail hostel/ approved premises. Six women (15%) were sleeping rough at referral, including two women in tents. Three women were living in local authority temporary accommodation, and a further three people were in refuges.

**Table 2.1: Living situation of women at point of referral**

Type of living situation	Number (percentage)
Staying with family or friends	13 (32%)
In prison	8 (20%)
Rough sleeping/ in tent	6 (15%)
LA temporary accommodation	3 (7%)
Bail hostel/ approved premises	3 (7%)
Other temporary hostel/ accommodation	3 (7%)
Refuge	3 (7%)
Unsuitable property	1 (2%)
Hospital	1 (2%)
Total	41 (100%)

As noted in Chapter 1, research is increasingly demonstrating how women with complex needs may be experiencing multiple forms of homelessness, particularly hidden homelessness, which have made them less visible than single homeless men with high support needs<sup>29</sup>. Whilst, the women using this service were not a representative sample, the diversity of experience of homelessness (and risks of homelessness) is a striking finding, particularly the extent of hidden homelessness.

Although self-reported data on homelessness is limited due to people having differing definitions of homelessness, nearly two thirds of women using Jigsaw Housing First

<sup>29</sup> Bretherton, J. (2017) op. cit.; Mayock, P. and Bretherton, J. (eds) (2016) *Women's Homelessness in Europe* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

reported they had been homeless more than twice (58%), including a quarter of women who had been homeless five or more times<sup>30</sup>:

- 17 women reported they had been homeless once or twice (43%)
- 13 women reported they had been homeless between three or four times (33%)
- 10 women reported they had been homeless five or more times (25%)

Over half (56%) of Jigsaw Housing First users stated that they had been statutorily homeless (that is considered as homeless by a local authority under the homelessness legislation, Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) at some point in their lives. Half of these (11 women) were current applications, of which eight had been accepted as statutorily homeless, with two women found intentionally homeless and a third ineligible (unstated reasons).

The women using Jigsaw Housing First were quite likely to report a history of rent arrears. Twenty women (49%) had a history of rent arrears in the last five years.

At referral, only one woman using Jigsaw Housing First was working; everyone else was reliant on welfare benefits, mainly Employment and Support Allowance for people who have 'a disability or health condition that affects how much you can work'<sup>31</sup>, indicating a level of poor health amongst service users (see next section).

## Support needs

As suggested by the complex needs assessment scores at referral, self-reported traumatic and other difficult life experiences and support needs were very high amongst the women using the service.

As Figure 2.2 shows, virtually all women had experienced domestic violence as adults (38 women, 93%). In addition, 39 women (95%) reported some form of abuse or trauma in their lifetime.

Experience of mental health problems was also reported by nearly all service users (38 women, 93%), with ten women (24%) having stayed in a psychiatric unit. Perhaps less expected given the relatively young age of service users was the high proportion (18 women, 44%) of women reporting physical health problems and/or a disability. Nine women (22%) did not have a GP practice at referral, and 26 (63%) did not have a dentist.

Similarly, 34 of the 41 (83%) women reported either a drug or alcohol problem, with all stating that drugs were an issue, and 30 of these women also stating that alcohol was also an issue for them.

As would be expected with a project seeking to meet the needs of ex-offenders, nearly half (46%) had experience of the prison system, with others experiencing community-based sentences. The longest sentence served varied from 3 to 64 months (with an average of 17 months).

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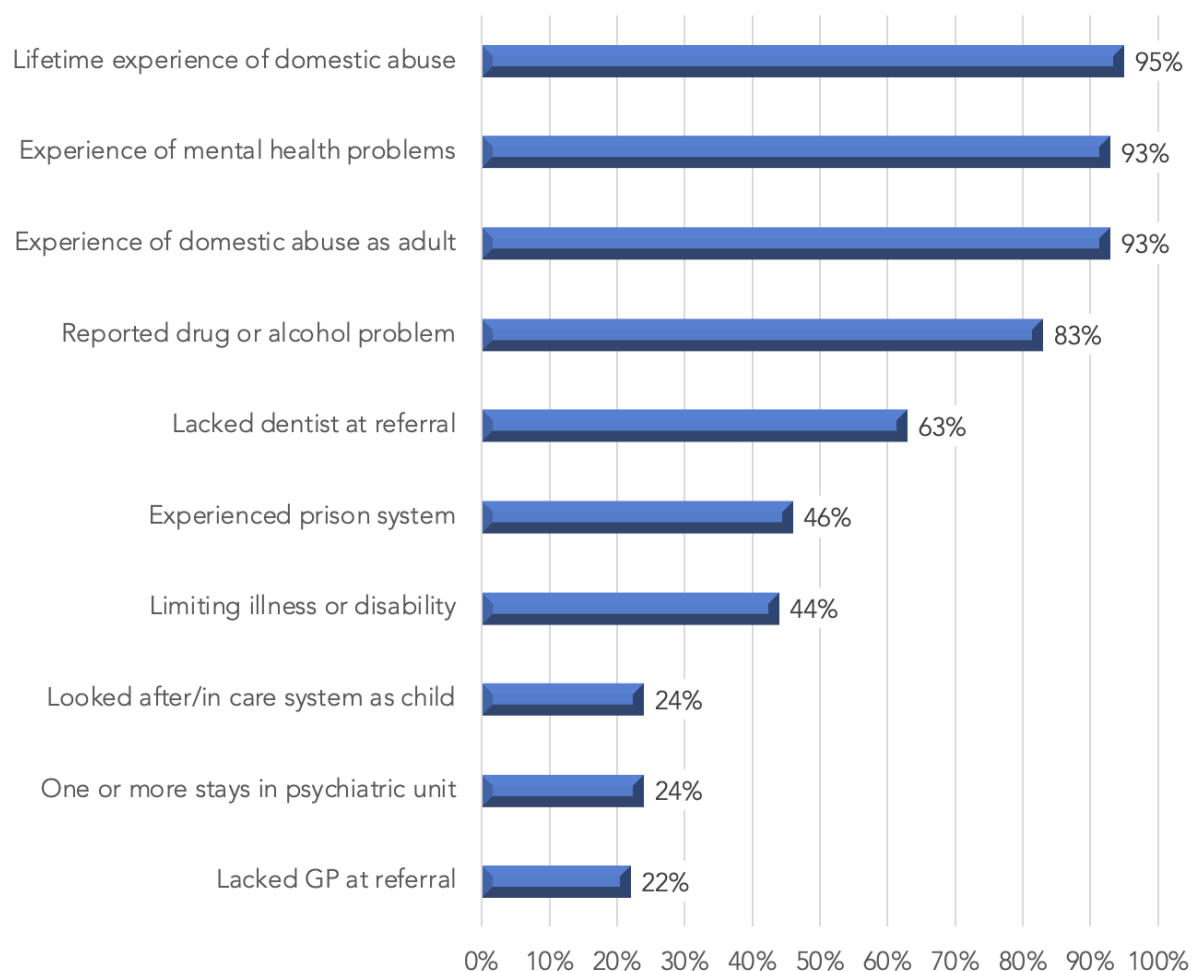
<sup>30</sup> Data were not collected for one service user.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/employment-support-allowance>

Ten women (24%) had experience of the care system (foster care and/or living in a children’s home) as children.

None of the women had served in the military services.

**Figure 2.2 Reported experiences and needs among the women**



For the workers and managers of Jigsaw Housing First, the complexity of the women’s needs was often expressed in terms of the circumstances in which those women had found themselves and which they continued to experience at different levels. Women’s needs existed in an individual sense, because there were issues around mental health, physical health, addiction and other support needs, but also in terms of their former, current and fractured relationships, which often had direct influence on their well-being, quality of life and opportunities.

### Contact with the Criminal Justice System

The women who had been supported by Jigsaw Housing First had all had contact with the criminal justice system<sup>32</sup>. For one group, contact had not been extensive (nine women had

<sup>32</sup> This information was reliable being provided by referral agencies (mainly within the criminal justice system).



one conviction each, 22%), but for another group contact had been repeated (14 women reported 10 or more convictions each, 34%). This latter group included women who were described as prolific offenders.

Detailed anonymised information on offending history was available for 26 women using the project. A total of 831 offences were recorded for 24 women, with the other two women described as 'prolific' offenders. Five of these women had committed between 80-169 offences each.

The women had been convicted of theft and breaches of court orders, but this was a group of people who had also sometimes been convicted of serious offences. A few women had been convicted of assault and other violent offences, though the more serious charges of actual bodily or grievous bodily harm were not widely reported.

Box A shows the meaning of 'complex needs' for women using the service.

**Box A: Threshold Housing First customers: What does 'complex needs' mean in women's lives?**

- Most Threshold customers lived in childhood family settings in which they experienced high stress, including high levels of violence. In addition, almost all women experienced domestic violence in adulthood. The sustained nature of routine violence, and lack of safety, led to long-term trauma and lack of trust in relationships.
- Adverse childhood and adult circumstances also resulted in extremely poor psychological and physical health, including the premature development of chronic illnesses. Many women had undiagnosed or untreated health problems that impacted on other areas of their lives, such as educational achievement and poor employment records.
- Unresolved needs and involvement in violent and controlling relationships often resulted in behaviour that led to punitive responses, including criminal justice interventions. These interventions compounded existing mental health problems and very poor self-esteem.
- Women usually did not have access to sufficient resources (internal and external) to support parenting in adulthood. Some women had multiple children removed from their care, and had to live with the trauma of losing children and being labelled a 'bad mother'.
- Complex needs on a day-to-day basis meant feeling afraid, judged and stigmatised, with low self-belief and lack of hope for the future.

### 3 Delivering Housing First support to women

This third chapter focuses on the support being delivered to the women utilising the Jigsaw Support Housing First project. It describes the support provided, identifying the key features of the Housing First support approach, by drawing on the experiences of staff, agencies and service users themselves.

As with all Housing First services, the Jigsaw Support service aimed to provide an intensive support service to formerly homeless people by both identifying appropriate housing and helping people to settle into their new home and re-build their lives.

The service accessed appropriate housing for women as quickly as possible. Women were given as much choice as was possible, including housing type and location. The housing offer is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Housing related support was provided on an ongoing basis to manage tenancies. Intensive case management was delivered covering any and all aspects of a woman's life that affect her ability to live independently. Daily welfare checks were part of the standard delivery, including in evenings and at weekends<sup>33</sup>. A personalised budget was also available to help women access a range of resources, including items for their home and a telephone to ensure contact is maintained.

As can be seen below, building successful, trusting relationships was at the centre of service delivery, with a strength-based approach adopted. The service was designed to be persistent and reliable, to stand by the women 'no matter what', and advocate for women with other services.

#### Staff and agency views on service delivery

Jigsaw Support Housing First staff spoke about the holistic nature of the Jigsaw Support Housing First service:

*Housing First is a wraparound, its holistic and its tailored to that woman and it can look however she wants it to look and focus on what she wants it to focus on, they can build up a really positive working relationship with the support worker, "you said you were going to do that and you did do that for me" ... you can build up that rapport and really achieve things. (Staff member)*

Staff also spoke about the intensity of support as being key to service delivery. They were able to work with 6-7 customers at one time and offer a very responsive service to customers. Building successful, trusting relationships was at the centre of service delivery. The service was as customer led as possible, and the daily welfare check was seen as crucial to ensure the safety of women:

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<sup>33</sup> Services for people with complex needs do not usually offer evening and weekend contact (Sharpen, 2018; op.cit).

*...building relationships, that's very important as a lot of these women have not had that from people or organisations... it is very different from anything they have come across and many of these women will have had lots of different sorts of rejections, lots of sort of doors closing, no, no, no, we don't want to know if you are going through a low week or a low period, whereas with us that is absolutely fine, you don't want to see us this week or next week, that's absolutely fine... we will still be contacting you every day to make sure you are okay, and that is fundamental in how successful this is, they don't get that anywhere else (Staff member)*

Being persistent was also key to service delivery:

*That's what really stands out, what is the really positive thing that we do is: Persistence, persistence, persistence, we keep chipping away... We don't give up. (Staff member)*

The service wanted to ensure that their customers felt valued. This was seen as essential for people to start believing in themselves:

*They've got people... but they are not there, no-one gives, no-one cares, no-one supports and it is that attitude, we are here for you, it's about you this, we are going to get you a roof over your head, and we are then going to start looking at what needs getting addressed and what you want to be doing, valuing them I suppose, whereas they might never have had that, or had that kind of feeling, even if they've had their own social worker, the state of social care, you don't get that quality time.. it's the support really that makes them want to stay with us...if they need us for 7 hours a day we are going to be there... it's there every day if you want it... (Staff member)*

Staff also explained how they used motivational interviewing techniques to deliver a strength based approach to working with women. It was crucial to stress people's potential, rather than limitations stemming from traumatic past experiences:

*...positivity, by saying well done, bigging them up, as they've probably never had it... by just being positive and giving them that confidence, that kind of thing, it makes a massive difference... (Staff member)*

Agencies spoke very highly of the support provided by the Jigsaw Support Housing First services. The high intensity of the support was one of the most valued elements of the support. There was a recognition that other services, particularly statutory providers, did not have enough time to support the women on a day-to-day basis with tasks such as accessing GPs, other health services and helping them manage their tenancy. The service was able to offer support with, 'All the bits that hold everything together really'. The daily welfare checks were also felt to be incredibly valuable:

*The part of the service that I found really good was that they rang them every day, and the women really really took to that, a few of mine just said it's really nice, I know that I'm going to get that call today and someone cares... I didn't find many of the women didn't respond to that... they could say that they were having a good day, as well as when having a bad day and could off-load.... Rather than getting to a crisis... (Agency representative)*

Agencies also praised the service for adopting a client-led approach to service delivery. The service was able to work closely with women to identify possible activities and opportunities that could enrich their lives and well-being.

*It's an absolutely fantastic service... We do the things that needed to be done from a risk management perspective, they would also take on the women's perspective of what they want, it was very client led....* (Agency representative)

The Jigsaw Support Housing First service was also felt to offer a good balance between offering support to women but being sensitive not to create a dependency on them. The service was also seen to be offering 'appropriate' levels of support over time to meet increasing or reducing need.

## Using the Jigsaw Support Housing First Project: The Views of Women

### A flexible, wide ranging service

Women explained that the project Housing First assisted them with all aspects of their lives, that support was comprehensive, flexible and responsive to their needs:

*There's not one thing that I've asked for help with and they've not helped me, there is nothing that they've said no to or I can't do that, absolutely everything, they are brilliant.* (Service user)

*Things they help me with... my housing, bills, debts, anything like, if I'm low on money and I need a food parcel, they will help me out with that, any forms, going to the doctors with me, anything I need help with, I can ask her and she will help me with. If it's anyway impossible, she will work around it and we'll get it done.* (Service user)

*Yeah, they come to the doctors with me and speak to me doctor, cos I'm on antidepressants now, but cos I've moved we've got to get a new doctors and that's what I were doing Thursday...(Service user)*

*I was due to become homeless and this is how I ended up with this property....before I actually lost me house I got a property, which was brilliant for me. So I didn't actually end up homeless because they were quick at it, they pushed things along, and that's so I didn't end up on the streets. They made sure I had a tenancy that was suitable for me; I told 'em like I had a fear of heights, things like that (01.27) and they managed to get me a ground floor flat which was suitable...(Service user)*

Women described a very 'hands on' service, which offered lots of practical help. Assistance included:

- Finding and furnishing accommodation
- Helping to decorate their accommodation
- Helping sort out bills and benefits
- Buying food/ meals (including shopping)
- Getting food parcels
- Buying clothes (including shopping)

- Buying a mobile phone
- Attending activities/ meetings with them (for example, women's centre/ drug services)
- Open bank accounts
- Register with doctors/ dentists
- Helping with contact with children
- Helping make house secure from violent ex-partners
- Sort out medication/ health matters
- Accessing courses
- Accessing the gym
- Going for walks or to local places like museums

Without exception, the women using the service described this practical support as very helpful to them:

*...they did pay my phone bill for me because I struggled. But out of the whole time I've not asked for anything. They've done me flooring and just last week or the week before my cooker blew so they did get me a new cooker... (Service user)*

*..She has helped me get some clothes, because I had nothing... she's helped me sort my benefits out, she is helping me decorate my flat, she's got an award for me (Service user)*

*She also bought me a mobile phone as well which has been a really big help so I could get in touch with people, doctors, benefits, that's been a real big help (Service user)*

*If I've needed it, yeah, yeah, they have been helping me a lot, cos when I had no fridge I was finding it hard because I couldn't buy shopping so me money weren't lasting me. But she already, she's brought me food parcels when I've needed it and stuff, and then she rushed the fridge along then when she realised that I weren't, it weren't like lasting long. (Service users)*

Women also described a project that offered them considerable emotional support. This support was hugely appreciated by the women, not least because many women had such little support in their past and present lives.

*I don't have many people in life but [the worker] is one of them... I'd be pretty in the shit if not...(Service user)*

*... it's fair to say that she has been there more for me, in the past four month, than my mum has in my entire life. I don't look at her like a mum, but she is just somebody who has supported me like my own family should have done, really. (Service user)*

Very few women could think of how the service could do anything further for them. The first interim report highlighted a request for counselling support and more help with leisure activities such as swimming. In the second round of interviews, one of the women would have dearly loved to be able to horse ride (and a second was hoping to train in horses); this area may be worth investigating in the future. A couple of users also suggested that it would be good if the project allowed them to travel in the worker's cars (something also raised by one agency).

Women talked about getting access to things they wouldn't have deemed possible without Jigsaw Support's help. The benefits of working with the service extended into the connections that workers were able to make, the opportunities, services and contacts they were able to facilitate and there were some very positive reports from the women in this regard.

*Honestly she's, she's flipping amazing. She's took me to the Buddhist Centre, I wanted to, cos that's what I'd done when I, I was in custody and I wanted to do it when I came out, so she found one in Manchester; so she did that with me, we went there, that was amazing. She, she's got me a gym pass so I can do that; oh she just, I can't really put it in a nutshell, she's just... (Service user)*

*It's a Health and Well, is it, I think it's Health and Wellbeing College; it's not far from here near the Court. I should have brought my leaflet, my booklet with me...I'm doing Arts for, what's it, Arts for, Arts for Wellbeing...There's one about anxiety and there's another one. I'm doing three courses but I don't know what the other, I can't remember what the other one was called. (Service user)*

*Yeah, massive with, massive with the tenancy, getting me the tenancy, setting me up with the, the basic things; now and again they've had to get me food from the, what do they call them? Food banks. And just talking, just talking and knowing it's safe to talk... (Service user)*

When asked if there were any gaps in the service, the overall feeling reported by women was that the staff at Jigsaw Support were 'faultless' in their approach and in the extent and quality of support they offered the women.

*Brilliant. Honestly I'm not even lying, I can't, I couldn't even, I can't fault 'em, I really, really can't fault 'em. (Service user)*

*They give me support with absolutely; I don't know what, even know what, I probably wouldn't even be here now if it weren't for them. They're just like, they've nothing whatsoever that you could complain, that I can complain about. (Service user)*

*Nothing whatsoever; even stuff that I've not expected to have they've always offered me it, it before I've had chance to tell them...(Service user)*

## **Relational, non-judgemental support**

Women often reported that the relationships that they had with the workers were very good, that they felt understood, listened to and were working with people who did not judge them and were on their side. Often it was simply the support workers presence and attitude that was reported as making the biggest difference for women.

*Do you know what (laughs) it's not even like, you'd think it'd be all these fancy things and it's not, just her, just, just her, me and her just click, we just click. So she can*

*come round to the house and I can feel like shit and I end up making her laugh her head off, cos I've always been like that, a bit of a joker, just, just her. (Service user)*

*Well I know I've got someone that I can turn, do you know like, like even [worker] she phones me, and I don't know the other guys who phone me but they phone me every day, and I know I could phone them anytime, do you know? (Service user)*

*It's like having someone to rely on. It's not like I've not got it with me best friend but, do you know, she's got four, four kids and that and she don't, she don't need it. So it's like if I were ever in like desperate I know who I could ring, if you know what I mean? (Service user)*

*[worker] makes me feel comfortable and she says I can phone her any, any time, do you know like, and [second worker], she makes, she rings me, like I get a phone call all the time. It makes you feel a bit safer, do you know? (Service user)*

Women felt that the support was effective because it adopted what many of the women reported was a non-judgemental approach. This was important, because transformative effects from working with Housing First were reported as stemming from encountering a different set of attitudes, specifically a more positive set of attitudes and a way of approaching support that did not prejudge and recognised women's opinions and strengths. This created the sense that positive change was possible, that there were different horizons and that women were not in situations in which, because they were negatively judged from the start, they did not feel that a better life was possible. By having this more positive, engaged and non-judgemental mindset, Housing First created a stronger sense that positive change was possible and, according to the women, reportedly reinforced self-esteem, which again, contributed to a sense of an improvement in life being possible.

*And it's like what I've found with other services...they would judge me from the Police or say I can't work with you, or they swore at me, whereas this service is completely different, the workers actually listen to me and they ask me what was wrong as to why I was saying them things and why I was behaving in that way, and they talked me through and they talked me down to where I was calm and laughing again. So just cos they had listened to me and spoken to me about it I found myself coming into a calm place again so as that no longer mattered, whereas if I didn't have that I'd probably be explosive on doing whatever I were doing. So it was the way the workers actually worked with me at the time. (Service user)*

*And that's what I liked about this service; and it wasn't just easy to say, well you swore at me, that is it, and close the door...(Service user)*

*...they understood that there was reasons to me behaviour and why I were behaving in that way. (Service user)*

*...like cos they'll ring like "Are you OK?" And they'll email, I'm like "I don't want to speak today, to be honest with yer, I've been drinking" blah-blah-de-blah. "Oh [name] don't let it get you down" blah-blah-blah "I'll come and speak to you*

*tomorrow.” So the next day I won’t have a drink, I’ll snap out of it, tidy up cos they’re coming; yeah, and they don’t judge you or anything so it’s right good. (Service user)*

Recognising and responding to different dimensions of need was also reported as a strength for the Housing First service. An important point here was that women could often feel that there is an emphasis on the needs of a child whereas the needs of the mother are often overlooked. The Housing First service filled that gap, it recognised and responded to the needs of women who had often lost contact with children and in this was seen as different from other services that, in several senses, only *indirectly* protected a mother, while mainly focusing on children, whereas women felt they and their needs were properly seen and responded to by Housing First.

*And somebody’s who’s got your back as well and sees your side of things and your point of view, cos like the social workers are there for the kids and they don’t care about like how the mother’s feeling or anything, whereas these workers are there for the kids and the mother, so. (Service user)*

Overall, women reported how they felt they could be more open with their workers and made favourable comparisons with other services.

*Yeah, and like I don’t have to feel like I have to pretend anything, do you know, like I can tell her the truth and, and, do you know, like to let it off your shoulders and not be judged, if, if you know what I mean? (Service user)*

*So since I’ve started opening up, cos I’ve always found that hard, all the way through my life, at opening up, and then being to prison just made it harder; obviously the relationship before being in prison, so yeah, and she, [worker] has been tremendous with that, and I think the consistency as well, it’s not, like Probation I’ve had nine probation officers, which is horrific...(Service user)*

*When she came to visit me the first time, her sitting, her sitting with me and actually listening to my story, that were the most helpful because she took it all on board... she sat there and listened to ME, and not judged me – like other people who I’ve been to see, I feel like they are judging instead of listening to me, and she wasn’t like that...and she took everything on board and that’s what she has worked off and it has just been brilliant, her support and how much she has taken the time out for me really – she is really good because she has taken the time out for me and no-one ever does that for me. (Service user)*

## **Frequent/ available service**

Many women described a high level of contact with project staff. Daily contact by phone was standard, with face-to-face varying according to how often they wanted to see workers. Service users appeared unanimously happy with the level of support, receiving enough support but also not too much support.

The frequency/ intensity of the service was higher than other services that people were in contact with or had been contact with in the past – and was preferred by users.



*You go in and have a chat with your probation officer and see how you are and how you are doing and everything... but these are more better because you see them near enough every day like, well I do, and I've got their numbers and everything, they have just said, 'If you need anything, just give us a ring'... I prefer talking to these than the probation officer, obviously, you know. (Service user)*

*She will take the time out of her weekend or watching the soaps at night, she will take the time out, an hour or half an hour, to ring me, to see how I'm doing – that is really good that. Cos I have been with a few different agencies before, that were a bit like this but they were rubbish, they were a lot worse, they never rung me on a weekend just to see how I'm doing and stuff like that, that's really good. (Service user)*

The daily welfare checks appeared to be really appreciated as it showed that the workers really cared about them, as one woman explained, 'you know that they are still thinking about you'. Another woman said:

*I have phone contact every day, even at weekends – welfare checks, I love those welfare checks... because who phones at the weekend to see if you are alright? Nobody. But they do... It made me feel good that somebody is actually worried about me... it's amazing... it gives me that little boost every day, I like it. (Service user)*

## **A reliable service**

In part due to the nature/ intensity of the service, and in part due to the professional commitment of the workers employed, women stressed the reliability of the service – it was available to them when they needed it, for whatever they needed. Where workers were busy, they got back to customers as quickly as possible. They also actioned support as quickly as possible. In short, women felt they could rely on – and trust – Jigsaw Support Housing First to support them. From the perspective of staff, this meant that they “did not give up” on the women using the service.

*They told me that they would get me a property, which they have done; they told me that they would support me, which they have done; that they would get me into education – and I'm getting an apprenticeship in January... a few months ago I wouldn't have even thought about doing college...(Service user)*

One woman described how this kind of reliability of service was rare in her experience. This woman felt that she had been let down by a range of services, including Probation, her CPN and workers in supported accommodation.

*They always get back to me, a lot of services where they say we will do this, we will do that, you just get passed from pillar to post – but when they say they are doing something, they do it... I've had a really hard life and nothing has ever been seen through, basically, but with them, they have... They have not let me down once...I've been passed around from pillar to post, no-one has really helped me at all... they pass you to one person and that person will work with you, and they will leave and another person will come along, and you end up explaining it all again, then they say they will do this and then 3 weeks later you are on the phone and asking if anything has been done and they are like, 'Oh, I'm just getting round to it'...(Service user)*

It was really important that the service was able to offer consistent and ongoing support to women as they had very difficult childhoods, as well as adulthoods, and found it very difficult to trust others. Some women had often experienced multiple rejections and been abandoned in the past. One woman told us how the service had told her, *'I won't abandon you, it's you that's got to abandon me, you've got to sign me off... Basically I thought I was worthless and now I now I'm worth it'*.

## **Choice and control**

Service users spoke highly of a service that gave them as much choice and control as possible, also comparing favourably to other services which (sometimes for statutory reasons) were highly directive:

*They tried pushing me to do it, the [YOT] worker, they tried saying, [name], you're doing this, you are doing that, and it was like, I'm not. These are like, you can do it, these things are there if you want it, just take it if whenever you want it... I think they know me here, for four month(s). I knew my YOT worker for eight nine months but she didn't know me. They have actually took time out to get to know me and stuff, and that's good. (Service user)*

Some service users struggled with self-direction, but felt that the workers had the right approach in explaining and facilitating options:

*I don't have a clue sometimes what to do or who to go to, or what I need to be doing, and I don't know, they put everything into place, I know you shouldn't have everything done for you, but they do it with you, they explain things... not 'get this done!'...it really helps... they are not overbearing...but they will teach you. (Service user)*

## **Changes and challenges in support**

Women did report worries about end of support due to the possible end to the funding for the service and this was reported as a source of stress. Wider research has looked at this question across Housing First services in England and found some significant concerns about both the level and sustainability of funding, as when Housing First services are dependent on local authority contracts, funding is often limited and short term. In addition, some issues around the strategic integration of Housing First services across England have been raised, because there are not necessarily suitable services to refer people on to, should their needs change or funding for a Housing First service be reduced or cease altogether.<sup>34</sup>

*Basically just that the, the, I think the man that, I don't know if it's a few people, a few companies, but I know there's one particular man that funds it and that funding ends, I'm not sure if it ends in March; and I don't think they really know what's gonna happen, whether New Charter and Jigsaw will take it under their wing and do it, I don't know. But I think if it doesn't carry on, God, I think it'd be really shit for some*

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<sup>34</sup> Blood, I.; Birchill, A. and Pleace, N. (2021) Reducing, changing or ending Housing First support London: Homeless Link/Housing First England.

*people. I mean I've not got to where I need to be but I'm a lot further than what I was, and I, I, I worry for girls coming out if that wasn't there... (Service user)*

Several women spoke of the difficulties in managing a home, finances, bills and so on, on first leaving prison. This was something that Housing First had helped them with but some women reported a need for more support prior to release and around obtaining a property. Some women mentioned that they thought the service should have done much more earlier on and then possibly they would have avoided getting into trouble. This was within a broader picture of very positive attitudes towards the service as a whole, but some of the women nevertheless thought earlier and more intensive support would have further enhanced the service.

*Struggling, yeah. Because before I'd gone to prison I was in an abusive relationship, everything was controlled, I didn't have any control over anything, then obviously I went to prison; they don't, they don't set you up, they, they don't set you up to come out and, and think right...you know, when you get a flat this is what's gonna happen, this is... (Service user)*

*...you, you know, you've got to pay these bills and stuff like that. So I'm just bobbing along, bobbing along, yeah, and I just got in such a mess because I didn't, I just didn't know how to live, I just didn't know how to pay and, cos I'd been to pri, I'd been in prison four and a half years. So I'm, like I say, before, thirteen years before that I wasn't in control of anything; so it was, so it was a real struggle to just, I don't know, just to get, just to be normal, you know, and just like, like everybody else; you've got to pay bills, and I, I, I just, I just didn't have that mentality, I didn't... (Service user)*

**Box B: The Jigsaw Housing First approach: What is valued by women using the service?**

- **Staff who care and champion you**

*I think its cos with Threshold there is someone there that actually gives a shit...*

*They have both [women's centre and threshold worker] fought for my corner, when I thought there was no-one out there, who'd want to take me on, or want to fight for me, I thought I was just on my own, that I was alone, but now obviously I can say that I'm not, having these ladies around, it's just been great... there are people out there who do actually care about people like me...*

*I feel like they've got no lengths that they won't go to.*

- **Being listened to – and not judged**

*When she came to visit me the first time, her sitting, her sitting with me and actually listening to my story, that were the most helpful because she took it all on board... she sat there and listened to ME, and not judged me – like other people who I've been to see, I feel like they are judging instead of listening to me, and she wasn't like that...*

- **Being positive**

*They are always complimenting, picking out the good thing...*

*Each time I get a negative they give me a positive to bring me back up.*

- **Being asked about what will work for them; supporting their choices**

*...they just give me options you know*

*It was like that with my support worker before, pushing me into group sessions and stuff. Threshold, they're not pushy one bit like, it's all down to me sort of thing.*

- **Being available, including in evenings/weekends**

*I have phone contact every day, even at weekends – welfare checks, I love those welfare checks...*

*because who phones at the weekend to see if you are alright? Nobody. But they do... It made me feel good that somebody is actually worried about me... it's amazing... it gives me that little boost every day, I like it.*

*Always someone there when you need to speak to someone...*

- **Being reliable/doing what they say**

*They told me that they would get me a property, which they have done; they told me that they would support me, which they have done; that they would get me into education – and I'm getting an apprenticeship in January... a few months ago I wouldn't have even thought about doing college...*

*...In the past, [services] have built me up and then basically dropped me like a brick but Threshold are with me every step of the way with everything.*

## 4 Project outcomes

This fourth chapter focuses on the project 'outcomes' for the women using the Housing First service. It begins by outlining the numbers of people who have used the project over its five year evaluation period, before moving on to consider key outcomes: most importantly, tenancy sustainability, alongside wider outcomes including on health, relationships and re-offending rates.

### Project service users over time

At the end of the project, 12 cases were still open, and 29 closed.

Of the closed cases, two thirds (64%) of these were closed in a planned way, with just over a third (36%) unplanned. Table 4.1 shows the main reasons for the ending of support. For planned cases, this was usually after a completed programme of support although a few people moved out of area or declined further support. For unplanned cases, four women were taken into custody, one lost contact, another declined support, one person left their supported accommodation and, sadly, one person died.

**Table 4.1: Reasons for case closures**

	Planned	Unplanned
Completed programme of support	8	
Taken into custody		4
Moved out of area	3	
Declined support	2	1
Moved to care home	1	
Died		1
Lost contact		1
Abandoned supported accom		1
Other	2	1

Note: missing information for 4 cases

### Housing outcomes

#### Housing sustainment

The main measure of success in Housing First projects is the proportion of people housed who remain stably housed on an annual basis/ at the end of the evaluation. This measure

allows for any planned housing moves where people move to another more suitable tenancy.

Over the five year period, a total of 26 women (65%) were supported with permanent (re)housing: 23 women using Housing First were supported to find a permanent tenancy, as well as 3 women who were supported to remain in tenancies that were at risk at the time of referral<sup>35</sup>. Of the 23 women who were allocated tenancies:

- 12 women were allocated a permanent tenancy and remained in this for their full period of support;
- 7 women had planned moves following the first allocation:
  - 4 women were moved once, allocated a second tenancy after the first did not meet their needs;
  - 3 women moved twice, with the project helping to find them two further properties until their needs were met;
- 3 women moved to family after the permanent accommodation did not meet their needs (in 2 cases this was due to domestic violence and the women were supported to move to live with family members);
- 1 woman took up a job with tied accommodation.

In addition, of the 3 women who had tenancies that were at risk, two women remained in their tenancies (although one of these was still at risk); with a third woman having moved to supported accommodation.

In terms of tenancy sustainment in Housing First, planned moves are considered part of a successful move to a permanent residence. The moves by women were required for a number of reasons, including experience of domestic violence and the unsuitability of the property (affordability, facilities and location). A few people had been allocated private sector tenancies and had then moved to social tenancies.

If we are concerned with successful housing, then one would consider the 19 people in tenancies, plus one person who was settled in their tenancy that had been at risk, making a total of 20/26 women housed, a tenancy sustainment rate of 77%. If we include the person who had moved onto work and tied accommodation (which is not permanent but secure for the time of employment), this would increase the rate to 81%. This rate of tenancy sustainment is similar to the broader evidence on Housing First in England and in other economically developed countries, where rates of between 70% to 90% are being achieved, usually summarised as a rate of about eight out of every ten service users.

The 20 successful tenancies were all social housing. Importantly, the vast majority were from the Jigsaw group of services: eleven from New Charter Housing Trust (now Jigsaw Homes Tameside), three from Threshold Living (now Jigsaw Support), two from Contour, and one from Riverside and First Choice Homes Oldham, respectively. The importance of rehousing via Jigsaw's own housing stock cannot be overstated.

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<sup>35</sup> Data were available on 40 of 41 women on housing outcomes.

## Other housing outcomes

As reported above, 26 of the 40 women (for whom data was available) had been housed (or helped to sustain tenancies) over the course of the evaluation.

Of the remaining 14 women, all of these were closed cases (including one dormant). Five of these people left in a planned way for the following reasons:

- one woman moved to a care home for older people;
- one moved out of area to supported accommodation;
- two women were in hospital and declined further support from the project on discharge;
- one woman chose to be referred to a different provider for supported accommodation.

Eight people left the service in an unplanned way, in the following circumstances:

- one woman declined support whilst living in temporary accommodation;
- one woman disengaged and sadly died (was of No Fixed Abode);
- one woman disengaged whilst living with family;
- one woman abandoned their supported accommodation;
- four women were returned/ recalled to custody before they could be housed.

## Housing quality

The twenty women who had maintained their tenancies were asked by the Housing First support workers to rate their satisfaction with their housing in a number of areas. Overall, twelve women were 'very satisfied' with their tenancy; five were 'fairly satisfied'; 1 was 'not very satisfied'; (two unknown). In addition:

- Twelve women were 'very satisfied' with their 'local area as a place to live'; two women were 'fairly satisfied'; (six unknown)
- Ten women stated they felt 'very strongly' belonged to their neighbourhood; four felt 'fairly strongly'; one 'sometimes' and a further person, 'not at all' strongly; (4 unknown).
- Twelve women reported 'feeling safe' in their tenancy 'all of the time'; with four saying 'most of the time' and two women saying 'some of the time'; one person did not feel safe any of the time; (1 unknown)
- Twelve women said they didn't 'worry about losing their home', although five women said that they did worry about this; (3 unknown)
- Eighteen of the women reported that they would 'be sorry if I had to leave here and move somewhere else'; (1 unknown)
- Nineteen women reported that their home made them feel they were 'doing well in life'; (1 unknown)
- Nineteen women reported that they could do 'what they wanted, when they wanted' in their homes; (1 unknown)
- Nineteen women reported they could 'get away from it all' in their homes; (1 unknown)

- Space standards in rented housing were described as sufficient in nineteen cases; (1 unknown).
- Everyone who replied described their homes as in 'good condition' (1 unknown).

These findings indicated that final outcomes (sometimes after planned moves, see above) in terms of the quality and safety of the housing were often good, if not always entirely perfect. The women using the service, who had been rehoused, were often positive about their homes. They explained that the properties were in good condition and were either furnished or the project had helped them to furnish the property.

*It's a bedsit but it's fully furnished, newly decorated, new carpets, new blinds, it's really nice. (Service user)*

The location of the properties was very important to service users. A number of women described how they were relieved to be living away from where they previously lived for safety reasons in the case of domestic violence and/or being away from wider negative influences of peer groups and problems associated with poor neighbourhoods. As outlined above, a few women had needed to move as a perpetrator had located them - but the service helped women to find a new, safe property.

## **Securing Housing**

Staff working in Jigsaw Support Housing First, and other agencies, all highlighted difficulties in accessing affordable and adequate housing in Greater Manchester. A shortage of housing was a general problem, with customers with complex needs and often failed tenancies in the past, finding it almost impossible to access housing without specialist assistance.

However, over time, Jigsaw Support Housing First had established relationships with housing providers. By 2017, they were working with four housing providers (three offering two properties per year and one offering four properties per year) and a number of private landlords, as well as an agreement with every landlord in one of the three areas.

The interim report noted considerable early success in accessing properties. However, agencies reported that there were greater difficulties in accessing housing in the second year of the project, with some customers having to wait a number of months for housing. Due to these delays, the service made a decision to offer support to women who were waiting for housing, as they felt it was unfair not to do so, although they acknowledged that the ideal model would be to secure housing almost immediately and offer support alongside this.

*I think it would be great if there were more properties available...because the staff are willing to do the work and usually the clients are willing to put their bit in too, it's just having the facilities there, the actual house and stuff. (Agency representative)*

*I believe that they do really good work but their hands are tied awaiting on properties... (Agency representative)*

In the second half of the project, the majority of properties were sourced from within the Jigsaw housing group. This highlighted the importance of having a known housing source for



properties. This has also been highlighted in other Housing First projects where a partnership with a housing provider can make the difference in making a project viable<sup>36</sup>.

## Impact and meaning of successful rehousing

Staff at Jigsaw Support Housing First highlighted the importance of housing:

*The thing is, when they got their accommodation, they realise they can achieve something...they've always wanted to change things in their life, but they've not been given that opportunity, because they've all exhausted services and resources...*  
(Staff member)

Service users explained that getting a property was a huge weight off their shoulders, that really did provide an opportunity for them to start building a new life.

*Just hearing those words that I've got a property on Monday, it has taken a big weight off my shoulders, it's like wow, it's a Godsend. She has been working with me for two weeks and she has just been so amazing, she's been my angel basically, I want to cry when she phoned me to let me know, I couldn't believe how quick she did it for me...when they phoned me this morning, I was over the moon – even though the sun was out I wanted the moon out to – to jump over! (Service user)*

*What would you say is the most useful thing so far?*

*Getting me a property, because I thought how am I going to get myself sorted like without having somewhere to live, you know...it drives you on the beer because you've got nowhere, do you know, so and I am absolutely grateful that they have got me a property. First step isn't it? (Service user)*

*So far, what would you say is the most useful type of help provided?*

*Helping me find somewhere to live, the housing side. I was homeless for eight years, on the streets... they took my kids off me and I walked out of my house that day.*  
(Service user)

The importance of a home in creating a sense of security and safety, sometimes called a sense of ontological (life) security has been highlighted in American research among longer term users of Housing First services. The role of housing as a base on which to build, providing settled and safe living was found to be significant in housing sustainment and movement away from homelessness among people using Housing First for five years or more<sup>37</sup>. Project staff explained that they referred to people's new housing as their 'forever home', this term seemed to be realised in some user accounts:

*I have never felt that anywhere has been home, but here, with the help they have given me, just doing things, I've got it to how I want it, I'll never move now, that will be me now.... And I feel safe. (Service user)*

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<sup>36</sup>Blood, I., Alden, S. & Quilgars, D. (2020) *Rock Trust Housing First for Youth: Evaluation Report*, Housing First Europe Hub/ Rock Trust. <https://www.rocktrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/HF4Y-Evaluation-Report-July-2020-Final.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Padgett, D. K. (2007). There's no place like (a) home: Ontological security among persons with serious mental illness in the United States. *Social science & medicine*, 64(9), 1925-1936, p. 1934.

*I feel like I'm making a nice home, it's not just a place, it's a home, and it's mine, I can call it mine, so that's a nice feeling as well, to say that I've got my own home.*  
(Service user)

## Health and wellbeing

### Mental health

Self-assessments of mental health were available for nine of the twenty women who were successfully resettled - at referral and then at the end of the project (or when completed support if earlier). The findings here were quite stark. At referral, 8/9 women stated that their mental health was either 'bad' or 'very bad' (with one person saying it was 'fair'). At the end of the support, 6/9 stated that their mental health was either 'good' or 'very good' (and three said 'fair'). In all of these nine cases, self-assessed mental health had improved.

In addition, assessments were available for a further 10 settled women - here, four women stated their mental health was 'good' or 'very good', 3 'fair', and three 'bad' or 'very bad'. Overall, the vast majority of women settled in permanent housing had fair, good or very good mental health.

Women described how the support was helping them to reduce their anxiety and stress by addressing problems they were facing in a positive way with the support of the workers.

*Don't get aggressive with people, don't get violent, ring me, sound off to me' and we talk about it the next day... It's really helped, really really helped, because I am quite aggressive and I lose my temper real quick ... with them I can swear and get it all out, and then say thank you!... I'd be lost without them.* (Service user)

*I phone up [the worker] with a problem. I have no way of sorting this out, but [the worker] says, 'Calm down, give me 2 minutes, I'll sort it out', she phones back and it is sorted and I'm like, 'Wow', the big weight has gone off my shoulders, and I'm not stressed anymore for the whole day, otherwise I would be stressing for the whole week until I saw her... It's made me a happier person, definitely – and it's hard to make me happy!... I get stuck in my little depression bouts, and obviously if I can't get out of them depressions then I'm going to stay like that, but [the worker] helps me out of it, she drags me out... go for a coffee, that gets me out of the house, it gets me meeting people and seeing the world, better than my own four walls.* (Service user)

Women explained how Jigsaw Support Housing First was supporting their mental health in terms of helping them to move on with their lives and look forward to the future.

*They have just helped with everything, absolutely everything, they have got my confidence back up... cos I've felt for the past few years, with my ex-partner, I've been like in a little shell and I've not been able to get out of it, but seeing them, talking to them and making plans with them, it has kind of opened me up a little bit... It sounds crazy like... she has done loads, absolutely loads.* (Service user)

*Confidence...I know more about my rights now...confidence about speaking my mind but doing it appropriately.* (Service user)

For one woman, the service appeared to represent the last option for them, and one that had really transformed their mental health. This user was interviewed twice and she explained that there she had 'gone downhill' a few times, turning her phone off, but that the Housing First worker always managed to re-engage her, get her out and about and back on track.

*I know 100% that I would have topped myself – and I would have done it properly this time, there were no options for me, there was no avenues to go, there was nothing, I didn't have a clue what I was doing, the staff at [supported accommodation] were not doing anything to help, I was asking them... I had nothing, there was nothing I could do... but now I've got the world now! I feel so much better, taking care of my hair and my makeup – ask them what I was like when they first met me... I was just slumming, really bad, I was so depressed.... A different outlook on life now, completely. (Service user)*

Jigsaw Support Housing First staff believed that there had been some definite change in women's mental and emotional health in the main because the service could offer an intensive service – this meant that staff could assist people quickly to decrease anxiety, stress and worry, and also spend the time needed to reassure clients and undertake health enhancing activities.

*It is the time that we can give these ladies... Instead of that once a week somebody is coming around, they can ring me and say, 'I'm not feeling great, can you come around tomorrow?' I can spend all morning with them, do some baking, whatever it is that they want to do, for their mental health. I'm taking women to the gym as well and getting monthly passes for the gym to enable them to go on their own. That all helps their mental health. (Staff member)*

Some external agencies also recognised that the Jigsaw Support Housing First offered a potentially transformative service to women, providing the time and commitment needed to empower women to regain control of their lives.

*A massive difference, an absolutely massive difference...the women that they work with, the investment that they can give is what they really need, it's the empowerment, it's the increase in their self worth... they can advocate for them, it is person centred. IF they had the stock of houses there, there wouldn't be a service that matched up to it, it's just absolutely outstanding, it just rises above anything else that I've heard of or worked with. (Agency representative)*

*I think it is having a massive impact... It gives somebody a great deal of independence and I'm guessing that that person would feel quite valued as well, you know, here is a property, we are going to help you, and eventually achieve a level of independence where you no longer need us, that is quite empowering for a person who has perhaps never had stable accommodation before. (Agency representative)*

## **Addiction**

About a quarter of all women received specific support with drug and/or alcohol use during their time with Jigsaw Support Housing First. More generally, support workers supported a harm reduction approach, helping women to make positive changes in this area where they wished to. They also attempted to reduce stress in women's lives, which indirectly could

reduce the need for self-medication. Offering choice to women often led to them reducing harmful practices as they felt more in control of their lives.

*Here it's more laid back...they understand that you know you might have... mental issues, physical issues or alcohol or drug addiction, whatever it is. They take all that into consideration and know that it's got to go at a slow pace. You have to do it when you're ready...They can help you figure out what things would be good for you but they leave it to you to make that decision on what you think would be in your best interests...so that's what I think is really good about the service. (Service user)*

Three of the service users interviewed said that they had given up alcohol since being with the service, when previously they were heavy drinkers. Two other service users interviewed felt that the support of the project had enabled them to reduce their alcohol intake.

*I feel better in myself as well you know, like I've cut down on the beer, they have changed my life to be honest, you know, getting out of [area] and keeping out of trouble... (Service user)*

*Since I got a property and stuff, like I used to always drink and use it as a crutch... I don't drink as much since I got my property. They're making other things in my life positive so I don't need to do that. (Service user)*

## **Physical health**

Of the twenty women settled in tenancies, nine women described their physical health as 'good' or 'very good', with seven women saying it was 'fair' and only one that it was 'bad' (3 unknown). Whilst there was no comparison question at referral, the context was one of high rates of people with physical health problems and/or disabilities (see Chapter 2).

All women (except for 2 missing data) who had moved into settled housing were registered with a GP. Only ten women were registered with a dentist but this is likely to reflect wider structural issues with access to affordable dentistry nationally. Only four of the settled women used A&E at any point during support.

The women were asked about their levels of physical activity, their diets and smoking. Most smoked although four had given up during support, and six of the settled women reported they were eating healthily. However, 14 women did report themselves to be 'physically active'.

Women did not talk about their physical health as much as mental health in the interviews. However, they were appreciative of the help given by staff with arranging, and sometimes accompanying them to the doctors and other medical appointments.

## **Education, training and employment**

Engagement with education, training and employment was limited among the women using Jigsaw Support Housing First. Of the twenty women in settled tenancies, only one had engaged in training/ voluntary work as a peer mentor, also obtaining a qualification under NHS Leadership for this work. In addition, one woman had moved out of her tenancy to tied accommodation as she obtained a full-time job.

Existing research into the engagement of homeless people with these kinds of activities has stressed the importance of settled housing in providing a base from which to undertake education, training and work seeking activity<sup>38</sup>. However, women face other barriers too. The criminal records and the support and treatment needs of the women were also significant potential barriers to engaging in formal economic activity. Chapter 2 showed that the majority of women were on benefits that recognised they had a disability or some limitations to their ability to work. This remained the case at the end of the research.

It is evident that more support is needed for women to move into training and employment and that this might be a long-term aspiration - and for some women, something that might not happen at all or not for a long time without significant structural changes to employment opportunities for people who have experienced major traumas in their lives. It should be stressed that women themselves often had a positive outlook on the future and some identified very specific ambitions in their lives often related to training for a particular occupation. The service enabled women to imagine new possibilities in their lives; however the reality was that these hopes did not usually come to fruition and more project resources might be needed to shift this in the future.

*And since, since [worker]'s come on, [worker]'s actually give me the motivation to actually, I don't know, she's just kicking me up the arse, I don't know how or why or whatever it is; I don't know whether it's a, a young, I don't, or sparkiness or whatever, she just...Yeah, she's given me some motivation. (Service user)*

*They have changed my mind-set about everything... things are looking up for me, things are starting to change and look good for me, and I quite like that idea, I like the feel of it. It has proper changed my mind-set about everything and thinking positive.*

*... you know, I thought I had nothing so I might as well just let go [with alcohol], but now it's coming back up, and I can look to the future now...get on courses...I want to work... I know I'm going to get to the top, with their help, I know I am... (Service users)*

## **Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour**

Out of the 20 women settled in their tenancies, only four had any offending during their period of support, with three of these leading to convictions (and one of these three involving a prison stay). Two offences were relatively minor: breach of peace and drunk and disorderly. In the case of the prison sentence, the service continued to support the women and ensured she was resettled on leaving prison.

Of concern, seven of the 20 women had been victims of crime during their time with the project. In most cases this involved domestic violence, however three women had been assaulted and one robbed.

The twenty women who had been housed successfully by Jigsaw Support Housing First had collectively committed and been convicted of 292 offences. Seven of the women had

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<sup>38</sup> Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2016) *Crisis Skylight: Final Report of the University of York Evaluation* London: Crisis.

previously been in prison. The research demonstrates that women who were in sustained contact with Jigsaw Support Housing First appeared to show a marked reduction in convictions and offending behaviour, compared to the patterns of conviction they reported prior to engaging with the service.

A number of women referred directly to the impact they felt that Jigsaw Support Housing First had on their offending. Women did not talk about targeted work focussed on their 'offending behaviour'. Rather it was the overall nature of the support from the project, both the housing and the intensive support, that helped them to move forward and invest in a new life without the need to offend or fall back into previous survival patterns. The support of the project appeared to have given women hope for the future and something concrete in terms of housing and a lifeline. These supports enabled women to start turning their own offending behaviours around, giving them the strength to avoid offending and focus on a better future for themselves and their families.

*I was a bit off the rails before I got with Threshold. I got a criminal record and stuff while I was on the streets and stuff... I've just behaved totally since I've had this worker. I've not got into any trouble or anything so I haven't needed any help with that. (Service user)*

*I: What difference has the Threshold service made so far?*

*Everything, I don't know, I can't really explain it, it's just like is it real?! This time [in prison] if I had known more about Threshold, I think I would have gone straight towards working with them, as well as the women's centre, cos that is what I should have been doing on Probation, and then if I had known I could have got somewhere housing wise, I probably would have gone in a different direction and stuck to it..*

*I: Which would have meant...*

*No prison. (Service user)*

Jigsaw Support Housing First staff felt that the stable base and support, with a high degree of encouragement and positivity, had made a difference. Effective inter-agency working with probation and other agencies also helped to keep customers on track.

A number of agencies reported that the service was having a direct impact on reducing reoffending. Two statutory agencies spoke about how the service was providing 'protective factors' via stable accommodation and getting people out of abusive situations, and addressing other 'criminogenic' risk factors related to reoffending such as addressing financial problems, helping with family and other social networks and providing someone who 'cares':

*...giving them a life back independently, gives them something to live for and stay out of trouble for... I genuinely believe that it reduces risk, risk of harm, to the women themselves, to the public, to reoffending... (Agency representative)*

*...certainly in terms of the risks for reoffending, having a stable address and this level of support massively helps that, she has now been reduced to medium risk [from high], a large part of that was having this stability and this extra support... (Agency representative)*

In addition, one of the housing providers explained that the support from the project had enabled anti-social behaviour to be minimised in their tenancies:

*I'm not saying that there are no issues as there always will be issues with clients with complex needs moving into a home... there is a lot of support that goes in, there is a high degree of empathy and sympathy but also from the client a willingness to try and get their lives back on track and maintain the home that they've got. (Agency representative)*

## **Domestic violence**

As outlined in Chapter 2, most women (93%) had experienced domestic violence in their past. During the service delivery, seven of the 20 settled women experienced domestic violence indicating that this was an ongoing issue for several women on the project.

Project staff explained that they linked women into specialist domestic violence services and ensuring that properties were secure and they had access to personal alarms. Whilst this was not always successful first time, many service users explained that the project (often working with women's centres) was succeeding in helping them address previous domestic abuse in their lives – having a major impact in terms of assisting them away from physically and emotionally harmful situations.

*Without Threshold I would either be dead or in prison because I would have killed him or he would have killed me. (Service user)*

*I: What difference has the Housing First service made to you?*

*It's just given me a new lease of life, it's like I can think about taking care of myself, instead of just like having to worry about my ex-partners, I don't have to go out grafting so I have to pay them so I can stay there, it's just took all that weight away (Service user)*

Two of the women interviewed explained that the project had re-located them during their period of support because of the risk of domestic violence, one women had to go into a women's refuge for a couple of weeks and had now been resettled, the second woman now felt she had a much safer house.

*This one is better as it has got a front and a back door, the first one only had a front door and he used to stand in front of it, so I had no exit...so I didn't feel particularly safe in that place... and I've got security doors now as well so I feel a lot safer. (Service user)*

## **Family and social relationships**

### **Relationships with children**

As outlined in Chapter 2, the majority of women were parents but no women were living with their children at referral, with half of children having been permanently removed. During the five year evaluation period, for the twenty settled women, one woman had her child permanently removed (this was already in the process at referral) and one woman had voluntarily agreed for a new child to be temporarily looked after.

It did not prove possible for the project to transform women's lives to allow the return of children (and with adoption this would not be possible), however a number of service users and staff reported positive steps forward in terms of assisting with contact arrangements. In one case, the project had helped a woman re-establish direct contact with three of her children. For others, letterbox contact was hoping to be improved:

*I've got children, they are fostered out, I've got a letter-box, so [the worker] is going to help me see if there is a way that I can send letters and photos and things like that to it, so we are looking into that as well. (Service user)*

One woman, interviewed twice for the research, had already had children adopted but was being supported to visit her new baby in foster care. The service user and project staff both thought that this contact would have broken down if it was not for the support.

*[The Housing First] worker even comes to contact sometimes, because if I'm having a really bad day, I struggle at contact, leaving the baby, like walking away from her, so [the worker] has to come just for the separation bit, which has massively helped me, well it has stopped me picking up my daughter and walking away with her... They interact with social services because they don't believe a word I say... (Service user)*

## **Relationships with wider family and friends**

Fourteen of the settled women reported that they were in contact with family members. Most of these women were seeing family daily, several times a week or several times a month. Whilst this group of women were not necessarily representative of homeless women as a whole, the contrast with what would normally be expected among men with the same experience of homelessness, i.e. very high rates of social isolation, is quite striking and again points to the differences that can exist between women and men who become recurrently or enduringly homeless<sup>39</sup>. Satisfaction with their contact with family was also quite high for the women - with an average score of 7 (using a scale of 1-10 (10 being completely satisfied)).

Some women interviewed explained that their relationships with family had improved. For example, one woman said that contact with her mother had broken down two years ago, but they had recently re-established contact. This same woman had been rehoused close to other family members and she was now able to assist her sister with childcare. Another woman explained that after two years support:

*I've got my family back now as well because they have seen how good I've been doing...so that is another good thing that has come out of it all as well. I'm happy about that... really that is through Jigsaw Support because they have helped me get back on the straight and narrow. (Service user)*

Thirteen women also stated that they were in contact with friends. Whilst contact was also quite frequent, satisfaction with friendships were much lower at an average of 4.6 (using a scale of 1-10 (10 being completely satisfied)). Additionally, a couple of service users felt that the project was providing them with a support network through the workers. One person felt that the workers were like 'friends', and another explained,

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<sup>39</sup> Bretherton, J. (2017) Reconsidering Gender in Homelessness. *European Journal of Homelessness* 11(1), 1-21.



*... this kind of gave me my support network...somebody who I could talk to or get on the phone... she just gives me that place to be able to, I don't know, exert myself and then just calm down. (Service user)*

## **Overall views of women: Transformative support**

*Absolutely everything; my whole life in general it's just changed, it's so much better. (Service user)*

Women who have used the service were overwhelmingly positive about the experience. They spoke about how Housing First had given them an increasing confidence and self-esteem and that the support from the service had, in more than one case, been 'life changing'. The research team encountered women who were agitated, angry and in emotional distress when they first began working with the service, who when interviewed the second time reported that their lives had changed and who, to the research team, also presented as and seemed very different.

*I think they're a brilliant service. Honestly I think all the workers are great, I think they've all got the right attitudes and, you know, the right beliefs and give people the right support. (Service user)*

*Changed my life completely. People did start believing in me and giving me positives rather than negatives, saying well you can't do this or you're never gonna be able to do that. Like I even got told I'll never work in support work and I am (laughs) do you know what I mean? So it just goes to show them believing in me and continuously giving me positives when I had the negatives, it just kept me going and kept picking me up, so, rather than them putting me down. (Service user)*

Another woman spoke during her second interview about how she felt she had 'blossomed' since the first interview and, again, how she felt this was down to Jigsaw Support's support.

*...they've...sort of pulled me out the gutter; and I just said that to [worker], I said "God I've blossomed (laughs) you've pulled me out the gutter and give me a kick up the arse." (Service user)*

*It's given me a better outlook; it's actually given me an outlook that I can actually move forward, because after they took me daughter I was seriously, I wasn't going, I was in, I was going down...(Service user)*

*Yeah, so that's the only time, and that was through obviously getting the Court, like our kids, and it's like the final thing and I thought well I've been grieving for them two years so that was just; yeah, so it weren't as bad as it would have been if I didn't have my workers, I would have just drank, I probably would have just drank a bottle of beer and gone and kicked off at the neighbours. (Service user)*

With this sense of greater attention, less judgement and flexible support that reflected their opinions came reported improvements in mental and physical health among the women. These reports of being in a better mood, feeling more confident and self-assured and moving away from, if not entirely escaping, feelings of depression were widespread. Housing First could also help in relation to continuity of care, working to ensure that treatments were accessible on a sustained basis.

*My mental health's a lot better, I manage medications better and I do other things a lot better as well really, like I'm not overwhelmed with things now. Health is better because they're helping me keep on top of me medication cos otherwise I, I don't, I forget, and then it could be months before I remember that, oh God, shit, I've not had, I've run out of tablets. So they help me keep to my appointments as well. (Service user)*

These findings echoed what women reported during earlier phases of this research, a clear sense that Housing First was very positive with them and about their future.

*...they are always complimenting, picking out the good things...(Service user)*

During these earlier phases, women also described a service that whilst positive, was also honest and straightforward with people:

*...they are very straightforward, don't beat around the bush, tell you how it is, they don't leave you dangling...*

*They don't bullshit you... and they don't talk down to you. (Service users)*

Service users described how the workers acted as an advocate or champion for the women. One woman explained how they had 'stood up for me'. Another woman very eloquently and emotionally described how she felt that the service – working with the women's centre - was on her side:

*They have both [women's centre and threshold worker] fought for my corner, when I thought there was no-one out there, who'd want to take me on, or want to fight for me, I thought I was just on my own, that I was alone, but now obviously I can say that I'm not, having these ladies around, it's just been great... there are people out there who do actually care about people like me ...[she cries] (Service user)*



## 5 Cost effectiveness of project

### Exploring the cost effectiveness of Jigsaw Support Housing First

The cost effectiveness of Jigsaw Support Housing First can be explored in three, interconnected, ways. All of these approaches are based on comparative costs.

- The cost of Jigsaw Support Housing First compared to ‘housing-ready’ services. This means the costs compared to fixed-site accommodation-based services with onsite staffing, such as hostels, supported housing and transitional/move on accommodation, where support is attached to the building and designed to make someone ‘housing ready’ so they do not need any support, or not very much, when they move out.
- The costs compared to other examples of Housing First services operating in England and the wider UK. Some of the differences here are to do with location, i.e. wages are higher and other operating costs will be higher in some parts of the country than others. Other variations in costs may exist, such as what the staff ratio is relative to the number of people using Housing First, as in a service that supports 20 people, where workers have a ‘caseload’ of 10 people each will cost less than a Housing First service where four workers have a caseload of five people each.
- The cost compared to continuing to experience long-term and repeated homelessness, which can have very high costs associated with frequent and long-term use of hostels and supported housing services, sometimes also nightshelters, that does not result in a sustained exit from homelessness. Long-term and repeated homelessness can also, as was the case with many of the women using Jigsaw Support Housing First, result in frequent contact with the criminal justice system and also with emergency health, mental health and addiction services, all of which can have high financial costs attached to them.

### The costs compared to housing-ready and other Housing First services

This section of the report draws on research conducted for Housing First England/Homeless Link in 2018/19, *The cost effectiveness of Housing First in England*<sup>40</sup> which collected data on the comparative costs of Housing First services compared to other forms of homelessness service in England. Costs have been adjusted to 2020 levels<sup>41</sup> using the Bank of England inflation calculator and include gross hourly wage and estimated back office costs.

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<sup>40</sup> Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2019) *The cost effectiveness of Housing First in England* London: Housing First England/Homeless Link.

<sup>41</sup> It is only possible to calculate inflation over time once a year is complete, so the most recent figures that can be estimated are for 2020.

**Figure 5.1 Estimated (average) comparative costs for first month of support**

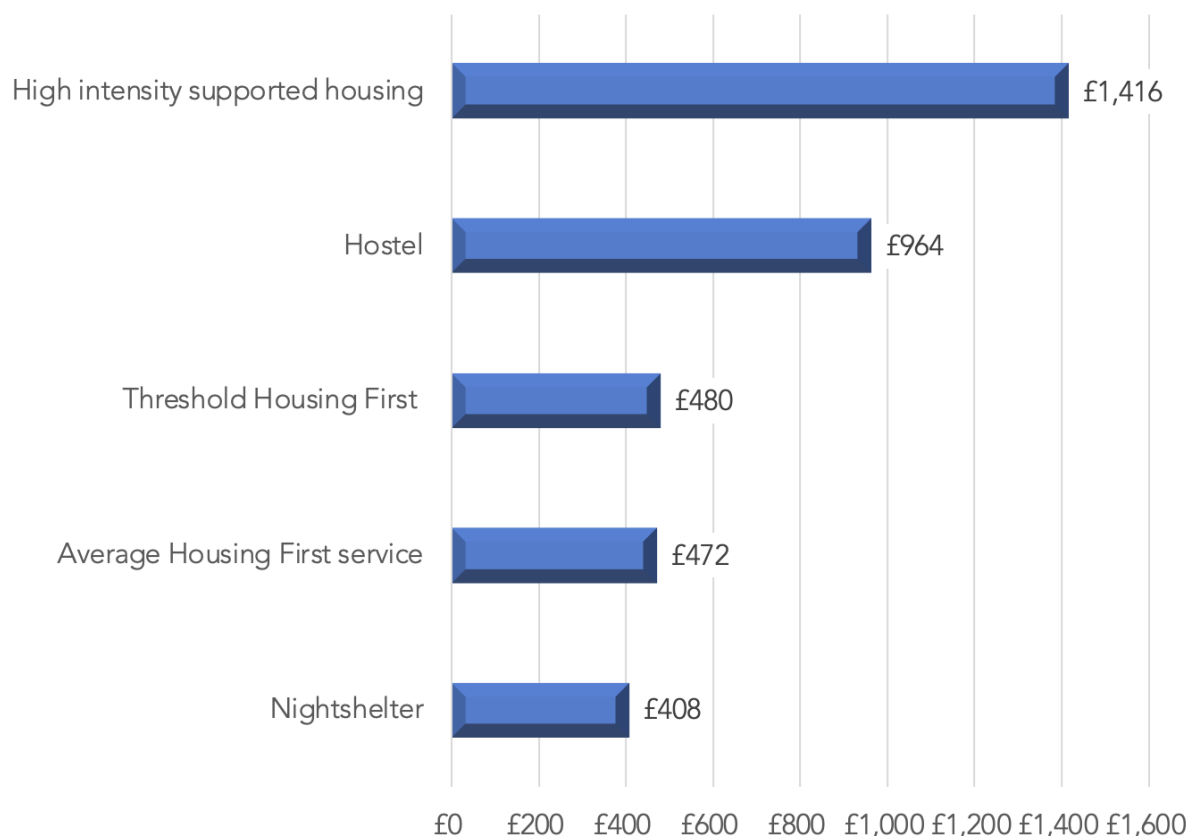


Figure 5.1 shows the comparative average costs for Jigsaw Support Housing First compared to other services for the first month of support someone received. According to Jigsaw Support, someone would typically have a high rate of contact during the first month, as is common to all Housing First services<sup>42</sup> because someone’s needs are being understood, they are being intensively supported and connections are being made to other services in relation to the support they have decided they want. While this is not a standardised figure, rather an approximation based on experience, Jigsaw Support Housing First estimated that around 30 hours of contact would occur in the first month.

As can be seen (Figure 5.1), Jigsaw Support Housing First had very slightly higher costs than the average Housing First service in England, based on the 2019 research<sup>43</sup> but its costs were significantly less than high intensity supported housing (designed for people with high

<sup>42</sup> Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2019) op.cit.

<sup>43</sup> Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2019) op.cit.

and complex needs, 24 hour staffing, specialist support workers) and for hostels (medium intensity supported housing, again with 24 hour cover). Nightshelters have become less common in the UK over the last 30 years, being replaced by smaller, more intensive supported housing and hostel services and housing-led (tenancy sustainment) and, in recent years, Housing First services. These basic services, which sometimes only operate overnight, tend to offer only lower level support and focus on the provision of a bed, food and basic amenities, the costs for a month in this sort of service were typically lower than for any other form of homelessness service, including Housing First.

In summary, using estimated figures adjusted to 2020 prices, the first month of (average) support costs in high intensity supported housing cost almost three times the level of Jigsaw Support Housing First (295%), while average support costs in a hostel were twice the level (201%). Other Housing First services were, on average, very slightly less expensive (but as this was an average, some were less expensive, others more expensive), while, on average a nightshelter cost around 85% the level of Jigsaw Support Housing First, being aware that these services offered less support than other forms of service.

These figures begin to change over time. This is because the amount of service contact between people using Housing First services tends to drop as they become more settled. Housing First is designed to be able to increase and decrease support as necessary, but for the 2019 research on the costs of Housing First across England<sup>44</sup>, Housing First services reported they were typically providing less support at Month 6 than at Month 1 of service use. Across Housing First services as a whole, support dropped from an estimated average of 33 hours of contact at month 1 to 20 hours at month 6, while Jigsaw Support Housing First reported a drop from an estimated average of 30 hours contact at Month 1 to 25 hours at Month 6. The costs for other services (Figure 5.2) remain constant, this is because they are fixed, i.e. the cost of providing support staff is always the same, it cannot be adjusted because the levels are part of the operation of a fixed site service (equally a fixed site service will cost the same to operate whether it is full or only partially full).

On a per-person basis, Housing First becomes relatively cheaper over time<sup>45</sup> and this also applied to the Jigsaw Support Housing First service. Support contact and hence support costs typically fall, whereas in fixed site services like supported housing, those costs remain constant (Figure 5.2). This creates an element of flexibility for Housing First services, in that they can be running a mix of higher need and lower need cases, and as in the case of Jigsaw Support Housing First, make some cases 'dormant' ensuring that women could still access support if needed, but in the meantime also be able to take on additional cases. There are some risks here in the sense that a Housing First service could reach a kind of saturation point, i.e. have so many dormant or low contact cases that if only a few of them suddenly again require significant support, it will be difficult to manage alongside the newer cases. Some issues have been identified with the challenges of managing cases when support needs either increase or decrease across the Housing First sector as a whole, and ideally, Housing First needs to be within an integrated approach where if needs become very high,

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<sup>44</sup> Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2019) op.cit.

<sup>45</sup> Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2019) op.cit.

someone can be referred 'up' to more intensive services, whereas if they fall, they can be referred 'down' to less intensive tenancy sustainment/housing-led floating support.<sup>46</sup>

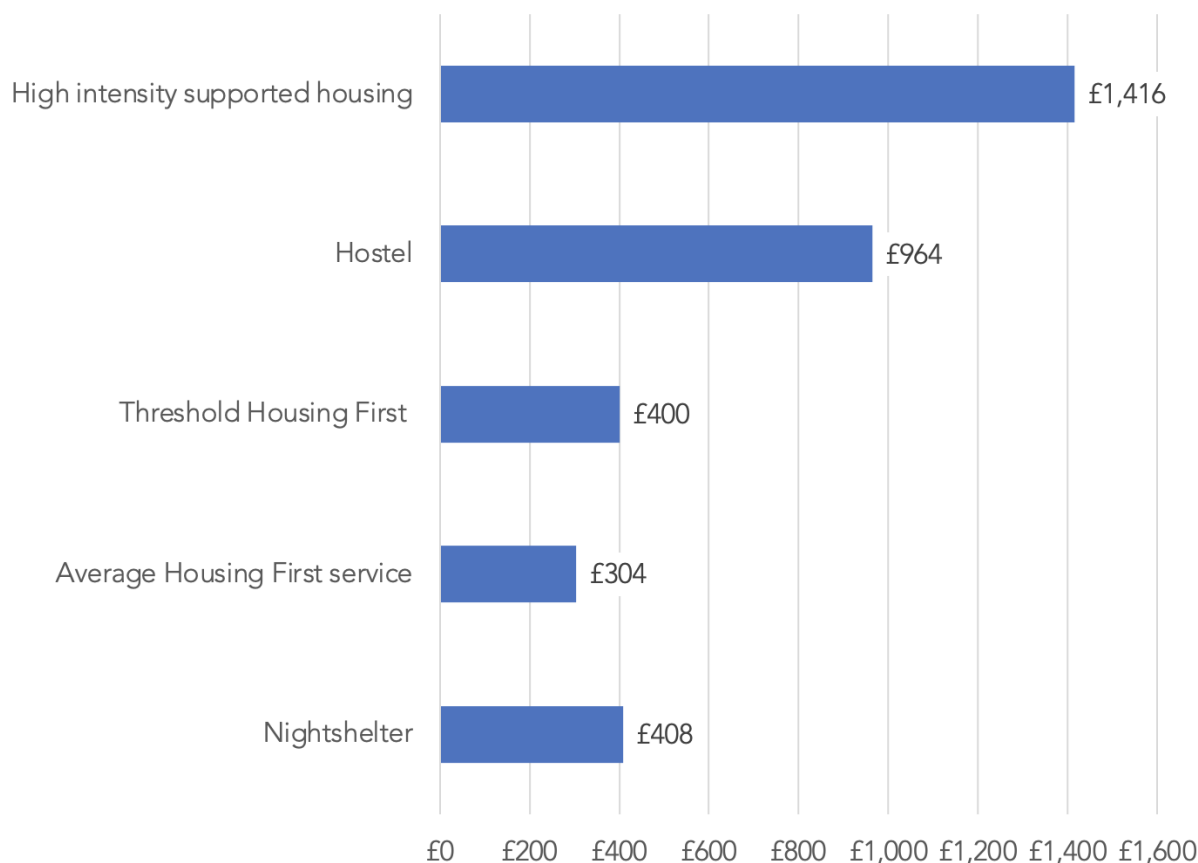
Ultimately, the main comparison between Housing First and other services is the cost of total support provision over time. For example, if a high intensity supported housing service successfully houses someone after nine months of contact and that person is able to live more or less independently from that point, the support cost (at estimated 2020 prices) is £12,714. By contrast, Jigsaw Support Housing First was typically much less expensive for the same period, not only because the monthly cost was lower in the first month, but because it also dropped over time. Based on the estimates provided by Jigsaw Support, by Month 9, costs would be around half of those at Month 1, so total costs would be something like £3,600, assuming support costs drop steadily between Month 1 and Month 9. If support also ceased to be necessary from Jigsaw Support Housing First, then the support cost advantages are very clear compared to the most expensive form of alternative service (high intensity supported housing). Equally, Housing First in general and Jigsaw Support Housing First in particular also cost significantly less than the average costs of a hostel for nine months, which again are fixed at £964, making nine months of costs £8,676.

However, if Housing First engages with someone for two, three, four or five years, the costs start to look similar to a shorter stay in supported housing or a hostel. This assumes that the hostel or the intensive supported housing does successfully provide a sustained exit from homelessness after, as in this example, nine months, if someone is still using Housing First support, even at a low level, for a much longer period, the financial costs may be equivalent or greater.

## **Figure 5.2      Estimated (average) comparative costs for sixth month of support**

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<sup>46</sup> Blood, I.; Birchill, A. and Pleace, N. (2021) *Reducing, changing or ending Housing First support* London: Homeless Link/Housing First England.



Outside the UK, particularly in North America, the financial argument for Housing First has always been that because alternative services are much more expensive, even long periods of Housing First use are still likely to have lower costs than comparatively short (successful) stays in fixed-site services. Alongside this, it has been argued that because those North American services tended to only be successful in 40%-60% of cases in ending homelessness, whereas people Housing First services are typically still in settled housing at one year and beyond (around an 80% retention rate), making Housing First still more financially efficient. There is a need to be careful here, because it should not be assumed that the picture in England and the wider UK is identical. North American linear residential treatment (LRT) services are abstinence-based and have strict behavioural codes, they are also very expensive by UK standards.<sup>47</sup> By contrast, most UK fixed site services are likely to follow a harm reduction model, be choice-led, more relaxed on multiple levels and significantly cheaper to run, there is also evidence to suggest they are more effective than LRT services, albeit that there is a population of people experiencing homelessness with complex needs who make repeated and sustained use of these UK fixed-site services without their homelessness ending.<sup>48</sup> Another issue here is that UK fixed-site services still tend to have an operational assumption that most lone adult homelessness is experienced by men, although understanding of that women's homelessness has been underestimated, alongside understanding of the complexity of women's needs is increasing.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Pleace, N. (2018) *Using Housing First in Integrated Homelessness Strategies* London: St Mungo's.

<sup>48</sup> Pleace, N. (2018) op.cit

<sup>49</sup> Bretherton, J. and Mayock, P. (2021) *Women's homelessness: European evidence review* Brussels: FEANTSA.



Data were available on the duration of contact that 38 women had with Jigsaw Support Housing First. Of 26 women whose support had come to an end by 2021, the average contact time had been 291 days, with a lower median figure of 216 days, the median being the middle number when all the numbers are put in order. When a median is lower, this suggests that the average has been 'pulled up', i.e. there are a few women with longer than typical periods of service use and this makes the average higher than was typical for most women. This suggests that women who had completed their contact with Jigsaw Support Housing First were typically engaging for less than a year, on average about nine months and a median of about seven months, which meant that costs would typically be lower than if those women had stayed in hostel or intensive supported housing for a similar period or for shorter periods. If women became 'stuck' in intensive supported housing and hostel accommodation, i.e. if they were unable to move out because of issues like challenges in finding suitable housing, those services would start to become much more expensive than Jigsaw Support Housing First once the women had been there for a year or more. Two further women had become 'dormant' cases.

However, Jigsaw Support Housing First also had data available on a smaller group of 10 women who were open cases, including women with very high and complex needs, where the period of engagement with Housing First had been much longer. Among this group of 10 women, the duration of contact with Jigsaw Support Housing First was nearly five years on average and just under four and half years when the median value was looked at. Two points are important to note here:

- While this minority of women had been in contact with Jigsaw Support Housing First for several years, their costs would be likely to have fallen over time. Jigsaw Support estimated that their contact hours would be around 25 per month at Month 12, and assuming this remained constant, each year beyond the first year, the estimated support costs per year would be in the order of £4,800 (£400 a month). This is not a high figure relative to the estimated average support costs of hostel and intensive supported housing, i.e. equivalent to five months of support costs in a hostel and just over three months of support costs in intensive supportive housing.
- Internationally, it is not unusual for Housing First to be in sustained contact with people for periods of five years or more. Housing First is designed as an open ended service for people with very high and complex needs and there is an designed-in assumption that it will not always provide a relatively quick solution to homelessness, but will instead enable a sustained exit from homelessness for highly vulnerable people through prolonged support that will reduce over time, before, in *some* cases, a point is reached when someone can potentially live more independently.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Pleace, N. (2018) op.cit; Pleace, N. (2016) *Housing First Guide Europe* Brussels: FEANTSA  
<http://housingfirstguide.eu/>

The costs of Jigsaw Support Housing First were pretty close to the typical operational costs of other Housing First services in England.<sup>51</sup> There were services that were more expensive and those that were less expensive, but this is often a matter of differences in wage levels and other costs in different parts of England, rather than being the result of major differences in caseloads or approach. Recent research by Housing First England reported, for example, that the most typical caseload for Housing First services was seven, close to the caseload of six in Jigsaw Support Housing First.<sup>52</sup>

## Costs compared to long-term and repeated homelessness

In 2016, research conducted with the support of Crisis explored the costs of longer-term and recurrent homelessness in England. That work reported that the estimated public spending on the 86 people for 90 days was £742,141 in total and £8,630 on average<sup>53</sup>. In 2020 prices, the average cost was £9,617 per person in terms of public expenditure, that is services funded by general taxation that included local authority commissioned supported housing, hostels and nightshelters, the NHS, including both mental health and addiction services and the criminal justice system. If these averages held true, the cost of unresolved, long-term and repeated homelessness would be (at 2020 prices) £19,234 for 180 days and some £38,468 for one year.

The actual costs per person were found to vary considerably, some people who were experiencing long-term and repeated homelessness had almost no financial costs attached to them, because they had little or no contact with publicly funded services. Other people were *very* expensive in terms of public expenditure, including individuals who had repeated and sustained contact with mental health, addiction, emergency medical (frequent use of ambulances and/or accident and emergency) and the criminal justice system (repeated arrests).

In overall terms, the 2016 research found that the use of homelessness services was the biggest single expense, usually in the form of stays in hostels and supported housing which did not result in an exit from homelessness. Long-term homelessness as an experience of repeated and long stays in accommodation-based services was widespread among people who had high support needs and was much more common than time spent living rough. Collectively, the 2016 research found that 43% of public spending on this group of people experiencing homelessness was on hostels and supported housing. The next biggest expense was the cost for the criminal justice system, including arrests, being processed, held overnight and (typically short) prison sentences, accounting for 35% of spending. The general use of the NHS accounted for 12% of spending with another 10% of spending on mental health and drug and alcohol services.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2019) op. cit.

<sup>52</sup> Homeless Link (2020) *The picture of Housing First in England 2020* London: Homeless Link.

<sup>53</sup> Pleace, N. and Culhane, D.P. (2016) *Better than cure? Testing the case for enhancing prevention of single homelessness in England* London: Crisis.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Even if Jigsaw Support Housing First was only providing support at a lower cost than supported housing and hostel services, there was likely to be a significant saving for local authorities, particularly if the women were able to make a sustained exit from homelessness with the support of Jigsaw Support Housing First. Estimating what *might* have happened, i.e. how often women might have used hostels and supported housing had Jigsaw Support Housing First not been there, is difficult, not least because it is increasingly clear that women often react differently to homelessness, relying on family, friends and acquaintances more than services, not least where those services contain men in significant numbers, because of the multiple associations between women's homelessness and domestic abuse<sup>55</sup>

However, a small theoretical example can be used to illustrate the potential savings. If it is assumed (Figure 5.3) a woman using Jigsaw Support Housing First was supported by the service for one year, whereas if the service had not been available, she would have been using supported housing, a hostel or possibly an emergency/nightshelter, the potential savings on support costs are obvious. If this were to be the case for five women, say all of whom would have been resident in a hostel for one year if Jigsaw Support Housing First was not available, the saving (average, estimated support costs at 2020 prices) would be some £35,865.

### **Figure 5.3      Estimated support costs for one year for different service types**

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<sup>55</sup> Bretherton, J. and Mayock, P. (2021) op..cit; Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2021) *Women's Homelessness in Camden: Improving data, strategy and outcomes* London: Fulfilling Lives Islington and Camden.



Estimating potential savings for the NHS, mental health and drug and alcohol services is difficult. One reason for this is because these costs can quite often increase as a result of using Housing First. In the case of a service like Jigsaw Support, women may often be (re) connected to NHS, mental health and addiction services that they should have been using, but were not engaged with, through Housing First, meaning that costs increase rather than decrease. Equally, while some people experiencing homelessness on a long-term and repeated basis with complex support needs can make repeated use of services like A&E in hospitals, a pattern which if it can be changed so they use an ordinary GP can have significant savings, the evidence suggests people in this group are probably a minority among people experiencing homelessness with complex needs.<sup>56</sup>

One area in which it is possible to be more confident about costs is in respect of the huge change in offending behaviour by the women using Jigsaw Support Housing First which as noted dropped from 831 recorded offences (and two 'prolific' offenders for whom exact data were not available) among 27 women to just *five* recorded offences while supported by Jigsaw Support Housing First. If it is assumed that an arrest and processing (held overnight) has an approximate cost of £815<sup>57</sup>, each 100 arrests that involved being processed and held were costing £81,500 and while not all the arrests might have involved being held overnight, those that led to a court appearance would be closer to £16,500.<sup>58</sup> As

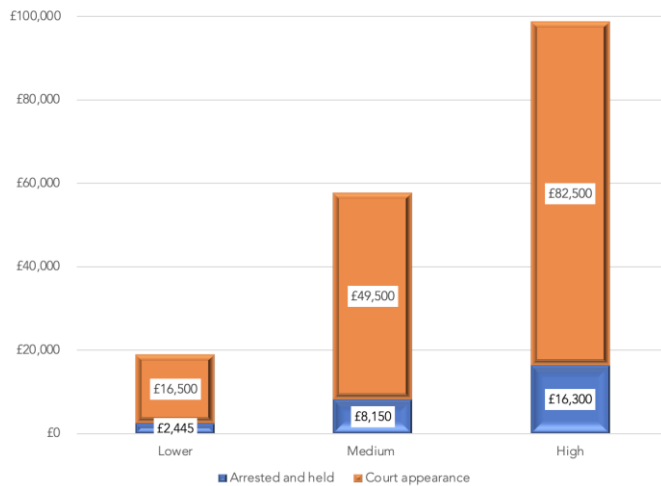
<sup>56</sup> Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2020) *Health and Care Services for People Sleeping Rough: the views of people with lived experience* The Partnership for Responsive Policy Analysis and Research (PREPARE).

<sup>57</sup> Based on costs from New Economy Manchester for 2015 (adjusted to 2020 costs with the Bank of England inflation calculator) of £719 for arrest and detention, £14,603 for a court appearance (violent offence, costs vary) and £673 in local authority costs for dealing with an anti-social behaviour incident, See: Pleace, N. and Culhane, D.P. (2016) *Better than cure? Testing the case for enhancing prevention of single homelessness in England* London: Crisis.

<sup>58</sup> As above.

is described above, the women were not simply involved in petty crime, there were some cases of assault, drugs and public order offences.

**Figure 5.4 Illustration of savings in public expenditure linked to reductions in offending**



As an illustration, the estimated average and median financial savings that would be present for different rates of offending are shown in Figure 5.4. Figure 5.4 is estimated and it is illustrative, it does not represent actual patterns of offending for any particular women using Jigsaw Support Housing First. The lower figure is based on three arrests involving being held overnight and one court appearance, the medium figure assumes 10 arrests and three court appearances, the high figure assumes 20 arrests and five court appearances. The reductions in expenditure associated with such a seismic change in offending behaviour among almost all the women who were still active offenders when they began using Jigsaw Support Housing First are stark.



## 6 Learning from the Jigsaw Housing Service

[The women] *must wake up in the morning and think you couldn't write the script, you know, I'm the victim here, I've been beaten and battered and raped all my life and actually people are still coming at me and, let's see how tough you are, let's take your kids off you now, and then we are going to take your liberty off you, and then we are going to beat you some more, it's cruel... What you have done with Housing First is you've shown them love and respect that they have never had at any point in their life.* (Project worker)

Over five years, Jigsaw Support Housing First delivered important outcomes to a group of long-term and recurrently homeless women, with histories of offending and with high and complex needs. Positive housing outcomes and an increase in residential stability were being achieved for women whose lives had been characterised by homelessness and there was evidence of clear, profound, reductions in offending behaviour. Just as crucially, women also spoke of the positive differences the service had made to their lives in helping them to start believing in themselves, after facing so much negative pre-judgement and hardship prior to working with Jigsaw Housing First. Housing First provided the support needed to begin to live new lives where they had real control and could feel optimistic for the future.

This final chapter reflects on the key learning from the Jigsaw Housing First service for developing similar services in the future.

### Trauma informed service

The need for 'trauma informed' services is increasingly being recognised when working with adults who have experienced Adverse Childhood Circumstances (ACEs) and/or multiple disadvantage in their adult lives<sup>59</sup>. Trauma-informed care means looking to understand the reasons why people feel as they do, working to understand and to respect someone's experiences and opinions rather than prejudging and sanctioning certain behaviours automatically. Closely related to this, much good practice in the homelessness sector has centred around developing psychologically informed environments (PIEs)<sup>60</sup> where both spaces and relationships are designed to support recovery from past trauma and difficult experiences. Whilst these developments can apply equally to men and women, there is growing evidence that women experiencing homelessness are more likely to have experienced traumatic lives than men<sup>61</sup>, including very specific traumas of losing primary care of a child and/or domestic violence (see below).

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<sup>59</sup> Sharpen (2018), op.cit.

<sup>60</sup> Breedvelt, J.F. (2016) *Psychologically Informed Environments: A Literature Review*, Mental Health Foundation: London; Westaway, C., Nolte, L., and Brown, R. (2017) Developing best practice in psychologically informed environments, *Housing, Care and Support*, Vol. 20:1, pp 19 -28; Phipps C., Seager, M., Murphy, L., Barker, C. (2017) "Psychologically informed environments for homeless people: resident and staff experiences", *Housing, Care and Support*, 20:1, pp.29-42.

<sup>61</sup> Walters (2017), op.cit.; Bretherton, J. and Mayock, P. (2021) op.cit.

There is growing evidence, which has been assembled in recent years in Ireland, North America, Europe and the UK, that women's recurrent and long-term homelessness is often unresolved because access to the right mix of integrated services is not in place. Existing services are still too often posited on the incorrect assumption that lone adult homelessness is almost entirely male, meaning services can either be underdeveloped in scale and/or unsuitable in design, i.e. they are designed for men or have limited provision for women in a gender mixed service. Women can have nowhere suitable to find help, or only a very limited range of options available, and the probably greater tendency of women to resort to the precariousness of hidden homelessness, living with friends, relatives or acquaintances in situations of legal and physical insecurity, without privacy and without control over the space, needs to be seen in that light.<sup>62</sup>

These failures are systemic, it is not simply a question of there not being enough homelessness services that are designed by women and run by women, entire homelessness strategies, from prevention, through to outreach, fixed-site supported housing and tenancy sustainment/housing-led and Housing First services are built around the idea that women are only a fraction of lone adult homelessness. From this assumption, follow other problems, as numbers are thought to be small, analysis of need has lagged far behind that of lone adult homeless men, who if anything have arguably now been over-researched and analysed. As new evidence has come together, understanding of the high and complex needs of women, who have become effectively trapped in long-term and recurrent homelessness, has increased. Incidence of trauma is higher, experience of domestic and other abuse is near-universal and rates of severe mental illness, addiction and other complex needs are also extremely high. Housing First can be part of the answer to this, but it must be a version of Housing First, like Jigsaw, that recognises that women's long-term and repeat homelessness, particularly in relation to trauma and experience of abuse, often means that a woman is presenting with even higher and more complex needs, as well as often *different* needs, than is the case for many long-term and repeatedly homeless men.<sup>63</sup>

The Jigsaw service made a conscious and deliberate effort to focus on the women rather than their offending: reframing women from 'prolific offenders' to a greater understanding of their humanity. Whilst this approach is central to all Housing First services, the nature of the complex trauma experienced by women, often involving abuse and gender-based violence, means that trauma informed care had to be at the centre of the service built and run by women – with all interactions being framed from a perspective of how something feels to the individual, and a recognition that the behaviours the women display are a normal reaction to their environment and experience. For example, one woman explained to staff that she used drugs to keep herself awake on the streets as she had been raped whilst sleeping rough. It meant really listening to people, trying to understand and not judging people:

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<sup>62</sup> Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2021) op. cit.

<sup>63</sup> Bretherton, J. and Mayock, P. (2021) op.cit.



*What I like about this service is they understand that you're just angry...they know it's not aimed at them...they talk you through it...you know you've always got that person to rely on no matter what you say... It gives you more of a friendship than a worker...that person that you can just let off onto and they don't judge you, it's just the best help ever... (Service user)*

It also meant that the service needed to focus on the building blocks of extremely low self-esteem and self-worth of women. The service focused on what might seem like small things, like helping women to do their nails when they were struggling with self-care.

#### *Attachment aware services*

As described above, many women had difficult and often traumatic childhoods, and adult experiences, and one major impact of this was finding it difficult to trust others. It was recognised that this may be (partly) as a result of insecure attachments in childhood, following early developmental trauma including neglect, abuse and/or experiences of loss. The narratives of both the women using and delivering the service were marked by concepts associated with loss. The ongoing nature of the support can be particularly important for people who have experienced multiple rejections in the past. For example, one woman explained how the service had told her, *'I won't abandon you, it's you that's got to abandon me, you've got to sign me off...Basically I thought I was worthless and now I know I'm worth it'*.

An attachment aware service takes a relational approach, where the quality of the relationship between the women and worker is crucial, modelling and developing trusting relationships over time. The importance of providing a trusting relationship is acknowledged to some degree in some existing homelessness services, however this is not usually within a framework of attachment aware services, nor is it often achieved with high levels of staff turnover. A similar Housing First service has recently identified the need for attachment theory training for their service<sup>64</sup>.

The Jigsaw experience highlighted the importance of offering consistent, reliable and ongoing support to women. In quite profound ways, within appropriate safeguarding boundaries, the Housing First workers were almost offering the support of a parent or guardian, providing the consistent and constant support needed to ensure that women felt safe, valued and supported going out into the world. Some women had never had this type of support in the past.

Trust was also fundamental for women to move forward with reducing harmful behaviour. Many women felt that this was the first real time that people had noticed them and cared for them. This transformative approach led to women wanting to change for the staff who were supporting them, as well as themselves. Women explained how they appreciated a service that stuck with them 'no matter what';

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<sup>64</sup> Inspiring Change Manchester, cited in Walters (2017), *ibid*.

*... in the past they've [services] built me up so much and then basically dropped me like a brick but Threshold are with me every step of the way with everything...*  
(Service user)

Jigsaw Housing First did not include any formal clinical psychological service input however there was capacity to spot purchase formal inputs where they could not access support from existing services quickly enough.

### **Responses to domestic violence at centre of service**

Research in USA has suggested that Housing First for women fleeing domestic violence requires safety planning as a key principle of delivery (Sullivan and Olsen, 2017). The experience from this research and other work also supports this finding in the UK.<sup>65</sup> Virtually all women using the service had experienced abuse, usually recently. The service had established close working relationships with local women's centres that could offer expertise and support for women fleeing domestic abuse and violence. However, as the service developed it became clear that Jigsaw Housing First also had to place safety planning at the centre of its delivery of services – making women safe was the first priority of the service, and also underpinned all other areas of support.

The provision of safe accommodation, in a safe location, was paramount. Although the Government's Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2010-20 had a commitment to ensure support, including accommodation, is available to women with complex needs experiencing domestic abuse, local refuges were not always accessible or appropriate for women with complex needs, as they could not always support people with severe mental health problems and/or substance abuse issues, and/or they offered shared rather than independent accommodation<sup>66</sup>. Austerity has also affected this sector<sup>67</sup>.

Recent legislative change has adopted a wider definition of domestic abuse, which defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as encompassing violent or threatening behaviour; controlling or coercive behaviour; economic abuse; psychological and emotional or other abuse, which is a wider and, importantly, seen as a more accurate description of the range of abuse experienced inside the home than 'domestic violence'. The appointment of a national Domestic Abuse Commissioner in England<sup>68</sup> has seen a new emphasis on developing a more strategic response to abuse. Other innovations, following much of the same logic as Jigsaw, include DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) Accreditation, a system for training housing provider staff to recognise potential warning signs that domestic abuse is occurring in order to more effectively trigger preventative interventions, stopping the abuse and the associated risks of homelessness.<sup>69</sup> DAHA Accreditation sits

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<sup>65</sup> Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2021) op.cit.

<sup>66</sup> Quilgars, D. and Pleace, N. (2010) *Meeting the needs of households at risk of domestic violence: The role of accommodation and housing-related support services*, London: DCLG.

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jan/22/not-cancer-kittens-50-year-fight-fund-womens-refuges-domestic-abuse>

<sup>68</sup> <https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/about/>

<sup>69</sup> Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2021) *An Evaluation of DAHA Accreditation: Final Report* London: DAHA.

within the wider model of the Whole Housing Approach<sup>70</sup>, a model designed to The Whole Housing Approach (WHA) which is a framework for addressing abuse across a particular area, such as a local authority. The Whole Housing Approach (WHA) is designed to function as a coordinated, cross-tenure, support package to help people experiencing domestic abuse to either maintain or access safe and stable housing, run by a WHA Coordinator. There are strong parallels between these ideas and the logic, approach and ethos of Jigsaw Housing First.

The Jigsaw service attempted to find appropriate accommodation as quickly as possible. This often needed to be at a distance from previous partners or other perpetrators; in this way, it was helpful that the project worked across three local authority areas. The service also needed to access properties with appropriate safety measures in place to enable them to feel safe and offer protection in the event of being located by a perpetrator. The project worked with a local sanctuary scheme to offer features, such as enhanced locks, CCTV, two exits, and/or a safe room. In the early days of the service, it was not always possible to access suitable properties quickly, which led to women needing to move again, but this improved over time.

The service also had to work hard with other providers to ensure that access to housing was not contingent on previous debt/rent arrears and/or anti-social behaviour that was a result of a previous partner's behaviour. Being willing to continue to work with a woman who was still struggling to leave an abusive situation was also necessary.

The Housing First principle of separating housing from support is key for women escaping domestic violence as the Jigsaw Housing First project demonstrated that they sometimes needed to move more than once to ensure their safety.

### **Mothers and children at the centre of service delivery**

As highlighted above, a high proportion of homeless women with complex needs utilising the Jigsaw service had lost children to the care system. This is likely to be the case for other similar services.<sup>71</sup> Whilst men are also likely to suffer from the trauma of not being in contact with their children, the women using Jigsaw Housing First had more often had children removed from their care by statutory care orders. This is a massive traumatic experience that remains largely unacknowledged by public services in the UK and internationally – and there have been calls for more training for social workers and allied workers in this area<sup>72</sup>. For example, the recent Canadian study on Housing First for women highlighted the issue of unresolved grief and loss following child apprehension as the root cause of ongoing trauma<sup>73</sup>. Further, this explicitly (via the court system) leads to women

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<sup>70</sup> <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/what-we-do/whole-housing-approach/what-is-the-whole-housing-approach/>

<sup>71</sup> Bretherton, J. and Mayock, P. (2021) op. cit.

<sup>72</sup> Broadhurst, K., Mason, C., Bedston, S., Alrouh, B., Morriss, L., McQuarrie, T., Palmer, M., Shaw, M., Harwin, J. and Kershaw, S. (2017) *Vulnerable Birth Mothers and Recurrent Care Proceedings: Final Report*, Lancaster: Lancaster University.

<sup>73</sup> Oudshoorn *et al.* (2018), op.cit.

being labelled as ‘bad mothers’, which is accompanied by deep shame and stigma<sup>74</sup>. One of the findings of this research was that women reported they felt properly ‘seen’ and understood for the first time. Services that had supported them when they had children with them had been focused mainly on those children and it had been the children, not the mother, who had been the concern of child protection services, with reportedly little thought being shown for what was happening to their mother.

The Jigsaw service highlighted the need for this loss to be acknowledged rather than continue to be a hidden shame for women. Further, it also took a proactive approach in working with women to consider whether and how positive re-connection with children might be possible. A Housing First service working with any woman who has experienced this will need targeted support from trained workers. The pilot phase of the service identified the need for more appropriate experience and training of Housing First workers in this area.

### **Making a home**

The importance of a home in creating a sense of security and safety, sometimes called a sense of ontological (life) security has been highlighted in other Housing First literature<sup>75</sup>. No Housing First studies have explicitly examined the gender dimension of this. Whilst this study was also not able to compare across men and women, the narratives highlighted the high priority placed by women on creating a home, that was comfortable, aesthetically pleasing and decorated personally by themselves. Some women had never had their own home before, and once they felt safe, the task of making a home was very important to them. The Housing First principle of choice and control was central here in helping women create their own space. The personalisation element of the project was also supported by a budget that helped women make purchases for their home.

*I feel like I’m making a nice home, it’s not just a place, it’s a home, and it’s mine, I can call it mine, so that’s a nice feeling as well, to say that I’ve got my own home.*  
(Service user)

Whilst the project helped women access accommodation in both the private rented and social housing sectors, it was reported by both staff and service users that social housing usually provided better quality and more secure housing; the social housing tenure tended, therefore, to better facilitate the creation of ‘homes’.

### **Increasing women’s agency**

Progress in gender equality has been made in recent decades, however girls and women continue to experience gender inequalities in a number of areas, including education,

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<sup>74</sup> Sharpen, J. (2018) Jumping through hoops: How are coordinated responses to multiple disadvantage meeting the needs of women? London: AVA, Agenda and St Mungo’s.

<sup>75</sup> Padgett, D. (2007) There’s No Place Like(a)Home: Ontological Security Among Persons with Serious Mental Illness in the United States, *Social Science and Medicine*, May; 64(9): 1925–1936.

employment and income<sup>76</sup>. Across the globe, women still have access to fewer opportunities across their lifetime on average compared to men. Women with complex needs have often led extremely constrained lives and may also have been subject to criminal justice and child protection proceedings, which severely limit people's agency. Domestic violence involves being controlled by another person and can hugely constrain people's lives. Beyond the UK, the European Federation of Homelessness Organisations (FEANTSA) has, in recent years, been highlighting the issues around the gender dynamics of homelessness and the specific, insufficiently understood needs of women experiencing homelessness at European level.<sup>77</sup>

The Jigsaw Housing First service gave women choice and control and this was hugely valued:

*It was like that with my support worker before, pushing me into group sessions and stuff. Threshold, they're not pushy one bit like, it's all down to me sort of thing.*

*They tried pushing me to do it, the [youth offender] worker, they tried saying, [name], you're doing this, you are doing that, and it was like, I'm not. These are like, you can do it, these things are there if you want it, just take it if whenever you want it... I think they know me here, for four month(s). I knew my YOT worker for eight nine months but she didn't know me. They have actually took time out to get to know me and stuff, and that's good. (Service users)*

### **A different approach to offending**

It is now widely acknowledged that female offenders are one of the most highly vulnerable groups of people in society and that the underlying causes of offending need to drive rehabilitation policy<sup>78</sup>. This project demonstrated that with the right support and accommodation, women could quite quickly move away from previous patterns of offending. Staff posited that the intensity of support, alongside quality housing in a safe location, made a huge difference to the likelihood of reoffending. The support, stability, tolerance and understanding offered by Jigsaw Housing First had produced shifts in offending behaviour that were striking, frequent, long-term patterns of multiple offending had very often fallen away, to the point where most of the women using Jigsaw Housing First were, quite simply, no longer offenders.

Offending was understood as a symptom of women's wider social, financial and emotional exclusion and abuse; it was not a defining feature of their lives. However, the project found itself battling with other systems that continued to define women by their offending histories, both in terms of other agencies and wider society (for example, employers). The

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<sup>76</sup> HM Government (2019) *Gender equality monitor*, London: HM Government  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/814080/GEO\\_GEEE\\_Strategy\\_Gender\\_Equality\\_Monitor\\_tagged.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/814080/GEO_GEEE_Strategy_Gender_Equality_Monitor_tagged.pdf)

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[https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/Position\\_papers/FEANTSA\\_background\\_paper\\_Women%27s\\_Homelessness\\_and\\_GBV.pdf](https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/Position_papers/FEANTSA_background_paper_Women%27s_Homelessness_and_GBV.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> Ministry of Justice (2018), op.cit.

project argued that a new deal for the women was needed which would enable women to move on with their new lives with a clean slate.

### **Systems change approach**

The need for a more coordinated approach to delivering services for people experiencing multiple disadvantage in their lives is now recognised, with new approaches including the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) approach and partnerships established via the Big Lottery Fund's Fulfilling Lives programme<sup>79</sup>. Both these programmes have emphasised the need for partners to work together to change systems to better meet people's needs. In turn, Housing First offers a radical approach in terms of offering the right to housing, with open-ended support to people who are the most marginalised in society. However, Housing First services have not tended to emphasise a systems change approach: the original model providing a largely closed system of support, and only recently has the importance of Housing First being part of a coordinated homelessness strategy been acknowledged<sup>80</sup>.

Further research has highlighted the need for women-specific homelessness strategies, the requirements for homelessness services built and run by women and the need to adapt systems to recognise the nature and extent of women's homelessness.<sup>81</sup> Resources remain a significant problem, but there has been significant innovation, both in the increased (though still rather limited) spread of Housing First provision designed for women and new ideas like DAHA Accreditation, the Whole Housing Approach and the new Domestic Abuse Commissioner structure in England. Jigsaw Housing First reflects, augments and extends these ideas, as a practical, working and very often effective example of what a Housing First service designed for homeless women, and women with a pattern of offending, associated with high and complex needs, can achieve.

The Jigsaw Housing First experience demonstrated that it is not enough to support women to access existing services in the community. Often services that women need do not exist or exist in the wrong format. The Jigsaw Housing First service found themselves fighting women's corners against other agencies or systems, in particular social services and mental health services. This meant that the service had to challenge other services or systems that were holding women back from progressing with their lives. In particular, the service supported women to challenge other services' assumptions about them as mothers. It also centrally challenged wider prevailing views of representations of women who had resorted to offending due to constrained and violent situations they had faced. This was so central to the delivery of the service that it could be argued that it needs to be incorporated as a key principle of Housing First. It also suggests the need for person centred or trauma informed commissioning as a mechanism for applying learning and driving systems change.

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<sup>79</sup> <http://meam.org.uk/the-meam-approach/>; <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/multiple-needs>; Sharpen, J. (2018) *Jumping through hoops: How are coordinated responses to multiple disadvantage meeting the needs of women?* London: AVA, Agenda and St Mungo's.

<sup>80</sup> Blood *et al.* (2017), *op.cit.*

<sup>81</sup> Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2021) *op. cit.*

## **Conclusion**

The Jigsaw Housing First service demonstrated that this model can be adapted to meet the needs of women without moving away from the principles of Housing First. However, the service needs to be enhanced in a number of ways, placing trauma informed relational support at the centre of service delivery and placing a much greater emphasis on women's key relationships, including addressing domestic abuse and challenging existing services to support mothers with their relationships with children. These services now need to be developed at scale, with a responsibility to identify the people who can benefit from this model. Commissioners of service also need to find adequate resources to support the development and delivery of these new transformative, but long-term, services for women who have experienced life-long disadvantage.