

HOUSING FIRST IN ENGLAND

SERVICE USER CASE STUDIES

Stuart

Stuart had been sleeping rough for five years when he was diagnosed with HIV. His world, already disrupted through years of sleeping on the streets, spells in prison and drug use, crashed around him: "I spent the next five years trying to destroy myself".

Stuart fled the Midlands 15- 20 years ago for reasons relating to drugs. He began rough sleeping in London's West End. He became extremely "successful" at street begging, which increased his drug use. The impact of Stuart's lifestyle left him with serious health issues. He has recently been diagnosed with end stage renal failure. Stuart was placed a number of times in temporary hostel accommodation, which he repeatedly abandoned. Stuart was living in a squat, had disengaged with services and neglected his health to such a degree that he was at serious risk of dying.

Today, things are very different. Supported through Housing First, Stuart is settled in his first home for 15 years. In spite of ongoing health problems, Stuart has just started some courses at St Mungo's Broadway Recovery College and would like to do some volunteering - *"to give something back."*

Since being housed Stuart has started kidney dialysis (3 times a week), has a social worker and a care package. He will always have serious physical health needs but there is support in place to manage these now. Without this Stuart would have been left to try and manage these conditions on the street. Stuart hadn't had his own accommodation for over 20 years. He now has his own flat and with support from St Mungos Broadway's Housing First service has been able to keep it.

Claire

From the age of 16 Claire has been in a relationship with Stephen who was an older, controlling man, who has periodically been abusive. They had a child together whom she lost custody of when he was 3 and since then their lives became more chaotic and spiralled out of control with substance abuse and homelessness becoming prevalent. Claire was often accommodated in Homeless accommodation but remained in a relationship with Stephen who refused accommodation and slept rough which meant that the majority of the time Claire did too.

Claire struggled to engage with services, and the drug use and every aspect of her life was very chaotic. She lived this way for about 10 years. Her relationship with Stephen has remained off and on in that time. Claire stated that she wanted a chance to prove herself and it was clear by this point that Homeless Hostels didn't work for her.

Claire entered Changing Lives' Housing First 18 months ago and her life has changed quite dramatically, it is very much her tenancy and Stephen stays only when she wants him to. She has built up a rapport with her workers and engages on a level that she never used to. She is still using but it is sporadic and not as chaotic and she would classify it as for weekend. She is stable on her script and attending appointments. She also registered with the GP for access to free gym sessions and has taken responsibility for her bills when previously she wouldn't pay rent/service charges. Perhaps most significantly out of everyone that has moved into their own tenancy she has replaced the initial furniture items that had been sourced for her with her own things and donated the old items back to the project, her flat has her own stamp on it.

In addition she hasn't slept rough since accessing her own accommodation, which she had initially thought upon viewing that she wouldn't have a chance to get. Claire states that being given this opportunity has simply changed her life, she has more freedom now than she has ever had and she doesn't believe she could ever again live the way that she used to.

Julio

Julio is a 35-year-old man who had a difficult childhood – as one of five children, he was the only one given up by his mother. The trauma of being rejected as a child has had a lasting impact on his emotional and mental well-being. He grew up in an environment where drug and alcohol use was common and became an addict himself. While Julio experienced periods of paid employment, he would invariably end up losing jobs and becoming homeless due to his drug and alcohol addiction and mental ill health.

In 2011, Julio found himself at a particularly low point and deliberately had himself arrested for stealing, as he wanted to be sent to prison in an attempt to stop using drugs. Julio was sleeping rough when he was referred to SHP's Redbridge Housing First service in July 2013, following his eviction from a hostel for rough sleepers due to his aggressive behaviour.

Julio said: *"When they found me I was sleeping in Hyde Park. My ESA benefit had stopped. My depression had gotten a lot worse. I felt I was worth nothing."*

Since receiving support from Housing First, Julio has found work in a café, which has boosted his self esteem. After many years on antidepressants, Julio was able to stop taking medication. He has started exercising regularly and is considering going back to college.

Despite periods of disengagement, which Julio says are due to his feelings that he is undeserving of help, the service has been flexible and creative in continuing to offer him consistent support.

Julio said: *"My Housing First support worker was friendly and gentle and this helped me to start to see things being OK again. Whenever I have doubts about myself they will take time to talk to me. They helped me cut down on cannabis and this helped me to decide what is best for me, which was to get a part-time job. They helped me to tell the benefits people I had done this so that my rent was still paid and I did not end up in the street again. They helped me to get a flat that I'm happy with – I have somewhere that I call home now. I have been thinking about a painting and decorating course and my support worker has shown me where to find information about this. This is the first time in many years that I feel I can do more things for myself."*

John

John is a 39-year-old with a history of rough sleeping dating back to 1986. Since 2002, he had been regularly sleeping rough on the streets of London, leading to an ASBO from Camden for rough sleeping and begging. John tried hostel accommodation a few times but was unable to cope with the environment.

John became addicted to heroin, crack cocaine and alcohol during his time on the streets and would often beg to fund his habit. He was diagnosed as HIV positive in 2009 and also has Hepatitis C and recurring TB. Because of his health problems, John can only manage very short journeys by foot and often feels very sick in the mornings, sometimes taking a couple of hours to get out of bed.

John was referred to SHP's GLA Housing First service in June 2013. The service helped him make a DLA claim and accepted support to help him in his recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. He is now independently attending hospital appointments, when he was previously reliant on help from his carer and his Housing First support worker. *"This time it feels different, I really feel ready. Although I'm still unwell, my health has improved massively since January 2014,"* said John.

There are historical repair issues with John's flat, but he has developed the skills required to manage them. *"My support worker has really helped me deal with the repair problems. If it was left to me I would have lost my rag, I really appreciate all the help I've received from Housing First."*

John is due to attend rehab at the end of March 2015. He has been successfully paying his rent on time and has abstained from anti-social behavior. He has also rekindled a relationship with his mother. As a result, John feels ready to move back to his hometown, Newcastle, and will be assisted to move there before his current tenancy ends.

Robert

Robert is in his 50s and has spent most of his life living on and off with his Mother and on the streets in Chichester. He has an addiction to alcohol and consumes Cannabis on a daily basis. Whilst he was in hospital for an extended period of time with a broken neck, as a result of falling off a bus when under the influence, Robert's mother relocated out of the area, and after being discharged from hospital, Robert sofa surfed for several years and then found himself rough sleeping every night and regularly committing acquisitive crime.

Robert accessed day services until he was admitted to hospital again, and then discharged street homeless. He managed to access accommodation at a night shelter, where he was assessed for Housing First by Stonepillow.

Since accessing support from Housing First Robert has not been admitted to hospital once and has started engaging with his new G.P. for his alcohol addiction, C.O.P.D. and epilepsy. Robert has attended Recovery Workshops on budgeting, health and, housing and has weekly appointments with local substance misuse services around harm minimisation. Since receiving support from Housing First Robert has not been involved in acquisitive crime and has also volunteered at a furniture restoration project and has also volunteered at a local museum.

Housing First has allowed Robert to move forward in addressing the areas of his life he feels he would like to in his own time and in his own way and as a result he feels that the next step for him, with support will be his own tenancy in the private rented sector.

Robert wanted to state for the record, *"Housing First has been most helpful and has got me out of a lot of trouble. I have been able to learn new skills and am looking forward to my hopeful recovery. I am grateful"*.

Jane

Jane is 43 years old and had rough slept on and off for the past 10 years. She engaged in heavy drug IV and alcohol use and was a victim of domestic violence. Jane has a diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder. Jane was constantly getting involved in anti social behaviour, causing her to have an ASBO against her in Tower Hamlets area, and also has problems maintaining friendships with her female friends without violence occurring between them. She was unable to maintain a hostel, tenancy or healthy relationships with support staff, so has a history of turning back to the streets and her ex partner. Jane displayed paranoid behaviour and would not attend any appointments or meetings alone

After being housed by Thames Reach Housing First services Jane has reduced her alcohol intake and now abstinent from IV drug use and has to date reduced her script from 75mls of methadone to 30mls. She has maintained her clearing house tenancy for the past two years, engaging with housing support staff from Housing First to guide her with her managing her tenancy.

Jane has refrained from returning to the area where she was given the ASBO and has also engaged with support from the Victim Support team and police around her domestic violence and provided enough evidence for her ex partner to be given a long sentence. She has begun independently attending appointments at the GP as well as the drug and alcohol support service that she attends and no longer requires Housing First to attend with her.

Frank

Frank is a 48 year Portuguese man who CRI Brighton Rough Sleepers Team had been working with for 5 years, before he was accommodated under the CRI Brighton Housing First Pilot. He has complex and multiple needs including acquired brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, personality disorder, alcohol misuse, anti-social behaviour and physical health issues. Frank had been a revolving-door client in Brighton hostels and temporary accommodation since he was evicted from his council accommodation due to anti-social behaviour. He struggled living in a hostel environment and the longest time Frank sustained hostel accommodation was 5 weeks.

Frank had sustained serious physical injuries in a car accident and suffered with high levels of pain. He was due to have both hips replaced, however due to his unstable accommodation and mental state he was not able to engage with the relevant health services to get these operations carried out. He used alcohol to 'self-medicate' and his binge drinking regularly resulted in him being evicted and arrested. Frank is subject to an ASBO (Anti-Social Behaviour Order) and prior to being accommodated by CRI Brighton Housing First, he breached his ASBO approximately 8 times per year, resulting in numerous short and medium term prison sentences. Frank was often verbally abusive and aggressive to workers making engagement challenging. Frank took a number of over-doses of prescribed medication and would often present at A&E or call the paramedics for assistance. He had been admitted to Intensive Care due to intentional overdose twice in the last two years before he was accommodated by Brighton Housing First.

Since being accommodated in his own flat by CRI Brighton Housing First Frank has decreased his use of alcohol and no longer binge drinks. His street presence and anti-social behaviour have decreased significantly, as have the number of arrests and police interventions. He has breached his ASBO only once in the last year. Frank has engaged with health services in order to improve his physical health and is now being seen regularly by a neurologist and is due to have his hip replacement operation next month. He has not taken any overdoses and has not accessed A&E since being accommodated by CRI Brighton Housing First. His mental state has improved and he now smiles and laughs. Frank loves his flat and keeps it in immaculate condition. He now budgets and buys food that he enjoys cooking for himself, as well as furniture and plants. Frank has re-discovered his love of DIY and has discovered that he has green fingers and enjoys looking after the plants on his balcony.

'This flat is the best thing that has happened. You saved me from rough sleeping again, you saved my life. I can't live in hostels, the noise and problems of people knocking on your door all day and night. The problems people make. I like this flat. No problems here at all. The neighbours are nice and it's really quiet. I like to stay in and I'm not bothered about going out to drink with people on the street like I used to, where I would get into trouble with the police.'

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