

# Housing First Auckland City Centre Programme: Responsiveness to Māori

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## Introduction

Housing First programmes have been implemented in many countries across the world. Housing First, which provides rapid access to permanent housing with flexible community-based supports, works better than traditional approaches for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples who are experiencing chronic homelessness.<sup>1,2</sup> However, Housing First needs to be adapted in order to achieve optimal results for Indigenous peoples. For example, when Housing First was implemented in Winnipeg, Canada (where 70 per cent of people experiencing homelessness were Indigenous) both the programme and participants faced systemic barriers. There was significant discrimination and racism against people in the programme from both landlords and within the health system.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, there was a lack of culturally appropriate affordable housing as well as poor access to cultural amenities.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, the Housing First teams 'achieved remarkable success in placing the participants on a path towards recovery from homelessness and mental illness'.<sup>5</sup>

Lessons from the Canadian experience suggest that in order to succeed, Housing First needs to be delivered in culturally appropriate ways as well as to challenge the legacy of colonisation including the structural/systemic barriers that contribute to homelessness.

In this paper we describe how the Housing First model has been intentionally adapted for the Auckland city centre where almost 60 per cent of people experiencing chronic<sup>6</sup> homelessness are Māori. We describe the methods we used, what we learnt along the way and some of the initial programme developments.

## Background

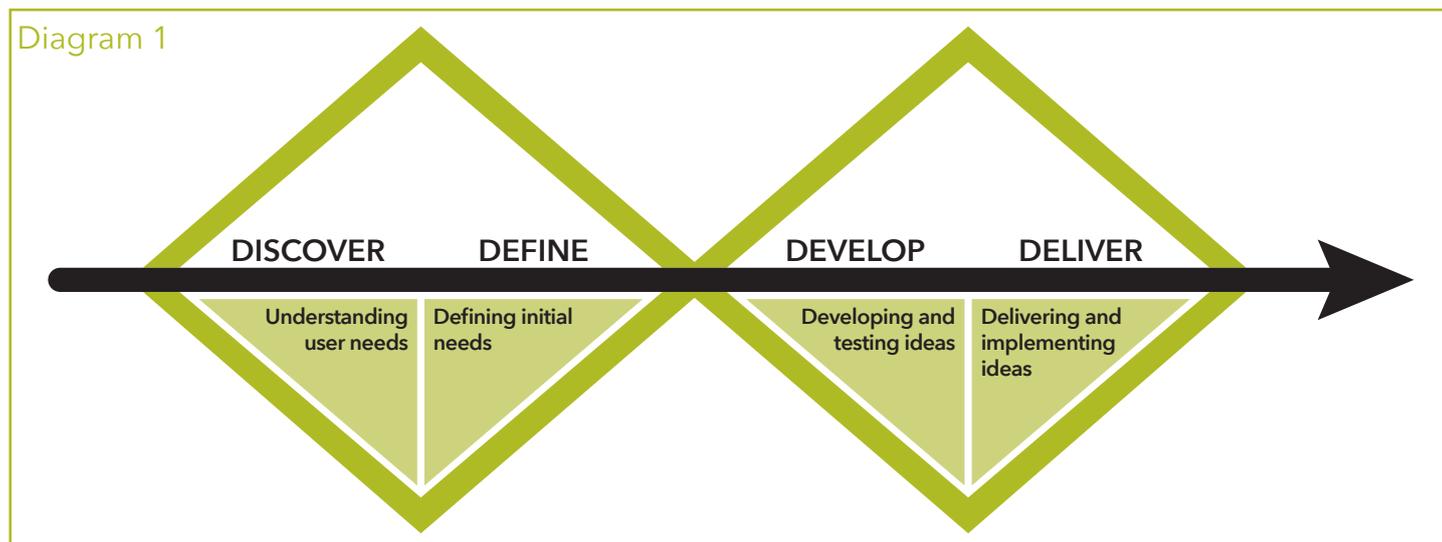
In 2016, after many years of attempting to support people into housing, Lifewise and Auckland City Mission recognised that more needed to be done to effectively support people to sustain tenancies. They joined together to design and implement a Housing First programme for the Auckland City Centre using a human-centred design approach. Part of the attraction of Housing First was the robust and extensive evidence of effectiveness as

well as the values and principles underpinning this approach. Lifewise had funding from Foundation North's Catalysts for Change programme which meant we had the resources to employ a service design lead, an internal evaluator and to establish a Project Working Group (which included four people with lived experience of homelessness plus representatives from government, health and housing agencies). The design phase was led by the Lifewise Practice and Development Manager.

## Design Methodology

Human-centred design involves end users as experts of their own experience. It reflects a fundamental change to traditional service or programme development. Rather than service providers designing services or programmes in isolation, the co-design approach enables a wider range of people to make creative contributions in the formulation and solution to a problem.

There are key steps in a human-centred design approach as shown in Diagram 1.



In the *discovery* phase we gathered data and information to understand the needs of people experiencing chronic homelessness. We did this through: empathy interviews with 18 people who had experience of homelessness in the city centre, developed journey maps of users experiences, held focus groups on specific topics and completed analysis of Lifewise and Auckland City Mission service data where we identified 189 people who were chronically homeless in the city centre. In the *define* phase we synthesised the learnings and insights. We formed personas and developed design challenges that arose from people's experiences. As part of the *develop* phase we sought a wide range of ideas at an ideation workshop and built prototypes to test with users. These learnings helped us to develop a service blueprint for the city centre Housing First programme. In the *deliver* phase we continuously test and refine the prototypes throughout implementation.

### Key Insights, Data and Design Challenges

The experience of people with lived experience of homelessness was central to the development of the city centre Housing First programme. Their contribution happened in different ways; from participation on the project team, participation in empathy interviews, creative brainstorming sessions through to the initial testing of ideas and concepts. Most of the people involved were also of Māori descent.

We uncovered six key insights that guided the development of Housing First:

- People living on the street quickly become part of the street culture. This culture is dominated by a Māori paradigm where concepts like manaakitanga and whānau dictate how they live their lives. Once housed, people carry these values with them and there is a strong desire to continue to support their rough-sleeping whānau.
- The idea of moving indoors and creating a home can be an overwhelming experience. People often lack practical support with adjusting to their new home and can experience isolation, boredom and conflict.

- People have everyday hopes and dreams for their futures including where and who they might live with. However, people often feel hopeless about their dreams being realised.
- Many people feel disconnected or lack positive connections with their family and wider whānau. The pain of this can be debilitating for some and negatively impacts on their lives.
- Engaging with and navigating services can be an insurmountable challenge and many people often rely on support workers to do this for them.
- Trust and mutual respect were seen as key factors for building meaningful relationships between participants and service providers. These relationships provide a platform for people to move forward. Alternatively, relationships where there was a lack of trust and transparency generated frustration and confusion.

Through the analysis of Lifewise and Auckland City Mission data sets we discovered that 59 per cent of people experiencing chronic homelessness in the city centre were of Māori descent. People had been homeless for a long time – 90 per cent of people had been homeless for two years or more. The average length of time was seven and a half years. Substance use issues were common and in addition many people had chronic physical health problems.

### Implementing Housing First in the City Centre

The learnings from the design process also enabled the surfacing of fundamental cultural values that are important to the community and how the team will work – manaakitanga, whakawhānaungatanga, rangatiratanga, tika, pono, aroha. One of the first steps to ensure that Housing First was optimised for Māori was to employ a team with knowledge and experience of tikanga me Te reo Māori. The Housing First team has a designated cultural leadership role and the team culture is built on the cultural principles.

The team start each day with karakia and waiata, sometimes joined by Housing First whānau. They have trialled the use of mihi whakatau (traditional welcoming process, often

used outside a formal marae setting) when introducing groups of participants to the Housing First programme.

Very early on the team refused to use the term client and instead refer to participants as whānau. The term whānau is used to express inclusivity and recognises the connectedness that is established between the team and participant through the mihi whakatau process. The ongoing use of the term whānau by the team provides a subtle mechanism of system disruption and challenges a culture of 'client/worker' – 'them/us'.

One Housing First whānau member signalled this in a recent interview:

*And that's what's important – they make you feel like you are at home, that you are not just a client, nobody likes being called a client [...]*  
– Housing First Whānau Member).

Part of what the team actively try to do is to encourage partners and stakeholders to go beyond their own definitions of family/whānau and explore and encourage people to take a broader view of what can constitute a whānau relationship. This can then redefine how behaviours are perceived and promotes a broader cultural understanding and acceptance.

### Prototypes

The team are testing and refining two prototypes based on the cultural principles and the learnings from the design process. A prototype is an early sample or model built to test a concept or a process that solves a particular design challenge. Two design challenges emerged specifically around the issues of managing visitors:

- How Might We support tenants to show manaaki and aroha to their friends without it jeopardising their tenancy?
- How Might We support people to employ effective strategies to manage visitors that get beyond their control?

The following prototypes are now being tested and adapted with whānau as they participate in the Housing First programme.



Photo provided by Claire Aspinall

## Pōwhiri and Kawa

The Pōwhiri/Welcoming Event is an opportunity to celebrate people moving indoors and to set the kawa for the home in front of the participant's friends and whānau. The event itself can take any form depending on the participant's choice, and could range from a small intimate cup of tea to a whakatau to a full pōwhiri. The event is supported and organised by kaumātua, the key/peer worker and the whānau member (participant). Prior to the event, the team work with the whānau member (participant) to explore concepts around home, manaaki and aroha and to set the kawa. The kawa may specifically discuss how people want others to treat them and their home with a focus on visitors.

Setting kawa actively promotes boundary setting that is known to

both the tenant and Housing First team. Having the kawa based in tikanga and Māori values adds cultural weight and validity, making the kawa more likely to be adhered to (like the kawa of a marae). It also provides an opportunity to talk about visitors and management of unwanted visitors. This process could also support people living together in groups to set their kawa.

## Manaaki Days

Whānau need options where they can provide manaaki/ hospitality in the same way that most other New Zealanders would take for granted. Manaaki days utilise neutral spaces to host events, dinners, family gatherings, meals for friends and family. Housing First whānau members (participants) work with their key worker, peer worker, and other community development

organisations or groups to create an event, that is, boil up Sunday and host the event for their friends and family. This provides a mechanism for whānau to provide manaaki and aroha to their friends without it jeopardising their whare.

## Partnership and Governance

The programme was opened with a pōwhiri by mana whenua Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, who have asked for a second hui with the team now that the programme is off the ground. At a governance level, four people of Māori descent sit on the Housing First Governance Group – two with lived experience of homelessness and two Housing First kaumātua.

## Conclusion

Housing First is much more than introducing new programmes. It is about fundamentally shifting or disrupting the way multiple service systems operate to put people (who have been very poorly served in the past) at the centre. We are in the early stages of implementation but already we are seeing the benefits of working in a way that meets the unique cultural needs of the whānau in the Auckland city centre.

## Endnotes

1. Goering P, Veldhuizen S, Watson A, Adair C, Kopp B, Latimer E, Nelson G, MacNaughton E, Streiner D and Aubry T 2014, *National At Home/Chez Soi Final Report*, Mental Health Commission of Canada, Calgary, Retrieved from: <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca>
2. Distasio J, Sareen J and Isaak C 2014, *At Home/Chez Soi Project: Winnipeg Site Final Report*, Mental Health Commission of Canada, Calgary, Retrieved from: <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca>
3. McCullough S and Zell S 2016, *The At Home/Chez Soi Project: Sustainability of Housing and Support Programs Implemented at the Winnipeg Site*, The Institute of Urban Studies, The University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg.
4. Alaazi D A, Masuda J R, Evans J, Distasio J 2015, *Therapeutic landscapes of home: Exploring Indigenous peoples' experiences of a Housing First intervention in Winnipeg*, *Social Science and Medicine*, no.147: pp. 30-37.
5. *ibid* p.36.
6. By chronic homelessness we mean that a person has been continuously homeless for at least 12 months or on at least four separate occasions in the last three years and they have an impairment and which can be a physical, mental, or emotional impairment. The impairment is expected to be long-continuing or of indefinite duration and to substantially impede the person's ability to live independently.