



HOUSING FIRST
— AUCKLAND —



The Housing First Auckland Collective

Origin, impact and future focus

September 2023



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Introduction

Purpose of this document

This document is the result of a project in late 2022 to capture the impact of Housing First Auckland, a collective impact programme that supports implementation of Housing First across Tāmaki Makaurau. A methodology to assess the social value of the Housing First Auckland Collective (the Collective) was agreed with current leaders from member organisations (Auckland City Mission Te Tāpui Atawhai, Lifewise, LinkPeople, Visionwest Waka Whakakitenga, and the Wise Group). The methodology included conversations with staff who provide the Housing First programme and past and current leaders from member organisations within the Collective. In parallel, programme data and 58 information sources were analysed including media articles, reports, research and videos and documents of whānau experiences.

Quotations throughout this document are from the conversations and documents analysed. They are attributed as:

- Whānau – in this context refers to current or past people who have entered the Housing First Auckland programme.
- Peer Support Workers - paid employees of a provider within the Collective who have personal experience with homelessness and advocate for whānau coming through the programme.
- Leader – past and present leadership within the Collective.

Data are reported as at end of June 2023.

Analysis of these conversations sought to answer these questions:

- What is the origin story of the Housing First Auckland and how did it get to where it is today?
- What impact has the programme had since it became operational in March 2017?
- What are the future priorities and focus for the Housing First Auckland Collective?

Introduction

The origin of Housing First

The Pathways Housing First approach was originally developed in New York in 1992 by Sam Tsemberis. Sam and his colleagues believed that housing is a basic human right, and those who are experiencing homelessness should be housed immediately regardless of their health challenges or status.

Pathways Housing First was developed in response to traditional approaches to housing and homelessness challenges being focused on resolving medical, mental health and addiction issues as a precondition before being housed. These approaches were, and continue to be, expensive but were also failing. They were creating significant barriers to

housing due to the complex and recurring nature of the health challenges, including relapse. In the United States, integration between housing and health solutions was non-existent, causing people to be discharged onto the street and creating a cycle of homelessness. It was clear that the traditional housing approach was an ineffective solution for housing the homeless.

Since 1992 Housing First programmes have been developed and implemented across the United States and in Canada, Europe, Australia, and now Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa).

“I would say the fundamental shift for Housing First was a kind of movement away from the traditional clinical service approach, which was heavily emphasizing treatment first, to an approach that actually not only listened to, but incorporated, the views of the consumer into the very design and operation of the programme.”

– Leader

Bringing Housing First to Auckland

Courageous leaders from various organizations that supported community housing in Aotearoa held collaborative conversations to find different and better ways to respond to homelessness. Leaders at Auckland City Mission Te Tāpui Atawhai, Lifewise, the Wise Group, and Visionwest Waka Whakakitenga recognized the significant inequity faced by Māori experiencing homelessness, mental health and addiction challenges, and in the justice system, due to intergenerational impacts of colonization. Traditional housing services were failing a key population. There was a need for better, Māori-informed solutions.

Leaders from each organisation pursued learning from successful international models, including Housing First policy initiatives, to improve responses to homelessness in Aotearoa.

In 2015 Lifewise and Community Housing Aotearoa invited Sam Tsemberis to visit Aotearoa to introduce Housing First as a viable model. At the time, The People's Project in Hamilton had already been providing Housing First services for whānau. Sam met with media and held conversations with government officials and policymakers, positioning Housing First as an effective way for the government to respond to homelessness.

“At the heart of homelessness in New Zealand, you see rawly the impact of colonisation.”

– Leader

In 2016, the New Zealand Government and Auckland Council allocated substantial funding for a Housing First programme in Auckland, with additional funding provided for a Sustaining Tenancies Pilot Programme. This marked a significant step forward and the beginning of adopting new and sustainable approaches to ending homelessness.

Lifewise and Auckland City Mission Te Tāpui Atawhai embraced a human-centered design process to adapt Housing First to a kaupapa Māori approach as part of their tender process, ensuring a strong focus on Māori responsiveness and a process that values Māori with lived experience of homelessness.

“There is a deep, deep belief of a home as the most basic of human rights. Not something just to get people off the streets or something for social cohesion, or economic development, but at a very deep level, a human right.”

– Leader

The Housing First Auckland Collective

Once Lifewise, Kāhui Tū Kaha, Visionwest, LinkPeople and Auckland City Mission had been selected as the preferred providers for Housing First in Auckland, a group of ten people from Aotearoa attended the Canadian National Conference on Ending Homelessness in Hamilton, Ontario. This group consisted of some of the preferred providers, representatives from the Auckland Council, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), and CHA. Lifewise and Wise Group leaders provided significant encouragement and support to organisations to attend.

The conference became a catalyst for a new way of working collectively, with providers deciding to work together on the delivery of Housing First in Auckland. Committed to delivering Housing First collectively, providers developed a joint proposal for a collective impact approach. As a result, additional funding was provided by MSD and Auckland Council and the Housing First Auckland Collective was formed.

The journey toward bringing Housing First to Aotearoa took a lot of time, resources, dedication, collaboration, and advocacy from a committed group of leaders. As a result, they were able to change the public and government narrative, transforming Aotearoa's response to housing and homelessness and creating greater housing outcomes.

“As a group of leaders, there's been a consistent way of working together. A consistent belief that we are all here to address and end homelessness.”

– Leader



Impact of the Housing First Auckland Collective

Collaboration and collective impact are powerful

The successful adoption of the Housing First model in Auckland, and more widely across Aotearoa, would not have been possible without the Auckland organisations working together as a collective. The collective impact approach shone a light on the power of collaboration and the Collective's early advocacy work is undoubtedly the key contributor to Housing First receiving government funding.

It was at the Canadian National Conference on Ending Homelessness that the collective impact approach was formally agreed upon by providers, and the collaboration and advocacy to bring Housing First to Aotearoa proceeded this. Foundations of the collective impact model included a leadership paradigm that brought together key leaders in the community and encouraged new thinking to solve homelessness. The Collective has been a container for change.

Homelessness is complex, systemic and multifactorial. Responding effectively to homelessness required an integrated approach across multiple sectors including housing, health, social and justice systems. The power of collaboration as a collective ensured that a systems view was incorporated whilst gaining buy-in and support from a wide range of

government officials and agencies across systems, enabling greater intersectoral collaboration.

Member organisation leaders leveraged their relationships with government decision makers to include programmes, services and policy that were part of the problem as part of the solution.

“When you've got a big social issue, like ending homelessness, you can't tackle it on your own. Joining together and bringing all our skills, knowledge, and different parts together like government, council, local boards, and saying this is a whole community issue, not just one organisation's issue.”

– Leader

1,534

supported into sustained housing

including

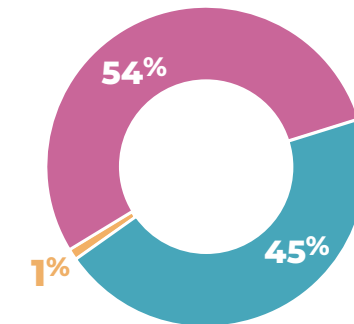
725

children

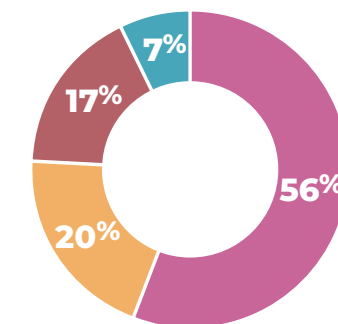
There are multiple enablers that contributed to the successful uptake of Housing First in Aotearoa including the strong commitment to partnership from each organisation and a commitment to the model being implemented effectively with fidelity and appropriate funding.

Housing First was piloted in Auckland and the member organisations achieved significant health, wellbeing and housing outcomes for vulnerable people. The pilot programme has since been scaled nationally across Aotearoa.

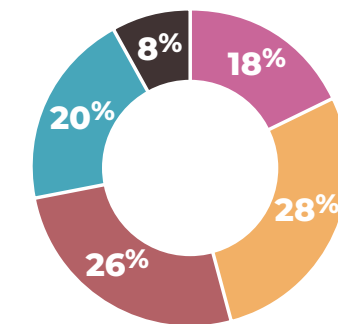
Housing First Auckland has supported 1534 people into sustained housing from 2017 to June 2023.



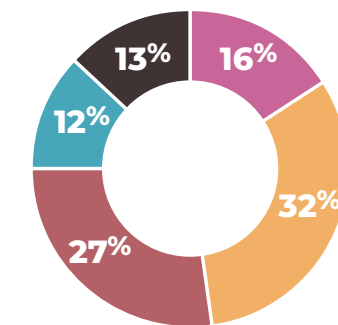
Gender
 Female
 Male
 Gender diverse



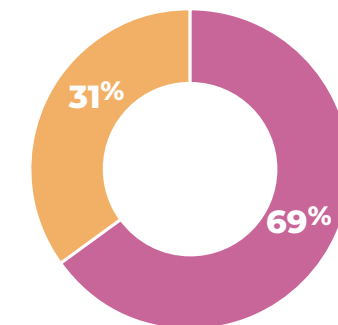
Primary Ethnicity
 Māori
 Pacific Peoples
 Pākehā/NZ European
 Other ethnicities



Age
 Under 30
 30 to 39
 40 to 49
 50 - 59
 60 plus



Duration homeless
 Less than 1 year
 1 to 2 years
 3 to 5 years
 6 to 10 years
 11 years plus



Household
 Single adults
 Families with dependent children

Adapting Housing First to a kaupapa Māori model has been intentional and critical work for the Collective

Housing First is recognised internationally as a leading evidence-based programme to end homelessness. It has been the subject of numerous robust, high-quality research studies (Roggenbuck, 2022). The model has proven itself highly successful and impactful, with housing retention rates typically ranging from 66 percent to 90 percent in these studies. Several studies have also highlighted that Housing First programmes achieve better housing outcomes than traditional approaches. For example, one French study by Aubry (2020) found that 85 percent of tenants receiving Housing First were housed after two years compared to less than 40 percent of people receiving treatment as usual. Data show a similar picture in Auckland, with 88 percent of Housing First Auckland whānau sustaining tenancy for 6 months or more and remaining housed.

Although successful internationally, studies show that indigenous groups experience lower success rates compared to non-indigenous groups when using the Housing First model. In Auckland, Māori are six times more likely to experience homelessness statistics compared to others (Housing First Auckland, 2022a).

57%
of all Housing First Auckland whānau are of Māori descent

This reflects the substantial intergenerational impact of colonisation on Māori and the immense and unjust resulting inequity.

It was clear to the Collective that for Housing First to work in Aotearoa, iteration of the model was critical to ensure that the model aligned with Māori principles and worked for Māori. The Collective was and continues to be deeply committed to achieving this, placing great significance on Māori ways of doing being integrated across all aspects of the service delivery model.

89%
of Housing First Auckland whānau sustain tenancy for six months or more and remain housed

A ground-up approach was developed by Collective leadership, which used a human-centred design process to understand how Housing First could be adapted to include and be led using a kaupapa Māori approach, and to have a focus on Māori responsiveness and achieving optimal outcomes for Māori.



Signifying the unification of each unique organisation within the Collective, the Tāiki framework places great significance on Te Ao Māori and Māori cultural concepts that seamlessly integrate with the five principles of Housing First. When implemented alongside Housing First principles, Tāiki enhances and enriches the programme delivery, ensuring that services are delivered in a way that works for Māori.

Rangatiratanga
Self-Determination

Whanaungatanga
Positive Connections

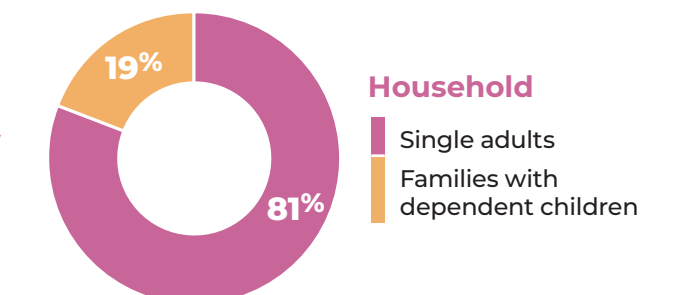
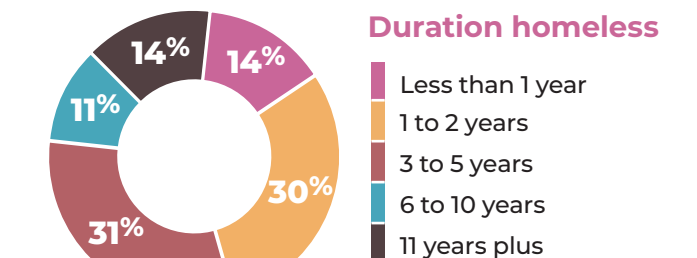
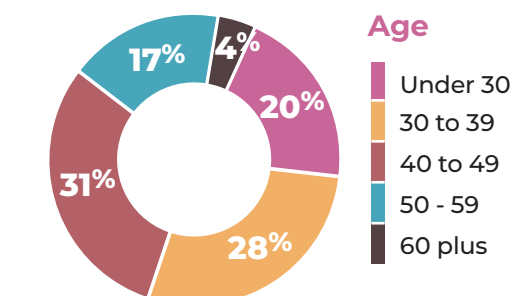
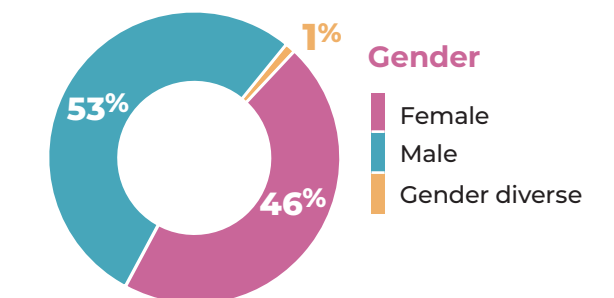
Manaakitanga
Hospitality and empowerment

Māori cultural values were embedded into Housing First values, including rangatiratanga (self-determination), whānaungatanga (positive connections), and manaakitanga (hospitality and empowerment). Through dedication and collaborative leadership, the Collective successfully established a Māori Rōpū for Housing First Auckland that led the development and implementation of a kaupapa Māori framework for the Collective known as the Tāiki framework.

“The Housing First approach is to really put the whānau, our people who are out there, those chronically homeless, really putting them at the forefront of what we are trying to do, and actually listening to what they need and not what we think they need.”

– Peer Support Worker

Whānau who identify as Māori





Housing First Auckland is making a significant difference to the lives of whānau who have experienced homelessness

The Housing First Auckland model is epitomised by putting whānau at the centre and giving them tino rangatiratanga. Whānau whakapuāwai, which represents success for whānau, requires a solution that is whānau-led, where people have choice over when and how to engage with and leave Housing First Auckland. The tenets of rangatiratanga, whakawhanaungatanga, and manaakitanga have enabled whānau to get their mana back. People report coming from nothing and ending up with a strong sense of belonging, their lives being put back on track with associated feelings of ownership and security.

21%

of Housing First whānau who have been housed have been homeless for 6+ years.

“You take them through from absolutely nothing, and watch them go into their own homes, and then you watch their futures open up, and they’re more accepting of the fact they do belong in the community, and that’s their mana. You just see the glow in them.”

– Peer Support Worker

“Every morning I wake up, I think of things I can do, like my washing. I have neighbours who I get on very well with who look out for my house and I for theirs. That’s a level of security I have not felt for so very long. That’s very much a blessing and I’m so grateful.”

– Whānau

Whānau experiencing homelessness traditionally report fears of judgement, experiencing disrespect, and poor treatment from the system and institutions. Whānau are therefore pleasantly surprised at the warm, non-judgemental reception that they received from Housing First Auckland key workers who treat them like a normal person. Moreover, they appreciate the absence of any prerequisites to access housing support, such as abstinence or compulsory counselling. Housing First Auckland removes the bureaucracy and red tape associated with being housed and gets people into housing faster. The Collective does not give up on people, and believes that everyone deserves the chance to embark on a pathway towards a better future.

“People treat me like a normal person, I have found. It's not to say they didn't treat me as a normal person in the street - a lot of it's my mindset - but I feel part of my community, and that's a big thing.”

– Whānau

The benefits of Housing First Auckland extend far beyond that of the individual. People who have been supported through the programme are often motivated to want to help others who are in similar positions and support their local communities. This not only supports community integration, but also encourages other whānau to consider housing options.

“That's what I'm looking at, that's my goal, to give back to those who have given to me. Cause I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for them.”

– Whānau

Housing First Auckland has also enabled a healing of past relationships and a rebuilding of bridges that have been destroyed. Whānau Māori who have been disconnected from their whenua and iwi have recounted how Housing First Auckland has helped reconnect them with their whānau and marae. This takes time and patience, but is a significant determinant of success.

“Engagement with their whānau. I reckon that the key to working with our whanau is re-engaging them back into the whanau and rebuilding the bridges that they've destroyed.”

– Peer Support Worker

Whānau are united in their view that one of the biggest benefits of Housing First Auckland is its holistic approach to homelessness and the wraparound support that follows being housed, which is integral for achieving true transformation. The Collective acknowledges that being housed represents only the first step in a journey towards whānau whakapuāwai. The stability of a home provides a strong foundation for recovery and improvement in other aspects of peoples' lives. For example, it has been reported that whānau who have been housed have improved employment opportunities and access to WINZ entitlements, access to health and social services (mental health and addictions services in particular), financial support and legal support. This translates to sometimes rapid improvements in mental health, physical health, substance use and debt management.



“The point of difference of Housing First is the wraparound support, and giving people the sense of their own sovereignty, rangatiratanga, and making a partnership rather than a dictatorship. And we've tried our best to keep true to those principles.”

– Peer Support Worker

“I've been here six weeks now and although it's in its early stages, I'm finding my health has already improved. I'm also able to structure my budget a lot better, I'm able to offer my other, still-homeless colleagues or friends advice. I'm able to think better.”

– Whānau



Enhancing lived experience into service design and delivery has been a core commitment of the Collective

A critical part of the Housing First model and its success internationally is the inclusion of peers who have lived experience of homelessness. Before the adoption of Housing First, peer support workers were uncommon within housing services. The Collective was committed to involving people who are impacted by homelessness as part of the solution from the beginning. People with lived experience were intimately involved with the design and establishment of the Auckland Housing First services. The design process engaged people who were experiencing homelessness in order to deeply understand whānau lived experiences of service provision and homelessness.

Once Housing First was implemented in Auckland, peer support workers from each organisation led the development of a Lived Experience Advisory Group. This group's role was to provide advice and advocacy to the programme leaders and implement ideas based on their first-hand experience of homelessness.

Housing First peer support workers are able to interact, advocate and support whānau in a way that is understanding, trustworthy, non-judgmental, and mana-enhancing. This creates a sense of community and belonging whilst restoring hope and personal power into whānau lives.

“I want to help people that like myself have fallen down in many ways, but you know, with support. When someone advocated for me and what I needed, I was able to get help.”

– Peer Support Worker

Each organisation within the Collective has unique population demographics, allowing for a diverse range of perspectives and skills to be shared. Whānau report that the involvement and support of peers is a key factor towards improved experience and sustainable housing outcomes (Housing First in Auckland, n.d).







Future focus for the Auckland Housing First Collective

Since Housing First launched in Auckland, there has clearly been significant impact from the organisations working together collectively, including improved collaboration with government agencies, effective advocacy, sharing of data, cross-organisational learning and development, and shared programme planning.

To achieve further future impact, the Collective is deeply committed to their shared vision: that everyone has a place to call 'home'. In recognition of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and to address inequities in homelessness for Māori, this vision sits at the heart of Maiea Tāiki E!, their Māori-led strategy, which was co-created by leaders and staff across the Collective during 2022 and 2023.

Ā tātou whaingā rangatira Our shared priorities

Through the co-creation process six shared strategic priorities were agreed for the future :

-  **Deepen our relationships with Te Ao Māori, hapori Māori, iwi and hapū**
-  **Create access to a range of decent housing options to meet the current and future needs of whānau**
-  **Partner with communities, organisations and government to achieve better social, health, employment, and stable housing outcomes for whānau**
-  **Build a thriving, diverse and inclusive workforce that meets the future aspirations and dreams of whānau and communities**
-  **Demonstrate the value of our mahi, drive equity, and amplify the voices of lived experience**
-  **Advocate for a whānau-centred, flexible, high trust, adequate and secure funding approach to housing that gives certainty**

These six priorities will inform the work of the Backbone and Collective organisations in future years as they continue their passionate drive to ensure all people have a place to call 'home' and support whānau whakapuāwai.

The illustration features a large, stylized sun with a face in the upper left, rendered in warm orange and yellow tones. Below the sun, several black birds are shown in flight against a light blue sky. On the right side, two large, dark red spiral structures rise from a ground covered in a pattern of purple and red diamonds. The overall style is artistic and textured, with visible brushstrokes and a soft, ethereal atmosphere.

Tātou kitenga Our vision

A just and caring Aotearoa where all people have a place to call 'home', to achieve their life aspirations and live their full potential:
whānau whakapuāwai.

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