The Evidence Base for Housing First

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Outline

- Where does the evidence come from?
- How reliable is it?
- What does it tell us about effectiveness?
- What ‘lessons’ have been learned?
Where Does it Come From?

• Internationally:
  • United States: Pathways and multiple other projects
  • ‘Housing First Europe’ social experimentation project: Portugal, Denmark, Netherlands, Hungary, UK ‘test sites’ (+5 ‘peer sites’)
  • Canada: Chez Soi/At Home multi-site trial
  • France: 4 city study

• Closer to home:
  • Turning Point Scotland Glasgow pilot
  • Housing First in England: 9-service evaluation
How Reliable Is It?

- Large quantitative Randomised Control Trials (RCTs)
- Smaller, primarily qualitative studies
- Findings all ‘point in same direction’
- Consistency and ‘weight’ highly compelling
Housing Stability

- Housing retention – generally in order of 80-90% still accommodated after 2(ish) years
- Confirms that homeless people with complex needs ARE able to sustain independent tenancy
Health

• ‘Clinical’ outcomes more mixed, but positive on balance
  • Physical health – improvement overall, but some still in poor health
  • Mental health – improvement for many, but outcomes negligible for some
  • Substance misuse – reduction/stabilisation for most; no increase
Criminal and Anti-social Behaviour

• Overall decrease in:
  • Involvement with CJS/ASB
  • Participation in ‘street culture’ activities (begging, sex work etc.)

• (Understandable) stakeholder anxieties re risks of ASB/ neighborhood disturbance rarely borne out
Financial Wellbeing and Social Support

- Financial wellbeing often improved; but still ‘poor’
- Some gains re improving social support and community integration, but social isolation/loneliness still widespread
- These long-term goals given baseline?
Cost

- Compelling evidence in some contexts (esp. US, Canada and France) that cost effective and delivers cost savings
- In UK, evidence on costs is limited, but estimates suggest that:
  - no more expensive than hostels, and may deliver substantial cost savings (c. £15k pppa)
  - JRF estimate that if 58,000 people with complex needs ['Hard Edges'] housed via HF, could save £200mill pppa after 2 years
‘Lessons Learned’

- Initial resistance to HF at local level seems inevitable, but is not insurmountable; ‘seeing is believing’
- Service user experiences are neither uniform nor linear
- Imperative re adhering to key HF principles; higher levels of fidelity = better outcomes
Key Messages

- Evidence showcasing HF effectiveness is far stronger than is true of any other intervention targeting rough sleepers / single homeless people
- Housing First is not a panacea … but demonstrates exceptionally positive housing (and other) outcomes for a group that has historically been poorly served by mainstream services
- Outcomes are best when core HF principles are adhered to
A Few Key References