

# 20 Lives 20 Homes: A Place-based Iteration of the Housing First Model

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## Background

The *20 Lives 20 Homes* (20 Lives) program is a local place-based response to homelessness based in Fremantle. Fremantle is a key urban centre serving the south metropolitan region approximately 20 kilometres from Perth, Western Australia (WA), and comprises the principal port for Perth.

Established in Fremantle with the generous support of philanthropic donations and some state government support, LotteryWest have now been solely funding the program since January 2021. 20 Lives is a collaborative impact project, and builds off the *50 Lives 50 Homes* Housing First program<sup>1</sup> that operated in Perth from late 2015 to late 2020, and now morphed into the Advance to Zero Project in WA.

20 Lives commenced as a pilot in November 2019, with the initial

aim, as its name implies, to support and find housing for 20 of the most vulnerable street present people in Fremantle, as identified by the Vulnerability Index-Service Decision Assistance Tool, VI-SPDAT.<sup>2</sup> At its core are two highly experienced outreach case workers who are based with St Patrick's Community Support Centre (St Pat's), a key organisation in the WA homelessness sector located in the heart of Fremantle. In the pilot, RUAH Community Support Services coordinated the backbone response for 20 Lives and the provision of wrap around after hours support through the After Hours Support Service (AHSS). Foundation Housing was also involved in the pilot, trialling a private rental brokerage initiative that was funded by the WA Department of Communities, in response to the shortage of social housing and affordable rentals in the Fremantle vicinity.

20 Lives is now in its second year, and St Pat's is providing the backbone support as well as the outreach work and case management. As a collective impact initiative, connecting people to other supports and existing services is an important aspect of 20 Lives, and here the place-based ethos is evident, with the 20 Lives program developing cooperative relationships and referral pathways with other Fremantle and south metropolitan health and social support organisations.

## The 20 Lives Model

Housing First principles drive the aims of 20 Lives, prescribing safe and permanent housing as a priority, provided prior to, and not conditional upon, addressing other health and well-being issues.<sup>3</sup> Other elements of support provided by 20 Lives include intensive case management, assistance with housing and personal ID document applications and practical household items as well as connecting people to health, mental health and financial services.

With aspirational organisational aims:

- i. to broker and sustainably house 20 of the most vulnerable street present homeless people in Fremantle, into long-term housing
- ii. to remove barriers to successful long-term housing through a person-centred and trauma informed approach
- iii. to work with the individuals to put in place the wrap-around services required for their success.

20 Lives has shown that through their model they have been able to deliver and go beyond those aims.<sup>4</sup>



20 Lives Outreach Case Worker with a client



20 Lives client Martin after being housed

Despite the limitations of available affordable housing in the Fremantle and greater metropolitan area of Perth over the last five to seven years,<sup>5</sup> and rental vacancy rates sitting below one per cent,<sup>6</sup> 20 Lives has successfully achieved their goals, with 27 people being supported as at 1 November 2021.

| Figure 1:<br>Who has 20 Lives Supported?<br>(as at 1 November 2021)   |
|---|
| 27 people   |
| 59 per cent MALE<br>41 per cent FEMALE  |
| 44 YEARS AVERAGE AGE<br>(range 23 to 63)  |
| 6 YEARS ON AVERAGE<br>SPENT HOMELESS<br>Equivalent to 59,708 nights<br>collectively sleeping rough (at time<br>of undertaking the VI-SPDAT <sup>2</sup> ) |

### 20 Lives Outcomes

From a Housing First<sup>7</sup> perspective, preferred housing is long term, either through low-cost social housing or private affordable rental. The shortfall of housing has meant other options have needed to be sourced, a wider mix of accommodation types, including some people opting for long-term lodging by choice has been implemented. With the importance of choice embedded in the Housing

First model,<sup>8</sup> 20 Lives has supported people to access a range of housing options, there has also been some movement between different types of accommodation. Figure 2 describes how the 27 clients of 20 Lives have been housed as at November 2021.

| Figure 2: Where are they now?<br>(as at 1 November 2021)   |
|--|
| 2 people are in social housing lodging   |
| 6 people are in private lodgings   |
| 3 people are in private rentals through a rental subsidy from St Pat's (1 tenancy and 2 License to Occupy)                                 |
| 2 people housed with Housing Choices Ltd   |
| 6 people have reunited with family   |
| 1 person has passed away   |
| 1 person is incarcerated and no longer in the 20 Lives program   |
| 3 people couch surfing — 1 entering into rehab, 1 self-selected to live with family, now priority listed and waiting for long-term housing |
| 5 people are in public housing through the Department of Communities   |
| 4 people have received assistance but no longer require support from 20 Lives  |

## 20 Lives 20 Homes Case Study

### Background

Amy\* is an Aboriginal woman who has been sleeping rough in the Fremantle area for approximately seven years. She has a long history of family violence, substantial debt, and has children in care. Amy has sustained substantial bone damage due to physical assault and untreated injuries and struggles with her mental health and substance misuse.

### Interventions undertaken by 20 Lives

20 Lives support workers have engaged with Amy over a long period to gain her trust. They assisted her with documentation and housing applications and have supported her to access legal advice and connect with a regular GP. The 20 Lives workers have liaised with Department of Communities regarding housing, complicated due to debt, the 20 Lives workers have supported Amy with a debt discount application.

Amy was finally housed in a two-bedroom private rental in 2020, allowing access to her grandchildren and enabling her to re-establish her relationships with her family. 20 Lives assisted Amy with a Rental Subsidy to support the arrangement financially. 20 Lives brokerage was used to source whitegoods, furniture and vouchers.

### Current Situation

There have been no issues with the tenancy — rental payments and tenancy has been well maintained over 12 months. The 20 Lives outreach workers continue to advocate for Amy and she has been priority listed on Department of Communities Housing waitlist. Amy continues to engage in Case Management, the 20 Lives Outreach Workers and with After Hours Support Service ensuring she receives appropriate medical support as well as AOD support.

\*Not her real name

In addition to housing needs, and common to people who are sleeping rough,<sup>9</sup> the people supported by 20 Lives often have multiple health, mental health and/or AOD issues. The AHSS has assisted people, newly housed, to cope with these issues, assisting them with illnesses or infections that may have gone untreated for a long period of time. This has been especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a coordinated response, during the lockdown phase and as part of street outreach, 20 Lives assisted all participants in the program to get into some form of accommodation, so they didn't have to sleep rough, while both over the phone and face to face intensive support was provided by the AHSS and the Outreach Case Workers including the St Pat's Doorstep Dinners program.<sup>10</sup> The AHSS also provided home visit support, with measures taken to protect both workers and clients. People were provided with complete and updated information of the risks/impacts of COVID-19 as well as emotional and psychological support.<sup>11</sup>

The case study opposite highlights the terrible circumstances the 20 Lives clients have found themselves prior to engaging in the program and the importance of the wrap around and caring support received by the outreach workers from 20 Lives.

### Conclusion

The 20 Lives program has been WA's first localised place-based adaption of Housing First and was highlighted in the WA Department of Communities 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness as an innovative example of a place-based adaptation of the Housing First model in WA.<sup>12</sup> There are now other localised Housing First initiatives in a number of other areas of WA.

Whilst adhering to Housing First principles, the 20 Lives program has had to be flexible in its approach to housing options and has continued to support a number of its participants through transitions from one type of accommodation to another. This is salient to note as it reflects that the notion of a single 'forever home' is often not feasible for a raft of reasons, but what is critical to 20 Lives, and Housing

First is that people are supported if they need to move to alternate accommodation, or if they return episodically to homelessness. Too often, homelessness and tenancy support services are funded only to support people for a time limited period (for example 12 months), but as seen over the course of 20 Lives, the availability of ongoing wrap around support that is responsive to each individual's recovery journey is crucial, and life changing. The shortage of social housing and affordable rentals remains a challenge for the 20 Lives program and for the homelessness sector in WA more broadly.

### Endnotes

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7. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute 2018, *AHURI Brief: What is the Housing First model and how does it help those experiencing homelessness? The benefits of prioritising housing for those experiencing homelessness*. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/policy/ahuri-briefs/what-is-the-housing-first-model>.
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9. Cheung A, Somers J, Moniruzzaman A et al 2015, Emergency department use and hospitalizations among homeless adults with substance dependence and mental disorders, *Addiction Science and Clinical Practice*; vol. 10, no. 1, p. 17.
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11. 500 Lives 500 Homes 2020, The Campaign. n.d. <http://www.500lives500homes.org.au/the-campaign/the-campaign> (accessed 28.02.2017).
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20 Lives client Susan after being housed