

# Housing First Rotherham

Delivered by South Yorkshire Housing Association  
in partnership with Target Housing

Commissioned by Rotherham  
Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC)



# 1. Introduction

**The Housing First model is proven to end homelessness, and works on the belief that housing is a basic human right.**

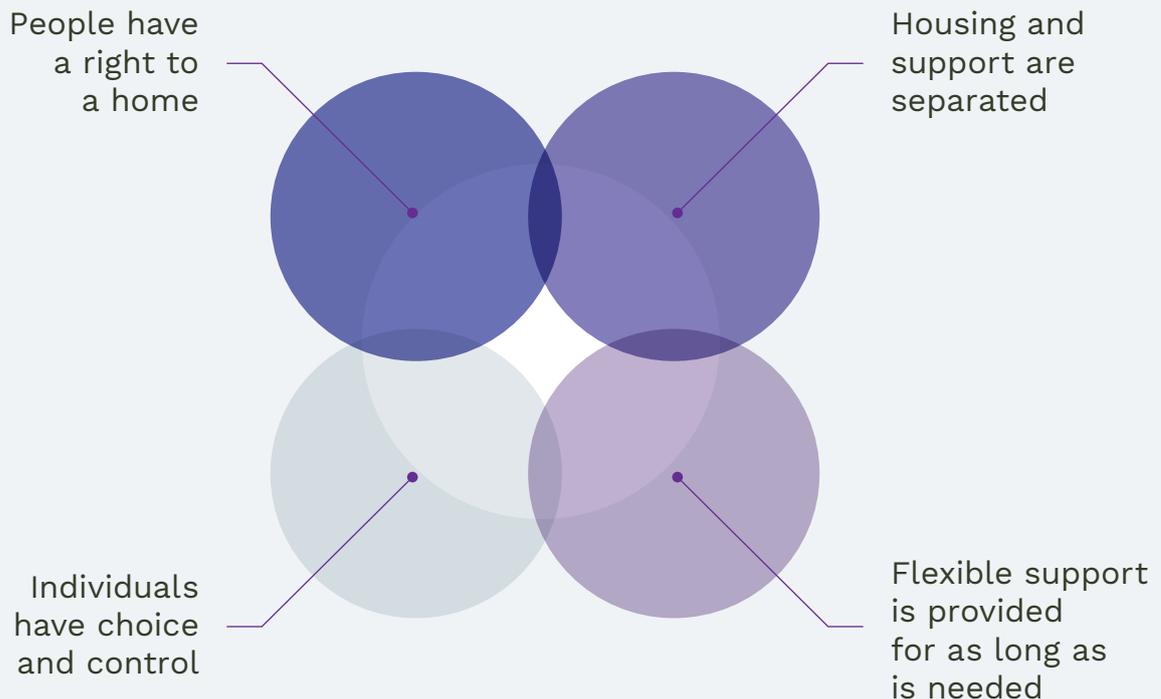
Housing First offers people who are experiencing homelessness, and that have multiple and complex needs, a home for life. The home isn't conditional on the person accessing further support, but they should desire to have a tenancy. Multiple and complex needs may include experience of domestic violence, entrenched street homelessness, and/or mental health needs.

The model works by offering people a home, first – this acts as a stable foundation for recovery and to rebuild their lives. Housing First customers are supported to settle in their home, and to make choices about how they'd like to build on their strengths and meet their goals. Our customers do not have to access further support to be able to stay in their home, but flexible and personalised support is offered for as long as it is needed.



## Housing First principles

Housing First services are given guidance on how to embed the Housing First principles into their work, as studies have shown that services with high fidelity to these values are most effective at supporting people to live in their own homes.



## Housing First Rotherham

Housing First Rotherham started as a pilot project in 2018, delivered in partnership by South Yorkshire Housing Association and Target Housing. It has since grown, and currently works with 30 customers to settle in their home.



**“I jumped at the chance to be part of Housing First Rotherham, and it was the best decision I’ve ever made.”**

## 2. Housing First Rotherham in numbers

### The local and national context

**90,000**

households living in temporary accommodation in the UK

**31,320**

people presented as homeless in Yorkshire and the Humber 2019–2020

**“Core homelessness has a much higher proportion of single people, quite a high proportion of whom have complex needs”**

Building our way out, Shelter (2020)

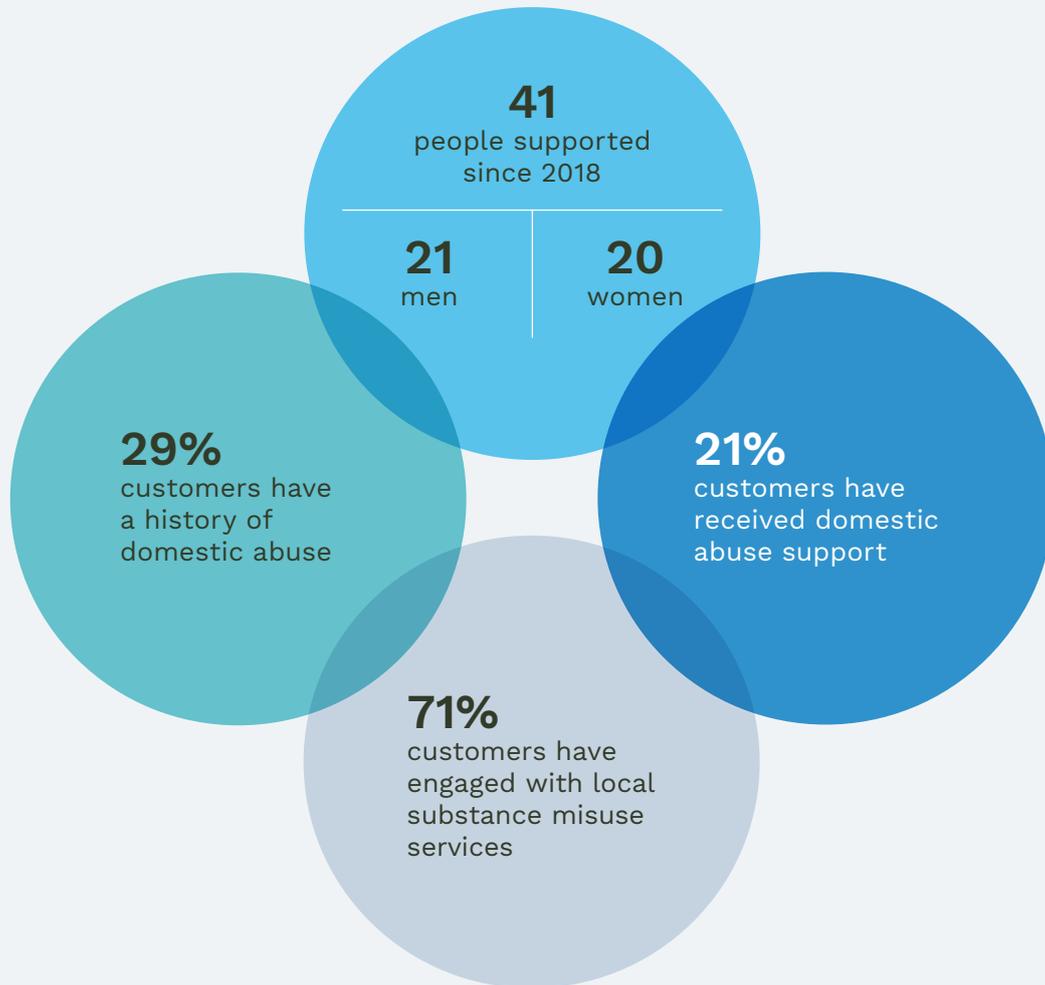
**1,802**

people presented as homeless in Rotherham 2019–2020.

The top reasons were:

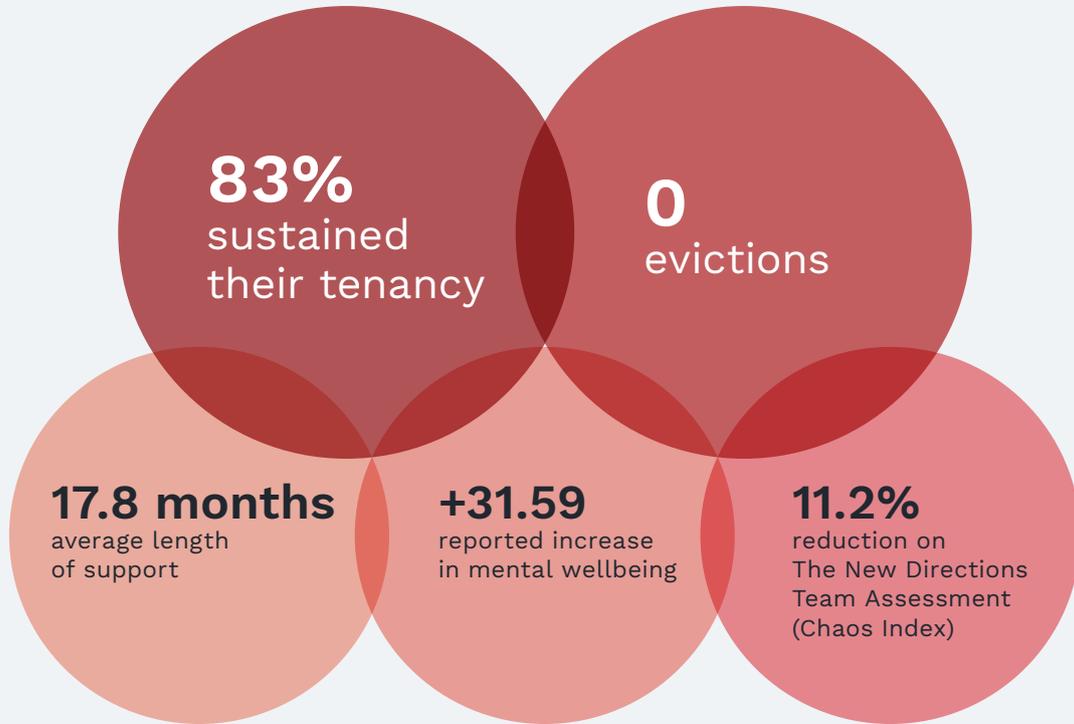
- Breakdown in relationships
- Friends and family unwilling to accommodate
- Domestic violence
- End of private rented tenancy

## Our customers



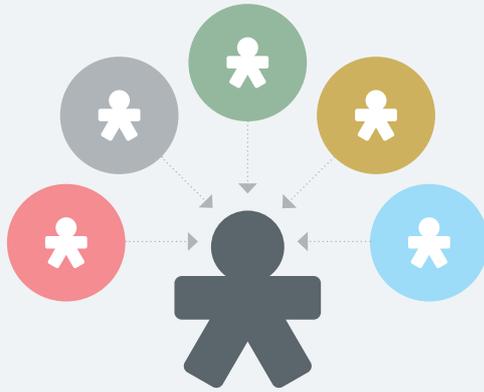
**“My new house means so much to me. It is like being given a second chance to prove to everyone, family, friends and my workers who I really am. I look forward to making new friends in the community, positive ones.”**

## Our customers' achievements



**“I can’t describe how happy I am with the support I get. I have a nice little flat and my own space. I’ve had so many chances but no one has let me show how I can change. I feel at peace and feel excited that I will be here forever, so thank you.”**

### 3. How we support our customers



“I see my keyworker nearly every day, and she helps me get my methadone so I don’t have it stopped. She is always a phone call away and we work well. First person I have trusted since forever.”

Our keyworkers support our Housing First customers in their home and community, and work with them to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to meet their goals.

**“My support worker is amazing and always there when I need her, she is like a true friend I trust and can rely on loads, she gives me confidence in my sen and also gives me support when I need it.”**

Our keyworkers' caseloads are small, which means that they can build positive relationships and proactively engage with the people they work with. We also use flexible and innovative ways to manage behaviour which may have previously led to eviction. This is known as 'elastic tolerance'.

## **Customer A received a formal anti-social behaviour noise complaint for regularly playing loud music in the early hours of the morning.**

Instead of first issuing them with formal written warnings, staff informed them of the complaint, and their keyworker worked with them around how they can address this.

It became apparent the customer's routine had become limited, and substances they were using kept them up at night. The customer identified ways to address this, including walking their dog more frequently and clearing their outdoor space so they had more room to start gardening.

The customer enjoyed this so much they also offered to tidy their neighbours' and friends' gardens. They were also reminded of support available through our trauma-informed counsellor.

Within four weeks, neighbours reported that the anti-social noise had reduced and there appears to be an improved relationship between the customer and their neighbours.

We work with our customers to manage and improve their physical and mental health by supporting them to register with the GP and attend appointments, to meet with our trauma-informed counsellor, and more. We also provide tenancy support, debts and benefits advice, and support our customers to learn new skills, such as cooking.

## 4. A trauma informed approach

**“It is reasonable to assume that individuals and families who are homeless have been exposed to trauma. Research has shown that individuals who are homeless are likely to have experienced some form of previous trauma; homelessness itself can be viewed as a traumatic experience; and being homeless increases the risk of further victimization and retraumatization.”**

- Shelter from the Storm,  
The Open Health Services and Policy Journal (2010)

**“85% of those in touch with criminal justice, substance misuse and homelessness services have experienced trauma as children.”**

- Hard Edges, Lankelly Chase Foundation (2015)

In 2019, our service secured additional funding for a dedicated trauma-informed counsellor. We now offer our customers flexible and unlimited counselling in their home.

Rachel, our trauma-informed counsellor, offers a range of therapeutic services including counselling, art therapy, walking therapy, and video and phone counselling. She also offers 'cook and chat' sessions – a customer chooses a recipe, Rachel brings the ingredients, and they talk while cooking together.

**“Everyone we work with has experienced compound trauma – whether that’s through adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), mental health complications, physical and emotional abuse, addiction or homelessness, or as is often the case, a combination of those. With that in mind, we want to offer people a chance to explore and process what has happened. We offer individual therapy as an opportunity to reconnect body and mind; to experience a safe relationship and ultimately, to heal.”**

As one keyworker says:

**“All customers are different but they’ve all got one thing in common – they’ve all had trauma. If they have counselling, they can learn coping strategies and don’t have to do drugs or drink to cope.”**

The idea of counselling came from our customers. They were feeling frustrated at being unable to access mainstream therapy, and they were being offered support that didn’t meet their needs. Our counsellor is flexible with her sessions, there’s no waiting list, and no penalties for not attending.

Our counsellor also runs fortnightly reflective practice sessions with keyworkers: safe, creative spaces to think about work and connect with each other.

“It runs with the Housing First principles. Prior to you coming there was a mammoth battle to get help. You can work with them as they are.”

“It makes a difference when they have spoken to you. I can tell from their body language.”

Housing First keyworkers’ feedback on our counselling services

“I am going to start doing counselling with Rachel. I’ve already met her, and felt at ease with her straight away... I’ve had counselling in the past and not really felt that connection. I know I need some counselling, and it’s a big deal to have someone in the team you can have it with. It’s really good.”

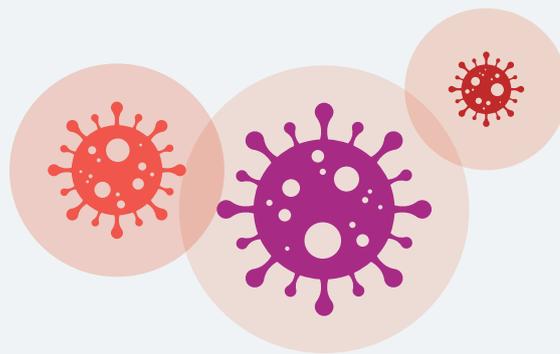
Customer feedback on our counselling services

## 5. Working through the Coronavirus outbreak

Our high fidelity model of support meant that we were able to support our customers to stay safe in their home during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We continued to provide intensive support to customers, face to face, by telephone and video – this included providing some of our customers with a phone and with digital tablets, so that they could stay in touch and continue to participate in activities. We also created wellbeing packages which included tea, coffee, biscuits, and other treats and essentials. Our customers were also supported to shield and self-isolate by delivering food parcels and medication to their door.

At Christmas, we gave one of our customers a baking hamper, and were able to use some fundraising donations to purchase a digital piano for another customer. All of our customers received gifts, and the presents were thoughtfully chosen to meet our customers' preferences and to help them to achieve their aspirations.



## 6. Our customers

**“I can not stress enough how much I would recommend Housing First to everyone. For me it is so different than any other service, I have had loads of support services in the past. I love the way the support can be there as long as you want or need it.”**

## Meet Customer C

Customer C was referred to Housing First Rotherham after it was recognized that he was in a very vulnerable situation, and at immediate risk of exploitation.

Customer C had a history of insecure accommodation and rough sleeping, and is diagnosed with a progressive brain injury – Fragile X Syndrome – which left him with limited understanding of other people’s intentions and circumstances. This often led to him being financially exploited, and he became a target in the local community.

Customer C lived in different places while he waited for care and accommodation to be approved. They were all unsuitable, and included living at a care home for an older people, and with ‘friends’ who continued to exploit, harm and threaten him. This resulted in Customer C’s substance misuse increasing.

Customer C then got a home with Housing First. He received daily support from his key workers, who worked with the local RMBC neighbourhood teams to help him to overcome challenges and to settle in his home. They recognized that Customer C would be more suited to living in sheltered accommodation, and worked with him move into a new flat with 24-hour support. The Housing First team supported Customer C to move into his new home, and to put the right support in place to keep Customer C safe and well. Customer C regularly tells us how happy he is in his home for life.



## 7. Contact us

If you'd like to find out more about Housing First Rotherham, get in touch:

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