Gaining and Preserving Pioneer Status: Key Lessons from the Housing First Pathfinder Programme in Scotland

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Pathfinder Context and Overview

- Significant political endorsement of HF at national level from 2018
- Five projects: Aberdeen/shire, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling
- Funded by Social Bite, Merchants House of Glasgow, and Scottish Government
- 579 people with 'complex needs' housed April 2019-March 2022
- Demographically, tenants predominantly White British (99%), middle aged, men (68%)
- Variation in consortium composition and mode of delivery, but all 'broker' model
 of support, intended caseloads 1:7, almost all secure social housing tenancies
- Independently evaluated by Heriot-Watt University and Rayment Consulting

Research Questions

- 1. To what extent did projects maintain **fidelity to the core principles** of HF?
- 2. What factors **facilitated or hindered** HF development and delivery?
- 3. What were the main **outcomes** for service users?
- 4. How much did the projects **cost** to deliver?
- 5. What **lessons** might be drawn as Scotland moves toward 'HF by default' for homeless people with complex needs?

Research Methods

- 1. Interviews and focus groups (3 time-points, total n=200)
 - support provider leads/partners
 - frontline support workers
 - local stakeholders
 - national stakeholders
 - service users
- 2. 'Tracker' monitoring data (n=579)
- 3. New Directions Team (NDT) assessments (n=104)
- **4. Service user questionnaires** (n=101)
- 5. Financial returns

Housing First is just as effective in Scotland as elsewhere ... even in the context of a pandemic

Stakeholder attitudes are changing for the better ... but there is still a long way to go

Housing First is effective in preventing repeat homelessness ... but other benefits won't be realised fully until barriers to healthcare are addressed

Housing First improves lives ... but does not vitiate disproportionate risk of early mortality

Implementational 'sticking points' are to be expected ... and will shift over time

Joint working goes a long way ... but is too often reliant on personal relationships and goodwill

Fidelity to the core principles of Housing First is achievable ... but also fragile

Housing First staff have a tough gig ... and should be supported and paid accordingly

Housing First works for most people it targets ... but we still need solutions for others

Conclusion

- HF delivery in Scotland is difficult, but achievable, and indisputably worth pursuing
- If Scotland is to retain its status as an international pioneer in HF implementation:
 - political commitment commanded in early years must be maintained
 - fidelity to principles must be preserved given their centrality to effectiveness

Further detail

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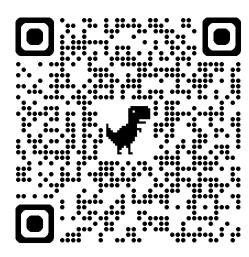
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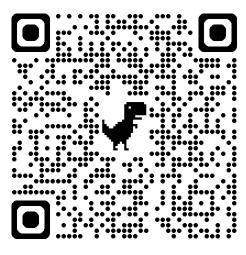
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- Abstract_Scotland has been heralded as an international pioneer in Housing First implementation given the level of political commitment the approach has commanded and pace at which the intervention has scaled up in recent years. This status was catalysed by a major three-year 'Pathfinder' programme, operational from April 2019 until March 2022, which scaled up Housing First provision in five areas and housed 579 people experiencing homelessness with complex needs (e.g., co-occurring problematic substance use and/or mental health problems). The Pathfinder served as a litmus test regarding the opportunities and challenges associated with scaling up Housing First at pace. This paper distils nine key lessons emerging from an independent evaluation of the Pathfinder which focus on its achievements and limitations, together with factors facilitating and inhibiting Housing First mobilisation and mainstreaming. These will inform future delivery as Housing First increasingly becomes the default response for individuals with complex needs as per recent Scottish Government policy directives. At least some, find all, are likely to resonate in other countries aiming to embed and/or expand Housing First provision. The paper concludes that the level of political commitment the approach has commanded up until this point must be maintained, and fidelity to the core principles preserved, if Scotland's status as a Housing First pioneer is to be retained going forward.
- Xeywords_ Housing First, Homelessness, Complex Needs, Multiple Disadvantage, Scotland, United Kingdom

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