



Co-design in practice - the Auckland city centre Housing First project

A collaborative project to address chronic homelessness in Auckland's city centre using the Housing First model is underway. The project team are using their collective knowledge to explore ways of getting chronic rough sleepers into permanent housing quickly and offering them a range of supports to meet their needs.

The Housing First project kicked off on 1 June this year and members include: Lifewise, Auckland City Mission, the Assertive Community Outreach Service (ACOS), Community Alcohol and Drug Services (CADS), Airedale Property Trust (APT), Community Housing Aotearoa (CHA), Ministry of Social Development (MSD), and Housing New Zealand (HNZ). Also on the project group are people with lived experience of homelessness. Their involvement is crucial to the project so that the voice of the rough sleeper community is at the table from the outset.

The team are using a co-design approach to adapt the Housing First model to our unique context in Aotearoa, and more specifically, for those who are currently experiencing chronic homelessness in the Auckland city centre.



From left to right: Rangi, Awatea, John H., Robert St., Darryl, Rachelle, Scott, Albert, John K., Moira, Louelle, Sophia, Robert Sm., Gerard, Lisa and Vicky (plus Zoe and Sarah—not in photo)

Co- design reflects a fundamental change to traditional service or programme design. Rather than service providers designing services or programmes in isolation, the co-design approach enables a wider range of people to make a creative contribution in the formulation and solution of a problem. A key tenet of co-design is that users, as 'experts' of their own experience, become central to the design process. For the Housing First project, the contribution of people with lived experience occurs in different forms, from participation on the project team, participation in empathy interviews, creative brainstorming sessions and through to the initial testing of ideas and concepts.

The lived experience voice and active contribution is critical throughout and actually guides the development of solutions. Project lead, Zoe Truell, says this is a human-centred way to understand the

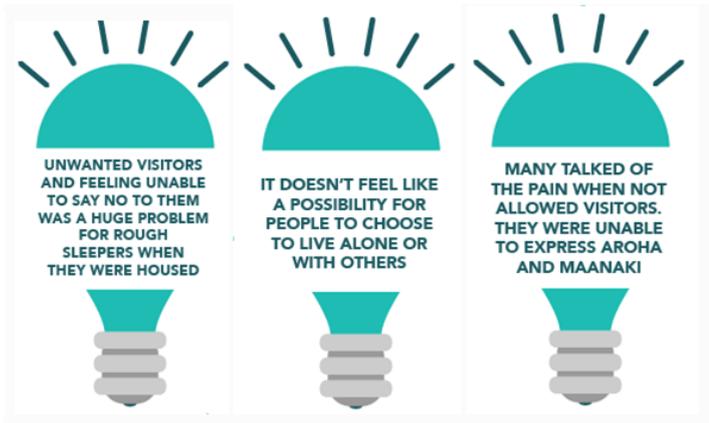
complexities for those experiencing chronic homelessness in Auckland city centre and a way to create housing and supports that are better-orientated to people's wishes. "Tenancies fall over a lot and we need to make sure we are setting up homes that can be sustained."

Learnings from the co-design process so far

Through the 'understand' phase of the project, the design team conducted in-depth empathy interviews with people currently experiencing chronic homelessness, and people who are now in housing. They also studied the quantitative data and explored service providers' experiences to understand the issue from all perspectives.

The process revealed a number of key learnings and insights that highlight the need for an intentional kaupapa Māori response, including:

- 59 per cent of those experiencing chronic homeless in the Auckland city centre are of Māori descent
- Concepts such as manaakitanga, and āwhina mai – āwhina atu are practised and integral to the rough sleeper community



- Many people currently lack positive connections with whānau and often seek these through their street community

Zoe says developing the project in a culturally appropriate way is important. The team want to learn from the implementation of Housing First with indigenous people in other countries and from the implementation of kaupapa Māori programmes here in Aotearoa. "We have an opportunity to make sure it works well here in New Zealand, particularly for Māori, and we will be looking at

how we incorporate things like living collectively and how we might foster cultural values throughout the programme".

Some of the other key insights and learnings include;

- people need choice in where, how and who they live with;
- people find moving in and adjusting to their new home to be an overwhelming and stressful experience;
- people need to express manaaki to others in a way that does not jeopardise their tenancy and;
- people need quality trusting relationships with their support workers

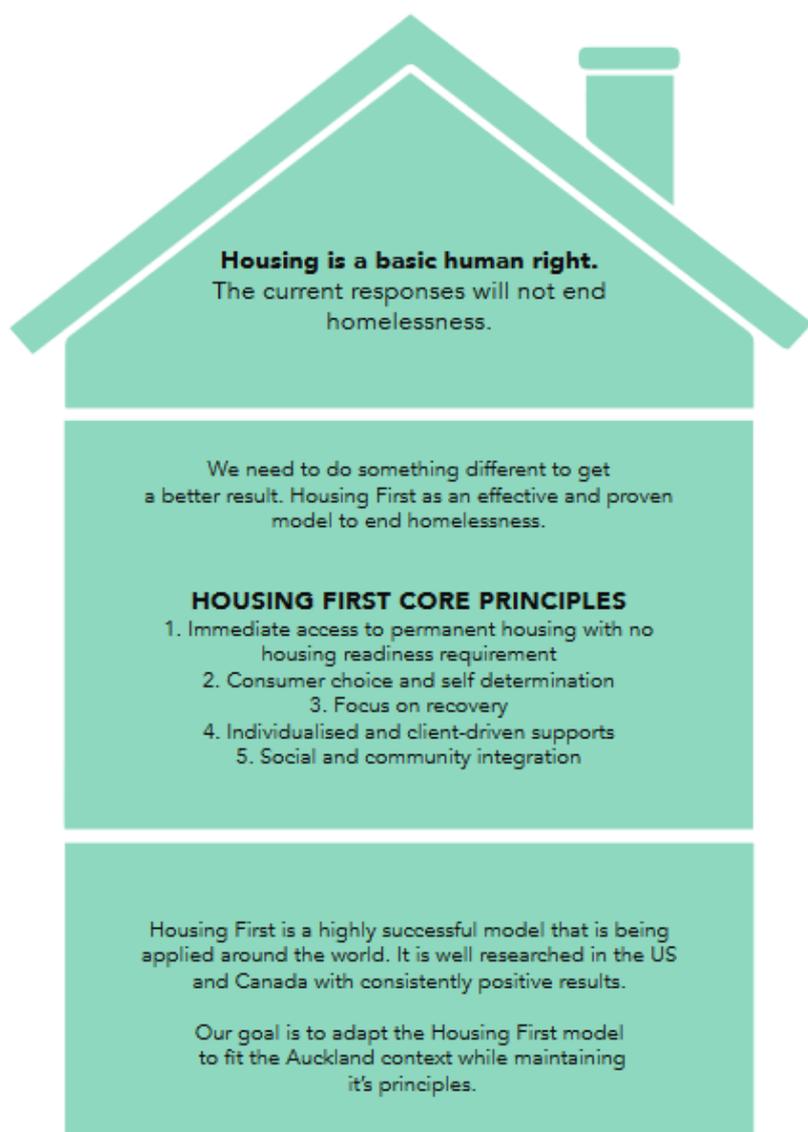
The next steps are to take these key learnings and to co-design solutions that directly meet these needs. The team will again be drawing on the experience and perspectives of a wide range of people, including those with lived experience to do this.

Feedback from Sam Tsemberis (CEO Pathways to Housing and founder of Housing First in New York) to the group is that they need to be flexible, particularly with housing options, to be able to genuinely respond to people's housing choices - independent apartments will not work well for everyone.

Peer support an important component

Peer support is integral to the Housing First approach and is a key part of this Auckland project. The project members with lived experience of homelessness are also exploring how to develop peer and community support for the Housing First programme. This will initially include peer-to-peer training for 15 people with lived experience. They are also organising media and public speaking training to support the project members with lived experience when talking with others including the media about their experiences and needs.

Peer support worker Awatea Hawke talks [here](#) about his experiences being homeless in Auckland and why he thinks this Housing First project will work.



A recent announcement by the Minister for Social Housing, Paula Bennett, to support new Housing First projects in Auckland is a welcome boost for the group. "It will ensure the project can be confidently progressed to the implementation phase," says Zoe Truell.

While the project working group is currently in the design phase they expect to enter into the testing phase in October through to December. The team have been working incredibly hard and have a real sense of hope that the implementation of Housing First will end chronic homelessness in the Auckland city centre.