



LOTTERY FUNDED



West Yorkshire - Finding Independence  
Delivering Fulfilling Lives:  
Supporting People with Multiple Needs Programme



Research and Evaluation

# Housing First for Female Sex Workers in Leeds

## Background

Women recruited for the project experienced a high level of support needs relating to histories of **homelessness, substance use, domestic violence, mental and physical health issues, self-harm or suicide attempts**, and have **had children removed from their care**. This meant existing models of housing and support in the city had not met their needs.

## Approach

Providing a **long-term home is essential** to the model as this becomes a base from which to work with the women. The **choice** of where to live was also crucial for the women and central to providing housing.

The project included a **dedicated, assertive and flexible** Multiple Needs Support Worker (provided by Basis) and a similar Tenancy and Housing Support (from Foundation) – the **separation of roles** was incredibly important. The support was **“unconditional”** and **non-judgemental** about the women’s choices and this was critical in establishing and maintaining trust with the women. By being **person-centred**/service user-led the workers engaged with the women on the issues that are important to the women, not concentrating on service outputs.

**Gender-consciousness** was also embedded within tenancy management, in line with considerations around a **trauma informed** approach. By taking a **harm reduction** approach it was possible to work with the women through their issues without alienating them but at the same time to make measurable improvements in their situation. The project also sought to support and resource the **whole of the women’s lives** – from furnishings to hobbies and activities – not just dealing with problems.

All of these features of the project were only possible due to the **very low caseloads** which meant that high intensity support could be provided and emergencies could be attended to and managed successfully.

## Key Features



- Unconditional Support
- Trauma informed approach
- Women with high support needs
- Gender-conscious tenancy management
- Person-centred approach
- Dedicated, assertive and flexible worker
- Very low caseloads
  - Non-judgemental support

## Organisations involved

**WY-FI** is funded by the **Big Lottery Fund**’s Fulfilling Lives ‘Supporting People with Multiple Needs’ programme with **DISC** as the lead partner and **Barca-Leeds** as a Leeds delivery partner. **Barca-Leeds** provided support in the application and evaluation process and practical support in the delivery of the project. The **WY-FI** Innovation Fund contributed £99,184 towards running costs and staffing for the project.

**Foundation**, a homeless prevention charity and registered social landlord, delivered the specialist housing support as part of this project.

**Basis Yorkshire**, a charity who work with women and young people across Yorkshire, provided the specialist support workers.

## Contacts

**WY-FI**  
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**Basis Yorkshire**  
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## Research and Evaluation

### Key Successes

- Sustained tenancies
- Women maintained their drug treatment programmes
- Safer working practices
- Positive health improvements for the women
- Mental ill health addressed
- Improved relationships with services
- Great partnership working



### Outcomes

Women housed with Basis Housing First have been supported to reach levels of independence which may not have been achieved in other service, examples include:

- 3 of the women housed positively ended their intensive support towards the end of the project
  - 6 of the women sustained their tenancies for over 12 months, demonstrating the value and cost benefits of this model
  - 1 woman stopped sex working since being part of the project, whilst others reported a positive impact in terms of safer working practices and a reduction in harm.
- 5 women have started on Methadone since they got their Housing First tenancies. All have stayed on 'script', sometimes with short breaks
  - In some instances support demanded daily visits to local healthcare professionals over a sustained period of time and coordination of multiple local agencies. This actually saved 2 women from having leg amputations, and another woman is now making positive progress in her health after not being expected to survive her alcohol-related illness past the life of the project

### A WY-FI Perspective on Housing First for Female Sex Workers in Leeds

The ways of working proposed by Basis reflected very strongly the WY-FI approach – **person-centred, based on choice and personal assets, intensive support** and **low caseloads** aimed at addressing multiple needs and having multiple service providers involved in the delivery of a support plan.

Accessing and maintaining accommodation is generally an issue for the WY-FI beneficiary cohort. With the Basis client group the issues are compounded by the women's work and the perception in the community of the work and the women themselves. WY-FI's work with women with multiple needs highlighted that choice in the location of accommodation was a major factor in sustaining tenancies. Choice of location in this project has helped sustain the beneficiaries' continued engagement in other services, notably substance treatment and physical health.

Findings from this project have broadened our understanding about co-production and what it means to co-produce services with a cohort of people who have been severely and damagingly stigmatised. The sense of stigma is so strong that when support is no longer needed women move on from the service and don't look back. This is part of their future resilience and partly a recognition of, and overcoming, their own victim hood.

The full report, can be downloaded at:

<https://basisyorkshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Basis-Housing-First-Final-Report-March-2018.pdf>

The report was produced by Emma Bimpson, a postgraduate researcher who looks at ways housing and homelessness providers have responded to austerity at the University of Leeds