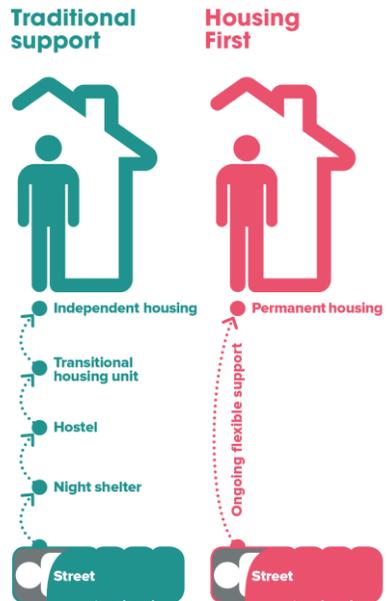




Westminster VAWG Housing First Project



What is Housing First



- A Housing and Support model for people with multiple disadvantage
- Developed in 1990s in New York City
- Adopted internationally; currently 105 services in England
- Based on a set of 7 principles
- 70% - 90% tenancy sustainment rate and improved outcomes in health and wellbeing





The Housing First Principles

Housing First Principles

How They Align with Gender and Trauma Informed Practice

1. People have a right to a home

1. Housing is a fundamental human right and prioritises safety.

2. Flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed

2. Building trusting relationships are crucial for healing from trauma.

3. Housing and support are separated

3. Offer of housing is unconditional - prioritises safety and stability.

4. Individuals have choice and control

4. Women have had their agency taken from them - this model aims to give it back.

5. An active engagement approach is used

5. Proactive engagement approach to counteract mistrust of services.

6. The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations

6. Empowerment and self-determination

7. A harm reduction approach is used

7. Harm minimization includes safety planning around VAWG

Housing First for Women

- Only a few dedicated services for women in England
- Most homeless women with multiple disadvantage have experienced gendered violence and abuse
- Women are more likely to be “hidden homeless”
- Many refuges are unable to support women with multiple disadvantage
- HF aligns well with gender and trauma-informed practice



“We believe a Housing First model for domestic violence survivors would ensure they are in safe and secure accommodation quickly and then their other needs could be addressed, including mental health treatment and other specific trauma induced issues”

(All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness Report: Homelessness Prevention for Care Leavers, Prison Leavers and Survivors of Domestic Violence, 2017)



Westminster VAWG Housing First



Housing Partnerships

- Project designed with securing housing *first*, before the support was commissioned
- Collaboration
- Service Level Agreement (SLA) between all partners
- Coalition of housing providers are highly valued
- Offers safety and security for clients



Our women: their needs and experiences

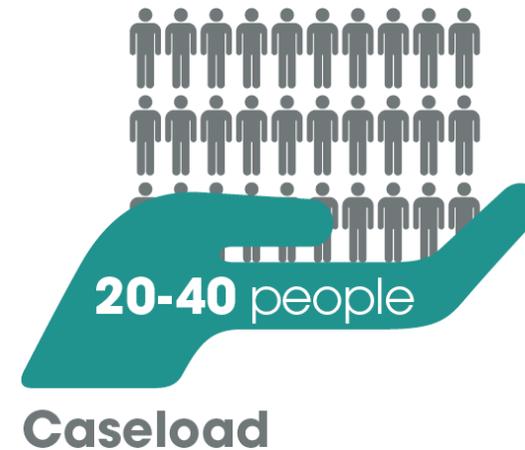
- **All the women** have experienced homelessness (rough sleeping, supported accommodation, sofa surfing), one or multiple forms of VAWG (domestic abuse, sexual violence and sexual exploitation), substance misuse and poor mental health.
- **14** - children removed from their care.
- **10** - offending histories.



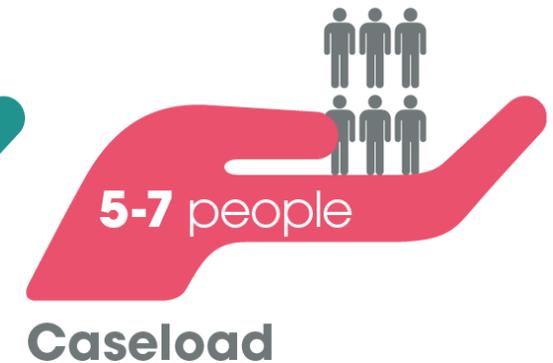
Support Provision

- All support workers are women and are trained in VAWG; Trauma and gender-informed service.
- Long-term, holistic one-to-one support with every aspect of life.
- Specialist provision; can provide specialist domestic abuse support + more, including risk assessments and safety plans.
- Practical support e.g. benefits, rent, bills, GP, etc.
- Partnership working; worker is single point of contact for other agencies & reduces working in silos.
- Tailored to women experiencing multiple disadvantage; reduction in paperwork.
- Client-led, flexible working.

Traditional support



Housing First



What Homes Are Needed For Housing First?

- **Having a choice**
- Affordable
- Suitable
- Stable tenancies that are sustainable and long term
- Things to consider: safety, physical health, disabilities



The impact

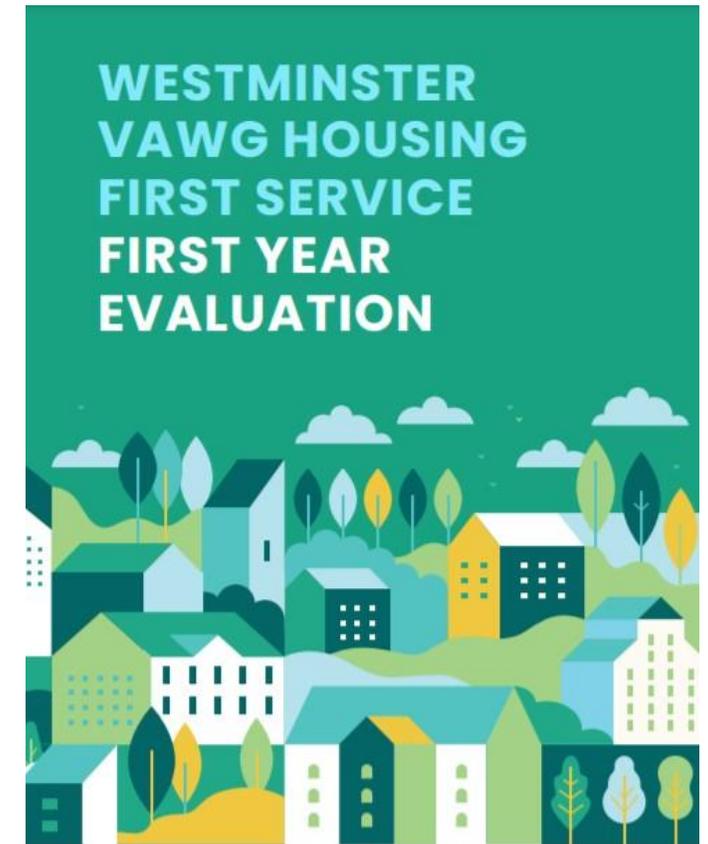
"I was homeless - living in a cold derelict building with no support services four years ago. I had to sleep under three duvets, and I had nothing. The council referred me to a B&B before I got into a hostel where I was for three years, then I was introduced to Solace Housing First. I didn't know anything about Housing Associations until then. This flat just feels like a dream. I never imagined I would get housed in this area. I feel so lucky, I could have been God knows where. I feel like things have just got better and better."

"Now I feel like I have my place where I am safe. I have a place where I can go to sleep; I'm safe, I have my shower, I can cook my food. Before I was on the street - I wasn't safe, and I was scared 24 hours a day. I can finally do my things, if I am hungry, I can make my food; if I need to wash my clothes, I can do that. I feel like a human, not an animal. Before on the streets, where I couldn't wash my clothes, I had to stay in dirty clothes. Now I can sleep in a bed, I can use the shower when I want. I feel like a human should feel. This is most important, is because I am a woman and I feel safe."



Outcomes – Year 1

- **8 out of 9** women housed have maintained their tenancies (89.5%).
- **9 out of 11** women continue to engage well with her Housing First worker.
- **10 out of 11** women have made disclosures and are speaking about their experiences of VAWG to their Housing First worker.
- **8 women** were supported to access drug and alcohol services, 3 women accessed psychological support and all but 2 were registered with GP's and supported to attend health appointments.
- **All the women** were supported around current or historical experiences of VAWG. 7 were supported to make reports to police.
- **2 women** had reconnected with family members including children who were removed from their care.
- **2 women** have been accepted into college. **7 women** supported to pursue their interests e.g., art, writing, knitting





- Katie experienced physical and emotional abuse from family members from a young age
- Also experienced domestic abuse and grooming
- Substance misuse and rough sleeping as a response to the trauma
- Housing First supported Katie to access independent accommodation.
- Now Katie is completely clean, facilitating recovery groups, accessing psychological support, and recently accepted into college.
- Ongoing visits from Housing First worker to support her with DA from current partner.
- Katie says ‘Make sure that rough sleepers can access accommodation that allows dogs as they are a great support’

Women’s Voices: A Housing First Case Study



Housing First for Women: Considerations for practice

| Engaging | Managing | Supporting | Housing |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p>Engaging women may take longer and be more difficult.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Pre-engagement work to build relationships with women- Caseload maximum 5 women- Good relationships with referrer. | <p>Managing domestic abuse/VAWG.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Supporting women who remain in relationships with perpetrators- Linking perpetrators in with support- Adapted risk assessment and safety planning | <p>Supporting women as mothers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Supporting women with Children's Services, court, and contact with their children.- Acknowledging grief and loss | <p>Partnerships with housing providers - affordable, secure & suitable properties.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Consideration of safety of property for woman.Matching property to woman's needs e.g. in block of flats, on street etc. |

Housing First for women: Considerations for policy

- More Housing First projects specifically for women
- Gender-informed practice integrated into generic services
- Long term, sustainable funding - engaging women with complex trauma and addressing domestic abuse/VAWG takes time.
- More affordable and sustainable housing
- Identifying women – hidden homelessness vs. rough sleeping
- Gender and trauma informed practice within other partner agencies – e.g. mental health services, drug and alcohol services
- Housing First for women experiencing long term/chronic homelessness and VAWG should be prioritised under the safe accommodation duty of the Domestic Abuse Act.



Thank you!

Natalie Wong

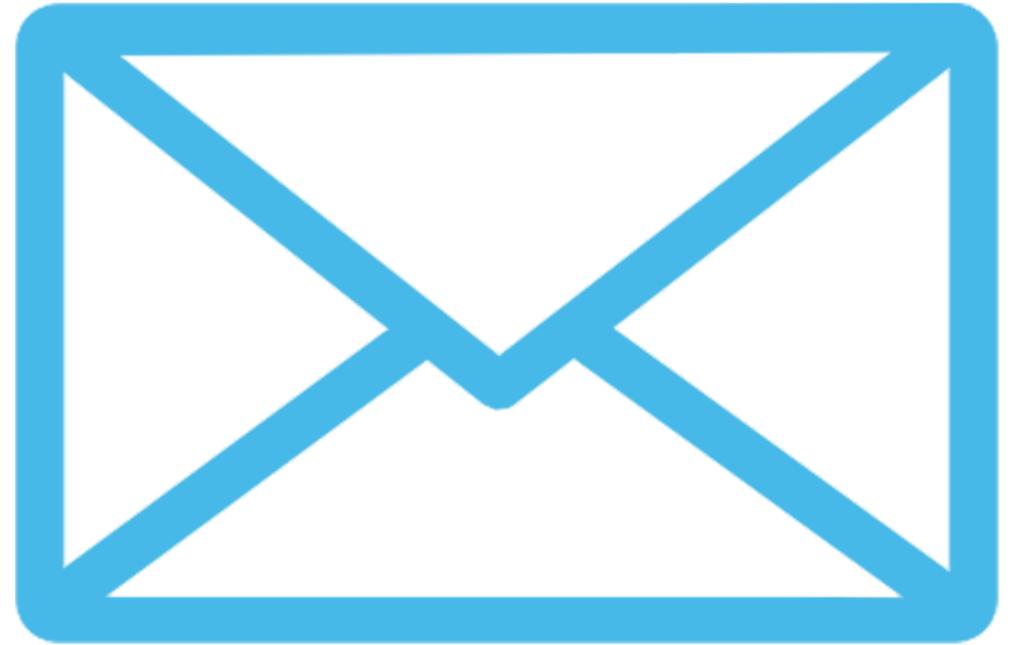
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STANDING
TOGETHER
AGAINST
domestic abuse