

# HOUSING FIRST IN WALES

Alex Osmond, Housing First  
Policy and Practice Co-ordinator  
at Cymorth Cymru

[alex@cymorthcymru.org.uk](mailto:alex@cymorthcymru.org.uk)



# THIS PRESENTATION



- The Welsh context and Welsh Government's perspective
- Housing First Network and Sub groups
- The principles
- Housing First accreditation
- COVID-19, phase 2, and Housing First
- Key points from my perspective

# INTRODUCTION



## Who am I?

- Have experienced RS and homelessness in South Wales
- Work at Cymorth Cymru, representative body for housing support services in Wales
- Have worked at various other support providers and third sector organisations

# WELSH CONTEXT



- Political consensus across parties on Housing First and homelessness more generally
- Small number of dense urban environments mainly in South, rest is more rural/small-town

## Pre-COVID timeline

- **2017:** WG supports new approaches to homelessness with funding. Several HF projects start
- **Dec 2017:** Cymorth Cymru establishes Housing First Network
- **February 2018:** Welsh Gov's Rough Sleeping Action plan recognises effectiveness of HF
- **April 2018:** Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee publishes report recommending HF as default approach

## Pre-COVID timeline

- **December 2018:** £700m funding for HF projects in Conwy/Denbighshire, Cardiff, RCT and Merthyr
- **Oct 2019:** Welsh Government publishes strategy reiterating the role of HF
- **Oct 2019:** Homelessness Action Group (HAG) recommends that rapid rehousing, including Housing First, should be the default approach to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping

# NETWORK AND SUB GROUPS



## Housing First Network

- Strategic conversations around Housing First in Wales
- Made up of staff from support providers, housing associations and RSLs, local and national government
- Developed principles, stances
- Collaborates on documentation and guidance
- Updates on Housing First developments
- Shares good practice
- Discusses current issues affecting Housing First at a strategic level

# NETWORK AND SUB GROUPS



## Housing First Network Wales Sub Groups

- Housing Management
- Housing First for Youth
- Communications
- Health and Social Care
- Housing First for Women
- **Additional group during COVID:** Housing First Operational Group

# THE PRINCIPLES



**Based on principles developed by Homeless Link, with a Welsh context in mind:**

- People have a right to a home that is affordable, secure, habitable, adequate both physically and culturally, and with availability of services (as per UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). It should also be dispersed in the community and not as part of an institution.
- Housing and support are separated.

# THE PRINCIPLES



- The service is targeted at people who demonstrate a repeat pattern of disengagement with hostel accommodation and/or, individuals accessing rough sleeping or accessing EOS (Emergency Overnight Stay) at the point when the referral is made.
- Flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed.
- An active engagement approach is used.
- Individuals have choice and control.

# THE PRINCIPLES



- A harm reduction approach to substance misuse is used.
- The service is delivered in a psychologically-informed, trauma-informed, gender-informed way that is sensitive and aware of protected characteristics.
- The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations, and as such has an explicit commitment to a small caseload.
- The widest range of services are involved from the outset (health, substance misuse, mental health, police), so individuals can access them if needed or wanted.

# ACCREDITATION



- **Background:** developed in late 2019, accreditation's purpose is to ensure the model remains strong and true to principles as more projects develop
- **Process:** Project provides documentation to evidence adherence to principles; interviews with key staff members reinforce this evidence; recommendations are made; final report details response to these recommendations; Panel meets to decide whether to award accreditation

## Current status of accreditation:

- Conwy and Denbighshire Housing First project has been awarded accreditation (final report is available on Cymorth Cymru's website)
- Two other projects underway
- Plans for subsequent accreditations running to end of financial year
- Accreditation will also look at COVID's effects on HF

# COVID, PHASE 2 AND HOUSING FIRST



## **Key issues coming up from providers during the pandemic:**

- Balancing face-to-face contact needs and staff safety
- Working with partners and clients to ensure lockdown procedures are followed
- Being creative with support
- Overstretched teams
- Balancing housing people quickly and properly following client choice
- Housing supply, limited voids etc.

# COVID, PHASE 2 AND HOUSING FIRST



- Pandemic has meant that services have had to adapt how they function and be flexible in response to the crisis. This has posed questions about compliance with the principles during such a challenging time.
- **The Housing First Network's stance:** *softening* a principle, *with good reason*, and *with a clear plan to return to that principle as soon as possible*, does not mean an approach is not Housing First
- However, *abandoning* a principle, *even with justifiable reasons*, means we cannot call a project Housing First

# COVID, PHASE 2 AND HOUSING FIRST



- **‘Phase two’**: Welsh Government’s name for the next step in responding to the pandemic
- Supported with £50million funding (capital and revenue)
- Guidance set out plans to transform homelessness services with a clear movement towards rapid rehousing, including Housing First.
- This follows the Homelessness Action Group’s report in March 2020, which reiterates the importance of rapid rehousing and HF
- WG working with local authorities who have neither model to support them to develop these services
- Important to ensure expansion doesn’t lead to loss of fidelity

# KEY POINTS FROM MY PERSPECTIVE



- Well-designed projects with fidelity to the principles can endure, and even thrive during, challenges like COVID
- We need to work hard to ensure the push towards housing-led approaches doesn't regress
- Developing buy-in to Housing First, and effective relationships, is still a vital part of the work we need to do
- People who are initially suspicious of Housing First who take the time to buy in can be its best advocates