

Benefits of scaling 'housing first' approach to address homelessness in Scotland

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A new report from Heriot-Watt University, and Matt Rayment from ICF, has outlined a range of findings highlighting the benefits and challenges of scaling the "Housing First" approach to address homelessness in Scotland.

The independent report outlined the success of the "Housing First"

Pathfinder program which transformed the way some of the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness are supported across Scotland.

Housing First targets homeless people with complex support needs, providing them with a safe home of their own, along with intensive tailored support.

The "Housing First Pathfinder Program" set out to scale up Housing First delivery across Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling. It housed and supported 579 people.

Homelessness charity, Social Bite, catalyzed the program by securing pledges from [housing](#) providers to make one-bedroom flats available for rough sleepers with complex support needs. Social Bite committed £2m towards the program through mass participation fundraising events like Sleep in the Park, with £5m investment by the Scottish Government and £150k from Merchants House of Glasgow.

The report showed that the Pathfinder was very effective at preventing repeat homelessness. Tenancy sustainment rates stood at 88% over 12 months and 80% over 24 months while there was also [positive feedback](#) from participants regarding support with health and substance misuse, with many reporting that the program had "transformed" their lives.

The value of Housing First in enabling a sustained escape from harms associated with rough sleeping and homeless hostels was also emphasized, as were the opportunities afforded by having a stable home to do "normal" things which restore dignity and foster recovery.

The report states that while strong political backing has helped the facilitation of Housing First to this point, several challenges were encountered. The lessons learned will be invaluable as Housing First

continues to be scaled up across Scotland. There is a national policy ambition for it to become the default response for [homeless people](#) with complex needs. Government figures indicate that there are now an estimated 1,333 Housing First tenancies across Scotland.

Josh Littlejohn MBE, Founder and Executive Director of Social Bite, said: "At Social Bite, we're firm believers that everyone in Scotland should have a safe place to call home as it's not just a basic human right, but is essential to create a society where everyone truly has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

"The Pathfinder report further underlines the untold benefits of scaling up this approach right across the country to help transform lives and communities. Housing First helps drive up tenancy sustainment, improve people's mental health and has huge cost savings for [local authorities](#) so I'm delighted to see so many positive findings included in this new report."

Professor Sarah Johnsen from the Institute for Social Policy, Housing, Equalities Research (I-SPHERE) at Heriot-Watt University, led the evaluation report. She said: "The Pathfinder evaluation showed that delivering Housing First at scale may well be difficult, but it's achievable and very definitely worthwhile given the immense benefits for individuals supported.

"Scotland has been seen as an international pioneer in Housing First given the level of political support its received and pace at which it's been scaled up. We must hope that this commitment is maintained given the pivotal role it can play in ending homelessness and promoting recovery for people experiencing multiple disadvantage."

Housing Secretary Shona Robison said, "The Scottish Government provided funding of over £5.5 million for the Housing First pathfinder

program, which saw 579 people with difficult experiences of homelessness get keys for a new home. We are delighted to see that almost all tenants interviewed said they would recommend Housing First, with many saying that the program had transformed their lives.

"We are continuing to work closely with our local government and third sector partners to end homelessness and rough sleeping in Scotland."

Ruth Whatling, Head of Policy and Equality at Homeless Network Scotland, said, "This report marks the culmination of the hard work of those who drove local Housing First pathfinders in their many different roles. And it marks the strengths and successes of people now building and living their lives in their own home.

"The comprehensiveness of this research led by Prof Sarah Johnsen from Heriot-Watt University provides clear direction on how we should now branch out Housing First across Scotland. Sharing learning will be key to ensuring Housing First continues to be delivered in a way that reaps such significant benefits for individuals and communities as well as the wider public sector."

More information: Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder Evaluation: Final Report—Executive Summary. [DOI: 10.17861/jg8s-2v04](https://doi.org/10.17861/jg8s-2v04)

Provided by Heriot-Watt University

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