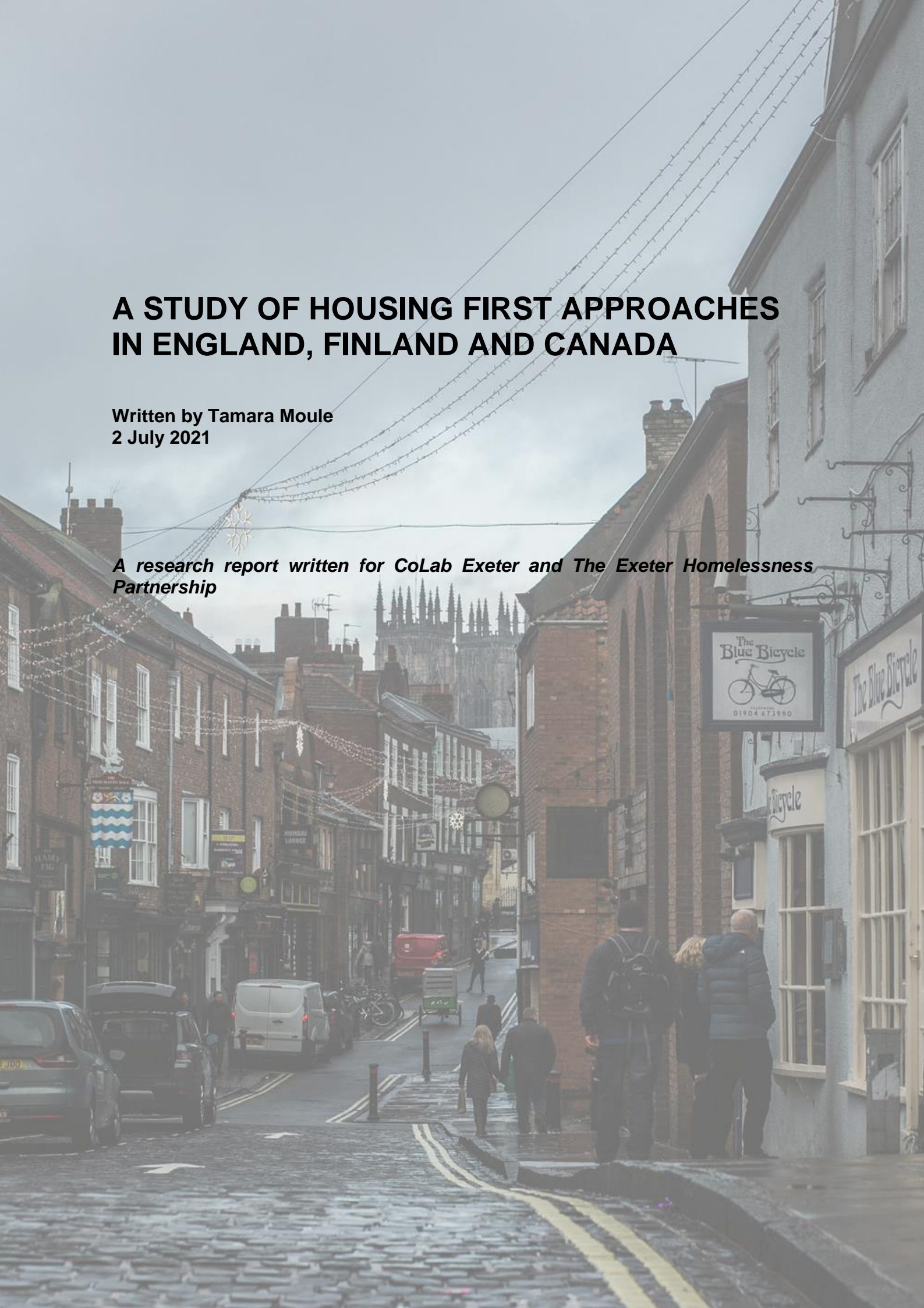


# A STUDY OF HOUSING FIRST APPROACHES IN ENGLAND, FINLAND AND CANADA

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*A research report written for CoLab Exeter and The Exeter Homelessness Partnership*



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Housing first is an approach to tackling homelessness developed by clinical psychologist Dr Sam Tsembris. This approach follows a model which differs from traditional staircase models of homelessness services, and instead works to provide beneficiaries with long-term, stable housing as well as wrap-around services to help them manage and overcome mental health or addiction issues.**

**This report written for CoLab Exeter and Exeter Homelessness Partnership focuses on national examples of Housing First Models in England, Finland and Canada, as well as providing examples of regional case studies for each country. Thereby, the report provides an overview of models differently influenced by various demographic, economic and social factors. Despite the differences in each approach, their faithfulness to the Housing First philosophy offers various comparisons and learning points.**

**The findings of this report are positive overall, with each of the case studies showing that Housing First models have relatively high success rates; are generally proven to maintain housing sustainment (with the majority of individuals remaining housed throughout/beyond study periods) and are cost effective in offsetting costs to social, health and justice services in the long-term. The challenges facing each of the housing first approaches studied vary, but predominantly concern securing funding and housing to use as part of the scheme.**

**Overall, this report finds Housing First to be a flexible approach that can be adapted to work in a variety of environments, as exemplified by the positive findings from each of the demographically variable case studies.**

## INTRODUCTION

This report has been written for the use of CoLab Exeter and Exeter Homelessness partnership. The aim of this report is to present different approaches to the Housing First model in Europe and North America, with specific case studies for each location. This overview will allow for comparison of Housing First approaches in the locations examined.

Due to this research report being carried out in Exeter for services based in the Exeter area, Exeter has been selected as the first case study for the Housing First England Program, and is discussed following a broader overview of Housing First in England in part I.

Subsequently, due to the well-known nature of the Housing First model in Finland and the significant media attention that its scheme has received, Finland has been selected as the second nation of study, as discussed in part II. The metropolitan area of Helsinki, the Finnish Capital, being home to 60% of homeless people in Finland (14), this city was selected as a case study for the Finnish approach to Housing First, where the model has been executed on a large scale. Helsinki being a capital city and having a significantly different demographic to Exeter, this case study is not largely comparable, but provides an example of a highly successful Housing First scheme as a model example of what can be achieved by the project.

Finally, a discussion of Housing First as implemented in Canada is presented in part III. This nation was selected due to the well-established nature of Housing First models in Canada, as well as its notable *At Home/ Chez Soi* study, which followed Housing First approaches in five cities in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach as a means for tackling homelessness. Moncton, New Brunswick, was chosen as a city case-study for this section of the report. Moncton was one of the five cities studied as part of the *At Home/Chez Soi* project, and has a comparable population size to Exeter as a smaller city in a rural area. As a home to a successful and well-studied Housing First program, Moncton is therefore a location of interest for this study.

The following sections of this report will outline what Housing First entails as a philosophy, before moving on to discuss Housing First implementation in each of the national and regional case studies outlined.

## WHAT IS HOUSING FIRST?

'The Housing First model prioritises getting people quickly into stable homes. From this point, any other support needs they might have – such as alcohol and drug dependency, physical and/or mental health problems – are addressed through coordinated and intensive support.'

*Crisis, The Plan to End Homelessness (28)*

The Housing First model is an approach to tackling homelessness which uses the provision of stable housing as a start point rather than an end point out of homelessness (1). The model was developed by Dr Sam Tsembris and initially implemented in the early 1990s in New York City (2), and has since been implemented throughout Europe. Tsembris, a clinical psychologist, began to construct the model as he understood that providing temporary accommodation to homeless people in shelters was not an effective solution and did not lead to these individuals being housed in the long-term (27).

The Housing First model differs significantly from more traditional 'staircase' models of managing homelessness, which often rely on making homeless people achieve certain goals in order to 'prove their ability to hold down a home' (27). Instead, Housing First provides individuals with a stable home without any prerequisites based on the assertion that housing is a fundamental human right.

Housing first units are normally delivered as either congregate/unitary models, or via a scattered housing approach. Congregate/unitary models are made up of 'self-contained units within the same building' where formerly homeless individuals are given a property; this approach is common in North American projects (28). By contrast, the scattered housing approach involves individuals being relocated to self-contained properties scattered across the city in question, in amongst the greater community.

Alongside the stable accommodation provided by Housing First services, they also offer support services for individuals struggling with addiction, mental health or other issues. The combination of provision of stable housing and wellbeing services allow for recovery from mental health or addiction issues to be pursued in a stable environment. Furthermore, Housing First models often place an emphasis on giving recipients of the service 'control and choice over how they are treated' in order to best cater to each individual case (27).

Following various successes worldwide, Housing First models are being increasingly implemented in the United Kingdom, and are seen by numerous charities working to tackle homelessness as a key strategy in its prevention and management. For example, Crisis UK have named it 'the most important [recent] innovation in tackling homelessness' (28). However, the success of the model relies on the availability of housing and funding for the program, which can often be key limitations in its implementation.

This report will highlight the successes of three nations in implementing Housing first models, with the hope that such an overview will show the suitability of Housing First as a successful measure for tackling homelessness, despite those challenges that each nation and region may have faced in this implementation.

## HOUSING FIRST IN ENGLAND

'The rapid expansion of Housing First over the last few years, through a diverse range of projects across the country, should be promoted and celebrated. However, there is more to do if we want Housing First to be viable and accessible to all those who need it.'

*The Picture of Housing First in England 2020, Housing First England (8).*

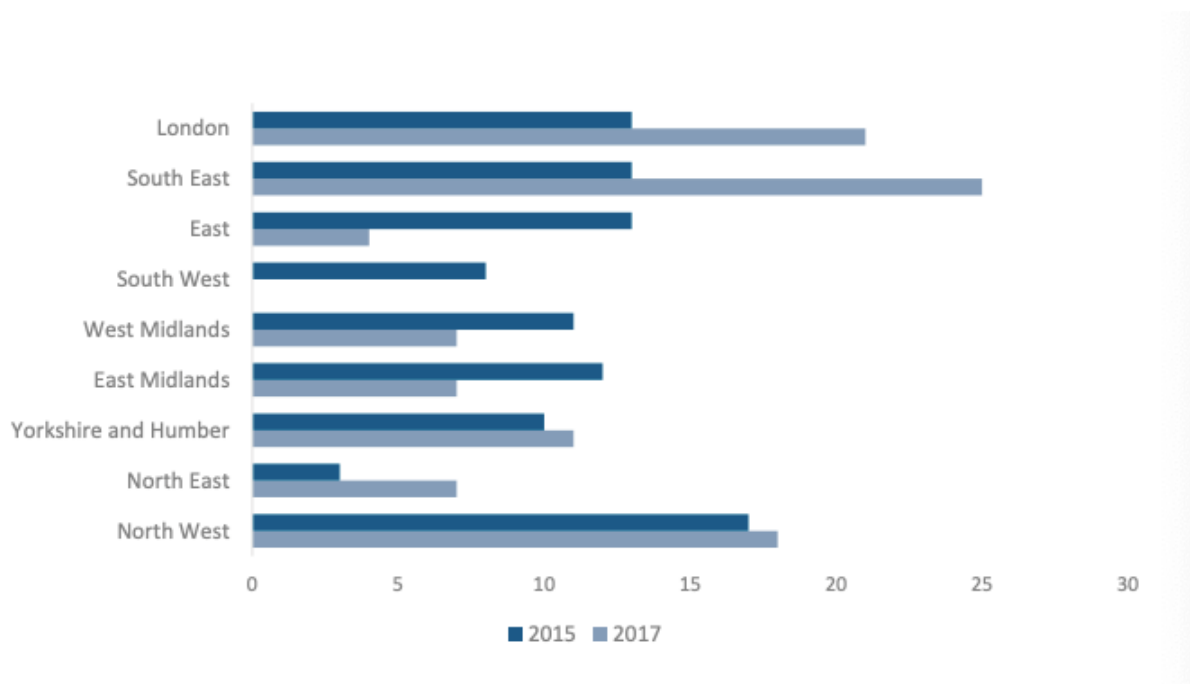
Housing First services have been on the rise in England since 2010, with services established based on need in local areas (16). Projects continue to grow, with 105 active projects recorded in 2020 (29). In England, Housing First services are required to follow seven 'Principles for Housing First England', identified by charity Homeless Link, which are as follows:

- People have a right to a home
- Flexible support is provided as long as it is needed
- Housing and support are separated
- Individuals have choice and control
- An active engagement approach is used
- The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations
- A harm reduction approach is used (4).

Furthermore, *Housing First England* is a project which began in 2016, and is delivered by charity Homeless Link and funded by Comic Relief and Lankelly Chase. The project has the aims to expand the reach of Housing First programmes nationally, as well as to deliver Housing First services at scale, overcoming barriers to the service, and to promote the Housing First model as a solution that can contribute to ending homelessness (7). *Housing First England* has also acted as a single point of reference for stakeholders and commissioners as well as working to promote Housing First as a solution to Homelessness through different outreach events (7).

An evaluation of the project found that the *Housing First England* project contributed to raising awareness for the validity of Housing First as a programme, with evidence indicating that *Housing First England* has made a significant contribution to 'supporting the growth and acceptance of the model' (7). This evaluation noted growth in Housing First services across London, the South east and the North of England between 2015 and 2017, as indicated by the below graph. The evaluation highlights the positive significance of an increase in Housing First services in the London region in relation to elevated house prices in this area, which act as a potential barrier to the provision of the service (7).





*Figure 1: Distribution of Housing First services across England, 2015-2017. Shows the percentage of total Housing First projects in England, in each region. As seen in 'Evaluation of Housing First England: A Report for Homeless Link' (7).*

Beyond this, Housing First as a nationwide approach has grown further between 2017 and 2020, with one report citing an almost six-fold increase in capacity of services between these years, and the greatest proportional increase in services in the South West of England during this period (8). The growth of the service over recent years suggests the success of the model, and numerous existing programmes are actively looking to expand, or have already done so as a result of increased demand caused by the Coronavirus pandemic (8). Nevertheless, Housing First remains a small proportion of help offered to individuals facing homelessness and multiple disadvantage in England, with a key challenge being securing funding to back the service as well as accessing sufficient stable housing to provide to beneficiaries (8).

There are currently three large-scale, government-backed Housing First pilot schemes running in England. These are located in Greater Manchester, Liverpool and the West Midlands, with the former two projects set to run until 2022, and the latter West Midlands project until 2023 (30). These schemes have currently shown significant successes, with nine out of ten recipients reportedly continuing to live in the properties that they received (30). However, despite successes of the project, homelessness charities are warning that a lack of continual funding sees the projects on a "cliff edge" (30), unable to offer continual services to their communities. It remains to be seen whether the schemes will receive further funding, as ministers have stated that funding will only be prolonged when the outcomes of the pilots are clear (30). This challenge represents the greater struggle for Housing first as its promise of long-term support is often limited by the short-term cycles of funding rewarded to such projects (8).



## HOUSING FIRST IN EXETER



As a local housing authority with an estimated count of more than 20 rough sleepers in April 2018, Exeter City Council was able to access funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Rough Sleeping Initiative. An expansion of Housing First programs was prioritised as one of eight key areas of need by the City Council, and thus funding was used to launch the Exeter Housing First Project (6).

Housing First Exeter works as a collaboration between Julian House, a charity supporting vulnerable individuals, and BCHA, a South-West England charitable housing association. The project is part of the greater *Housing First England* project, and has recently been extended into 2021 after an initial 18-month pilot scheme (5). At the time of writing, the project is supporting 15 people with complex needs in Exeter, with six further individuals having been referred to the scheme (5).

The caseload for the Exeter project is of limited size compared to larger pilot schemes in England; this nevertheless allows for varied and flexible support to individuals with complex needs. One particular success of the Exeter project is the collaboration between the Exeter City Council and BCHA case workers (5), and accommodation from Exeter City Council has been used to house beneficiaries.

### Challenges that Housing First Exeter faces include:

- Obtaining sufficient accommodation for all referred individuals
- Difficulty in engaging social care in cases with individuals with complex needs
- The wider challenge of promoting recognition of Housing First as an alternative model to managing and preventing homelessness
- Managing the risk of exploitation by individuals involved in County Lines, due to the accommodation that Housing First offers (5)

Despite these challenges and the relatively small-scale operational system of Housing First Exeter, the project has seen positive results and has successfully accommodated a number of complex cases, which has an estimated positive effect on other local services. (5)

Housing First was not part of the Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District Council Homelessness Strategy for 2016-21, most likely because the Exeter Housing First scheme began in 2018, two years after the strategy began. A new Homelessness Strategy is due to be published in 2021 in collaboration with Exeter Homelessness Partnership and other partners; the inclusion of Housing First in this strategy would contribute to legitimising it as a successful model for homelessness management and acknowledge its successes in rehabilitating individuals with complex needs.

## THE FINNISH APPROACH TO HOUSING FIRST

Housing First in Finland was adopted as part of a larger government strategy to tackle homelessness throughout the country in 2007. The strategy, split into two initiatives, PAAVO I (running from 2008-2011) and PAAVO II (2012-2015) had the overall aim of 'halving long-term homelessness by 2011 and eradicating it by 2015' (9). Based largely on traditional Housing First structures, the Finnish homelessness strategy aimed to provide beneficiaries with a permanent residence, while supporting them with help tailored to each individual case (9).

The Finnish Housing first model involved a 'tripartite approach' involving the state, municipalities and the help and support of NGOs, a model that was used during both the PAAVO I and PAAVO II phases of the programme (10). The original programme covered ten cities with the most significant homeless populations nationally, each one of which was required to sign a letter of intent with state administration (10). PAAVO I aimed to deliver 'at least 1,250 new dwellings and supported housing places for long-term homeless people' in the cities participating in the project (10), with a focus on the conversion of homelessness shelters into places of permanent residence to be used by Housing First as a key achievement identified by one report (10).

By contrast, the PAAVO II programme saw more of a focus on developing 'scattered housing alternatives with floating support and preventative services' (10). In this way, the Finnish model made use of both congregate and scattered housing across the two PAAVO initiatives.

Furthermore, a focus on the prevention of homelessness has formed a large part of the later PAAVO II programme, including the provision of housing advice services which have been highlighted by one study as measures 'of central importance in the reduction of homelessness in Finland' (10). The same report states that between 2012-2013, 280 evictions were avoided in Helsinki due to the work of housing advisors to their client base of 16,000 beneficiaries.



## HOUSING FIRST IN HELSINKI

*'The most central challenge for eradicating homelessness is significantly improving the availability of affordable rental housing in the Helsinki metropolitan area in particular'*

*The Finnish Homelessness Strategy (10)*



With over 60% of homeless people in Finland living in the Metropolitan area of its capital city Helsinki (14), the city can be used as a case study to show a significant Housing First model at work in both a scattered housing model and a more unitary/congregate approach. The large provision of apartments available through the Helsinki Housing First programme can be seen as a testament to its success, as by autumn of 2013, Helsinki had 2,086 supported apartments and an additional 905 supported apartments sublet from the Y-Foundation, Finland's fourth largest landlord and a key national developer of the Finnish Housing First Model (10); (13). In addition to this, over 1,000 further housing units and flats are provided by other organizations to the scheme (10).

Two examples of unitary housing provision are the **Alppikatu 25** apartment block and the **Ruusulankatu Housing Unit**, both located in Helsinki City. These examples are outlined below alongside that of scattered Housing First accommodation in Finland and also gender-specific developments targeted at helping women.

### **ALPPIKATU 25**

An emergency shelter for the homeless since 1937, the Alppikatu 25 apartment block has now been converted into a Housing First service with 80 apartments, a conversion which affirms the attitude that individuals living in 'temporary shelters and hostels are still homeless' and that 'only permanent housing can provide a safe, sustainable solution to homelessness and a foundation for a decent life' (11).

### **RUUSULANKATU HOUSING UNIT**

The Ruusulankatu residence unit is a supported housing unit primarily providing homes for young adults living with issues of substance abuse, and otherwise badly marginalised young people (10). The unit was initially opposed by its surrounding community, but is now viewed in a more positive light thanks to the community work that its residents are involved in through its support scheme (14). Such work 'can also be thought of as integration, as the purpose of it is to increase the residents' sense of belonging to society' (14), and some Finnish municipalities demand that the residents of supported housing units engage in such work (14).

## **SCATTERED HOUSING**

By contrast to the two above examples, scattered Housing First apartments are also located across Helsinki and offer permanent tenancies to previously homeless people (11) throughout the greater community.

## **DEVELOPMENTS OF HOUSING SERVICES FOR WOMEN**

The Helsinki Deaconess Institute, a not-for-profit organisation providing social welfare and health services (15) has the aim to 'develop gender-specific housing services and support the young and early middle-age women using drugs' (11). Housing first works to offer women with issues of substance abuse permanent housing after a recent release from prison, even if they do not partake in rehabilitation. Offering housing to such individuals has in the past been an impossibility, and still is in many areas (11).

## **HOUSING FIRST IN HELSINKI: CONCLUSIONS**

A number of factors are contribute to the successes of Helsinki's Housing First programme. Namely that the capital owns 60,000 social housing units, and has ambitious targets of building 7,000 new homes a year across all categories (12), meaning that the Housing First services in the city are not likely to face significant shortages of social housing. The city's ability to offer affordable social housing to its residents, coupled with further support for mental health and addiction difficulties through Housing First services, has fostered positive change in the city. Housing advice services have also helped to significantly contribute to homelessness prevention (12).

Helsinki's statistics speak for its successes: in 2008, shelters and hostels offered nearly 600 beds to homeless people; by comparison, today there is 'only one permanent service centre for emergency accommodation with 52 beds (and extra temporary accommodation in winter if needed)' (11). Through the provision of permanent and stable housing for its residents, the city has successfully reduced its homeless population (12), and continues to seek better ways to do this through innovations such as the gender-specific research carried out by the Deaconess institute, which has the potential to provide a different angle to existing homelessness policy and research.

## REFLECTIONS ON HOUSING FIRST IN FINLAND

The objectives of the PAAVO I and PAAVO II programmes were to halve long-term homelessness by 2011 and to eliminate homelessness by 2015 respectively (9); (10). Although these ambitious targets were not achieved, they represent a strong willingness on behalf of the Finnish government to tackle the issues of homelessness and rough sleeping with a long-lasting strategy. Indeed, there was a significant decrease in the levels of homelessness during the PAAVO projects, as levels fell by 28% between 2008 and 2011 during the PAAVO I phase, and the project saw an overall decrease in homelessness of 33% across the two PAAVO phases between 2008 and 2015 (9). Most notably, within Europe Finland is the sole country in which homelessness has shown such a significant decrease in recent years (9); compared to the UK which reported an increase of over 130% of rough sleepers between 2009 and 2015 (9), it is evident that the Finnish strategy has been successful in not only reducing levels of homelessness but also maintaining housing sustainment. Reports on Housing First services in Finland show high rates of housing sustainment, with relatively small numbers of individuals leaving apartments or being evicted in Helsinki (10).

A key success point of the Finnish model is likely to be the 'tripartite approach' (10) used, wherein the involvement of state, municipalities and NGOs ensured a comprehensive strategy with inputs from a range of stakeholders and professionals within the homelessness sector. A balanced involvement and collaboration of these parties has meant that the strategies created are approved by municipalities as well as on a national level, with more specific input from NGOs with an experience in working in homelessness.

Moreover, the emphasis in the PAAVO II programme on homelessness prevention, and particularly housing advice services has statistically shown a reduction in evictions in Helsinki (10), marking this as an important tool in the maintenance of housing sustainment. Maintaining housing sustainment is a challenge in the rehousing sector, which sees people leaving accommodation for a variety of social, environmental and financial reasons. Therefore, the Finnish housing advice service shows the importance of housing advice as a supplementary tool to Housing First programmes.

Undoubtedly, the Finnish spend of an estimated €250 million on the Housing First project (12) shows a significant budget; however, recent studies have shown that around €15,000 are saved by emergency and social services and the legal system for every single homeless person given permanent, supported housing (12). Coupled with continuously lowered rates of homelessness, Finland's strategy has proved to be a positive step forward in combatting homelessness in Europe.

## THE CANADIAN APPROACH TO HOUSING FIRST

*“The universal success of Housing First across all At Home/Chez Soi sites is telling us that we’ve hit on a winning strategy for addressing homelessness for people with mental illness,”*

*Louise Bradley, President and CEO of the Mental Health Commission of Canada (21).*

In Canada, up to 200,000 people are classified as homeless every year, marking homelessness as a ‘serious public policy concern’ (22). Canada typically follows a ‘staircase’ approach to tackling homelessness and the provision of homelessness services, relying heavily upon shelters and emergency housing (22). Nevertheless, Housing First is viewed by the Canadian government as a ‘proven approach to tackling homelessness’ (18). A Housing-First-style strategy has been used in Canada since the 1970s, though the term ‘Housing First’ only became popularized much later through the work of Dr Sam Tsembris (17). In Canada, Toronto Charity Houselink was at the time pioneering an approach in which provision of stable accommodation to individuals suffering with mental health or addiction issues was ‘considered a priority’ (17). This longer history of the use of a Housing-First-style approach explains the well-established and government backed use of the model in Canada.

Subsequently, March 2013 saw a five-year government renewal of the Canadian Homelessness Partnering Strategy. This included ‘a new focus on the Housing First approach as well as a commitment of 119\$ million’ in order to increase use of Housing First services as a part of the national homelessness aid model (17).

Housing First models in Canada are complemented by one of two support systems, ICM (Intensive Case Management) or ACT (Assertive Community Treatment). The ICM model provides a client with a case manager who has the responsibility of brokering a relationship with support services for the client, with the goal of reducing support and making a transition to mainstream support services as soon as possible (19). By contrast, the ACT model is a multi-professional approach which provides the client with a multi-disciplinary team (this might include a doctor, psychiatrist, nurse and substance abuse specialist) to provide intensive support to individuals with ‘significant mental health and/or addiction issues’ (19). The ACT service is provided on an unlimited time-scale, with changes to ‘lower-intensity services’ (19) for those clients able to progress in their recovery (19).

One research project in particular has contributed to the acceptance of Housing First as a successful model for managing homelessness in Canada; the *At Home/ Chez Soi* project, a five-year project launched in 2008 and funded by the federal government, working in partnership with the Mental Health Commission of Canada, launched a trial of Housing First approaches in five cities across Canada (19). The aim of the project was to gain knowledge about which approaches were effective for people ‘experiencing serious mental illness and homelessness in Canada’. The effectiveness



of the Housing First strategies in the five cities studied (Vancouver, Toronto, Winnipeg, Moncton and Montréal (20)) were compared and analysed in order to 'identify what works, at what cost, for whom and where' (19). The project was seen as successful overall, with Louise Bradley, President and CEO of the Mental Health Commission of Canada commenting that its success "across all *At Home/Chez Soi* sites is telling us that we've hit on a winning strategy for addressing homelessness for people with mental illness," (21).

The following section of the report will focus on the Moncton *At Home/Chez Soi* project findings. Moncton has a population of 108,620 people (23), the most similar population size to that of Exeter (133,333 people (24)) than any of the other Canadian cities studied by the project. The analysis of Moncton indicates the applicability the Housing First model to a small-sized city and may therefore be of interest as a comparable city to the Exeter Housing First project.

# AT HOME/ CHEZ SOI: AN ANALYSIS OF MONCTON, NEW BRUNSWICK



Moncton being a smaller city relative to the four others on the *At Home/ Chez Soi* study, its Housing First project was particularly effective in determining whether such an approach would be effective in a 'small city and rural region' (26). Moreover, due to demographic differences, homelessness has been noted to appear differently in smaller cities and rural areas than in larger cities (26), marking the Moncton study as one which would identify whether Housing First strategies had sufficient flexibility to tackle homelessness in such an environment. Indeed, the overall success of the project at Moncton proved that Housing First is a strategy applicable to cities and regions of variable population size and environmental and demographic make-up.

The Moncton study followed 201 individuals, each of whom had mental health difficulties; the study group was divided into individuals that would receive support services from Housing First, and those that would receive treatment as usual (TAU) (25). Alongside Housing First aid, ACT services were provided to recipients (25).

The findings from the Moncton study were strongly positive in a number of fields, as outlined below.

## **Reduction in Homelessness**

Out of the Housing First and the TAU group in the Moncton Study, the Housing First group were able to demonstrate a higher percentage of time in stable housing (25). Furthermore, a greater percentage of Housing First recipients (74%) were continually housed during the final six months of the study compared to only 30% of TAU recipients (25).

## **Quality of Life**

The Housing First approach was reported to 'facilitate an improved quality of life as well as other positive changes beyond housing stability' (25). This finding indicates that housing stability is an important factor in improving wellbeing for those suffering from mental health and/ or other issues. The creation of a stable environment can thereby be further conducive to the treatment of such issues.

## **Financing the Program**

A significant finding was that of the cost savings calculated by the Moncton program. The study found that over the course of a two-year period, for every \$10 dollars that were invested into the Housing First program, the average savings for health, social and justice services were \$7.75 (25). This indicates a noteworthy reduction in spending on services, which is likely to have a more pronounced positive economic impact if Housing First continues to be implemented in the study region.



Overall, these findings highlight the ‘feasibility and value of implementing HF in a small Canadian city and in a rural region’ (25), highlighting that the benefits of Housing First are substantial relative to its costs in cities smaller than those where studies have traditionally been carried out.

### **Community Partners**

Reports from local community partners engaging with the *At Home/ Chez Soi* Housing First project in Moncton were largely favourable, with one report stating that a majority of community partners viewed the project as ‘having had a positive impact’ by empowering clients and having ‘facilitated clients achieving stabilization and provided access to mental health services’ (27). The report also highlights that in Moncton Housing First was ‘embraced by community partners as a valuable addition to the service delivery network’ (27), fitting well into the existing network of services available to homeless people, as well as bridging gaps in these services.

### **AT HOME/ CHEZ SOI AND HOUSING FIRST CONCLUSIONS FOR MONCTON, NEW BRUNSWICK**

The overall trends of the *At Home/ Chez Soi* project show favourable results for the Moncton project. The clear positive trends across homelessness reduction, finance, and community-partner support as well as various other areas highlighted in the *At Home/ Chez Soi* Final Report on Moncton(25) indicate that the Housing First approach has been more effective at reducing levels of homelessness than TAU options. Furthermore, the Government of New Brunswick has indicated that it will invest a further \$1.33 million ‘in services including ongoing rental assistance to individuals who participated in the At Home project’ (26), as well as into the development of a Flexible Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) team. The latter is a clear example of one way in which a locality is adapting aspects of the Housing First model to suit the local demographic, something which the Canadian government outline of these models expects and actively encourages (19).

The effectiveness of the approach in a smaller city and more rural community indicates the suitability for the Housing First approach to be adapted to different city sizes and demographics. The Moncton *At Home/ Chez Soi* study therefore represents a groundbreaking research project which not only supports Housing First as an effective tool to tackle homelessness, but also as a flexible and adaptable approach that is not limited to a large city demographic.

## REFLECTIONS ON HOUSING FIRST IN CANADA

In Canada, homelessness is a significant issue and is identified as a 'serious public policy concern' (22); governmental approval of Housing First strategies and a longstanding implementation of such models since the 1970s therefore indicates a dedication to this approach as a successful model for tackling homelessness. Housing First Services in Canada have become more well-established thanks to continual and favorable research into this approach, notably through the *At Home/ Chez Soi* study.

A key success of Housing First strategies in Canada appears to be the flexibility of the services. The unique size of the Moncton study (Moncton being a significantly smaller city than its four counterparts in the *At Home/ Chez Soi* study) and the positive trends identified by it in themselves show the possibility of applying the Housing First model to cities of various sizes. Moreover, investment targets for Housing First that had been in place under the previous Canadian Homelessness program have now been removed; this move allows more flexibility for communities within their use of the Housing First approach (18), enabling them to adapt the approach according to local needs. The removal of these targets and the subsequent flexibility this allows demonstrates a significant trust in the usefulness of Housing First as a strategy on behalf of the Canadian government.

Furthermore, as a means of continual support for communities across the country wishing to implement Housing First approaches for the first time, a toolkit guide has been created in order to 'guide the planning and implementation of effective Housing First programs in Canada' (26). Created following the successful findings of the *At Home/ Chez Soi* project, the toolkit is available online via the Mental Health Commission of Canada and Homeless Hub Canada websites (26).

In conclusion, the findings of the *At Home/ Chez Soi* project have been broadly positive not only in Moncton but across each of the five cities studied, with the overall conclusion that, 'with careful adaptation, Housing First works for many different contexts' (21) in Canada.

## CONCLUSIONS

*“Housing First is the most important innovation in tackling homelessness of the last few decades. It is proven to end homelessness for around 80 per cent of people with high support needs.”*

*Crisis, The Plan to End Homelessness (28)*

Compared to the traditional staircase model, Housing First offers an approach promising stability and a nearly immediate long-term home for previously homeless individuals. As demonstrated by each of the case studies analysed, such an approach has been noted to show numerous successes, notably in reducing homelessness and maintaining housing sustainment, as well as in limiting costs to social, health and justice services. Housing First offers a model which encourages societies to rethink current service provision for homeless people in order to offer a faster, more comprehensive and humane service to those in need.

The overall success of Housing First Models in England, Finland and Canada, and across the three regional case studies examined (all of which have varying population sizes and demographics, as well as being affected by other social, political and environmental factors to varying degrees), indicates that Housing First is above all a flexible model that works successfully when adapted to local contexts. The Moncton, New Brunswick study in particular came to this conclusion and highlighted the suitability of Housing First to smaller cities, which is encouraging news for the Exeter Housing First programme.

Furthermore, beyond the capacity of this report, data from many more countries is emerging as positive for Housing First approaches, marking the Housing First philosophy as an increasingly popular approach to take in the battle against homelessness.

**Table 9: Housing First: housing solutions**

- **Finland:** *National Housing First Programme:* Virtual eradication of rough sleeping and a drastic and continued reduction in numbers of other homeless people
- **Denmark:** *National Housing First programme:* Between 74% and 95% of people housed in 2009 to 2013 maintained their housing
- **Canada:** *Chez Soi programme:* 73% of people housed in the programme, compared to 32% of those receiving Treatment as Usual
- **US:** *Pathways to Housing:* 85% of participants housed in the programme for a period of five years
- **France:** *Un Chez Soi d'abord:* 85% housing retention after two years
- **Australia:** *The Street to Home Brisbane:* 95% of clients sustained housing in Brisbane after one year. *The Street to Home Melbourne:* 80% of participants had been housed one year or longer

*Figure 2: Housing First outcomes in different countries. Source: The Plan to End Homelessness: Chapter 9, The Role of Housing First in Ending Homelessness, Crisis. (28)*

One consistent success point across each of the case studies in this report was collaboration between national and regional governments, NGOs and other services in order to implement the programmes. Finland's tripartite approach was seen as a success; Canada's approach was government backed while working with Canada's

Mental Health Commission, with particular praise from community partners that the scheme in Moncton also involved, while the Exeter approach is similarly praised for its collaboration between the City Council and charity BCHA. This observation highlights the importance of actively encouraging collaborative work across partner organisations in the running of Housing First projects.

Furthermore, the wrap-around service provision that Housing First delivers is also a factor of utmost importance in its success, as the stable housing provided fosters a safe environment for individuals to pursue treatment and recovery from mental health and addiction issues. Typically, ACT or ICM models are used, although other complementary services have also proven successful, with the Finnish housing advice services playing a significant role in sustainment of housing. This particular success suggests potential to research other services that may benefit the Housing First Programme further, though inclusion of further services is of course contingent on greater funding for Housing First approaches, which predominantly rely on government aid.

Indeed, one of the biggest challenges for Housing First schemes appears to be a lack of funding, as particularly exemplified by the English pilot schemes due to terminate in 2022 and 2023, and finding themselves on a “cliff-edge” (30) without further government support. Another significant challenge can also be sourcing enough affordable accommodation to provide to the service, particularly in the context of the current housing crisis in the United Kingdom. These challenges can create significant limitations for Housing First services, which are only able to be solved through policy and governmental changes. The availability of affordable housing in Helsinki, for example, is due to the large quantities of social housing available, and ambitious yearly targets for building housing in the capital (12).

However, from an economic viewpoint, the findings of this report consistently show that the Housing First approach has proven to be economically sustainable, highlighting its suitability for government investment. Although Housing First may appear to be a more costly strategy than standard service provision for homeless people, its long-term savings can be significant, with both the Finnish and Canadian approaches reporting positive economic outcomes, notably in reduction of use of health, social and justice services. A further study found that in Finland, providing long-term housing through a scheme such as Housing First can save ‘up to €15,000’ of taxpayer contributions per year per person housed in the long-term(27), a finding marking enormous economic saving potential through successful implementation of Housing First services.

A limitation of a study of this genre is that despite the comparisons drawn between the English, Finnish and Canadian approaches as well as their regional case studies, significant social, environmental and demographic differences across the three countries make it difficult to draw clear conclusions about comparable aspects of their approaches. For this reason, this report has sought to separately identify how Housing First approaches have worked in each of the countries, and to draw overall findings from this.

A clear conclusion is that, despite the differences in each location, the three Housing First approaches studied have proven to have positive effects on both the individuals

rehoused, the greater community and the economy. Increasingly, Housing First is proving itself as a powerful approach to rethinking how homelessness is tackled worldwide. Its international success suggests that the greatest take-away to make is that Housing First is a flexible strategy that is suitable to be adapted to local needs, and is still able to show consistently positive results.

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