



# ROCK TRUST HOUSING FIRST FOR YOUTH PILOT

## EVALUATION REPORT

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Housing First Europe Hub

Rock Trust

Almond Housing Association

Centre for Housing Policy, University of York

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Action for Children



## FOREWORD



**Samara Jones, Programme Coordinator, Housing First Europe Hub**

The Housing First Europe Hub is a network of organisations, cities, governments, housing providers, foundations and researchers working together to support and promote the scaling up of Housing First as a means to end homelessness. Rock Trust is one of our founding partners, and we have been honoured to build this pilot project together to shape, test and assess the impact of Housing First for Youth.

Along with Rock Trust and Focus Ireland, this project has provided us at the Housing First Europe Hub with the framework to develop a European definition of Housing First for Youth and an evaluation framework [www.housingfirsteurope.eu/housing-first-for-youth/](http://www.housingfirsteurope.eu/housing-first-for-youth/).

This new and robust evidence of the efficacy of Housing First for Youth as a successful, rights-based, approach that supports young people in their own accommodation, will serve as an important example of how to deliver Housing First for Youth. We will share the findings with our growing network of Housing First for Youth projects and programmes in France, Finland, Ireland, Belgium, Denmark, England, The Netherlands and Canada.

We salute Rock Trust for its courage to implement this innovative programme. Rock Trust's staff and the young people themselves are to be commended for making this pilot a success, and hopefully a new standard of practice when it comes to supporting young people. The findings of this pilot project clearly demonstrate that when you apply the core principles of Housing First, young people can thrive.

We were also very happy to have the opportunity to meet and work with Almond Housing Association as part of this project. We have consistently been impressed by their staff's dedication to this approach, to supporting the young people in their housing, and to sharing their experience with other social housing providers.

This has been a learning experience for us all. When we were discussing how Rock Trust would find participants for this programme, I remember that the target group was to be "the young people who are failed by other projects and systems". I am very happy to see this report prove that a Housing First for Youth approach can provide young people, especially those who might otherwise be left to struggle on their own, with a home and the support they need to keep it.

Thank you to the young people, the staff at Rock Trust and Almond Housing Association, and to Deborah Quilgars and Imogen Blood for this valuable report which will help us all to further make the case for Housing First for Youth as both a response to youth homelessness, and as an effective approach to preventing it.



**Kate Polson, CEO, Rock Trust**

Rock Trust is Scotland's leading youth-specific homelessness charity. We began 30 years ago delivering shared transitional accommodation to provide a supportive and safe environment for young people to live. This accommodation gave young people an opportunity to develop their skills and learn to live independently alongside their peers. We have long since recognised that this model is not suitable for everyone and we are committed to developing a range of housing and support models to ensure that the needs of every young person are met.

When we learned about the Housing First methods being used across the world and the growing body of evidence of its efficacy, we could clearly see how it might be adapted and implemented for young people. The support of everyone involved in the project, the housing partner Almond Housing Association, the providers and commissioners of services in the communities we work in, and everyone involved at Housing First Europe Hub, has enabled us to deliver a project specifically tailored for young people. Importantly, it has also meant that the project was implemented with fidelity to the model and that we could share our learning with others.

This pilot project in West Lothian, Scotland, the first of its kind in the whole of the UK, was so successful in its infancy that it was extended in size and replicated elsewhere before this evaluation was completed. It is our vision that significantly more young people have access to Housing First for Youth as one of their housing options, and that this model becomes a core part of global strategies to end youth homelessness for good.



**Tracey Longworth, Housing Support Manager, Almond Housing Association**

Almond Housing Association is a mainstream provider of social housing in West Lothian. Our development and commitment to Housing First for Youth was breaking new ground not just for us but across Scotland. For many housing providers the concept of providing secure tenancies for vulnerable young people with no requirement to engage with support would be unthinkable, but Almond Housing Association fully committed to the project with both resources and passion to make a difference. We wanted to support positive change for our most vulnerable young people.

We are immensely proud of our involvement in this project. The outcomes for the young people in this project have, and continue to be, exceptional, and we are delighted that Rock Trust will be directly funded by the Local Authority to continue this vital service.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

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

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

## Referrals to the project

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

## Impact and outcomes for young people

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

### Tenancy sustainment:

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

### Relationships:

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

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

## Health and well-being

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

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

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

## Meaningful activity

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

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

## Fidelity to Housing First model

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

## Immediate access to housing with no preconditions

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

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



## Youth choice and self-determination

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

## Positive youth development orientation

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

## Individualised and client-driven supports

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

## Social and community integration

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

## Wider context and future direction

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

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

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



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

There were three main future areas for consideration:

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

## **About the research**

The evaluation involved three main elements:

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

# 1 METHODOLOGY

Our evaluation was conducted at the end of the pilot, and included:

## **Review of quantitative data completed by nine young people:**

This was collected by Rock Trust when the young person first moved in to a Housing First property, and six months later. Though data is being collected every six months, we have focused on the first two time points, as some of the young people have not been with the service long enough to have completed later surveys. The questions measured change across a range of themes around Housing Stability, Health and Well-being, Education and Employment and Social Inclusion.

## **In-depth interviews with six young people:**

These took place across two visits either at the Rock Trust office, the young person's or a family member's home, as preferred. We attempted to interview all 12 young people; however, a few declined or were not available at this time. We asked young people to talk retrospectively about their experience of the service, including: access, suitability of housing and support; delivery; liaison with other services; overall value of service (impact on housing and wider well-being), and suggestions for improvement.

## **Interviews with project staff based at Rock Trust and Almond Housing:**

- A focus group with four frontline staff;
- Eight face-to-face and one telephone interview with a total of ten members of staff, at operational and strategic levels.

## **Telephone interviews with seven professional stakeholders:**

These were involved in commissioning or delivering local services for care leavers and had some level of involvement in the pilot. They included: operational and strategic staff based at other charities and at West Lothian Council (including Housing, Homelessness, Social Policy and Social Work (Children and Families, Inclusion and Aftercare key worker, Criminal Justice)). The interviews aimed to understand how the Housing First pilot fits into wider service provision and to gather views on its perceived impact.

## **A 'light-touch' evaluation of the new Pathfinder project in Edinburgh:**

We gathered a 'snapshot' of current activity, by conducting telephone interviews with the service manager and two support workers.

## 2 INTRODUCTION TO HOUSING FIRST

Housing First was first developed by Pathways in New York in the early 1990s. Existing ‘staircase’ services for homeless people, offering hostel-type accommodation with requirements to demonstrate ‘housing readiness’, worked for some [2], but many could not complete the steps and had become ‘stuck’ [3]. Instead, Housing First provided someone with a home as quickly as possible and gave them access to intensive, mobile support to enable them to keep it.

Housing First also had a different ethos. Being grounded in the idea that housing is a human right, it aimed to reduce harm, maximise choice and encourage (but not require) positive change. The support offer is much more intensive than existing homelessness services, with one worker typically supporting between 3 and 7 people.

Since the 2000s, Housing First has also gained traction across Europe. A slightly different model of Housing First emerged in Finland, taking a more structural ‘housing-led’ approach [4]. Given the availability of universal, free healthcare services in these countries, most European services provided intensive case management only, facilitating access to other services, where the original Pathways model includes a multidisciplinary team of psychiatrists, nurses and addiction workers. Furthermore, some European services called themselves ‘Housing First’ without retaining fidelity to other aspects of the original model [5].

Housing First Europe has developed the following core principles for the model [6]:

1. Housing is a Human Right
2. Choice and Control for Service Users
3. Separation of Housing and Treatment
4. Recovery Orientation
5. Harm Reduction
6. Active Engagement without Coercion
7. Person-Centered Planning
8. Flexible Support for as long as is required

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[2] Rosenheck, R. (2010) Service models and mental health problems: cost effectiveness and policy relevance, in Ellen, I.G. and O’Flaherty, B. (eds), *How to House the Homeless*. Russell Sage Foundation: New York, pp. 17-36.

[3] Padgett, D.K., Henwood, B.F. and Tsemberis, S (2016) *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems and Changing Lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[4] Y-Foundation A Home of your own handbook: <https://ysaatio.fi/en/housing-first-finland/a-home-of-your-own-handbook>

[5] Pleave, N. and Bretherton, J., 2013. The case for Housing First in the European Union: A critical evaluation of concerns about effectiveness. *European Journal of homelessness*, 7(2); Greenwood, R.M., Bernad, R., Aubry, T. and Agha, A. (2018) A study of programme fidelity in European and North American Housing First Programmes: Findings, Adaptations, and Future Directions. *European Journal of Homelessness* 12 (3), pp.275-299.

[6] Housing First Europe: Core Principles of Housing First: <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/guide/core-principles-housing-first/>

The UK and international evidence suggests that Housing First:

- Achieves tenancy sustainment for between 7 and 9 out of every 10 housed [7];
- Can improve physical and mental health, but the evidence is less strong on this [8];
- Works best as part of an integrated homelessness strategy [9].

Housing First has been developed in Scotland over the past decade, following its launch in Glasgow by Turning Point Scotland [10]. Housing First is currently being ‘scaled up’ in six local authorities of Scotland. The Housing First Pathfinder [11] in Scotland is funded by the Scottish Government, Social Bite and Merchants House Glasgow. Homeless Network Scotland and Corra Foundation are managing delivery of the initial three-year programme, which started in April 2019.

### **Developing Housing First for Youth (HF4Y): a short history**

As Housing First is rolled out, there is discussion about whether and how the model needs to be adapted for particular groups, such as women [12] and young people, including care leavers.

- Canada has developed a specific HF4Y model and detailed guidance [13] as part of their programme to address youth homelessness. This outlines a set of core HF4Y principles which have been specially adapted to meet young people’s needs:

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

[7] Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2013) op.cit.

[8] Pleace, N. (2018) Using Housing First in Integrated Strategies: A review of the evidence London: St Mungos

[9] Allen, M.; Benjaminsen, L.; O’Sullivan, E. and Pleace, N. (2020) Ending Homelessness? The Contrasting Experiences of Denmark, Finland and Ireland Bristol: Policy Press.

[10] Johnsen, S. (2014) Turning Point Scotland’s Housing First Project Evaluation: Final Report: <http://www.turningpointscotland.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/TPS-Housing-First-Final-Report.pdf>

[11] <https://www.housingfirst.scot/pathfinders/>

[12] Quilgars, D. and Pleace, N. (2018) The Threshold Housing First Pilot for Women with an Offending History: The First Two Years York: University of York.

[13] Gaetz, S. (2017) THIS is Housing First for Youth: A Program Model Guide, Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

- The Housing First Europe Hub has developed a HF4Y network [14], and has provided funding for delivery and evaluation of pilots (including Rock Trust and Focus Ireland [15]), training events and a monitoring framework (University of York) and published guidance on delivering HF4Y in Europe [16]
- Focus Ireland has piloted both a youth housing project and HF4Y
- A recent evidence review [17] found limited literature from Denmark [18] and UK [19] on the specific needs of care leavers or young people.

However, attention on HF4Y is set to increase in the UK:

- Homeless Link plan to look at how Housing First can be tailored for young people [20]
- York University is evaluating Centrepoin’s HF4Y service for care leavers in Haringey.

The Rock Trust project is the first HF4Y service to be set up specifically for care leavers in the UK; it is also the first service of this nature to be evaluated independently.

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[14] Jones, S., Quilgars, D. and Sheridan, S. (2017) Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) in Europe: Concept, developments and prospects, European research Conference: Changing profiles of homelessness – implications for services. Barcelona, September 22nd, 2017.

[15] Lawlor, E. and Bowen, N. (2017) Limerick Youth Housing Evaluation Report, Dublin: Focus Ireland

[16] Housing First Europe Hub: What is Housing First for Youth? <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/housing-first-for-youth/>

[17] Bevan, M. and Quilgars, D. (forthcoming) The effectiveness of service interventions in relation to Housing First and housing-led services for care leavers, and young people: a narrative review, York: University of York.

[18] Benjaminsen, L. (2013) Policy Review Up-date: Results from the Housing First based Danish Homelessness Strategy, European Journal of Homelessness, 7, 2, pp 109-131.

[19] Miller, L. (2018) Rapidly responding to homelessness – a look at migrant homelessness, youth homelessness and rapid rehousing models. All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness, London: House of Commons.

[20] Homeless Link (2019) Youth Homelessness: Scoping report, July 2019. London: Homeless Link. <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/resource/research-evaluation>.

## 3 INTRODUCTION TO THE PILOT

### Support provider:

Rock Trust: works with young people in Scotland between the ages of 16- 25 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

### Housing provider(s):

Almond Housing Association (10 properties): owns 2500+ properties in West Lothian.  
West Lothian Council (2 properties): to provide additional choice of areas.

### Time period:

The pilot began in September 2017, with the funding running until the end of March 2020.

### Funding:

Rock Trust	£50,000
Almond Housing Association	£30,000
Housing First Europe Hub	£40,000
Nationwide Building Society	£50,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£170,000</b>

West Lothian Council have since committed to funding the project for another year (until end of March 2021) with a further funding boost from the Artemis Foundation. This funding will also enable the project to be extended to support a further 5 homeless young people (who are not necessarily care leavers).

### Staff structure:

#### Rock Trust:

- Service Manager (covers all Rock Trust Services in West Lothian)
- 1 x Full-time Project Worker (36.25 hours per week)
- 1 x Part-time Project Worker (21.75 hours per week).

#### Almond Housing Association:

- Manager (2 hours per month plus ad hoc support, 1-5% of full time equivalent post);
- Dedicated housing officer (typically 6-8 hours per month; around 5% of FTE post).

### Referrals:

Through 15 Plus Planning Group, led by the local authority, including all local accommodation and support providers working with care leavers/ young people who are homeless.

**Number of young people supported:**

A total of 12 young people are being supported by the service, though this has grown gradually over the duration of the pilot.

**Profile of the young people:**

The focus of the pilot has been on young people with experience of local authority care. Data was available for the first 10 care leavers who had been supported by the service (a further 2 have moved in very recently).

Of these, 6 are male and 4 are female, with ages ranging from 17 to 20.

At the stage when young people first presented to the HF4Y project, all had experienced some level of childhood trauma, instability, multiple moves and a lack of security, including a background of parental substance misuse, alcoholism and/or neglect. The majority of the young people had experienced domestic or institutional abuse.

All of the young people came to the service with a history of complex needs and behavioural issues, these included: non-attendance or exclusion from school, going missing, offending behaviour and physical/ verbal aggression. Most had past or current issues with alcohol and/or drugs. Over half of the young people presented with mental health issues, and four were at risk of self-harming.



## 4 IMPACT AND OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Based on the data collected from the interviews and surveys, all service users achieved positive changes to their lives as a direct result of the support received through the pilot.

### Tenancy sustainment

Most young people referred to the transience of ‘places and faces’ that had surrounded their lives up to this point, many had experienced multiple ‘placements’:

**“When I lived in residential, we had a unit, there was no space, we were sharing with 10-13 year olds and people who were chaotic.” (Claire)**

The sense of home and being able to settle was viewed as a particularly important outcome for this group. Some did not identify with the idea of a ‘home for life’: they attributed this to their age but also in part to their housing and family histories.

There has been one instance during the pilot in which a young person chose to end their tenancy; though the individual has continued to engage with Rock Trust and hopes to find another suitable property in future. All of the other young people have been supported to maintain their tenancies successfully, with some planned moves.

The young people explained how a range of issues had impacted on their tenancy, at least during initial stages, though most felt that they had settled down to some extent. Once they had lived in the property for six months, only one of the eight young people surveyed said they worried about losing their home. Most of the young people explained that they needed support to live independently: managing bills, utilities and household chores was often overwhelming at first, though the support of Rock Trust helped build confidence:

**“[My Rock Trust worker] helps me manage my gas, electricity ...I was always like, ‘aw, I’m not going to read this letter’, I’m just ignoring everything completely but yeah, [the worker] showed me that I need to do this right and that keeps me together” (Lee)**

The Housing Officer also took active steps to de-escalate anti-social behaviour by keeping in contact with neighbours to ward off potential issues.

Interviewees valued the fact they had been able to choose their own furnishings:

**“At the beginning it was good as you get funding to get what you want, you are not just packed off somewhere.” (Claire)**

Once settled all bar one said their home made them feel like they were ‘doing well in life’ (compared to only three who felt this way at the beginning of the tenancy):

**“This is my home, this is where I can come and, you know, say, this is my place ... when you’re in your own house it’s like part of your personality, it’s part of yourself basically” (Lee)**

## Relationships

Housing First is a relationship-based model, in which the relationship with a small number of consistent workers is key to successful tenancy sustainment and positive outcomes in other areas. In the pilot, young people were in regular contact with:

- the two Rock Trust support workers (one was covered by a third worker during a period of maternity leave);
- their manager at Rock Trust; and
- the dedicated housing officer and manager from Almond Housing Association (for those with Almond tenancies).

All young people described ways in which the relationships they had with these workers had led to positive change in their lives.

The young people identified key aspects of this relationship which distinguished it from those with other professionals. They valued the 'stickability', recognising that the relationship was not time-limited or attached to where they lived.

**“they’re not just here for the short term, they’re helping you sort things out long term. And I like that they are always reminding you that they aren’t going anywhere, cos I’m so used to people just disappearing.” (Andy)**

The relationship was not tied to an obligation, and was flexible and non-prescribed:

**“When we speak to them, they don’t ask us for stuff, we built a relationship” (Jane)**

**“it’s not like social work, if I have a problem or if I feel rubbish or need someone to talk to, I can have a gab on the phone to [worker], who will pop out just for a coffee.” (Carly)**

Many spoke of trusting the worker, and feeling they were on their side. In one example where a worker needed to provide evidence for a safeguarding case, the young person accepted this was in her best interest and appreciated that the worker had been open and honest about what was happening. This differed to previous experiences where young people felt information about them was passed around “like a piece of paper”.

They valued the two-way, informal relationships, in which workers felt more like friends:

**“I can cheer them up and have a laugh sometimes, it’s not like workers, it’s like peers, it’s like individual people... I like having a worker that doesn’t feel like a worker, they don’t wear badges or anything like that.” (Andy)**

Others referred to workers (including the Housing Officer) doing “random” things for them, such as going for a birthday meal, giving them a Christmas card or sorting out a cage for one young person’s dog. Feeling that the HF4Y workers cared about them seemed to make the young people more receptive to making positive changes:

**“[the workers] give you that push – they know that we know what we are doing, but it takes us time to realise this, they care.” (Claire)**

As well as developing meaningful relationships with workers, young people reported other improved personal relationships, with one attributing this to having her own space. Of the eight survey respondents, three reported an improved relationship with their family; with the remainder reporting no change.

### **Health and well-being**

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

- Six of the seven who responded said their mental health [21] and satisfaction with life had improved.
- A third said they were eating healthier and exercising more.
- 2 out of 8 said drugs and alcohol were causing less problems in their lives; the others reported that it was the same.

In the interviews, we heard how HF4Y workers had helped some young people engage better with services and develop coping strategies which had in turn improved their mental health.

**“She helped me with doctor appointments...she will phone the doctors, I struggle a lot with that, she helped me talk to my GP, I struggle to speak to people.” (Carly)**

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

**“I had mental health problems, would self-harm, it used to be bad, my worker helped me a lot with this, she pretty much made me go to the GP, it was tough love. I have now learned to deal with my mental health better.” (Jane)**

Though most young people had ongoing issues, there was evidence of better self-management of risk, resulting from Rock Trust’s harm reduction [22] approach. A professional interviewee also referred to one young person who had serious issues around self-harm. Although this had not stopped altogether, the person had been supported by Rock Trust to significantly reduce the risks from it. Another young person continued to struggle with unresolved welfare benefit and health issues, but had succeeded in cutting out drugs:

**“Since moving here I am no longer on drugs, so that has changed. Just living here, I have settled down... it works for me. I still have anxiety and PTSD, and anti-social behavioural disorder, but this is being looked at” [with support from Rock Trust] (Mark)**

A few young people said they sometimes struggled to buy food, with one finding the prospect of going to a food bank “daunting”, but that their worker had done this with them. Another said that if he ran out of food, he would probably not eat if it was not for the intervention of his worker.

These examples highlight the huge progress which has been made; whilst reminding us that change is likely to be a long-term, cyclical process when issues are multiple and are rooted in traumatic histories.

### **Meaningful activity**

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

**“She always came up with loads of ideas. When I felt bad she suggested we try yoga, as it might calm me down. So, I gave it a go, she came with me, we went there and the others doing yoga were being all serious, me and [worker], we were laughing.” (Claire)**

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[22] A ‘harm reduction’ approach recognises that abstinence from substance use and other potentially harmful behaviours is not desirable/ realistic for many, and that these individuals may disengage if pressured into abstinence by professionals. Instead, workers support individuals to set their own goals and develop their own strategies to manage risk. This is a core part of the HF4Y model.

Three out of eight survey respondents said they had begun to access education or training since being involved with the service. One person described how she was getting her life on track with the help of her worker:

**“I have now started a college course in health and social care, I am enjoying this, I want to work in this area. My worker helped me apply for the course.” (Claire)**

Another talked about how his mental health issues meant he struggled to work, but Rock Trust was supporting him with this:

**“They’ve helped me put together my CV and gone round with me helping me to hand it in, because of my anxiety, I just couldn’t walk in somewhere and do that by myself” (Andy)**

Others said that though they were not currently ready for college, they were starting to explore options for the future, when the time is right.

## 5 FIDELITY TO THE HF4Y PRINCIPLES

In this section, we consider how the service managed to achieve these outcomes. We use the HF4Y principles as headings, and present evidence of the pilot's fidelity against them.

### 1. Immediate access to housing with no preconditions

Having a secure home is particularly important to care leavers, who have often experienced numerous moves and typically do not have the safety-net of a 'family home'. Workers explained that having stable accommodation can enable those with complex needs to reduce potentially harmful behaviours. For example, one young person reported they no longer felt they needed alcohol or drugs to escape reality and cope with life.

The separation of housing and support means that the relationship between the HF4Y worker and the young person begins before the tenancy and carries on should it come to an end. This also allows the support provider to focus solely on maintaining the relationship, and do 'whatever it takes' to keep the young person in housing that is suitable for them. By contrast:

**"[In traditional supported housing services)... it's difficult being the landlord and the support provider, because you are always having to look at getting the rent paid, etc but you are trying to support people" (Senior Manager, Rock Trust)**

One stakeholder cited the fact that Rock Trust can help find another tenancy where one has failed or proven unsuitable as a particular strength. This seems to be particularly pertinent in HF4Y (as opposed to Housing First for older adults): movement between tenancies is a natural part of young adulthood, as people make mistakes and decide to start afresh, begin or end romantic relationships or friendships, choose to move closer to (or further away from) family and so on.

### 2. Youth choice and self-determination

All the young people interviewed acknowledged a sense of control and choice and having the space to make decisions and mistakes within this. One stakeholder reflected on this being a 'different language' to what care leavers had experienced in the past. That the service treats young people as adults with both rights and responsibilities is a key application of the Housing First model to this cohort, given their age and life experiences.

The ability to promote self-determination was felt to be a key quality of project staff. Workers recognised that change in some areas was a gradual process, and that their role was to empower people to make decisions themselves. This came across strongly in the interviews with the care leavers, who all talked about the steps they had taken to achieve a change, even though they might attribute it to their worker.

Some stakeholders referred to the limited choice of areas in which Almond has properties; however, two young people who wanted to live in areas where Almond does not have stock had been supported into a council tenancy. Choices were made at many levels, for example, young people were given the opportunity to decide how to decorate and furnish their homes.

**“I will go and visit them in the residential unit ...maybe go to IKEA so they can think about the kinds of furniture they will put in the new place. We might go for lunch and talk about how they might decorate it” (HF4Y Worker)**

Individuals were able to use their Leaving Care Grant to furnish their properties; however, where they moved into Almond tenancies, the housing association provided a significant top up to this, allowing them greater choice in furnishings including paints and carpets.

The fact that the person has a permanent tenancy and the budget to make it their own, gives them more ‘ownership’, stability and sense of ‘home’:

**“Young people in reviews say they have ownership, they have chosen things, not had them bought for them – it doesn’t always mean they don’t get broken, but this ethos is really key”. (Statutory Worker)**

### **3. Positive youth development orientation**

By placing their faith in young people who had previously been dismissed or even demonised by services, the project challenges the labelling of people as ‘deserving/ undeserving’, ‘high risk’ or ‘manipulating’.

We heard many examples of the HF4Y workers building natural, ‘human’ relationships: with different boundaries and language, rooted in an understanding both of youth development and the impact of trauma. For example, one worker explained, “we don’t have a ‘meeting’, we have an informal chat at the beginning”. Staff from Almond were also able to articulate how they work in a trauma-informed way, despite the fact that this way of working is fairly new within housing management:

**“This means knowing individuals’ backgrounds, showing compassion, doing things differently because we understand their needs, and doing the least harm we can”. (Housing Officer)**



Young people and staff sometimes spoke of an unconditional ‘parent-like’ relationship between them, using terms such as “tough love”. This struck us as being quite different from the typical ethos of a Housing First service for older adults, but demonstrated an appropriate modification of the model for younger people.

**“Maybe you need to be a parent. It’s their first tenancy, they can get quite excitable...I talk to them about manners, I feel you sometimes need to be a parent to these kids” (Housing Officer)**

Young people were clear that abstinence was not required of them, though some had chosen to reduce or stop substance use, often with the support of their worker.

#### **4. Individualised and client-driven supports**

The general consensus amongst staff and stakeholders was that HF4Y is first and foremost a model of support, which is relationship-based, unconditional and ‘portable’.

**“The support you can offer someone is more important than the bricks and mortar” (HF4Y Worker)**

Project workers described the approach as ‘person-led, not system-led’: flexing to deliver what people want, not what processes demand. In other words, ‘there are no rules for the sake of it’. Given small caseloads, the support can be much more intensive and holistic than traditional housing-related support, and closer bonds develop as a result.

The young people recognised and valued the ‘stickability’ of the offer. Workers explained how the sense of permanence impacted on the quality of the support: friendship, trust and attachments grew, precisely because the support was not tied to particular needs; meetings did not have to have a specific purpose:

**“Compared to supported housing...they know there isn’t a risk of us leaving them – they know it’s constant – we’re there whatever happens, if they go to prison, have babies....but in supported housing, it is only 2 years”. (HF4Y Worker)**

**“We can take things at their own pace, rather than the pressure of going through a tick box, you have to learn to cook, do all these things...you can spread things out, it is more relaxed” (HF4Y Worker)**

As we saw in the previous section, the relationship with workers and the advocacy they provide are instrumental in creating positive outcomes for young people. By comparison,

**“People become retraumatised in a ‘staircase model’ – as they need to build new relationships, and they lose relationships with support workers at each stage”. (HF4Y Service Manager)**

If young people disengage, the service does not use or threaten them with sanctions. The individual has choice over when and how they are supported, but the offer is proactive. For example, a worker explained that they will go and look for a person at a friend or relative’s house if they are not at home when they said they would be.

**“The other commissioned services, close the case if there is non-engagement – so we are constantly re-referring people – Housing First are not doing that – they are there for the long term, and young people quickly get that”. (Statutory Worker)**

## 5. Social and community integration

As we saw in the last chapter, there was evidence of workers helping to reduce young people’s barriers to social integration: supporting them to overcome social anxiety, or try out local groups or services. For some young people, supporting house moves to areas where they are closer to support networks, was a key part of rebuilding relationships and resilience.

HF4Y workers also gave examples of supporting young people to develop their own strategies, e.g. for managing visitors, reducing self-harm, or dealing with social anxiety. Again, this was rooted in a trauma-informed approach, for example:

**“We won’t go in and say ‘don’t punch the door’, we say ‘you have punched the door, are you okay?’, which is a different way of looking at it” (HF4Y Worker)**

We heard that, where neighbour nuisance issues threatened young people’s tenancies, the Almond housing officer had been able to work with neighbours, to prevent problems from escalating.

## 6 REFLECTIONS ON COST EFFECTIVENESS

A comprehensive cost benefit/ avoidance analysis was beyond the scope of this evaluation; however, we present here some illustrations, comparisons and reflections.

Pleace and Bretherton (2019) found that cost off-sets for statutory services from Housing First occur [23]:

- **For local authorities**, where there is a reduction in homelessness presentations to the council and spending on other housing and support offers that prove to be ineffective;
- **For the NHS**, where there is an increase in planned and preventative use of healthcare, rather than in emergency presentations, ambulance call-outs and unplanned admissions;
- **For the criminal justice system**, where there is a reduction in repeat offending, short term custodial sentences and frequent arrest/ overnight detention.

We heard examples of potential cost savings to the NHS in section 4. Here we illustrate them with unit costs [24] which might have been avoided:

- A young person with mental health problems being supported to access the GP: a GP appointment costs £26, compared to a mental health admission at £436 a day.
- A young person who regularly self-harms learning to better manage this and reduce risks; this could avoid or reduce ambulance usage (£242 per call-out) and A&E attendances (£166).

Pleace & Bretherton (2019) found that Housing First will sometimes increase costs, particularly for the NHS, in cases where someone who should have been receiving treatment and support, but did not while homeless, is connected to the services they need through Housing First. This seems less likely for Rock Trust's cohort of care leavers than for older adults who have typically had longer histories of homelessness prior to engagement.

If these young people were to remain in their previous placements under Continuing Care [25], the costs to the local authority would range from £685 (foster placement) to £4899 (residential children's home) per week. However, given the complexity of their needs and the level of risk, mainstream placements may not be an option. Secure placements would be very expensive: a place in a Secure Children's Homes costs around £210, 000 per year, a Medium Secure Mental Health Setting, £588,015 [26].

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[23] Pleace, N. & Bretherton, J. (2019) The cost effectiveness of Housing First in England, Housing First England/ Homeless Link

[24] All unit costs taken from New Economy GMCA unit cost database 2019, unless otherwise stated

[25] Section 67 of The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 states that a young person born after 1 April 1999 who is looked after in foster, kinship or residential care is eligible to remain in their current care placement until they turn 21. This is called Continuing Care.

[26] <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2019/05/16/almost-1500-children-in-england-are-locked-up-by-the-state-at-a-cost-of-a-third-of-a-billion-a-year/>

**By comparison, we have estimated the cost of supporting one person in Rock Trust’s HF4Y to be £6,580 per year [27].**

We asked professional stakeholders where they thought these young people might be if the HF4Y project was not in place.

**“I know most of the young people in Housing First – they have been around quite a few services. I shudder to think what would have happened if they did not access Housing First – one would be in an abusive relationship.... it’s not a stretch to say at least one young person would be dead. In general, I would say you would have some who would be incarcerated – more drug use, dangerous choices”. (Third sector professional stakeholder)**

The following table summarises some of the alternative scenarios mentioned by this professional and others, alongside their estimated unit costs.

Failed tenancies	The average cost of a complex eviction is £7770 (includes temporary accommodation as well as landlord’s costs)
Longer-term homelessness	An estimated £20,000 per year [28] is spent by the NHS and Criminal Justice Service (CJS) where a person is homeless. Local authorities spend an average of £9,189 per year on rough sleepers and £125 per week on temporary accommodation
Increased drug/ alcohol use	Average annual savings of £3,994 accrue to NHS, and CJS where drug treatment is effective. A dependent drinker costs NHS an average of £2,133 a year
Increased offending/ custodial sentences	Young offender institutions cost £239 per day
Abusive relationships	The fiscal cost alone per incident of domestic violence is £2968

[27] We have divided the £170K total revenue funding for 31 months by 31 and multiplied by 12, to reach an annual figure, then divided this by 10 to give an estimate per individual. It should be noted that, at the end of the pilot, there were actually 11 active cases, but one of these had only recently joined the project. It should also be noted that Housing First pilots generally take new clients on gradually at the outset, so the unit costs can be higher in the first year, allowing for set-up and the fact that people generally need intensive support at move-in. The unit cost in the first year of the Rock Trust pilot was £12,400 per person (based on £62,000 revenue funding for 5 people for 12 months). This unit cost does not include furniture budgets for each tenancy or costs for evaluation/ monitoring support and excludes rent, which is covered separately by benefits in the UK (though it does include the intensive housing management provided by Almond).

[28] Pleece, N. and Culhane, D. (2016) Better than Cure? Testing the case for Enhancing Prevention of Single Homelessness in England London: Crisis

Despite these potential savings to the local authority, NHS and criminal justice sector, there are some health warnings here. The cost effectiveness of Housing First hinges on it being targeted at those who would be unlikely to succeed in traditional models and who are, without support, likely to generate high costs for statutory agencies. The Rock Trust pilot seems to be targeting the right cohort to achieve cost avoidance to the wider system.

Finally, even with the right support, 'recovery' for this cohort is unlikely to be linear, uniform and sustained: ongoing crises and lapses are almost inevitable. There has been at least one example of a tenancy which did not work out, and of a custodial sentence within the pilot period. Any future modelling of cost savings must factor in some level of ongoing cost for criminal justice incidents, 'avoidable' health crises and problems with tenancies.

## 7 THE WIDER SERVICE AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Using data from 2015/16, the Care Inspectorate reported that 45% of care leavers in West Lothian presented as homeless at least once [29]. A recurring theme from the professional interviews was that children's and homelessness services can tend to operate in silos.

The Social Policy department of West Lothian council spends around £1 million per year on housing-related support for care leavers: this includes a traditional supported housing project provided by Rock Trust, and other projects by Bethany Christian Trust, Open Door and Action for Children. The local authority has protected this budget, despite a decade of sustained local authority cuts. In recent years, they have set up a Public Social Partnership (PSP), consisting of public and third sector agencies and young people who will have the opportunity to be involved in 'participatory budgeting' to re-design services, partnerships and pathways.

The HF4Y pilot has been funded outside of this commissioned support; however, long-term sustainability hinges on its alignment with the wider strategic context, including:

- The Care Review Scotland (2020) [30] report, which highlights care leavers' inadequate housing, equipment, skills and support, and argues for non-time-limited, relationship-focused services, where 'kind and loving behaviour' by professionals is 'the norm'.

**"Older care experienced people must have a right to access to supportive, caring services for as long as they require them...so that there are no cliff edges out of care and support" (p.92).**

- The overall aim of West Lothian Council to reduce their use of (especially out-of-area) institutional placements, due to poor outcomes and high costs.

Professional interviewees agreed that a full range of housing and support models are needed to reflect care leavers' diverse needs. Congregate and shared models can work well for many, and the 'managed front door' reduces risks for some; however, they recognised a different approach is needed for a minority with the most complex needs. Requiring them to prove 'tenancy-readiness' in a congregate setting can set them up to fail; the alternatives (such as secure accommodation) are incredibly expensive and tend not to secure good outcomes. HF4Y, as we have seen, can work well for this relatively small group.

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[29] Care Inspectorate (2017) Report of a joint inspection.

<https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/3994/West%20Lothian%20children%20and%20young%20people's%20services%20joint%20inspection%20August%202017.pdf>

[30] Independent Care Review (2020): The Promise

Elsewhere [31], we have discussed the importance of funders not only committing to longer term funding if Housing First projects are to be delivered with fidelity, but also agreeing to performance manage providers more flexibly, based on trust and dialogue, rather than a rigid set of performance indicators.

The project and its commissioners will also need to decide how to manage the question of upper age limits, as the current cohort 'ages in place'. If a rigid age limit is introduced, the 'stickability' of the support will be jeopardised and young people risk yet another 'cliff edge'; if there are no age limits at all, the project could support some people into much later adulthood.

We found evidence of the positive impact of the HF4Y principles rippling out across mainstream practice at Rock Trust and Almond, and to wider services. Educating others about the ethos of HF4Y and Housing First more widely is a key task for a pilot service, and there was evidence of this happening. However, some in wider services still seemed to view the tenancy as a 'prize' or felt that additional conditions should be met to qualify for the ongoing service. There was also sometimes a tension between external professionals wanting Rock Trust to better share information about individuals, and workers' need to build trust with young people.

The shortage of local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) emerged as a recurring theme. This reduces the HF4Y workers' ability to facilitate access to urgently needed services. Rock Trust has recently begun to develop a more strategic response to this alongside its advocacy for individuals, through its membership of the West Lothian Rapid Re-housing Strategic Board [32] and a project on mental health in Edinburgh for which they have secured Comic Relief funding. Building closer partnerships with CAMHS was also identified as a strategic priority in our interviews with senior managers at the council.

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[31] See p.44: Blood et al (2018) Implementing Housing First across England, Scotland and Wales, Crisis

[32] The Board draws membership from across the council, West Lothian Integration Joint Board (including Health), Social Landlords and the voluntary Sector. It is responsible for oversight of the Rapid Re-housing Transition Plan, which aims to generate a better flow through the homeless system while shifting focus further to an early intervention and prevention approach: <https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/media/31211/2018-12-18-West-Lothian-RRTP-First-Iteration-FinalDraft-/pdf/RRTP.pdf?m=637063038965830000>



## 8 CONCLUSIONS

The pilot has been successful at identifying appropriate referrals, building relationships with young people, and working with them to achieve a range of positive outcomes. It is, by our assessment, operating with a very high degree of fidelity to the HF4Y principles. This is supported by good management and regular reflective practice by and between Rock Trust and Almond Housing Association.

The project has clearly benefitted from Rock Trust's existing understanding of young people's needs and their expertise in meeting these creatively and flexibly. The project is highly thought of by the external stakeholders we interviewed. Although the model requires ongoing investment in a relatively small cohort of young people, we suggest significant potential for cost effectiveness in both the short and long term, compared to alternatives for this cohort.

We were struck by the particular significance of 'stickable' support relationships for this cohort of young care leavers, even if the idea of a 'home for life' is perhaps less relevant and appealing to some of this age group than for older users of Housing First services. Choice, control, trust and ownership are hugely important for care experienced young people, given their previous experiences of multiple 'placements' and being passed around powerlessly.

Areas for consideration moving forwards might include:

### **Involving young people in service design and delivery**

When done well, this can be mutually beneficial for both the service and those using it; though careful thought and planning is essential to ensure input is meaningful, well-supported and makes a tangible difference. Some of the young people we interviewed expressed an interest in 'giving something back' to the project and supporting younger cohorts of care leavers, and 'youth voice' fits under the HF4Y principle of youth choice and self-determination. This could potentially take a number of formats, ranging from peer mentoring or a lived experience advisory forum to routine feedback mechanisms or simple methods to bring young people together and create opportunities for mutual support and community between them.

### **Education, Training and Employment (ETE)**

We heard various practical examples of individuals being encouraged and supported in this direction, though some stakeholders felt more could be done to promote ETE. There is a delicate balancing act to be struck here in work with individuals - the HF4Y Program Model Guide recognises that:

**"Addressing trauma can take time, and in many cases, must precede active and ongoing participation in other program goals and activities such as education and employment".  
(p.8, Gaetz 2017)**

However, strengthening strategic partnerships with colleges, employers and Department of Work and Pensions (DWP [33]) could be an area for future development.

### **Wider system change**

Rock Trust and Almond have worked hard to raise awareness of the HF4Y principles, in both their own organisations and through local partnerships. There is emerging evidence of more strategic work to challenge mental health and other statutory providers and system-led processes which often stigmatise and exclude care leavers and other young people with complex needs.

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[33] DWP is responsible for administering unemployment, disability and ill-health benefit payments.

## 9 REFLECTIONS ON THE EDINBURGH SITE

### Background and overview

Rock Trust has been running the HF4Y project in Edinburgh since August 2019, as part of a wider consortium of five other charities, who are delivering Housing First for older adults. The project is funded by Social Bite and Scottish Government and led by the Cyrenians.

The Rock Trust project is led by an Operations Manager and is supported by three Project Workers (two full-time and one part time). In March 2020, 16 people (the target is 17) had been accepted onto the service, of which 6 had been accommodated; all bar one is a care leaver. As properties are allocated through the mainstream housing list, the age composition is higher than West Lothian, at 18-20. Referrals are via two designated housing officers who work with care leavers in the area. They assess potential future need, with referrals accepted from those assessed as being 'at risk of developing complex and multiple needs'.

To gather views on how the service is working to date, we carried out telephone interviews with the Operations Manager and two Project Workers. All quotes are from these interviews.

### Operating the service

In setting up the project, the Edinburgh team worked closely with the Operations Manager at West Lothian, who shared learning and supported staff recruitment.

Unlike the West Lothian model, young people accepted onto the service are not allocated a property through a specific provider but bid through the city's choice based lettings system, which all registered social landlords use to advertise vacant properties. This, at least in theory, creates a wider choice of area and accommodation, though the flipside is that the service does not benefit from the 'personal touch' of one Housing Officer as in West Lothian:

**"We see the benefit of a designated housing officer, but we can't go that way in Edinburgh, it was something suggested when setting up strategic planning, but there are too many landlords" Operations Manager**

Staff worried about being candid with Housing Officers about young people's full histories, in case this prejudiced the likelihood of a property offer, meaning that a less secure tenancy would be offered or that 'guaranteed support hours' would be required. Once a tenancy was set up, the values and approach of the allocated Housing Officer was described as a 'bit of a lottery'. HF4Y workers felt that Housing Officers would ideally work in a more trauma informed way, but this was difficult to implement given the number of potential social landlords involved.

Staff reported advantages and disadvantages of being part of a larger consortium. In some parts of the city people who are being supported across the consortium are being placed on estates in close proximity to each other, which can lead to a range of issues, not least in relation to community perceptions and relations. Conversations amongst the consortium to better plan and coordinate are starting to take place. Being part of the consortium makes the project more vulnerable to external factors that might negatively impact on perceptions of the service; yet the consortium also offers a valuable support network, including opportunities for training, learning and support, compared to the relative “isolation” of the West Lothian project:

**“It’s good as I get tips and things, to know it’s not just me, others are going through the same things.” Project Worker**

### **How Housing First for Youth Edinburgh achieves outcomes**

Despite their very different strategic contexts, the services at both Edinburgh and West Lothian share core values, and both show high fidelity to the HF4Y principles. Both teams offer a trauma-informed, and harm reduction approach, with staff in Edinburgh echoing the importance of staff flexibility, resilience and a “whatever it takes” approach. For example:

**“One young person didn’t have a phone, so it was a case of where will he be, where are the places he hangs out? [The young person] is on a methadone script, so I found out which chemist he went to and waited for him there” Project Worker**

Both HF4Y workers referred to the importance of building trust, and reassuring young people that the support can stick to them, no matter what, as they learn and grow:

**“We know from the beginning [the young person] will make mistakes at certain points... they do learn that the support stays... there however they behave” Project Worker**

As in West Lothian, the staff see relationship-building as the cornerstone, especially since engaging with support is not a condition of the tenancy. Staff identified with the “parent-like care” observed in West Lothian and the importance of “blurring the boundaries” and developing more informal friendships, where young people talk about things they would not discuss with other professionals. While it is still early days, staff gave examples of impact, such as supporting one young person to address their hoarding:

**"[He] now has his own tenancy and hoarding is no longer a big problem. From his perspective it is his own place, he is proud of it, it has given him the motivation to stay on top of it." Project Worker**

## **Reflections**

Staff at the Edinburgh project compared their work supporting young people with those consortium members supporting older adults. They reflected that it can sometimes be easier to build trust with young people (who may have been let down less by services), yet younger people may need more support moving into their own tenancy for the first time and may be more vulnerable to exploitation. Being able to take time to prepare the person for their new home was where HF4Y workers felt they offered particular value.

The lettings system offers greater choice; however, some young people are restricting their searches to one street; one is not bidding at all. Although the project engages with them before the offer of a property, many remain in congregate or unsettled accommodation during this period which impacts negatively on their well-being in other ways.

It was felt that, in order for Housing First to continue to develop successfully in Edinburgh, more strategic integration and policy alignment is needed, involving not just direct delivery partners but also wider stakeholders, such as the DWP and local communities.

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

### Housing First Europe Hub

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

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



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



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

### Rock Trust

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

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



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## Authors

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Imogen set up the independent social research consultancy, Imogen Blood & Associates (IBA) in 2009. A qualified social worker and former prison drug worker, Imogen has also held research posts at Nacro and the University of Salford. She is interested in multiple needs, strengths-based practice and supported housing. IBA works across housing and social care, and has a strong track record in relation to Housing First, including feasibility studies (Liverpool City Region, Conwy & Denbighshire), evaluations (Soha, Rock Trust) and policy reports (Implementing Housing First across England, Scotland and Wales for Crisis/Homeless Link).

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Sarah is an IBA Associate and Freelance Research Consultant, specialising in homelessness, housing and social inclusion. She has nearly 10 years' experience of designing, delivering and managing research, evaluations and workshops for clients based across local authorities and the not for profit sector. She has held research posts at the University of Leeds and Sheffield, where she gained her PhD. Sarah started her professional career as a housing and welfare benefits adviser, working for both the statutory sector and Legal Services Commission.

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### Deborah Quilgars

Quilgars is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Housing Policy, University of York. She has 30 years' experience of undertaking homelessness research and is a particular expert on youth homelessness. Deborah has undertaken a number of evaluations of Housing First projects in the UK. Recently, she worked with Feantsa and the Y Foundation to develop an evaluation framework for Housing First for Youth in Europe. Deborah is a member of the Women's Homelessness in Europe Network.



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