



## The House Project Evaluation Summary

### Background

The Stoke-on-Trent House Project (HP) represents a new approach to supporting care leavers to take control of their transitions to independent living and to have greater involvement and choice in creating their own long-term home after care. The HP is a housing company based on a housing co-operative model, run for and by young people aged 16-18 who are leaving care. It comprises a staff team (including project facilitators to support young people) and partner agencies (including staff from legal, architect and training companies). The project involves the transfer of 10 council properties to the HP at any one time, on a short-term lease. The properties are allocated to HP young people under HP tenancy agreements alongside a bespoke package of support. When the young person feels (and is considered) able to live independently with less support they transition out of the project and they and their home transfer to a standard council tenancy. The project involves young people working with the architect and project management team to refurbish their property, which offers new skills and helps engender a sense of ownership and a real say in creating a long-term home.

### Aims and objectives

The HP aims to improve post-care housing stability and increase young people's satisfaction with their home after care. From that base, the project aims to improve wider outcomes and experiences to provide a positive and inclusive transition to adulthood. This includes improved participation in education, employment and training (EET) (a condition of HP membership), transferable skills, wellbeing, integration and greater autonomy.

### Evaluation

The evaluation aimed to understand the factors involved in developing and operating the HP model during its first year and to explore if and how it had affected outcomes for the first cohort of HP care leavers. Given the small sample (11), a mainly qualitative approach was used underpinned by participatory methods, which involved working with HP young people to agree research questions and interpret and present findings.

Data on HP implementation was gathered via Interviews and surveys with HP staff (6), partner agencies (2), young people (up to 11) and social workers or personal advisers (6). Data on early outcomes in housing stability, EET participation and wellbeing for young people, and their experiences of setting up and participating in the HP were gathered via interviews, focus groups and surveys with young people. We received an overall response rate of 62% across all data items requested. Data were collected at the start (T1), midpoint (T2) and follow-up (T3) in March 2016. Due to project delays, the evaluation re-opened in November 2016 (T4) to gather some post-move data from 5 young people who had moved into their HP tenancies. The short time frame and small sample limited the extent to which outcomes could be measured, hence only early progress is reported.

## Findings

The HP had made good progress towards achieving its aims during its first year; establishing the legal framework for setting up the company and transferring properties; developing a supportive system to enable young people to play a role in running the company; refurbishing 5 properties; and moving 5 out of 10 young people into their homes. Six months, however, proved an unrealistic timescale for set-up and getting properties ready for young people and subsequently they experienced delays in transitioning into their HP homes.

Follow-up data on young people's experiences were mostly positive; they welcomed the chance to choose and create their own homes and have access to individual and flexible support. They reported increased confidence, communication skills, and feelings of community and integration. The negative aspects almost exclusively related to delays in being allocated their HP homes. Some young people struggled to engage fully in the co-operative activities, sometime due to other commitments. A core group emerged to take on most tasks.

Despite a short follow-up there was a cautious indication of improvements in young people's wellbeing with the mean score for the group increasing from 67 at baseline to 74 at follow-up. Of the 9 young people responding at T3, 7 (78%) were in EET and 8 (88%) reported improvements in EET. Eight (88%) had remained stable in their baseline accommodation but 2 (22%) required temporary accommodation prior to moving to their HP home.

## Recommendations

The HP offers opportunities and potential for young people to find post-care stability and to support each other to develop the skills, agency and self-confidence needed to make a positive transition from care. Early findings suggest that a realistic timescale is needed to address the legal complexities and cross-departmental protocols associated with setting up such a company. Contributors to successful implementation included: strong leadership; commitment; senior level buy-in across council departments; and co-operation and flexibility from existing placement providers. Sustainability and replication of the HP model relies on a number of factors:

- the availability of sufficient and suitable council housing stock
- maintaining a flow of 16 and 17 year old care leavers into the project and successful tenants out of the project to enable the funding model to operate effectively and to free up capacity in the project
- cross-departmental buy-in to ensure joint protocols and effective safeguards across children's services, housing and other relevant agencies
- access to intensive and flexible support, including a skilled, experienced and well established HP staff team and continuing support and case responsibility from leaving care services
- creating robust systems and safeguards to ensure that young people are suitable for the project; only move into their tenancy when they are ready; and have contingency plans to safely and efficiently manage any changes to leaving care plans, exits from the project and housing breakdowns or evictions.

The second phase of the HP includes expansion within and outwith Stoke and will require further monitoring to assess its longer term sustainability and impact on outcomes for young people leaving care.

This evaluation was carried out during 2016 by Jo Dixon and Jade Ward from the Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York, with support from Jenny Lee and Mike Stein.

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