



An Introduction to Housing First for Youth (HF4Y)

WHAT IS HOUSING FIRST FOR YOUTH?

Adapted from the successful Housing First approach, Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is a rights-based intervention for young people (aged 13-24) who are experiencing homelessness, or who are at risk of becoming homeless. It's designed to address the needs of developing adolescents and young adults by providing them with rapid access to housing that's safe, affordable, appropriate and without pre-conditions, combining this

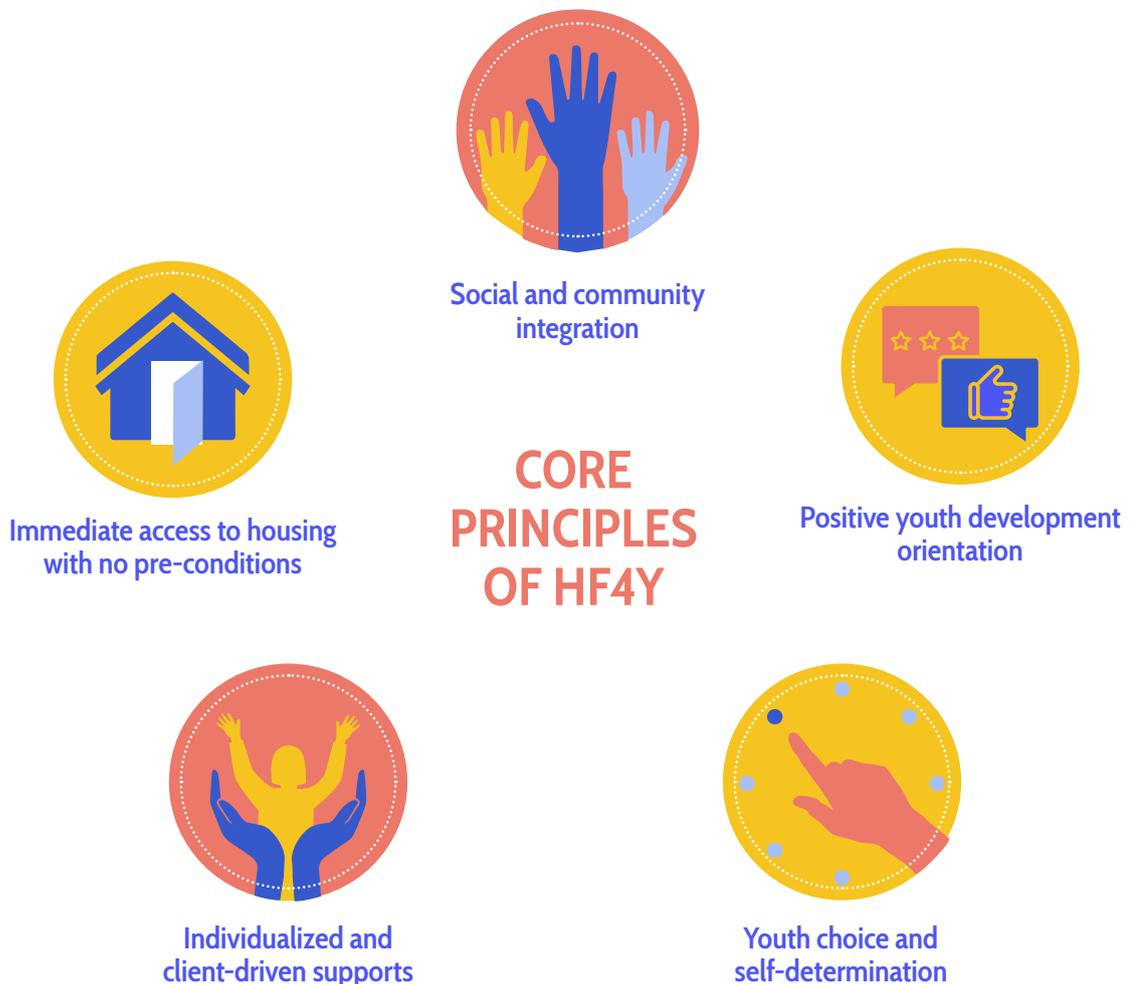
with necessary and age-appropriate supports that focus on health, well-being, life skills, engagement in education and employment, as well as social inclusion.

The goal of HF4Y is to support young people through their adolescence and facilitate a healthy transition to adulthood, all while having a safe and stable place to call home.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF HOUSING FIRST FOR YOUTH

A core tenet of Housing First is that housing is a basic human right, as outlined by the United Nations. The HF4Y model extends this right to young people, acknowledges

that young people have specific needs related to their age, and adapts the Housing First principles accordingly.



WHY DO WE NEED SEPARATE HOUSING FIRST FOR YOUTH SERVICES?

The HF4Y model was developed in Europe and Canada as an adaptation of Housing First to respond to the specific needs of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Typical homelessness and Housing First services, which may include tenants as young as 18 years old, are not necessarily equipped to best support young people. This is because a 'junior' version of adult services does not usually take into account the different kinds of support that young people need. They may separate younger service users from adults but essentially use the same approach for everyone.

Age matters when it comes to psychological, social, physical and emotional development.

At this relatively early stage of life, there's a significant difference between young people aged 13, 16, 20, 25, and trauma at any stage of development can lead to developmental delays.

HF4Y is different because it builds on the core principles of Housing First but goes further in adapting them to better serve the specific needs of adolescents and young adults. What's more, evidence from Canada (A Way Home Canada) and Europe (Rock Trust, Scotland, and Focus Ireland) has proven that adapting the service for young people in this way leads to better outcomes, which may include lower drop-out rates, remaining housed for longer and/or sustained engagement with support services.

WHY HOUSING FIRST FOR YOUTH WORKS

The support networks are different.

HF4Y teams need to work with different partners than Housing First teams. For example, young people in HF4Y often come from the child protection (child welfare) system. Other partners can include schools and post-secondary education providers, employers or training agencies, as well as health, mental health, addiction and other services.

Family may play an important role.

HF4Y teams may be contacted by the families of young people involved in the programme and young people in HF4Y may themselves be parents of young children. HF4Y provides support to help young people with these relationships.

Housing options are different.

In Housing First, the goal is to find permanent housing for tenants. In HF4Y, it's recognised that young people will move from one home to another over the course of time and the service allows for flexibility, ensuring that HF4Y support sticks with them, even if they change tenancies.

HF4Y can be key to preventing homelessness.

Housing First programmes are designed for people who have been homeless for a significant period of time, or who are chronically homeless. In HF4Y, there's a strong focus on rapid response and prevention, acting as quickly as possible to prevent young people from becoming homeless, either for

the first time or to prevent repeat experiences of homelessness. This includes rapidly intervening to support young people already experiencing homelessness, minimising as far as possible the length of the experience at this crucial developmental stage in their lives.

HF4Y is a relationship-based model.

HF4Y workers help young people to make positive changes in their lives. In the Rock Trust pilot project in Scotland, “young people 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” (Rock Trust HF4Y pilot project evaluation, 2020).

Youth-oriented support.

The majority of young people who become homeless have previously been in a situation of dependency on adults for support, which makes it a very different experience from that of adults who become homeless. Many young people do not have even the most basic experience of running their own home, finding a home, getting a job, organising their healthcare, or navigating the social system, and they are very vulnerable as a result.

They also have different legal rights, particularly those under the age of 18, who are legally considered minors in many countries. Young people make a different type of progress with HF4Y compared to adults in Housing First and often at a faster pace. While some adults with experience of chronic homelessness and/or complex needs may be dependent on long-term support, it’s not uncommon for young people to reconnect with education/part-time work and/or employment opportunities. For some young people, the support that they receive gives them a sense of stability and a foundation to enter the workforce, sometimes even more quickly than adults.

Housing First prioritises long-term street homelessness due to lack of sufficient housing availability, focusing on people who are in the most serious situations of exclusion and repeat or long-term homelessness (known as chronic homelessness). Unlike Housing First aimed at adults, HF4Y doesn’t wait for young people to have a long history of homelessness in order for them to access the service. Perhaps most importantly, HF4Y isn’t just about housing a young person and transitioning out of homelessness, but providing them with the skills to transition to independent living with all the resources they need to help prevent a re-occurrence of homelessness.

CASE STUDY: Rock Trust Pilot

Supported by the Housing First Europe Hub, the Rock Trust’s first Housing First For Youth service - piloted in West Lothian, Scotland, over a period of two years and the first of its kind in the UK - saw 92% of the young people involved successfully sustain their tenancies and 100% remain engaged with support throughout the project.

For more information, please see:

[Rock Trust Housing First for Youth Pilot: Evaluation Report](#)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

DID YOU KNOW?

Housing is a human right. The United Nations defines a home as:

- offering legally-backed security of tenure,
- affordable,
- habitable,
- having essential services such as power and water,
- accessible to the people who live in it, and as located within access to necessary services, such as schools and shops.
- Housing must also be culturally appropriate to someone's needs.

What are the implications of homelessness for young people?

When young people become homeless, both their physical and mental health are at high risk. They are more likely to become physically ill, experience depression, or even death by suicide. Young people experiencing homelessness are especially vulnerable because of their lack of experience of the world. In many cases, young people who become homeless will previously have been almost entirely dependent on an adult for food, economic and social support, as well as housing. In losing access to the life experience of the adult(s) responsible for them, they are more likely to be manipulated and subjected to criminal exploitation. They are also more likely to drop out of school, and there's a greater risk that they will develop substance addictions as a means to alleviate boredom, stress, or anxiety often as a result of peer pressure.

Another worrisome aspect is that despite the fact that youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to be victims than perpetrators of crime, most of the contact they have with the police is the result of the perception that youth experiencing homelessness are criminals and/or a public nuisance. This means it can be more difficult to build trust-based relationships and help young people to

get the support they need. The combination of youth trauma and criminal victimisation can have profound long-lasting effects that contribute to long-term entrenchment in life on the streets.

What's more, those who experience homelessness in their youth are more likely to become chronically homeless in their adult life. If youth homelessness isn't tackled at an early stage then the outcome is effectively creating the next generation of people who will experience chronic homelessness.

What are the causes of youth homelessness?

As with adult homelessness, there is no singular cause of youth homelessness, but it's important to note that the most common causes are different to those of adult homelessness. Youth homelessness may be due to any number of factors, including addiction, poverty, domestic abuse, family homelessness, loss of a caregiver, exit from state care institutions (foster care, children's homes), and exit from correctional care facilities, to name a few. In some countries, such as the Netherlands, about 70% of HF4Y service users have a (sometimes long and problematic) history in the youth care system. LGBTIQ people make up approximately 20-40% of youth experiencing homelessness in

Europe, while migrant young people become homeless due to a series of barriers in accessing social rights, housing, education and are faced with wide discrimination.

Often, these young people have experienced relational problems such as domestic violence, conflicts at home, the breaking of a relationship and the divorce or loss of parents. The lack of a social network also plays a role. Negative experiences in upbringing, family composition, school career, life events, financial position of the parents may also be relevant factors.

Young people who have experience of being homeless often also deal with complex, multiple problems, such as financial, psychological and/or addiction problems, which in some cases may be combined with a mild intellectual disability.

It's crucial to understand that people who are homeless are not only those who are visibly living on the street. There is also 'hidden homelessness', whereby young people may not have a fixed home but may find temporary accommodation by staying with family, friends, 'sofa surfing', living in squats, or other non-permanent accommodation.

Who is Housing First for Youth for?

HF4Y is designed to provide support and access to housing for young people with high support needs who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. For example, in the Rock Trust pilot project, the "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." (Rock Trust HF4Y Pilot Evaluation, p.14)

DID YOU KNOW?

Article 31 of the European Social Charter notes that Member States should:

- 1) Promote access to housing of an adequate standard;
- 2) Prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination;
- 3) Make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources.

DID YOU KNOW?

The right to housing is set out under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which notes: “the States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent”.

How are youth different from the adult population in their housing needs?

Young people are at an important stage of their physical, psychological, emotional and social development and have specific needs related to their age. An important difference from adult Housing First services is that due to their developmental and life stage, young people do not necessarily require permanent housing in the same way as adults do. This is because young people are expected to move home several times as they pass from childhood to adolescence to young adulthood, regardless of their age or social situation.

In normal circumstances, they might move from the family home into shared accommodation with friends as they attend third-level education or enter into the workforce for the first time. They may also change neighbourhoods or even cities to be closer to friends or different job or educational opportunities.

HF4Y takes into account that young people need more choice and flexibility in terms of their accommodation at this stage of their life, and understands that it is natural for them to desire to change their living location or situation more often than adults with stable jobs or families.

Young people need to be able to experiment and explore in order to identify what they want to do, where they want to be, and who they want to be as a natural part of developing into fully-grown, independent

adults. Perhaps most importantly, HF4Y ensures that the accompanying support services stay with the young person as they move from one home to the next. The HF4Y workers ‘stick’ with the young person and provide stability throughout their transition into adulthood.

What types of housing are provided in Housing First for Youth?

As in Housing First, housing in HF4Y should come from the standard housing market. Young people in HF4Y should have a choice as to where they live, should be listed on the tenancy or lease, and – in most cases – the housing should ideally be in the form of individual units.

There are instances where HF4Y programmes have worked with shared accommodation, but care must be taken to ensure that young people are not forced to share and that the core principles are respected.

HF4Y support can be provided in all kinds of accommodation including:

- Student accommodation
- Private Market Rental accommodation
- Transitional Accommodation
- Shared Accommodation
- Long-term tenancies

HF4Y is innovative and different because the support stays with the young person even as they move from one place to another. The support is not linked to the housing and neither are time-limited. Many programmes for young homeless people only provide support or housing for 6 to 12 to 18 months. In line with the core principles of Housing First, young people in HF4Y have access to both support and housing for as long as necessary.

Can Housing First for Youth be used as a preventative measure?

Absolutely! HF4Y is designed for young people who have experience of homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness. HF4Y can be an important part of strategies to prevent youth homelessness and it is crucial not to let young people become or remain homeless for any length of time before they are eligible for HF4Y. This is particularly relevant for young people who may have 'aged out' of state-run care institutions or who are in the process of exiting youth correctional facilities. It can offer a bridge between the institutional experience and independent adult life by teaching young people important life skills in a safe environment, as well as supporting their educational needs and preparing them for employment.

How is Housing First for Youth different from other models of youth housing support?

Unlike other youth housing services, HF4Y is not time-limited. It is designed to not only provide stable, age-appropriate accommodation, but

flexible support for as long as is needed. This means that young people are never discharged from HF4Y services into homelessness and there is continuity of care for the long-term (unlike some other services, such as state care homes, whereby young people may be discharged without further care provision when they reach an age considered to be 'too old' for the target age group for the service). This also means that HF4Y support is provided separately from the housing itself and 'sticks' with young people if or when they move from one home to another.

As with Housing First, single unit housing is preferred for HF4Y accommodation, whereas other youth housing services may focus on group or shared housing or accommodation for young people. As part of HF4Y, young people sign their own rental/tenancy agreements, which contributes to a sense of stability, safety and ownership over their living space. It also contributes to helping young people develop independence and learn responsibility as they transition to adulthood, an important part of helping them acquire the domestic and life skills they need to stay in their homes. Another key difference is that there are no pre-requisites for access to housing in HF4Y. Young people are not expected to complete 'housing readiness' courses before they are settled into a home.

What are the differences between Housing First for Youth and Housing First?

The philosophies of Housing First and HF4Y are essentially the same, but HF4Y support is more specifically tailored to the needs of younger people.

DID YOU KNOW?

The European Charter of Fundamental Rights, which is applied to institutions of the E.U. under Article 34, notes that: "in order to combat social exclusion and poverty, the Union recognises and respects the right to social and housing assistance so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources, in accordance with the rules laid down by Community law and national laws and practices"

In HF4Y, there is a more educational and guiding role than in Housing First, because young people do not yet know what they do not know, and therefore, above all, must be able to make well-informed choices, whereas most adults already have a greater degree of life experience that they can draw on to make decisions about their lives.

HF4Y support is more proactive about outlining the framework of possibilities available to service users, clearly explaining in understandable terms what the advantages and disadvantages are, and ensuring that young people feel empowered to make their own choices about their lives accordingly.

In short: Housing First seeks to restore autonomy and independence to adults who may feel they have lost it, whereas HF4Y seeks to help young people develop their autonomy from the beginning.

How does Housing First for Youth support education and employment for young people?

HF4Y teams support young people to engage better with services to improve their health and (physical and mental) well being, and develop healthy coping strategies. Young people in HF4Y often have significant mental health issues and addictions. HF4Y workers build relationships with young people to support them to get involved with activities that are meaningful and tailored to their interests and needs.

For some young people, these meaningful activities can include going to exercise classes, learning to drive, or even registering for courses or looking for employment.

DID YOU KNOW?

In November 2017, E.U. Member States established the European Pillar of Social Rights. While the Pillar is not a legally binding document, it recognises:

- Access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality shall be provided for those in need.
- Vulnerable people have the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction.
- Adequate shelter and services shall be provided to the homeless in order to promote their social inclusion

Are you interested in starting a Housing First for Youth service in your community?

We offer guidance and support to individuals and organizations looking to introduce or scale Housing First and HF4Y services across Europe.

For more information, please contact one of our Hub coordinators:

Samara Jones: samara.jones@housingfirsteurope.eu

Taina Hytönen: taina.hytonen@housingfirsteurope.eu

References & Related Reading:

- Gaetz, Stephen. (2019). THIS is Housing First for Youth: Europe. A Program Model Guide. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press
- European Framework for Defining Youth Homelessness (FEANTSA, 2020)
- Financing Youth Housing Solutions (FEANTSA Youth Homelessness Series, 2020)
- Alden, Sarah; Blood, Imogen & Quilgars, Sarah. (2020) Rock Trust Housing First for Youth Pilot: Evaluation Report (Rock Trust & Housing First Europe Hub)
- 17 Practices To Help End Youth Homelessness (FEANTSA, 2021)

For more information:

Housing First Europe Hub: www.housingfirsteurope.eu

Rock Trust: www.rocktrust.org

Focus Ireland: www.focusireland.ie

A Way Home Canada: www.awayhome.ca

Limor: www.limor.nl

Housing First Nederland: www.housingfirstnederland.nl

THE HOUSING FIRST EUROPE HUB

The Housing First Europe Hub is home to a European network of organisations, housing providers, foundations, governments, national platforms, cities and experts working together to promote the scaling up of Housing First as a key component of an effective systemic approach to end homelessness across Europe.

We support this effort through:

- 1. Training:** for Housing First service providers, governments, housing providers, etc.
- 2. Research:** as Housing First is strongly evidence-based, ongoing research and pilot testing are crucial to developing and improving the delivery of the approach.
- 3. Community of practice:** where practitioners can exchange knowledge and experiences with one another to help improve outcomes for service users.
- 4. Membership network:** we work with our Founding and Associate partner organisations to advocate for and support the implementation of Housing First across Europe. We also support national and regional Housing First networks as they share practice and knowledge for scaling up Housing First.

Interested in joining the Housing First Europe Hub as an Associate partner?

Associate partners should agree to commit to the core principles of Housing First, as set out in the Housing First Europe Guide, and be engaged in or working towards scaling up Housing First in their community. Associates have access to all Hub services including:

- All communication including the website and newsletter;
- The option to include their logo on the Hub website;
- The opportunity to co-produce tools with the Hub through participation in work clusters;
- Access to Train-the-Trainer courses and other activities;
- Invitation to all events, workshops etc., organised around the annual Steering Group meeting.

For questions, or to apply to become an Associate to the Housing First Europe Hub, please feel free to reach out to one of our Programme Coordinators:

Samara Jones: samara.jones@housingfirsteurope.eu

Taina Hytönen: taina.hytonen@housingfirsteurope.eu



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