



WHICH WAY HOME?

**THE EXPERIENCES OF THE
SIMON COMMUNITIES INTRODUCING
HOUSING LED SERVICES**

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND



INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York worked with the Simon Communities in Ireland to examine the development of housing-led services by the eight Simon Communities and the National Office. The research explored the impacts of the economic and policy context in which housing-led services are being introduced by Simon Communities, including housing supply and ongoing changes to health, social housing and welfare budgets. The research also explored examples of good practice in service delivery within the Simon Communities.

OBJECTIVES

The aims of the research were to:

- Explore the development of housing-led services by the eight Simon Communities;
- Examine the context in which the rolling out of housing-led services is occurring and look specifically at the ways in which contextual factors may be influencing how housing-led services are being developed;
- Look at how the Communities are developing good practice to address some of the barriers and challenges that relate to using housing-led approaches, and,
- Compare and contrast the experience of the Simon Communities in introducing and rolling out housing-led services with experiences in other countries.

METHODS

The research explored the above issues through discussions with senior managers, other staff and service users, and staff at the National Office. This included visits to three Simon Communities: Dublin; Cork, and Midlands. Interviews were also conducted with respondents from the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government; Health Service Executive, and the Dublin Region Homeless Executive. In addition, a literature review was conducted of the experience of utilising housing-led approaches in other countries.

The research adopted an analytic framework underpinned by evidence that suggests that homelessness services that follow the operational principles of the Pathways Housing First approach are more effective than traditional homelessness services at delivering an end to homelessness (Pleace and Bretherton, 2013a and 2013b). These principles include:

- Housing as a human right
- Respect, warmth, and compassion for all clients
- A commitment to working with clients for as long as they need
- Scattered-site housing; independent apartments
- Separation of housing and services
- Consumer choice and self-determination
- A recovery orientation
- Harm reduction

Respondents discussed their experiences and views on introducing housing-led services in relation to the eight key principles noted above. Respondents also discussed operational issues and some of the barriers and challenges in relation to rolling out a housing-led approach.

REPORT STRUCTURE

Chapter Two sets out respondents' views on the adoption and rolling out of housing-led approaches within Simon Communities and focuses on three issues:

- Where are Simon Communities in this process?
- How do housing-led approaches fit within a wider service mix?
- What needs to happen next?

The chapter begins by setting out respondents' views on the culture and ethos of Simon Communities in relation to the key principles, followed by a discussion of operational issues in taking forwards housing-led approaches. This is followed by a consideration of the process of transitioning towards housing-led approaches.

As part of this, and subsequent chapters, the findings also identify examples of good practice within Simon Communities.

Chapter Three focuses on the critical issue of housing supply. The first section explores respondents' views on the supply of social housing and private renting, as well as some of the key challenges for service users and service providers in sourcing accommodation and sustaining tenancies. The chapter then moves on to examine Simon Communities' experiences and views on developing their own supply of accommodation options.

Chapter Four discusses views on the supports necessary to make housing-led approaches work, and identifies a number of challenges in pulling together the range of support options that service users can realistically draw on. The chapter also considers the diversity of different geographical contexts in which housing-led services operate, and the need to tailor approaches to rural areas, as well urban settings.

Chapter Five sets the approaches to housing-led services by the Simon Communities within an international comparison with housing-led approaches in other countries. The final chapter (Chapter Six) draws together the main findings from the research and summarises the key challenges in taking forwards housing-led approaches in Ireland.

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CHAPTER TWO

**WORKING WITH THE
KEY PRINCIPLES OF
A HOUSING-LED
APPROACH**



INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the experiences and challenges of adopting a housing-led approach within Simon Communities. Respondents discussed the overall culture and ethos of Simon Communities in relation to the key principles outlined in the previous chapter. The chapter then sets out operational issues in taking forward housing-led approaches. This is followed by a consideration of the process of transitioning towards housing-led approaches, including how housing-led approaches fit within a wider service mix.

WORKING WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF A HOUSING-LED APPROACH

There was a general view among staff respondents that the culture and ethos of the Simon Communities coincided with many of the principles of a housing-led approach set out in the previous chapter, and reflected their approach to addressing homelessness. The level of enthusiasm and commitment within Simon Communities towards housing-led approaches was clearly evident. A number of respondents also highlighted communicating and discussing the key messages of the housing-led approach with staff as part of the transitioning process

towards housing-led services. Nevertheless, there was also recognition of the need to maintain and progress cultural change within Simon Communities in terms of attitudes and understanding of the approach. As part of this, some respondents discussed the gradual change in views and expectations of service users, reflecting the experiences of a growing number of the latter. One respondent commented on the need to engage more fully with service users to communicate the housing-led approach so that it would become the expectation and understanding of service users as the norm.

In relation to operational issues, individual Communities identified areas where change was necessary or ongoing. Often these were linked with planned developments, or were long recognised as requiring attention. The scale of change required varied considerably. A key aspect of the housing-led approach is a formal separation between support and treatment on one hand, and addressing housing issues on the other, underpinned by the concept that housing should not be dependent on service users being compliant with treatment. Tackling housing issues includes all aspects of sustaining the home such as paying rent, dealing with maintenance and repairs. One respondent felt that the value of achieving a separation between housing and support should not be underestimated in terms of facilitating positive outcomes for service users.



PRACTICE EXAMPLE:

Separation of housing and support between services

Cork Simon – a separation of housing and support functions has been utilised between the different organisations in Cork Rentals i.e. If Cork Simon provides accommodation, then another agency provides support and *vice versa*. Cork Rentals is an initiative between Cork Simon, Focus, and St. Vincent de Paul, to offer people stuck in homeless services the opportunity to move on to their own homes with visiting one-to-one support as needed. Suitable homes are leased at the market rate in the private rented sector, and are then let to people. Landlords are guaranteed the fair market rent, full management of their properties, and an assurance that their properties will be returned at the end of the lease in the same condition.

A separation of housing and support arrangements are also in place between an independent housing association and Cork Simon (www.corksion.ie).



PRACTICE EXAMPLE:

Internal separation of housing and support

The South East Simon Housing Officer focuses exclusively on housing related issues, including a housing management function such as rent. This post ensures an internal separation within South East Simon between housing and support in terms of staff roles.

There was recognition by other respondents of the need to operationalise this principle by separating out a housing management function from supports in terms of staff roles in situations where Simon Communities were themselves the property owner - or managed property - as well as providing the supports.

Another topic related to developing the range of options and choices available to service users with regard to harm reduction. In part this issue focused upon the range of accommodation options available to service users and the differing expectations within diverse projects and programmes with regards to alcohol and/or drug use. In this regard, one respondent noted that a rebalancing was necessary between harm reduction approaches and the continued use of requirements for abstinence in some projects. Other respondents highlighted gaps in service delivery such as access to wellness programmes, a lack of opportunities for service users to take advantage of harm reduction approaches in some areas, and also the consequences for harm reduction approaches of occasional limited partnership working between mental health and drug and alcohol services.

One respondent highlighted the value of being able to link with dedicated harm reduction agencies. In particular, the need to address access to discreet and confidential support options in rural areas was also highlighted in relation to harm reduction approaches. A feature of many rural areas is the visibility of service users in small settlements where they may be known personally by many members of the local community. The positive role played by a mobile needle exchange service was noted in one rural area.

A further issue in relation to the visibility of service users in smaller communities was that some people may be well known to service providers as well,



People come with a history. That's the other side of the rural aspect. So you are trying to get the local authority to look past your history. You're trying to get accommodation where you might be known (Staff)

Much larger - and more intractable – issues related to discussions about rebalancing the range and type of housing options on offer. In part, these discussions related to the mix of types of accommodation on offer, and the extent to which individual Simon Communities might ideally refocus away from emergency provision towards independent living options (these issues are explored in more detail below).

Discussions also included the size of some individual developments, and the extent to which larger projects may have a more institutional feel than smaller projects, where it was possible to create a more 'homelike' atmosphere. A couple of respondents also noted the need for a discussion about expectations in relation to the movement of some service users through transitional accommodation rather than into permanent accommodation with secure tenancies. A number of respondents also highlighted other practical difficulties in reconfiguring existing buildings in order to provide self-contained accommodation compared with options where people share facilities – not least financial constraints that individual Simon Communities may be operating with. A further obstacle was that some buildings are leased from other agencies, and this issue means it is problematic to give service users tenancies rather than licences.

The notion of independent living was itself noted as requiring greater clarity and discussion. In this respect, the term 'independent living' was viewed as the decisions that service users make about the type of accommodation they would choose to live in, rather than a definition of a specific type of housing option (i.e. scattered housing). One respondent felt that independent living should embrace the preferred choices that service users make for any type of accommodation – be that stand-alone accommodation, congregate settings or communal living – rather than associated only with stand-alone accommodation in scattered locations.

Respondents also discussed the skill sets required by staff in order to take forwards housing-led approaches, and that the specific nature of the competencies required to deliver housing-led services should not be underestimated. In this respect a couple of respondents reflected on strategies for staff recruitment that emphasised the underlying ethos and values that potential members of staff could bring to a post, rather than experience in the delivery of models of care and support.

The role of emergency accommodation

Demand for emergency services was reported across the Simon Communities as on the increase. There was considerable discussion within some of the Simon Communities about the role of emergency accommodation as organisations transition towards Housing-led approaches. There was a strong view that investment needs to take place in developing the supply of independent accommodation and supported housing prior to curtailing emergency provision, especially in the face of sustained demand from people who are homeless: variations on the comment 'putting the cart before the horse' were common. At the same time it was felt that there would always be some need for emergency accommodation. The emergency services provided by the Simon Communities offer an example of high quality accommodation combined with a settlement orientation.

Providing a wide service mix

One area of discussion was providing for the needs of all service users. A common theme returned to by respondents was providing for the service users who may not find that a move into stand-alone accommodation was suited to their needs. This is a point that has also been raised elsewhere (see Brooke, 2011). These discussions included reference to evaluations that reported the proportion of people for whom the Pathways Housing First approach in the United States had not ended homelessness. Whilst respondents who had communal living as part of their service mix felt that these were appropriate to the level of need in their areas, congregate housing models were more often viewed as a gap in their services. Some service users with a background in entrenched chronic homelessness, with long-standing experience of institutional living were often felt to express a preference for some form of communal experience, or at least the potential for social contact within some form of group setting. For example, fifty per cent of people who are long term homeless on Cork Simon housing waiting list expressed a preference for High Support (Congregate) housing, compared with fifty per cent who wished for an independent apartment.

As one focus group respondent commented,



Listen to the banter here now. We're always laughing. In the morning we have a giggle, whatever. And laugh, laugh, laugh. There's a great comfort level. There's no hassle and no stress. You know what the rules are. Easy going. There's no stigma (Service user).

A clear message from a number of the Simon Communities was the 'safety net' role of High Support Housing in their areas. A significant proportion of the residents in these types of accommodation had lived in stand-alone apartments, and had given up or lost their tenancies. In other areas service users were reliant on whatever other options were available. This often included emergency accommodation, or in the absence of this service, then a return to rough sleeping. Nevertheless, there were a variety of perspectives on taking the housing-led models forwards in this regard.

A couple of respondents reflected on relapses and felt that one cause for relapses in their own areas was the level of support that had been offered, rather than inherent limitations in the approach to supporting people in stand-alone apartments itself.

There was also a sense that the intensity of support required to sustain people in their homes had not been fully grasped either in policy terms or by many statutory providers. In addition, the level of support that should be offered to service users in stand-alone apartments by the Simon Communities continues to be explored.

Respondents emphasised not only a need for a long term commitment by support services, but also discussed the intensity of support required at the point of moving into stand-alone accommodation. These respondents discussed the apprehension on the part of many service users on moving in,



The piece from moving from emergency services into home is very traumatic. That support is needed at that time. Sometimes you get it right and sometimes not. It's very internal to the person, the fear of now being responsible for a place. I don't know how many times I've had keys handed back to me on the day they got the key. They couldn't deal with it (Staff)

One respondent commented on the impact on service users of their experiences of living for long periods in transitional accommodation,



People get stuck on the street or in emergency accommodation for years and years, and that's where the fear comes from – that street community. Whereas if they were genuinely six months through, you wouldn't have built up that fear. Some people have had ten years of being minded, being in a goldfish bowl, where you know if you walk out of your door, you can see staff or another resident. Then to go completely out there – it's terrifying (Staff).

Some service users in High Support Housing themselves tended to reflect this view, describing their anxiety at the prospect of a move,



It's frightening. Getting your furniture, it stresses you out. I'm worried about doing that and paying the rent. Very frightening. I had to step back and not do it. I need a push (Service user)

However, this is not to underestimate the desire for self-contained accommodation as distinct from necessarily a stand-alone home. One service user commented on the communal nature of living in high support housing,



I would like to do my own shopping. It's too institutionalised for me. I would like to do more for myself, which I'm capable of doing. It doesn't make sense to me, paying for dinner I might not like. I should be able to buy my own food, because I'm able to do it. This place is for people who are not able to do that (Service user)

A risk identified by a number of respondents across Simon Communities was the impact of a limited roll out of housing-led approaches on the broad range of service users needing accommodation and support. These respondents emphasised that without an adequate supply of accommodation and the opportunity for rapid movement into independent housing options, there was the potential for people to quickly become entrenched in very negative behaviours in emergency accommodation or other transitional accommodation options.

Young people, especially those leaving care, were viewed as particularly vulnerable in this regard. A priority for a number of Simon Communities was developing services to meet the needs of this group. However, a couple of respondents noted the specific challenges for young people leaving care, especially in relation to the skills to sustain independent living.



PRACTICE EXAMPLE:

Meeting the needs of young people leaving care

South East Simon after care service for those leaving the care of the HSE. The service works with people whilst they are in care at the age 17, preparing them for leaving care. Support is then provided to individuals up to the age of about 23 to help them make the transition into independent living. Support and advice is provided on issues such as finances, benefit entitlements, health, education, training and harm reduction; accessing community supports and social activity, as well as helping the person to develop skills such as budgeting, housekeeping, home maintenance, bill paying, being a good tenant, being a good neighbour and self-care. (www.southeastsimon.ie/en-us/servicesweprovide.aspx).

Adapting and modifying housing-led approaches

A number of respondents reflected specifically on the Pathways model and key differences in the contexts between the United States (New York especially), and Ireland. One identified difference was in relation to rent payments. Whilst the Pathways model was able to take rent payments at source, this option has not been available in Ireland. This was noted as having a significant impact on tailoring a model in Ireland that can address money management, arrears and thresholds for evictions, especially for service users in the height of problematic drug and/or alcohol use.

A further significant issue was the reliance in many areas on other service providers for the provision of key aspects of support, which emphasised the crucial role of inter-agency working in order to make housing-led approaches operate effectively. This aspect is discussed in more detail in chapter four. A key point, however, was a view that a model of support utilising Intensive Case Management approaches for people with high support needs was not just pragmatic, but also a potentially highly effective mechanism where the necessary supports could be accessed. The Assertive Community Treatment model was generally viewed as unaffordable.

One respondent discussed the potential for wider learning from other policy areas such as disability services. Whilst noting the value of congregate housing models, other commentators have highlighted a contradiction in the use of this model and policy advocated in the *Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities* (see Focus Ireland, 2012) – an argument set out in some detail by the HSE (2011). There is certainly room for some discussion about how these various strategies and housing options link together.

PROGRESSING DATA COLLECTION ON PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS

There was discussion by some respondents over the lack of data that currently exists nationally on the profile of people who are homeless, with a view that it was very hard to get a handle on what was actually happening at local level. It was felt that there was a need for robust figures on the number of people who are homeless, as well as data on the level of needs, especially for people who have high support needs and/or are long term homeless. This gap in the evidence base was thought to be hampering strategic responses. The absence of data also posed difficulties in assessing the effectiveness of policy and implementation of approaches for people who are homeless.

There were mixed views amongst respondents about the extent to which the Pathway Accommodation Support System (PASS) would meet the necessary requirements for the type of data needed. Specifically there was a concern that whilst PASS could potentially supply some of the data needed, in its current guise it lacked the number of fields required.

Underpinning discussions about the quality of information available on people who are homeless was how policy could be implemented and driven operationally at national level. In part respondents commented on the need for better or enhanced cross-departmental structures at national level to take a stronger lead in driving the implementation of housing-led services, and specifically to create and/or sustain the environment in which housing-led approaches can flourish. These comments reflected a wider concern that policy elsewhere had significant impacts on the ability of people who are homeless to take advantage of housing with supports.

CONCLUSION

Respondents discussed the adoption of housing-led approaches within Simon Communities, and highlighted considerable convergence between the ethos of Simon Communities and the key principles that underpin housing-led approaches.

Nevertheless, many respondents identified areas where continued change and progression was necessary, both in relation to working cultures and operational issues. Some of the issues discussed by individual Simon Communities included:

- Maintaining and progressing cultural change within Simon Communities in terms of attitudes and understanding of the housing-led approach amongst staff and service users. The latter includes the potential to engage more fully with service users to communicate the housing-led approach so that it would become the expectation and understanding of service users as the norm;
- Achieving a formal separation of housing from support;
- Access to a wider range of harm reduction options and wellness programmes.

Much larger - and more intractable – issues related to discussions about rebalancing the range and type of housing options on offer. A key message was the need for flexibility in rolling out a housing-led approach in order to reflect the context in which service users address their needs in Ireland. Respondents commented on the wide range of accommodation types that were considered necessary to meet the diverse needs of service users, and also the 'safety net' role being performed by various accommodation options such as High Support Housing. In this respect respondents' views perhaps reflected the perspective offered by Tsemberis (2013)¹ for a reverse staircase approach, where a Housing First approach is the starting option, with alternative accommodation options with intensive support available for service users.

Internal change was also viewed as constrained by two critical external factors, which have a significant impact on how Simon Communities can take forward housing-led approaches into the immediate future. The first issue was housing supply, which is explored in more detail in the next chapter. The second factor was adequate support for people with high support needs, and this discussed in Chapter four.

¹ <http://www.socialstyrelsen.dk/housingfirsteurope/test-site/sessions/sessions>

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CHAPTER THREE

THE SUPPLY OF ACCOMMODATION



INTRODUCTION

The success of a housing-led approach is based on there being an adequate supply of affordable accommodation with security of tenure. This chapter examines the barriers and challenges facing service users and agencies in accessing accommodation provided by social and private landlords. The chapter also discusses approaches by Simon Communities to providing their own stock of housing.

SUPPLY OF ACCOMMODATION

A consistent theme across this research was the dearth of adequate and affordable options for people to move into. Simon Communities reported very limited access to social housing as well as private rented accommodation. There were two main consequences of the limited supply. Firstly, there were very limited prospects for moving people straight into stand-alone accommodation. Secondly, if a tenancy broke down, then there were limited opportunities to move someone straight into another tenancy, with a subsequent reliance on existing options.

A difficulty with social housing was the very limited supply, long waiting times for accommodation and priorities for allocations, which tend to be aimed at the needs of families rather than single people. Respondents noted the very limited referrals from housing associations, with a view that there was often no transparency to allocations: it was not possible to see how people were being assessed, and that vacancies were not coming through to people who were homeless. Social housing was often viewed as a preferred option compared with private rented accommodation, partly in relation to security of tenure, but also the standard of accommodation on offer. Nevertheless, the limited access to social housing meant that service users were required to explore options for private renting.

Private renting

A key difficulty in private renting was sourcing affordable accommodation below the rent cap of an adequate standard. This problem was particularly severe for young people under the age of 25, as

they can be left with very little money to live on after they had paid their housing costs. There was a view that homelessness was increasingly about poverty – individuals simply lacking the financial wherewithal to sustain a home. Two respondents highlighted that this issue was compounded for some service users who were being asked informally by landlords to pay extra from their own resources to top up the level of rent being paid.

Many areas noted that demand for housing in the private rented sector was also limiting the available stock. Wider pressures such as the state of the housing market was highlighted as impacting on demand across the country, as well as locality specific pressures such as student demand in places such as Galway, or weekend lets in the North West.

Daft.ie publishes a rental report on a quarterly basis to track trends in rents around Ireland². The most recent report for the third quarter of 2013 showed that rents have continued to increase. Nationally rents were 4.8 per cent higher on average than the same period in 2012. The average rent for a 2-3 bedroom house was €842, compared with €804 a year previously. In Dublin, rents increased by between 7 and 8 per cent in the year to end of Q3. In the cities of Cork and Galway, rents increased by 3 per cent and 4 per cent respectively.

Furthermore, the supply of houses for rent has continued to decline. As of the 1st November 2013, there were 8,200 properties nationwide. There were 1,500 in Dublin, 1,100 across the cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford and 6,100 outside the cities. This was the lowest level of supply since November 2007 (although it is important to reiterate that whilst Daft covers a wide spectrum of properties, it does not capture all types of rental properties). The continued pressure on houses to rent has implications for people living on limited income striving to find suitable accommodation within their tight budgets.

In some areas a further issue delaying access to housing was being able to afford up-front costs in the form of deposits. The need for service users to build up savings for deposits lengthened the amount of time that was required in emergency

² <http://www.daft.ie/report/Daft-Rental-Report-Q3-2013.pdf>

services in some areas. The role of deposits in facilitating access to stand alone accommodation as a component of a housing-led approach was a point of contention. In areas where there was financial assistance with deposits it was noted by respondents that access for service users was increasingly being curtailed or that the process of obtaining such financial assistance was taking longer. In part, this was due to wider cuts in the resources available to service providers. It was also felt that there was a lack of transparency in relation to how deposits were allocated and why.

However, there was also an issue about the number of times that an individual service user was eligible for help with deposits in cases where tenancies might often break down. This particular problem was exacerbated in situations where some landlords were reported as unreasonably withholding deposits at the end of tenancies. On one hand there was a view that allocation mechanisms for access to funding for deposits needed to recognise that some people with high support needs may move through a rapid succession of tenancies. On the other hand, a couple of respondents noted a wider responsibility to tenants who made use of support for deposits on equity grounds.

Whilst there was considerable discussion about *accessing* private renting, there were also a wide variety of views about the type of support that Simon Communities might offer in relation to *sustaining* tenancies in private renting. One of the key issues was the degree of impermanence and lack of security that tenants feel in private renting, illustrated in the following observation by a staff respondent about people who have used treatment services,



We have had some success with people straight from rough sleeping, straight into detox; two-three months rehab, into an aftercare programme or aftercare house and then into private renting or local authority accommodation. People moving into local authority housing have done really well, because they have security of tenure. We find that private renting is not really working. They don't have that security – still feel they are not secure (staff).

This point was highlighted by another staff member, who was reflecting on the approach taken by the Pathways model in New York towards sub-letting,



We have service users in medium support who want to move into independent accommodation, but they want the safety of knowing that if they go into private rented, that they are not going to fall through the gaps if they have a slip. So that's the big fear piece. So the security of Housing First. Because generally they take over a tenancy, so they are sub-letting and there is an extra layer of security there. So that's important in terms of any future housing options that we look at (staff).

Indeed, sub-letting was viewed by a number of respondents as a significant mechanism for making the most of the supply of accommodation that could come through private renting. Initiatives such as Cork Rentals offered an opportunity to facilitate access to tenancies, as well as provide a greater sense of security for service users. Nevertheless, one respondent felt that any difference between the level of rent allowance and market rents should be a matter for national policy, and that there should not be a reliance on the financial input of voluntary agencies to make good any gaps. There was also a view that highlighted the potential for building a direct link between the service user and the private landlord, rather than maintaining the relationship between the service user and the Simon Communities. In this regard, the possibility of starting off with a sub-let and eventually working towards handing over the tenancy to the service user was seen as a valuable route to explore.

The future introduction Housing Assistance Payments was viewed as a potential route for overcoming some of the difficulties that currently besets access into private renting, especially the possible use of bonds as a way of mitigating the need for deposits. However, there was a concern by one respondent that the new system might lack the flexibility necessary to deliver a housing-led approach. Another option would be the introduction of a deposit guarantee scheme, which would minimise the potential for unscrupulous landlords to withhold deposits unfairly.

Respondents highlighted a number of advantages and disadvantages to accommodating people in private renting as opposed to social housing. Although social housing was highly prized as a means of enabling someone to sustain a home - partly a consequence of its scarcity – it was nevertheless noted that there were issues that could arise with this tenure. As one staff respondent commented,



There's a mismatch between housing options and support needs via social housing. People are being placed anywhere without consideration of needs and it stores up problems. When an offer does come up people are afraid to turn it down, and they may go somewhere that doesn't suit them at all (Staff)

One problem was that sometimes an allocation would be on estates with deep seated problems with anti-social behaviour.

In some instances respondents noted difficulties with social renting due to the attitudes and letting policies of social landlords, especially in relation to people with convictions, for example. In one area respondents noted that potential tenants were not allowed to view inside the allocated property until they had accepted the tenancy – and had subsequently found out why on visiting their new home for the first time. However, the standard of private rented accommodation on offer within rent caps was viewed as widely problematic. A number of staff respondents reported that it was difficult to 'sell' the idea of a move into private accommodation as a positive, progressive step in someone's life when it was often the case that the standard of accommodation service users were leaving was of a higher quality than the private let they were being offered. As one service user commented,



I was in [Simon Community accommodation]. It was grand, but I thought 'I've got to get out of here'. I looked at two apartments. I looked down [name of road], and down [name of road]. They were terrible places. And I came back and said 'Thanks, I'll wait'. And he said 'But you say you're ready to go?' And I said 'Yes, but not into a shithole' (Service user).

This view was also reiterated in the discussions with other service users, some of whom reported direct experiences of very poor conditions in some private lets,



There's nothing for you. The place was damp. I moved in the Spring and by summer everything I had was green, towels, sheets, everything. The damp came out. All the walls were mouldy (Service user).

A further issue reported was that in some instances Rental Accommodation Schemes were coming to an end, with consequent insecurity for tenants as they needed to move to alternative accommodation that was sometimes a considerable distance from networks that had been built up.

DEVELOPING NEW HOUSING OPTIONS

In the face of this limited supply, respondents highlighted a number of ways that Simon Communities were attempting to develop their own stock as a response. Clearly, the number of units possible via these methods was tiny in relation to the need. Nevertheless, one advantage with acquiring or developing stock in-house was that respondents could operate at lower thresholds with regard to sustaining tenancies in regard to risky behaviour in relation to drug and alcohol use than was often the case with housing options provided by other providers.



PRACTICE EXAMPLES:

Developing housing options within Simon Communities

Midlands Simon: procuring scattered apartments in the community. Part of the challenge in acquiring new property is seizing opportunities for procurement as they arise. The approach by Midlands Simon highlights what can be achieved at different points in the housing market cycle. Midlands Simon took advantage of specific initiatives during periods when the housing market has been very buoyant when funding via the Capital Assistance Scheme was available, and also during the recession when leasing options became viable (www.midlandssimon.com).

Dublin Simon: developing the potential for satellite (hub and spoke) units, to provide access to accommodation to service users from High Support Housing to move to a lower support model for some residents.

North West Simon: the design of new build apartments in Letterkenny was own door, making them very suitable long-term options for Service Users. The project was able to take advantage of the Capital Assistance Scheme just as demand was dropping. When the Capital Assistance scheme was no longer available, North West Simon was still able to lease a further 12 houses, as there were vacant unsold houses as a consequence of the recession. These acquisitions have enabled North West Simon to provide support to families (www.northwestsimon.ie/?pagid=supported-housing).

A challenge for developing the supply of accommodation was the attitudes of planning to new accommodation or developments. It was felt that the attitudes of planners, as well as perceptions by the wider community, tended to steer developments to locations where Simon Communities already had stock, thus risking ghettoising service users. An additional issue with planning were reported negative attitudes of planners towards congregate housing models.

A further issue was the financial constraints that individual Simon Communities were operating under, with the acquisition of apartment blocks, rather than scattered stand-alone apartments the only viable option. There was a wide range of perspectives between respondents over the pros and cons of providing accommodation as blocks, rather than scattered sites. A couple of respondents noted that as part of the transitioning to a housing-led approach, they would ideally focus on reducing the size of the blocks they were currently using. On the other hand, different respondents noted advantages in terms of the case loads that support workers could operate at (as opposed to time spent travelling between sites); levels of peer support between residents, and also issues with regard to managing and addressing anti-social behaviour.



PRACTICE EXAMPLE:

Attitudes to the acquisition of properties within the wider community

Midlands Simon worked with the media, and with the wider community as part of the process of acquiring new properties. These activities helped to diffuse potential tensions and promote the needs of people who are homeless as part of the community.

There was some discussion by respondents of the potential for developing models for acquiring properties, with recognition of the specific skill sets necessary for housing procurement and property management, as distinct from a housing management function related to tenancy sustainment.

Indeed, one of the gaps identified by a couple of Simon communities was finding the resources to fund staff time to source and acquire properties. This was viewed as needing a full time post not only to identify properties, but, for example, to build up relationships with private landlords and estate agents. One example of where this resource is present in Dublin where the Simon Community have a specific staff resource for the acquisition and refurbishment of property. A further example of this type of approach can be seen in Cork, with the creation of an independent housing provider.

Part of the discussion by respondents focused on accessing key sources of funding such as the Housing Finance Agency. Certainly other organisations have put forward the suggestion that the regulatory framework utilised by the Housing Finance Agency itself should be reviewed with a view to accessing accommodation for people who are homeless (Focus Ireland, 2012). One respondent felt that partnering arrangements with other Approved Housing Bodies should be explored. Simon Communities would continue to deliver services for people who are homeless in properties leased or owned by another housing provider.

In the absence of a significant flow of accommodation from external sources, there was also discussion about various mechanisms that have been used to generate a flow of housing stock run by Simon Communities themselves. There were a number of examples within various Simon Communities of successful approaches to acquiring housing – with a key advantage that there are no external requirements for thresholds that exclude people with high support needs. Nevertheless, there is a discussion to be had about the future direction of Simon Communities as providers of homeless services on one hand, and the skill sets and capacities necessary to act as housing providers on the other.

CONCLUSION

The scarce supply of affordable accommodation of an adequate standard was universally viewed as a critical block in taking forwards housing-led approaches on a meaningful scale. Given the current relative scarcity of lets for people who are homeless in the social housing sector, the immediate focus for agencies in the short to medium term was on prospects for utilising private renting. The balance of the discussion by respondents was on issues in relation to accessing this tenure. Policy issues relate to overcoming financial obstacles to enable people who are homeless to take on tenancies. These include exceeding rent caps (for which there is already a precedent); instruments to overcome the cost of, or need for, deposits, such as bonds, and also stronger measures to enforce compliance and standards amongst unscrupulous landlords.



CHAPTER FOUR

PROVIDING SUPPORT



INTRODUCTION

Whilst housing supply remains an overriding concern for respondents, many participants in the research also emphasised the crucial role of adequate support options for service users in making housing-led approaches work effectively. Although a right to housing occupies a key place in discussions on housing-led approaches, one respondent reflected on ensuring that support also receives its necessary prominence in making this approach viable:



Getting them [service users] to believe they have a right to access these services. It's not that they are deserving - they have a fundamental right to get treatment, to be treated with dignity and respect. To be listened to. That's a massive part of our work, just to get that into people's heads, and to build their confidence to access services (staff).

Picking up on some of the issues identified in Chapter One, this chapter offers the opportunity to explore the provision of support options in greater detail. The chapter examines some of the challenges for Simon Communities in configuring their support in a housing-led context, as well as joint working with other agencies. This includes a consideration of the intensity of support required to meet the diverse needs of service users; the timescales of support, as well as providing support in rural areas.

MAINTAINING ADEQUATE SUPPORT

Respondents to the research across the Simon Communities emphasised the costs of putting in place the levels of support necessary to sustain people with a diverse range of needs in their homes. Frontline staff highlighted current case loads per worker in relation to enabling the intensity of support necessary for service users requiring high support. A transition towards a housing-led approach would require a reconfiguring of staffing levels and case-loads.

One respondent discussed the limitations of the range of support models in their area, with either a housing support model with staff on site, or a

very limited number of visits to service users in stand-alone accommodation, and nothing in between. It was argued that a different support model was required, that could meet the higher support needs of some people, especially for key periods during the day between 5.00 pm and 9.00 am the following morning. A staff member in a different Simon Community also reflected on this issue,



Isolation is a big issue. Staff are there for visiting during the day. Or people can visit schemes during the day for programmes, training etc. But in the evenings that's difficult. Service users fear isolation. Some refuse to go from schemes. The fear of nobody to talk to. People come to life about ten at night and want a natter in the office. People miss that (staff).

Moreover, there was a concern across the Communities that the intensity of support required was inconsistent with the cutbacks taking place. Many respondents in the Simon Communities discussed the pressures that other service providers were under in terms of practice developing in response to cuts in services. Although it was often noted that service themselves were very good, getting access to them was becoming increasingly difficult, with greater waiting times for appointments and longer waiting lists. Frontline staff in a Simon Community noted that workers in one statutory service were providing additional help for service users while they waited for access to a service through goodwill. Staff who were going the extra mile to provide help shows the commitment of individuals involved, but seems no way to sustain a statutory service going forwards.

A Housing-led approach relies on the supports provided by a range of providers. Inter-agency working is critical and there is a need for a shared and agreed understanding of the operational implications of rolling out housing-led approaches at local level by service providers in both statutory and voluntary sectors.



PRACTICE EXAMPLE: Facilitating inter-agency working

The Simon Communities have held a number of events at national, regional and local levels during 2012 and 2103 exploring how housing-led approaches might operate in national and regional, urban and rural contexts.

It is difficult to untangle how far the financial constraints that other providers are operating under are driving practice, and how far there are very diverse interpretations of how a housing-led approach should look in relation to detailed implementation. A couple of areas of concern by respondents were:

- Perceptions by other providers of accommodation provided by Simon Communities as transitional and time limited, rather than someone's home for life;
- Time limited support rather than an open ended commitment. In addition respondents emphasised a need to recognise fluctuations in the need for support amongst service users as part of an open ended commitment (see below). However, a recognition that for some individuals that there is no end in terms of support required, was tempered by a need for workers to reflect avoiding dependencies.

A further issue was that variations between areas in terms of practice often came down to personalities and the nature of working relationships. On one hand, the fragility of this situation was highlighted as key staff with considerable experience might move on, retire, or as posts are frozen or cut. On the other hand, a number of respondents noted very pragmatic responses to this aspect of making a housing-led approach work. These respondents highlighted the value of building up an information resource for their areas of operation, which detailed key services and individuals within them who were supportive of housing-led services, and where referrals, applications and paperwork were more likely to be fast-tracked or handled sympathetically.



PRACTICE EXAMPLES: Joint working arrangements

South East Simon: the Housing First worker has developed an arrangement with the probation service to provide a maintenance support service as part of building relationships with private landlords.

However, other respondents noted that accessing services provided by different agencies was often on a case by case basis. There was a sense that service users were required to relate their 'stories' in order to prove a need, often many times to different providers. Respondents reported that one way of putting joint working on a firmer footing would be through the development of inter-agency protocols. A current weakness noted by a number of respondents was that service users with multiple needs could easily fall between services, if respective service providers refused to take responsibility for one aspect of a person's condition, until other issues were addressed. A view by one respondent was replicated by others elsewhere,



We find here that many people have dual issues. And mental health [services] will say people need to focus on addiction. And addiction services will say people need to focus on mental health. It's happened a number of times that they are not willing to support... (staff).

In part, this could be addressed through greater joint working and by a shared ownership of the needs of individual service users by multiple agencies. One respondent highlighted the use of joint working plans for service users between agencies in Dublin. This approach provides a practical example of a way in which joint responsibility for assisting service users to meet their needs can be taken. Respondents also noted developments in relation to building links with health, either in relation to multi-disciplinary teams, or as part of shared protocols with primary care teams.

In addition to the use of protocols, the need for mechanisms and processes for addressing difficulties in joint working is well recognised. For example, the Pathway to Home report (2009) noted the all Quarterly Reports from *Pathway to Home* model services included the opportunity to

report gaps and blocks in specialist and mainstream service provision, so that this information could be addressed systematically by the Dublin Regional Homelessness Executive and brought to the attention of the senior staff in relevant agencies (Homeless Agency Partnership 2009). It would be useful to see how this process works in practice, and the potential or value of replicating a similar style of handling 'blocks and gaps' elsewhere. Nevertheless, one respondent noted that there was a lack of clarity about existing routes that people could use to raise concerns and issues about access to support options, although it was also felt that the potential of current forums as a means of voicing concerns was not being fully exploited. A further question was raised over the extent to which the impacts of blocks and gaps are systematically recorded and quantified.



PRACTICE EXAMPLES:

Promoting inter-agency working

Galway Simon – multi-disciplinary team. The multi-disciplinary team consists of a Registered General Nurse, Community Mental Health Nurse, Substance Misuse Counsellor, Relapse Prevention Counsellor and a Chiropodist. The team is managed by Galway Simon Community but the remit covers all homeless services in Galway City. The multi-disciplinary team provide a holistic approach to those experiencing physical and mental ill health and addiction using a case management approach, as well as the active participation of the team at the point of assessment and support planning (see www.galwaysimon.ie/Whoware/OurMultidisciplinaryTeam.aspx).

South East Simon – Housing First worker (see: www.southeastsimon.ie/en-us/servicesweprovide.aspx). A key aspect of this approach is not only a dedicated post for service users with high support needs in stand-alone accommodation, but also a strong statement of intent with regard to joint, inter-agency, working by basing the Housing First worker with other service providers. The post was set up after a gap in services was identified for people with high support needs (see also: <http://www.homelessdublin.ie/housing-first>).

Maintaining an open ended commitment

A number of respondents commented on the diverse nature of support that was required by different service users, and the crucial commitment to maintaining open ended support for people. Respondents emphasised that part of this approach was about offering and enabling support whatever the changing housing circumstances of the service user. As two service users commented,



It's hard, because people put so much into us. And then we fall off. And it's not a bad thing, because maybe you'll learn from that a second go around: 'I'm not doing this again. I'm tired now. I'm going straight'. But you can come to the door after you're been with (Simon Community). After you've moved out you can still go to the door. No one's going to say 'well you don't live here anymore'. The door's always open (Service user)



Some organisations – you might get a second chance, but you won't get a third, fourth, fifth, sixth. [Simon Community] never turn their back. Never (Service user)

There were two aspects to this issue of maintaining open ended support. The first was that the amount of time that an individual visit might take, and building in the flexibility to accommodate this into case loads. The second aspect was keeping open the potential for support in the long term. Part of this latter issue related to the need for services to recognise fluctuations in level of support that people may want, with periods when a need for support may be relatively high, drop, and then go up again,



Tenancy sustainment would only be seen as, you know, a quick intervention to support people to maintain their tenancy, and it's low to medium support. What we have experienced is that for some of our clients, because maybe it's mental health, where you can move somebody in and you can sustain them. Get them linked into services. So everything is going to go for a while. And then they either come off their medication or they become ill and then it all collapses again (staff).

A concern by many respondents was that a clear understanding of a key element of a housing-led approach in relation to maintaining a commitment to open ended support was not always appreciated in local policy contexts. For example, although there was much praise for the work that tenancy sustainment services often undertake, there was some anxiety that this model of time limited support for people with low to medium support needs would become associated with an overall housing-led approach,



There are restrictions on putting in place the help that you could do to assist with boredom and isolation. Support is local authority driven, and is time limited. There are strict time lines about how long you can be in contact with someone. Our tenants are saying something else: 'we're frightened. We're isolated'. The systems don't support us to do that (staff).

An issue therefore was the extent to which services might be alerted to emerging difficulties experienced by service users after services such as SLI had stepped back from support. One respondent commented that people who lived in social housing were more likely to have the potential to remain linked to supports such as clinics due to the security of tenure they enjoy, as well as landlords who are more likely to be aware of support issues and take steps to assist people to link with supports. In contrast, it was noted that people in private renting are much more likely to make a number of moves, and risk slipping out of contact with services.

Risk management and staff safety

There was some discussion by respondents of the use of diverse risk management strategies that could be employed as necessary. One particular group identified as requiring alternative risk management plans were heavy drinkers, where there was a greater emphasis on minimising community harm.

Another aspect of risk management related to staff safety, and duties of care for employees, especially where workers were visiting people alone out in the community. One solution was for individual staff to double up on visits with other services as and when they had appointments with service users.

ISOLATION AND BOREDOM

A key challenge identified by a number of staff and service users was addressing isolation, loneliness and boredom that were often experienced by service users in stand-alone apartments.



It's hard when you move out of transitional housing, and you move in by yourself. There's a certain form of isolation, where there's no more residents around anymore. You can't have the Yap. You can't have the buzz. So you need support in certain areas. I found it OK because I'm down at [Simon Community] three times a week and still do computing there. But if there's nothing on, I can still just walk in. Go down and have a cup of tea and a game of pool. That door's always open for me (Service user).

Staff discussed the short and long term implications for support in addressing these issues. Addressing the challenge of isolation and boredom featured as part of the intense support required at the point that someone moves into their own home, and the immediate period afterwards. This links with the earlier discussion in relation to overcoming the fear and anxiety that can be experienced by service users about the prospect of a move. One respondent also commented on the role of support later on in the following weeks, as the initial experience of a move wears off, and there is the potential for a sense of anti-climax.

Respondents discussed the role of managing risk and harm reduction approaches as part of this element of supporting people in their own homes. Part of this included the maintenance of social networks around street cultures, and working with people to enable and promote choices around sustaining a home. This included supporting service users who were clear about keeping drinking physically distant from their own home.

There was also the role of support in helping to give people the confidence and skills to manage their own front door, and maintain social networks whilst minimising the risk of anti-social behaviour within people's homes.

As part of these discussions respondents also focused on much longer term roles for support linked with the challenge of enabling service users to integrate not only with communities, but accessing activities, especially employment related options. Respondents discussed the very limited options for service users in relation to taking up training and employment options across the Simon Community areas.

Although volunteering by service users within Simon Communities, and the important piece played by Simon Community volunteers was noted as a significant component of engaging service users, a couple of respondents highlighted that they were reviewing the role that volunteers played in this regard. In rural areas there can be also an issue in relation to preserving the anonymity and confidentiality of service users: people may not want their neighbours to be part of befriending or other volunteering support.

There was a sense that respondents across the Simon Communities were actively taking this agenda forwards, but that there was still a long way to go in developing the range of support options to sustain the longer term integration of service users within communities.

Several respondents highlighted the role that businesses have to play as part of their social responsibility objectives in taking forwards employment and training options for service users and the links that Simon Communities could foster in this regard. A further potential initiative noted by one respondent was to develop links with a bank to promote positive banking with service users.

THE RURAL CONTEXT

Service users who live in rural areas face particular challenges that require tailored Housing-led responses. A number of respondents, especially in the larger cities, reported that Intensive Case Management approaches using brokered services seemed to work very effectively. However, one respondent in Dublin noted that they were able to work with

specialised services and did not have to rely so much on mainstream provision where cutbacks in budgets have taken a toll on services. In contrast, a couple of respondents in different Simon Communities noted that whilst the language of policy is around reconfiguring services towards a housing-led approach, that in rural areas you cannot reconfigure what doesn't exist in the first place. For example, Murtagh & Partners (2011) have drawn attention to the relatively low level of statutory funding for homelessness services in the Midlands compared with other areas. A key aspect of working in rural areas was the greater reliance on other providers in rural areas to supply the required level of supports that service users may choose to take up.

Perhaps making a virtue of necessity it could be said that in some ways rural areas readily lend themselves to the housing-led approach simply because of the dearth of traditional transitional accommodation options that historically have been available. However, again, this presupposes an adequate supply of accommodation that agencies can use.

One very practical issue is how people in smaller communities can access support options if these are provided some distance away. Respondents also commented on the reconfiguration of services towards centralised provision - especially mental health services – that meant service users had to make their own arrangements to travel great distances.

However, the problem of accessing services some distance away from the home was not exclusive to rural areas and was also noted in Dublin. It was noted that the stock of better quality private rented accommodation tended to be out in the suburbs rather than the city centre. Whilst it was possible to source better homes, people were more likely to be isolated, with poor transport links to services or existing social networks.

In this regard, the requirement for a local connection by local authorities works against the potential outcomes that a housing-led approach could deliver. For example, people in rural areas who wanted to move to other counties in order to access accommodation with supports were often

precluded from taking up these options as they do not reside in the 'host' area. In contrast, for service users who wish to remain in localities they have always known – especially older people with personal care needs – mobile support options are not only very limited, but also shrinking. A number of staff reflected on the differences between brokering access to support services in urban compared with rural areas,



We assess the needs and then try to draw the supports from the community. It can be good if you are in an area with supports around you – it works a treat. But in more rural areas it can be tricky (staff).

CONCLUSION

As Simon Communities transition towards housing-led approaches there was a concern about reconfiguring case-loads to reflect the intensity of support required. This perspective included a consideration of the models of support available out in the community, especially to address the isolation that many service users experience. Such a reconfiguration would clearly have resource implications in terms of staffing, unless it is accepted that fewer people will be helped.

A particular concern related to ensuring that the high levels of support to service users were universally recognised by all relevant agencies, not just in the short-term as service users move into their new homes, but also potentially in the long term, with the need for a commitment by agencies to the principle of open ended support. There was also discussion of the requirement for a tailored approach to housing-led services operating in rural areas.



CHAPTER FIVE

HOUSING-LED SERVICES - THE GLOBAL CONTEXT



INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the wider context of housing-led approaches in other countries. The chapter explores the development of housing-led approaches before moving on to examine the evidence base on the efficacy of these approaches. This includes a consideration of subsequent debates on the effectiveness of housing-led approaches, with a particular focus on the use of different models such as communal housing options.

THE SPREAD OF HOUSING-LED SERVICES

There is clear evidence that housing-led approaches are highly effective in reducing long term and recurrent homelessness associated with high support needs (Tsemberis, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2012; Pleace, 2012; Busch-Geertsema, 2013). Housing 'First' services, which began with the operation of the Pathways to Housing Model in New York, were much more effective in ending 'chronic' homelessness than previous staircase models, which had sought to make someone who was homeless and had high support needs 'housing-ready' during a stay in supported congregate or communal accommodation before they were given access to housing. As housing-led services began to spread across the USA, into Canada and into the North and North West of the European Union, the original successes that had been achieved in New York were replicated.

Rates of housing sustainment of 84%, 86%, 97.5%, 93.8%, 92.9% and 79.4% have been achieved by various models of housing-led services, using different forms of the Housing First approach to support formerly chronically homeless people in the USA, Canada, the Netherlands, Denmark, the UK and Portugal (Pleace and Quilgars, 2013; Busch-Geertsema, 2013). By contrast, the staircase models, that aimed to make people who were experiencing long term/chronic homelessness housing ready through a stay in supported congregate and communal accommodation had only achieved success rates of less than 50% (Pleace, 2008). In Finland, there is evidence of falling 'long term' homelessness among people with high support needs as a result

of the implementation of the National 'Housing First' strategy (from 3,600 'long term' homeless people in 2008 to 2,730 in 2011, a fall of 33%)³. One study in New York reported that 88% of formerly chronically homeless people using Pathways Housing First were still stably housed after five years (Tsemberis, 2010a).

As argued by O'Sullivan (2012, p.28) in his review of homelessness strategy and the possible use of housing-led approaches for the Government:



Such an approach, which includes the use of scattered ordinary rented housing, floating support, 'consumer' choice and control, including harm reduction, the use of both flexible direct provision of support to high needs and case management/ service brokering and open ended support represents a departure from the 'staircase' or 'continuum of care' approach, which until recently has dominated responses to in Ireland and many European member states and North America.

The key reasons for the success of housing-led approaches (Tsemberis, 2010 and 2010a; O'Sullivan, 2012; Pleace, 2012; Busch-Geertsema, 2013; Pleace and Quilgars, 2013) are generally regarded as including:

- an underlying philosophy that housing is a human right;
- no requirement to cease using drugs and alcohol (though support is on offer);
- a harm reduction approach;
- no requirement to comply with psychiatric treatment (though treatment is on offer);
- separating housing from support, i.e. access to housing is not conditional on complying with treatment, stopping use of drugs or alcohol;
- ensuring people who have experienced long term/chronic homelessness have control over their homes;
- open-ended provision of support.

As O'Sullivan (2012) notes, housing-led services, including the Pathways Housing First model, are designed as services specifically intended to prevent and reduce long term and recurrent homelessness associated with high support needs, i.e. chronic homelessness, they are not designed

³ Source: Finnish Government, 2013

as interventions for all forms of homelessness. Housing-led services are a specific intervention designed for a specific aspect of homelessness and this clear targeting has also been important in the successes achieved in experiments in Housing 'First' services elsewhere in Europe (Busch-Geertsema, 2013; Pleace and Bretherton, 2013c).

The development of housing-led services in the economically developed world has had four broad stages. These stages can be summarised as:

- The development of the Housing First model in New York* by the Pathways organisation during the 1990s, drawing on the 'supported housing' service model which was developed for the resettlement of people leaving psychiatric hospital (Ridgway and Zippel, 1990). A series of evaluations, including a randomised control trial and quasi-experimental (comparison group) studies began soon after the Pathways Housing First model was first developed. These evaluations first began to indicate that the Pathways Housing First model was successfully ending "chronic homelessness". Pathways Housing First was targeted people whose long term and repeated homelessness was directly associated with severe mental illness and often with problematic drug and alcohol use, sustained worklessness, poor social supports (poor relationships with friends and family) and poor physical health. High rates of success in housing sustainment – ending chronic homelessness – were demonstrated by a succession of evaluations (Tsemberis, 2010a).
- "Housing First" becoming integrated into Federal level homelessness policy in the United States.* The process of integrating the Housing First model into Federal homelessness policy began under the Bush Administration and continued under the Obama Administration (Stanhope and Dunn, 2011). While on some levels this process marked a major success for the Pathways Housing First approach, it was also the case that a wide range of service providers began to develop and operate services that were partially modelled on the original Pathways Housing First model. As Housing First spread across the USA as an idea and more and more pilot services appeared across different cities, more variations on the original service model appeared (Pearson *et al*, 2007; Pleace, 2012)
- The spread of Housing-led/Housing First ideas into Europe and the emergence of European housing-led services.* Several European countries had been moving towards service models that emphasised greater choice and control for people who are homeless. In Finland, a large scale replacement of the existing shelter system had been underway at the point at which connections began to be made with the ideas of Housing First that were advancing in the USA. Finland, as had been the case in the USA, was using what were in effect several versions, or variations on the original Pathways Housing First model. In Finland, this includes conversion of shared emergency shelters and hostels for people who are homeless into blocks of independent flats or apartments to which support was provided (Tainio and Fredriksson, 2009; Tsemberis, 2011). This communal or congregate model of Housing First was also being experimented with in the USA (Larimer *et al*, 2009). The experience in Finland and the increasing dissemination and discussion of the consistently strong results being delivered by Housing First services in the USA, drew attention from European policy makers. A review produced for the 2010 European Consensus Conference on Homelessness (Busch-Geertsema *et al*, 2010) and the subsequent verdict of the Consensus Conference Jury both recommended use of the Housing First approach (ECCH, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2012). The Consensus Conference Jury also noted that the term 'Housing First' was encompassing both the original Pathways Housing First model and a range of other related service models. The Jury recommended the use of the term *housing-led* to describe those services which, while they reflected the Pathways Housing First model, did not entirely replicate it (ECCH, 2011). In 2013, the European Commission also recommended a housing-led approach (European Commission, 2013).
- The development of a global evidence base.* By 2013, it was evident that housing-led approaches were successfully reducing chronic homelessness, i.e. long term homelessness associated with high support

needs at very high rates across different countries and within various welfare systems. Earlier service models, notably the staircase or step-based models that tried to make people 'housing ready,' had sometimes housed less than 50 per cent of the people who were chronically homeless they worked with. Housing-led services working across a range of countries were ending chronic homelessness among 80 per cent or more of the people they worked with. A large scale multi-site evaluation in Canada (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012), the initial results of a large scale four site trial in France (DIHAL, 2012) and the Housing First Europe project, which reported on housing-led services in five countries (Busch-Geertsema, 2013), all had very similar results. Housing-led approaches are generally successful at ending chronic forms of homelessness and providing sustained housing for people who were formerly chronically, i.e. long term homeless.

DEBATES ABOUT HOUSING-LED APPROACHES

Criticism of housing-led services has come from two main sources. The first of these are academics, service providers and policymakers who have raised the following questions about the effectiveness of housing-led services:

- Questions about the strength of the evidence base for housing-led services, particularly criticism of the evidence supporting the Housing First service model in the USA (Kertesz *et al*, 2009; Rosenheck, 2010; Groton, 2013). These criticisms, which centred on methodological limitations, have lost some credence as evidence of success from multiple international evaluations of housing-led services have produced very similar results to the original American research on Pathways Housing First and other Housing First services (Busch-Geertsema, 2013).
- Questions about the other outcomes achieved following the successful housing of people who were formerly experiencing chronic or long term homelessness, i.e. whether improvements in mental and physical health, social support, community integration and

unemployment follow successful housing by a housing-led service (Atherton and McNaughton, 2008). These criticisms centre on whether or not other aspects of life improve once chronic homelessness has come to an end. Evidence is, at the moment, mixed, there is some evidence that living independently in their own home with access to support services over which they exercise control has generally beneficial effects on the health and well-being of people who were formerly chronically homeless, but, equally, that these positive effects are not always present (Busch-Geertsema, 2013; Pleace, 2012).

- Some questions about the limitations of housing-led models, particularly centred on the 5-15 per cent of people who are homeless for whom a housing-led service has not brought an end to their homelessness (Pleace and Bretherton, 2013b). Advocates of housing-led services have responded to these criticisms by arguing that it is not possible for one service model to suit everyone, and that housing-led services need to be one of a mix of services, albeit that, in their view, housing-led services should be the default response to chronic homelessness (Tsemberis, 2013).

A debate about the most effective forms of Housing First is also on-going. This is centred on the extent to which housing-led services should replicate the original Pathways Housing First model used in New York. This debate centres on the assertion that housing-led services that do not closely follow, i.e. have high *fidelity* with, the Pathways Housing First model are less effective, with that effectiveness lessening the more the service differs from the original model (Tsemberis, 2011).

These criticisms centre on the idea of ontological security, which can be broadly described as the difference between a living situation in which someone is merely *accommodated* and a living situation in which someone has a *home* (Padgett, 2007; Tsemberis, 2010; Johnson and Wylie, 2010). The original Pathways Housing First model places great emphasis on normalisation of life through normalisation of housing, in that people who were formerly chronically or long term homeless are intended to live surrounded by ordinary citizens who have no experience of homelessness.

Support is in place to maintain their housing, but they are in a context in which their lived experience and, crucially, the role of their own home, within which they exercise choice and control, is as normalised as possible.

Scattered housing, which ensures that people using a Pathways Housing First service are not located near one another and live in ordinary rented housing, is central to the role of Pathways Housing First in promoting ontological security. Further, the Pathways Housing First model is posited on the idea that ontological security produces gains in health, well-being and potentially economic and social integration, which it is very difficult to secure when someone lacks a home.

The original Pathways Housing First model is built around the assumption that if someone has a *home* their well-being will start to improve. From a Pathways Housing First perspective, not only the immediate risks of homelessness are removed, but the marginalisation and alienation from community, social supports from friends or family and from economic activity, all of which are associated with chronic homelessness, will all start to be counteracted because someone has an increasingly normalised life based around their own *home* (Padgett, 2007; Tsemberis, 2010).

Communal models of Housing First, which use a single building containing flats or apartments, or clusters of flats or apartments in one or more buildings, are criticised by advocates of the original Pathways Housing First service and other housing-led services that use scattered, ordinary, housing (Tsemberis, 2011; Busch-Geertsema, 2013). The core of their criticism is that if people who are formerly chronically homeless are living next to one another, rather than in the community, and are in an apartment block or block of flats that is physically separated from the community (and which may also be physically, i.e. architecturally, distinct from other housing) their housing situation and their life is not normalised. Rather than having the ontological security delivered by their own home, they remain distinct from normal citizens in normal housing, because where they live is not the same and their neighbours are all people like themselves.

Added to this criticism is new research raising questions about the efficacy of communal models

of housing-led services. This work suggests that communal services can face management issues, centred on having a large group of people with severe mental illness and often problematic drug and alcohol use living under what is (essentially) the same roof, albeit in their own flats or apartments. Some work from Finland and Denmark has reported lower success rates in communal housing-led services for these reasons (Kettunen, 2012; Benjaminsen, 2013).

However, the level of evidence on communal models of housing-led services is not yet extensive and direct comparisons between scattered housing and communal models of housing-led services are relatively scarce. Four further points may also prove to be important in this debate:

- The mechanism by which scattered site housing-led services create ontological security, i.e. normalising housing as far as possible, does not seem to be a perfect one. Results in respect of housing sustainment appear uniformly excellent, in that scattered site housing-led services across a range of countries and welfare regimes all seem to successfully house at least 80 per cent of the people who were formerly chronically homeless that they work with. Yet results on physical and mental health and social and economic integration can be mixed. This said, it may take considerable time for ontological security to develop and, outside the USA, evaluations of housing-led services that exceed one year in duration are currently rare (Busch-Geertsema, 2013).
- There are a minority of people who experience chronic homelessness for whom housing-led services using scattered housing do not appear to work. This group is small, often less than 10 per cent of the people experiencing chronic homelessness who are referred to a housing-led service using scattered housing and sometimes a still smaller number. However, previous research in Ireland found evidence that a small group of people experiencing long term homelessness might prefer to live in communal settings (Pleace and Bretherton, 2013a). Advocates of housing-led services, including Pathways Housing First itself, have also suggested that a minority of people experiencing chronic homelessness

might prefer to live more communally (Tsemberis, 2013). A key argument here is the concern, both among some service providers and among some people who are homeless, is that living in ordinary housing might result in *isolation* and *boredom* which can prove challenging when trying to avoid drugs or alcohol (Pleace and Bretherton, 2013b). In Finland, where use of communal housing-led services is widespread, there are those who defend the use of shared apartment blocks because of the camaraderie that can exist among people with a shared experience of chronic or long term homelessness (Kaakinen, 2012).

- Existing homelessness services, many of which were designed as communal shelters, hostels or supported housing, represent a significant capital investment and significant 'real estate'. The potential to re-use these services by conversion to housing-led models, as undertaken in Finland, allows for both a relatively rapid switchover to a housing-led approach to chronic or long term homelessness and may also reduce potential costs. As has been shown, both in this report and in previous research on housing-led services (Pleace and Bretherton, 2013a), a major shortfall in affordable housing supply is a considerable barrier to a widespread rolling out of housing-led services using scattered, ordinary housing across much of the country. The potential for re-using some existing homelessness service provision does warrant some examination. There is also the point that the costs of delivering support could be less when communal models of housing-led services are used.

It is important to be clear what the limitations of a communal model of housing-led services actually are. It has been noted elsewhere that the staircase services the original Pathways Housing First service was designed to replace were not always ideal versions of the staircase model, some were badly resourced and also poorly run (Rosenheck, 2010). It may be that with the correct management, mix of residents and provision of support services that a communal housing-led service can be successful.

CONCLUSION

The international literature raises a number of questions relevant to the service mix in Simon Communities. One area of contention is the use of communal living arrangements, and this model has received mixed views in the international literature. That said, it is also necessary to note that the evidence base with regard to communal models of housing-led services is not extensive. Respondents in the Simon Communities research were well aware of the dangers inherent in the use of communal models in relation the potential for people who are homeless to become rapidly entrenched in chronic behaviours. Nevertheless, a clear message from respondents was also that the particular context in Ireland suggests a valuable role for communal models as one component of a housing-led approach. This message reinforces previous findings in relation to the preferences of some service users for communal models.

A further issue relates to drawing on learning from international practice with regard to reconfiguring existing emergency and transitional accommodation, recognising the assets that these buildings represent. Again, respondents to this research highlighted two key barriers to be overcome in Simon Communities, particularly in the larger cities:

- Practical constraints in adapting existing buildings. This included financial resources available; the physical layout of buildings, as well as ownership and leasing arrangements;
- How to phase the adoption of housing-led approaches in terms of investing in a models based on housing-led housing options (scattered or communal), compared with emergency provision, given the context of the current demand from people who are homeless.



CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION



Respondents discussed the adoption of housing-led approaches within Simon Communities, and highlighted considerable convergence between the ethos of Simon Communities and the key principles that underpin housing-led approaches. Nevertheless, many respondents identified areas where continued change and progression was necessary, both in relation to working cultures and operational issues. Some of the issues discussed by individual Simon Communities included:

- Maintaining and progressing cultural change within Simon Communities in terms of attitudes and understanding of the housing-led approach amongst staff and service users. The latter includes the potential to engage more fully with service users to communicate the housing-led approach so that it would become the expectation and understanding of service users as the norm;
- Achieving a formal separation of housing from support;
- Access to a wider range of harm reduction options and wellness programmes;

Much larger - and more intractable – issues related to discussions about rebalancing the range and type of housing options on offer. One aspect of these discussions was the extent to which individual Simon Communities can take practical steps to refocus away from emergency provision towards independent living options. Respondents highlighted two key barriers to be overcome in Simon Communities:

- The first issue was internal to Simon Communities and related to practical constraints in adapting existing buildings, such as the financial resources available to make the necessary changes; the physical layout of buildings, as well as ownership and leasing arrangements;
- The second issue concerned the wider challenge of how to phase the adoption of housing-led approaches in terms of investing in models based on housing-led housing options (scattered or communal), compared with emergency provision, given the context of the current demand from people who are homeless, and the lack of affordable accommodation for people to move into.

Respondents also emphasised a range of broader issues:

- An adequate supply of affordable accommodation remains *the* critical challenge in adopting a housing-led approach. Reports from the Simon Communities about the lack of an adequate supply of accommodation are not a new message. Nevertheless, the implications of the limited supply of housing in taking forwards a Housing-led approach into the future are highly significant.
- Respondents to the research also emphasised the costs of putting in place the levels of support necessary to sustain people with a diverse range of needs in their homes. A key message from respondents was that the intensity of support required in a housing-led service was not a cheap option. Staff members discussed the intense support required to address:
 - The process of enabling someone to move into their own accommodation;
 - specific issues such as mental health and/or substance misuse;
 - deeply personal experiences around anxiety and confidence about moving into one's own home, and
 - isolation and loneliness.
- Participants in the research also highlighted that greater attention on inter-agency working was required in order to build the necessary packages of support for individuals.
- Many respondents felt strongly that there was a need for a shared and agreed understanding between service providers of the parameters and operating principles of a housing-led service. Part of this need included a suggestion for training for local authorities in the implementation of housing-led approaches at local level, as well as an enhancement of cross departmental structures at national level.
- There is a risk that housing-led approaches become diluted, and do not offer the depth or range of services that are necessary for people who are homeless to be able to meet their housing and support needs.

Taking these issues together has ramifications for the resourcing of Housing-led approaches. From a policy perspective, there needs to be a reappraisal of the up-front investment required in order to generate the flow of accommodation that, with adequate supports, would enable people who have experienced homelessness to take up sustainable housing options. A key risk noted by respondents was for the realistic prospect of a successful adoption of a housing-led approach given the wider resource context. There is a danger that adopting this approach at a time of cutbacks risks a questioning of the efficacy of housing-led models, when the issue rests with the resources that underpins addressing homelessness at this time in Ireland.

The balance of current evidence suggests that housing-led approaches are effective as long as the core elements of harm reduction, the separation of housing and support and the provision of intensive, open-ended support services are all in place (Pleace and Bretherton, 2013c). A challenge for the Simon Communities is building upon the current ethos within the Communities to continue the transition to housing-led approaches within an overall service mix that meets the diverse needs of service users.

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WHICH WAY HOME?

THE EXPERIENCES OF THE SIMON COMMUNITIES INTRODUCING HOUSING LED SERVICES

This paper summarises the key findings of the study **Which Way Home? –The Experiences of the Simon Communities Introducing Housing-led Services** and outlines the Simon Communities recommendations on moving forward with a housing led approach.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

As a follow up to our Finding the Way Home research and in light of the Government's commitment to end long term homelessness by implementing a housing-led approach, the Simon Communities in Ireland commissioned a piece of research to explore the experiences of the Simon Communities introducing housing-led services. The research was undertaken by Mark Bevan with Nicholas Pleace of the Centre for Housing Policy in York University and was designed to help inform and critically assess the use of housing-led services as a response to homelessness at both a national and local level.

The key aims of the research were:

- Explore the development of housing-led services by the eight Simon Communities;
- Examine the context in which the rolling out of housing-led services is occurring and look specifically at the ways in which contextual factors may be influencing how housing-led services are being developed;
- Look at how the Communities are developing good practice to address some of the barriers and challenges that relate to using housing-led approaches and;
- Compare and contrast the experience of the Simon Communities in introducing and rolling out housing-led services with experiences in other countries.

The research included:

- Discussions with senior managers, other staff and service users, and staff at the National Office.
- Visits to three Simon Communities: Dublin, Cork, and Midlands.
- Interviews with respondents from the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government; Health Service Executive, and the Dublin Region Homeless Executive.
- A literature review of the experience of utilising housing-led approaches in other countries.

Respondents discussed their experiences and views on introducing housing-led services in relation to the operational principles of the Pathways Housing First approach:

- Housing as a human right
- Respect, warmth, and compassion for all clients
- A commitment to working with clients for as long as they need
- Scattered-site housing; independent apartments
- Separation of housing and services
- Consumer choice and self-determination
- A recovery orientation
- Harm reduction.

Respondents also discussed operational issues and some of the barriers and challenges in relation to rolling out a housing-led approach.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND SIMON COMMUNITIES RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reinforces the message of the efficacy of housing led approaches once the core elements of harm reduction, the separation of housing and support and the provision of intensive, open ended support are available. There are a number of key challenges and barriers identified including how to phase the shift away from emergency provision towards investing in housing led options given current demand for emergency accommodation and the lack of affordable and adequate housing for move on. In addition, the challenge for Communities in relation to adapting existing buildings due to financial constraints, physical layouts, ownership etc. Based on the research findings the Simon Communities in Ireland make a number of core recommendations while some are internal to the Simon Communities in Ireland some are more applicable to the wider political, policy and service environment.

1. Resources

One of the findings of this research is that adopting a housing led approach in the context of cut backs may mean there are risks that housing led approaches become diluted and do not offer the depth and range of services necessary for people who are homeless to meet their housing and support needs. In addition, there is the danger the effectiveness of such approaches could be questioned when in fact the issues in fact lie with the resources that underpin the addressing of homelessness at present in Ireland as opposed to the overall approach.

We Recommend

- Government makes clear commitments regarding funding across all key departments with responsibility for addressing homelessness until 2016. This was identified in the first report of the Homeless Oversight Group. This will require more than holding funding at 2013 levels to meet growing demand.
- Government reappraises the upfront investment required to generate the flow of accommodation that along with adequate support would enable people who have been homeless to take up sustainable housing options.

2. Adequate and Affordable Housing Supply

The supply of adequate, affordable housing remains the key challenge in adopting a housing led approach

'...the implications of the limited supply of housing in taking forwards a housing led approach into the future are highly significant' (p38)

We recommend

- The recommencement of private and social housing construction on a realistic scale to meet growing demand. There must be ring-fencing within any such schemes for people moving out of homelessness.
- The development of mechanisms to improve access to finance for Approved Housing Bodies e.g. review and revision of the Capital Advanced Leasing Scheme (CALF) to make it more financially viable, removal of barriers to accessing finance thorough the Housing Finance Agency and the protection of the Capital Assistance Scheme for special needs groups including people who are homeless. The Housing Policy Statement (2011) recognised that the not for profit housing sector has a significant role to play in social housing supply.
- The delivery by NAMA on their much promised commitments in relation to social housing.

- The introduction of rent control in the Private Rented Sector is a critical development to help keep rents affordable.
- The preparation by all lead local authorities of a full inventory of voids in their regions some of this stock should then be made available to Approved Housing Bodies and NGO's by way of transfer or annual lease for a minimum of ten years. The Government released €15m as part of Budget 2014 in funding to bring approximately 500 'voids' back to use. In the immediate term there needs to be ring-fencing of a portion of these voids for people to move out of homeless emergency accommodation. In May 2014, it was announced that an additional €50 million of capital funding to the housing budget. €20 million will be allocated to the bringing back to use vacant Local Authority units, €20 million for the construction of social housing units and €10 million allocated for construction and refurbishment of units specifically for people who are homeless.
- The establishment of a National Social Rental Agency (SRA) which have proven very successful in other jurisdictions. This SRA would rent properties from the private rented sector (at market rates) and sub-let them to people who are long term homeless with significant support needs. This model has the advantage of providing people who are homeless with complex needs with a social landlord and removes perceived risks for the superior landlord related to fears of non-payment rent, anti-social behaviour and so on.
- The extension of funding available under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988 to provide for the critical role of Prevention and Early Intervention.
- The roll out of a national scheme as already exists within the Rent Supplement Initiative operating in Dublin. This would ensure that higher rent payments are made under the HAP and rent allowance schemes nationally where necessary to quickly secure accommodation for people who are long term homeless or at risk of long term homelessness.
- The provision of an adequate supply of accommodation, to be accompanied by a rebalancing of the range of housing options available. Communal accommodation will still be required for people whose needs are so high means they require 24 hour support and are unable to live independently. This needs to be planned for and resourced.

3. Open Ended Support

There were clear concerns expressed throughout this study about the resourcing of supports of the appropriate level and duration to help sustain people with a diverse range of needs in their homes. These can be supports:

- To enable someone to move onto a home of their own.
- To address mental health or drug and/or alcohol issues.
- To assist with anxiety and confidence building.
- To address boredom and isolation.

Open ended and ongoing support is critical to ensure a housing-led approach works effectively. It was evident in the research that ongoing support was needed and that it must be flexible and recognise fluctuations in the level of support that people may need.

We recommend

- That Government ensures that adequate support services are in place for housing led approaches to work effectively.
- Enhanced interagency work to build the necessary 'packages of support' identified in this research. This support must be opened and flexible.
- That plans for the provision of support services take account of the intensity of support required to meet the diverse needs of service users and the timescale that support may be needed for.

- That plans take account of the need for reconfiguration regarding staffing levels and case-loads in the transition towards a housing-led approach.
- That access to support to general and specialist services be improved upon. Cuts to frontline staff in statutory bodies are making it more difficult for people to access these services due to longer waiting times for appointments and longer waiting lists.

4. National and Local structures

The research found that there were some structures at both national and local level that required attention and needed improving upon.

We recommend

- That there is urgent action on the recommendations of the Homeless Oversight Group¹ who were appointed by the Minister in Feb 2013 and produced their first report in December 2013. The following are the most critical at present.
 - There is a need for full Cabinet commitment to the implementation of the recommendations of the Homeless Oversight Group Report (December 2013).
 - A structured Implementation Plan must be developed by the Homelessness Policy Implementation Team with input from the voluntary and statutory sector service providers to facilitate the transition from an emergency led approach to a more sustainable housing- led approach to achieve the 2016 target. The plan should outline adequate and measurable interim goals with sufficient resources, timelines and departmental and Local Authority responsibilities. This plan should include regular written progress reports to the NHCC/CDT.
 - There is a need for a shared and agreed understanding between service providers and funders on the parameters and operating of housing led services. This may necessitate some training, including training of frontline staff, on the issue locally and nationally.

5. Joint Working

Effective joint working (inter-agency, interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary) is essential for a housing-led approach to be successful.

We recommend

- Maintenance and expansion of inter-agency working between Simon Communities and statutory services at local level. The development of integrated approaches ensures people have access to the most appropriate services and support. This in turn will ensure early intervention and prevention and improve outcomes.

6. Internal to the Simon Communities

Very positively this research found a convergence between the ethos of the Simon Communities and the key principles of housing led approaches. Therefore, what is required is not necessarily seismic change but nonetheless the research did identify some shifts required.

- The Simon Communities need to more pro-actively pursue cultural and attitudinal change amongst both staff and service users so that housing led approaches become the expectation and the norm.
- The Simon Communities need to work to achieve a formal separation of housing and support and to enhance harm reduction services and wellness programmes.

¹ When the Government's Homelessness Policy Statement was published the Minister established a high-level three-person oversight group for the purpose of reviewing the approach being advocated in the Statement, identifying obstacles and proposing solutions.

Simon Communities in Ireland

Simon Communities in Ireland are made up of a network of eight regionally based independent communities. Each Community is a separate legal entity, individually governed and managed and are all funded separately. All eight Simon Communities work collectively through a National Office to conduct valuable research and to inform and influence national policy.

This structure is one of the key strengths of Simon – it enables us to respond most effectively to the issues of homelessness that are particular to each region; mobilising local support, responding to local issues using local expertise and local resources.

Services range from

- **Housing provision, tenancy sustainment & settlement services, housing advice & information services** helping people to make the move out of homelessness & working with households at risk;
- **Specialist health & treatment services** addressing some of the issues which may have contributed to homeless occurring or may be a consequence;
- **Emergency accommodation & support** providing people with a place of welcome, warmth & safety;
- **Soup runs & rough sleeper teams** who are often the first point of contact for people sleeping rough.



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