



HOUSING FIRST HOW TO

Tips from frontline
professionals



Skills and learning needs of Housing First workers

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

Housing First is a different approach to supporting people with histories of homelessness and multiple disadvantage. Projects must work flexibly and creatively and therefore staff need a slightly different skillset to those working in traditional services. This document aims to summarise effective service cultures, and the competencies and development opportunities that Housing First staff feel are required in order for them to be successful at their role.

Who is it for?

- Housing First managers and staff teams
- Prospective housing first workers, including those with lived experience of multiple disadvantage
- Commissioners.

“The quality and attitudes of staff are so important to us. There needs to be an understanding and empathy whilst enabling boundaries. The boundaries in Housing First services are very different to traditional support and that needs to be really clear when you’re recruiting... We offer intensive management and clinical supervision to staff so they are also supported.”

Amanda Bloxome, Service Manager, Threshold Housing First

Service cultures

Housing First workers advise that a certain culture is needed within the projects to enable them to work effectively:

- Good quality support for the staff; reflective practice and clinical supervision with external facilitators
- Opportunities for creativity and ideas to originate from anywhere or anyone within the project; collaboration across the team
- Internal audits that allow for opportunities to ‘stop and refresh’
- Staff are encouraged to be responsible for self-development, and have time built-in for it
- Strong administration, and intuitive recording systems
- Meaningful involvement of the individuals being supported by the project.

Staff competencies

Housing First support workers feel that their role is a vocation rather than a job. A range of competencies and skills are required:

- To have solid experience in a previous support work role; having lived experience of multiple disadvantage is also deemed valuable
- The ability to work flexibly, creatively and in a solution-focussed way
- To be assertive, confident and resilient; ability to not let the work phase you
- To show leadership qualities; skills of a strong negotiator; ability to advocate and be diplomatic
- To be non-judgemental, empathetic and tenacious
- To have a sense of humour, be personable and accept that things won’t go as you think
- To be good at recognising the need for, and ensuring, self-care due to the intensity of the work
- To understand the limitations of the Housing First worker role and be competent at multi-agency working
- The ability to work effectively with partner agencies and develop contacts and networks across a wide range of local services to enable effective signposting
- The ability to promote the service locally and engage and inform their own organisation around Housing First.

Training and learning opportunities

Housing First staff advise that their training and development needs are ongoing post-induction, and that training should be regularly refreshed across all levels of the organisation. A range of areas of training or learning were identified as desirable for the Housing First worker role.

People and their needs

- Trauma Informed Care
- Mental health/mental health first aid
- Personality disorders
- Domestic violence and perpetrator training
- Safeguarding
- Bereavement
- Drugs and alcohol (including spice)
- Learning difficulties
- Debt management and budgeting skills
- Multi-agency public protection arrangements

The system

- Housing law
- Welfare benefits and reform
- The Care Act
- Tenancy Law (who to contact, courts, evictions)
- How to identify and secure properties
- Criminal justice sector

Skills

- Advocacy
- Managing difficult/dangerous situations (often a key reassurance for landlords)
- Breakaway/de-escalation techniques
- Conflict resolution
- Mediation
- Lone worker training
- Reflective practice (including multi-agency, online forums, action learning sets)
- Chairing meetings
- Health and safety
- First aid

Ways of working

- Housing First principles/models; how this differs to traditional practices
- Solution focussed therapy
- Psychologically Informed Practice
- Trauma Informed Care
- Reflective practice
- Pre-engagement work
- Asset based approaches
- Motivational interviewing (MI)
- Cognitive behavioural therapies (CBT)
- Harm reduction techniques
- How to support people at different stages of their journey (stages of change/MI/CBT)
- Opportunities to shadow partner agencies and other Housing First services

Further information

Housing First England

www.hfe.homeless.org.uk

Housing First: Guidance for Support Providers [🔗](#)
(pages 20-26)



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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