



HOUSING FIRST HOW TO

Tips from frontline
professionals



Measuring residents' progress

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

Aims of this document

It is good practice to monitor the progress of Housing First residents, but because the services and the cohort they are aimed at differ from traditional services, it is important to also approach outcome measurement differently. This document aims to share staff's recommendations on how services can effectively measure the progress made by the individuals they are supporting.

Who is it for?

- Housing First managers and staff teams
- Commissioners.

ff It is excellent practice for Housing First services to collect and present evidence about the outcomes that residents experience. However, it is important to consider how we use and understand these outcomes. While we can and should use them to celebrate residents' progress, we should apply caution in using these outcomes as a yardstick with which to measure the performance of services or the progress of individuals.

“A core principle of Housing First is that individuals have choice over the support that they receive; mandating that certain outcomes be achieved, or judging an individual or service as ‘failing’ based on outcomes other than tenancy sustainment, risks undermining this principle.”

Research Manager, Homeless Link

Selecting outcomes to monitor for Housing First

The indicators of progress that Housing First services use for the people they support are likely to differ from those used by other services, because the principles-based approach does not expect or require residents to achieve certain outcomes. Reflecting this, services are often not commissioned in the same way as traditional services (e.g. there is less focus on KPIs).

Further, due to the often entrenched and complex needs of the Housing First cohort, staff believe it is unrealistic to expect significant changes and milestones to be achieved by all those supported.

However, in order to learn whether the service is successful, and to enable ongoing improvements, it is important to know what progress has been made and understand the ways in which those things can be measured.

Changes identified in residents

Housing First workers outline a range of both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ outcomes achieved with individuals accessing their services.

Hard outcomes

More commonly collected in other homeless services and easily measurable

- Tenancy sustainment (sometimes for a minimum of two years)
- Financial inclusion and budgeting skills
- Improvements in mental and physical health
- Reduced drug and/or alcohol use
- Management of medication
- Reducing re-offending and anti-social behaviour
- Reconnecting with family or children
- Engaging meaningfully with services – including a move from use of emergency services to planned appointments.

Soft outcomes

More difficult to quantify and sometimes to capture

- Becoming more independent and less institutionalised
- Change in self-worth, self-understanding/reflection and self-esteem/confidence
- Increased trust in the Housing First worker, services and themselves
- Willingness to take responsibility and reduction in requests for support
- Awareness of personal choices and the impact of these on others
- Taking healthy risks and returning for support when mistakes are made
- Being resilient
- Being safe in their own environment and managing their visitors
- Taking pride in their home
- Feeling part of a community and citizenship
- Families working better together
- Changes in personal hygiene.

Person-specific changes

- Asking for a toaster after living in a property for a short while – showing that the individual is beginning to settle
- Reporting being a victim of domestic violence for the first time – showing increased confidence and desire to protect herself
- Deciding to get a haircut – showing increased self-esteem and personal care
- Having a smiling face – showing real improvements in mental wellbeing.

Outcome measurement tools

Some Housing First projects attempt to capture progress and change using their existing organisational measuring tools e.g. various versions of the Outcome Star. However some teams feel the Outcomes Star is too complicated in this context, becoming a mere tick-box exercise, which residents associated with negative experiences in other services.

Other standardised measurement tools used include the New Directions Team assessment (otherwise known as the Chaos Index) and the SWEBWBS (Shortened Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale).

On the whole, teams advise that the nuances of individual progress could be best captured through more qualitative methods, such as case notes and case studies. Written and video case studies and self-reflective narratives were identified as a particularly good way to convey the voice of residents. It is also felt that reflective practice can be a good way of recognising changes.

With regards to individuals' use of services in other domains (e.g. criminal justice and health), and the wider impact of Housing First, some services have local agreements with partners to help gather information. For example, the police and community safety can inform on offending and anti-social behaviour, and various health services can indicate how use of services changes. This information can be used for cost-benefit analysis, but should be accompanied with case studies to illustrate that services are being used more effectively.

Further information

Housing First England

www.hfe.homeless.org.uk

[Housing First: Guidance for Support Providers](#) (pages 14-15)

[Housing First: Guidance for Commissioners](#) (pages 29-31)



What we do

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

Let's end homelessness together

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