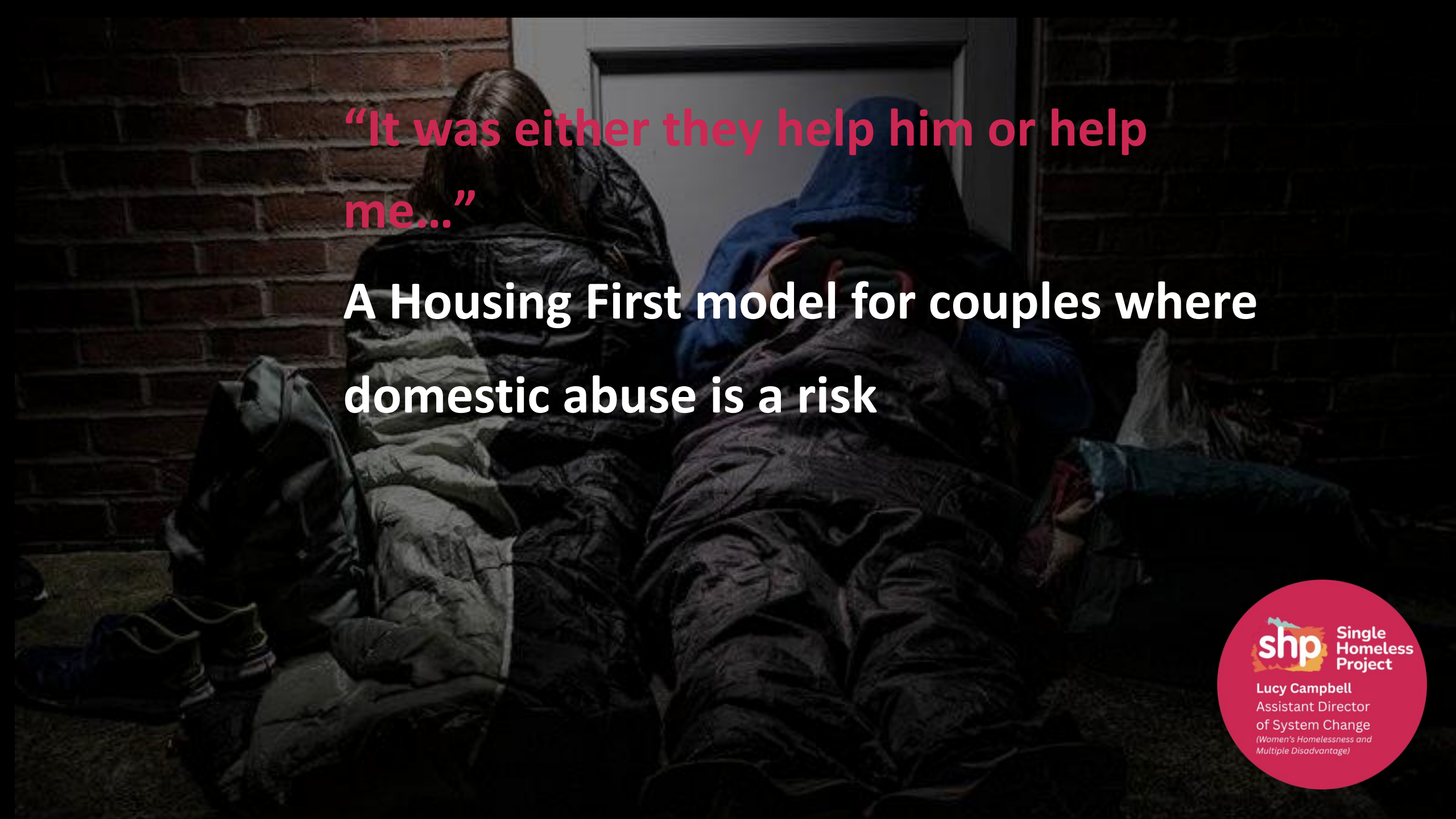


A photograph of a man and a woman sitting on the ground in front of a brick wall and a white door. They are both wrapped in dark, quilted thermal blankets. The woman is on the left, with her back to the camera, and the man is on the right, wearing a blue hooded jacket and looking down. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting it might be nighttime or in a shaded area.

“It was either they help him or help me...”

A Housing First model for couples where domestic abuse is a risk

shp Single Homeless Project

Lucy Campbell
Assistant Director
of System Change
*(Women's Homelessness and
Multiple Disadvantage)*

Couples: Homelessness & Domestic Abuse

- Domestic abuse affects many couples who experience 'entrenched' and long-term homelessness together (73% of 167 couples identified by local authorities in London in a 2025 study), resulting in further barriers to housing and support and unmitigated risk to survivors.
- Many domestic abuse services are unable to work with survivors who are always or often with the perpetrator, so survivors are rarely reached by specialist support.
- Many hostels or housing schemes will not accept couples, especially if there is known or suspected domestic abuse – they do not want to be seen to be condoning the abuse by housing the perpetrator.

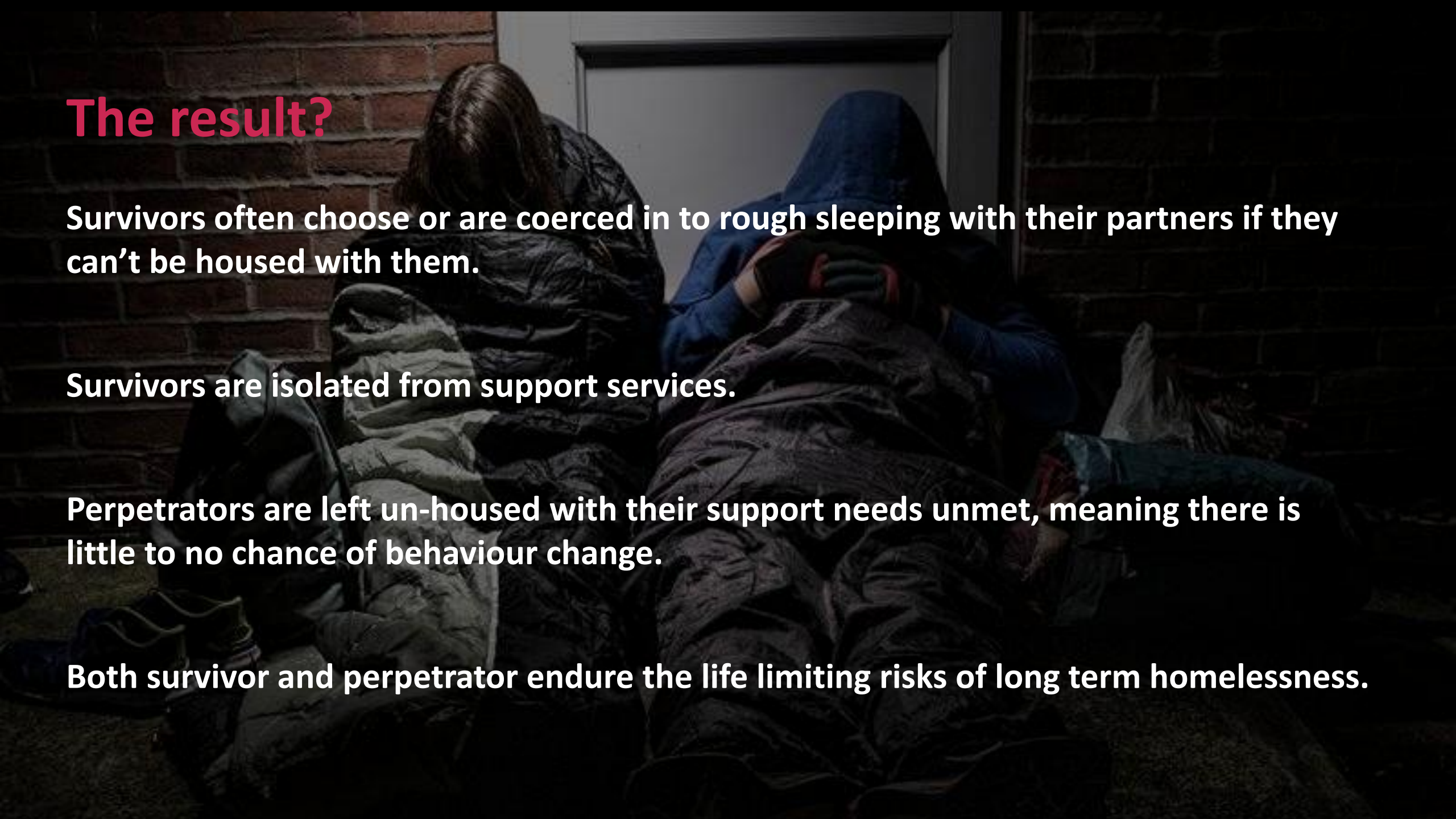
The result?

Survivors often choose or are coerced in to rough sleeping with their partners if they can't be housed with them.

Survivors are isolated from support services.

Perpetrators are left un-housed with their support needs unmet, meaning there is little to no chance of behaviour change.

Both survivor and perpetrator endure the life limiting risks of long term homelessness.



Principles for couples Housing First

1. The survivor's choice, autonomy and safety are always prioritised.
2. Perpetrators are provided with support to address their unmet needs whilst always being held accountable for their behaviour.
3. The couple receive separate and concurrent long-term housing offers, and separate but joined up wrap-around support.
4. Accommodation is needs-led not supply-led, with couple-specific consideration of proximity/location.
5. Strong local authority governance, leadership, oversight and support of the project is in place.
6. Clear safeguarding procedures are established to explicitly identify and manage risk for victim/survivors.
7. Risk management and decision making are shared across an established cross-sector network of statutory and voluntary agencies.
8. The staffing model provides specialist input and reflective support processes for containment and support of the Housing First team.
9. An active learning, reflection and improvement cycle is in place throughout the life of the project.

The background of the image is a dark, out-of-focus night scene. It features several bright, circular bokeh lights in shades of yellow and white, scattered across the frame. In the center-right, there is a dark silhouette of a person standing, facing away from the camera. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and somber.

And I was frightened of
losing him at the time, so
I just shut up and put up
with it basically.

Resources for working with couples

- 'Confidence in Complexity: Working effectively with survivors and perpetrators of domestic abuse in homelessness settings [guidance](#) and training – email lcampbell@shp.org.uk to book a workshop.
- [Guidance and recommendations](#) for supported accommodation and Housing First providers responding to perpetrators of domestic abuse accessing their services.
- Housing First for Couples [feasibility study](#).

A photograph of two individuals sitting on the ground in front of a brick wall and a white door. The person on the left is wearing a dark jacket and has long hair. The person on the right is wearing a blue hooded jacket and is holding a smartphone. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting it might be nighttime or in a shaded area. The ground is covered with some debris and bags.

Thank you!

Questions & discussion