

Case Study: The impact of Housing Coordination

Background

The client, Katrina, has a long history of homelessness within Westminster, frequently moving between hostel accommodations and temporary housing due to repeated incidents of financial exploitation and incidents of violence against women & girls. Katrina was referred into Housing first by her women's only hostel accommodation. She has faced significant physical health challenges and struggled with mental health issues, compounded by a history of abuse and exploitation. Despite these hardships, Katrina has built an established professional support network, including a dual diagnosis team, drug and alcohol support services, a hostel worker, and a Housing First worker, all working collaboratively to support her recovery. Her ultimate goal remains to achieve independence by securing her own flat, providing her with a stable foundation to rebuild her life. In July 2023, Katrina was sexually assaulted by someone who knew where she lived. This incident severely affected her sense of safety, leading her to feel unsafe in her hostel accommodation. The incident was reported to the police with the help of her professional network. Recognising the urgency of her situation, Katrina was nominated for a new property in mid-July.

Katrina moved into her own flat on October 13, 2023, an essential milestone in her journey toward independence. Here, the role of the Housing First (HF) coordinator at Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA) was crucial in ensuring the successful transition to her new home. The HF coordinator took the following key steps:

Tenancy Sustainment Meeting:

The HF coordinator arranged a tenancy sustainment meeting with the housing officer, Katrina, and a Solace Housing First worker. During this meeting, the coordinator explained the project's mission, the typical needs of the women supported, and the roles and expectations of all parties involved. This meeting also gave Katrina an opportunity to meet her housing officer and express any concerns or worries about the property.

Trauma informed response:

The housing officer flagged Katrina's property as a Housing First case, noting her vulnerabilities. To ensure Katrina felt secure, the officer arranged that all housing-related communication would be routed through him. This safeguarded Katrina from potentially distressing communication, such as 'scary letters' from the housing provider, which could trigger her fears about housing security.

Proactive Planning:

A follow-up review was scheduled for three months' time to ensure continued support and to discuss any concerns Katrina may have about her housing situation.

Despite the initial success in securing stable housing, Katrina faced a new crisis in December/January 2024 when a male acquaintance assaulted her and vandalized her flat. Fearing for her safety, Katrina fled the property and was quickly placed in temporary accommodation in Westminster. However, due to the trauma of the incident, she no longer felt safe returning to her original flat. The Housing First coordinator at STADA collaborated closely with the housing officer and the Solace Housing First worker to explore alternative housing options, including a management move to a different property through Katrina's existing housing provider, the Pan-London Managed Reciprocal Scheme to facilitate a move to a safer location, and re-listing Katrina for property nominations through the Housing First housing partnership.

Although the housing issue is not yet resolved, consideration is being given to the possibility of Katrina returning to her flat, following updates from the police indicating that the perpetrator is no longer in the area. This situation underscores the critical importance of the Housing First coordinator, especially for women who face trauma, as it provides essential mechanisms to move them when necessary to an alternative property to ensure their safety and well-being. The Housing First coordinator's continued involvement remains pivotal in facilitating Katrina's housing stability and addressing the ongoing complexities of her housing crisis.

Key Lessons and the Critical Role of the Housing First Coordinator

Holistic Coordination: The HF coordinator's role in bringing together all key stakeholders, including housing officers, local authority, and other support staff. This collaboration was essential for Katrina's transition into her flat and the ongoing sustainment of her tenancy.

Upskilling Housing Officers: The HF coordinator placed Katrina's needs at the centre of the housing process. By ensuring the housing officer was upskilled to understand the Housing First model, linked in with Katrina's key network and communicates effectively with Katrina in a trauma informed way, the HF coordinator helped reduce the client's anxiety and ensured her focus remained on maintaining her well-being and independence.