

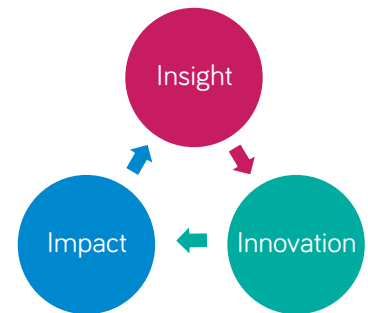
Housing ex-offenders and people in recovery from addiction: innovative and scalable models, responding to lockdown

Pulse is a series of briefings from The Forward Trust for staff, partners, commissioners and stakeholders to communicate:

- Insight from our research team's analysis of client data and other findings
- Examples of innovation and continuous service improvement
- Evidence of our personal, social and economic impact

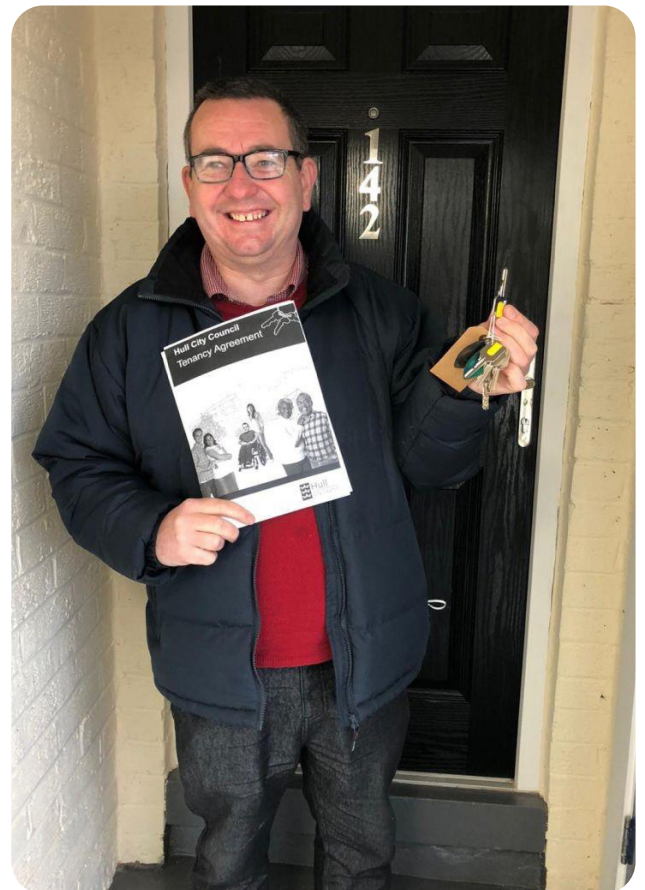
We also aim for these briefings to contribute to wider policy and practice debates.

The Forward Trust (Forward) provide a range of care, support and employment services to people struggling with drug or alcohol dependence or who have a history of offending. Despite our clients being amongst the most marginalised in society, we believe in everyone's ability to transform their lives and to achieve recovery from a lifestyle of addiction and crime.



"I now have a job and somewhere of my own to live. I feel like a new person. If it wasn't for Forward I'd still be using drugs and homeless."

- Forward Housing client



Executive Summary

- ▶ Forward works with some of society's most marginalised and vulnerable people such as prisoners, ex-offenders and people in recovery from addiction, who often have multiple and complex needs including homelessness. Over half of our 12,000 prison clients report having no home to go to upon release, a significant barrier to their recovery and rehabilitation.
- ▶ For many years, Forward has been helping clients who are leaving prisons to resettle in the community through partnership arrangements with 'supported housing' providers offering accommodation with additional professional care and support. While continuing to refer clients to supported housing, Forward has also developed two of our own alternative models of accommodation, offering choice for clients at different stages of recovery:
 - ▶ **Recovery Housing** for clients who are making good progress in their substance misuse recovery, who need more freedom than is offered in supported housing but who are not yet ready to live independently; recovery houses are for 3 or 4 clients to live together
 - ▶ **Vision Housing** – for prison leavers, ex-offenders, those on a recovery pathway, or those with low complex needs, such as mild mental health, who are more ready to live independently, providing access to suitable accommodation (room in a shared house, studio, house of multiple occupancy, or 1 bedroom property).

Both these models combine the provision of safe and good quality accommodation, with peer support and mentoring that helps individuals to sustain tenancies. Both also have innovative funding models that allow for scaling up provision without relying on contract funding.

- ▶ In the last 2 years, we have supported 173 vulnerable clients into housing, with 98% of those in accommodation sustaining their tenancies for 12 months or more. We currently have a network of 25 landlords providing access to over 500 properties per month, and manage 2 recovery houses with several more planned over the coming 12 months.
- ▶ In response to Covid-19 (which has exacerbated the vulnerabilities experienced by our clients and increased their risks of rough sleeping) we have flexed our models of support and contact with clients, for example by offering video viewings of properties. Between March 2020 and Dec 2020, we had 211 referrals, completed 197 assessments, arranged over 300 viewings and supported 58 people into privately rented flats. We did this whilst continuing to support another 51 clients (housed pre-March) through the pandemic with tenancy sustainment and wellbeing support.
- ▶ Beyond Covid-19, we have ambitious plans to scale up our models to support both a wider range of and higher number of people to find and maintain safe and secure housing; something vitally important given the challenging few years our economy and our client group faces in aftermath of the pandemic, with a likely rise in unemployment and financial hardship.

Context

Housing need among our client group

Forward works with some of society's most vulnerable people including prisoners, ex-offenders and those in recovery from substance misuse or addiction, many of whom have multiple and complex needs including homelessness. For example, in 2019/20, over half of our 12,000 prison-based clients reported having no home to go to upon release. One in 5 of our substance misuse clients in the community also reported housing problems or had no fixed abode.

For many people, any effort to confront their problems and turn their lives around can be undermined by poor or insecure accommodation, or the daily pressures of homelessness.

There are a number of reasons why our clients lose a tenancy or struggle to find a new one, for example:

- ▶ **Losing benefits while in prison** - entitlement to housing benefit stops for those sentenced to prison for more than 13 weeks; this means that many people have very little chance of keeping their tenancy open until the end of their sentence and end up losing their housing.
- ▶ **Lack of a steady source of income (other than benefits)** - 49% of our prison clients have not had a job for three or more years or have never worked
- ▶ **Prejudice and discrimination** - many private landlords refuse to let to ex-offenders or those claiming housing benefit¹
- ▶ **Underlying support needs** - 1 in 3 of our clients have mental health problems, and 40% have a possible dependence on alcohol or drugs², debilitating conditions that can make it hard for clients to manage their tenancy on a day-to-day basis without support.

"For me, alcohol and homelessness went hand in hand. I was in an abusive relationship which often caused me to drink, and when I left my partner and kids to try and escape it, I ended up homeless."

Forward client

Poor quality housing

The quality and type of housing available to our client groups can also be poor. Research in 2017 found that over half a million 'social' homes in England (equating to almost 1 in 7 of all homes in this category) failed to meet basic health and safety standards³. For those in the private rented sector, whilst rents have been rising consistently for a number of years, the amount of money given to those who need financial support to pay their rent (called the Local Housing Allowance or LHA) has been frozen since 2016⁴. This means people are increasingly less able to afford suitable housing, even if they had been able to do so in previous years. We know anecdotally from our own clients that this can leave them stuck in difficult circumstances, for example wanting to leave an abusive relationship but not being able to do so.

1. Source: Shelter, 2021. https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/what_causes_homelessness

2. Social Impact Report 2020. The Forward Trust. Page 6 – Key Client Characteristics. <https://www.forwardtrust.org.uk/media/2195/forward-trust-impact-report-2020-final-approved-9112020.pdf>

3. "More than half a million social homes in England do not meet basic health and safety standards", The Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-social-housing-health-and-safety-standards-failures-england-a7845961.html>

4. Shelter (2017). Briefing: Local Housing Allowance freeze. https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/policy_library_folder/briefing_who_is_affected_by_the_lha_freeze

The impact of Covid-19

During the pandemic we have seen an increase in the number of people needing temporary accommodation. There has also been a higher prevalence of anxiety and mental health problems, meaning clients have needed more multi-agency wraparound support before we were able to place them into homes.

We have also seen new types of client being referred to us – for example, people who had lost their jobs and could no longer afford to live where they had been before. Many of these new clients had a different background and set of needs to clients we had typically worked with before (for example, no experience of offending) and our team therefore had to adapt the types of support offered.

Covid-19 has also led to “utility poverty” for a number of our existing clients who we had already housed – people were at home more due to the lockdown (including children), and therefore water, heating and lighting bills all went up, whilst income was either stagnant or going down. There was also an increase in the need for food banks – something reflected across the board on a national scale. A September 2020 report by The Trussell Trust found a 61% increase in the number of food parcels needed, and that around half of the people who used a food bank at the start of the pandemic had never used one before.¹ On the other hand, many clients also report that they have been cooking and eating at home more, leading to less reliance on expensive and unhealthy takeaways.

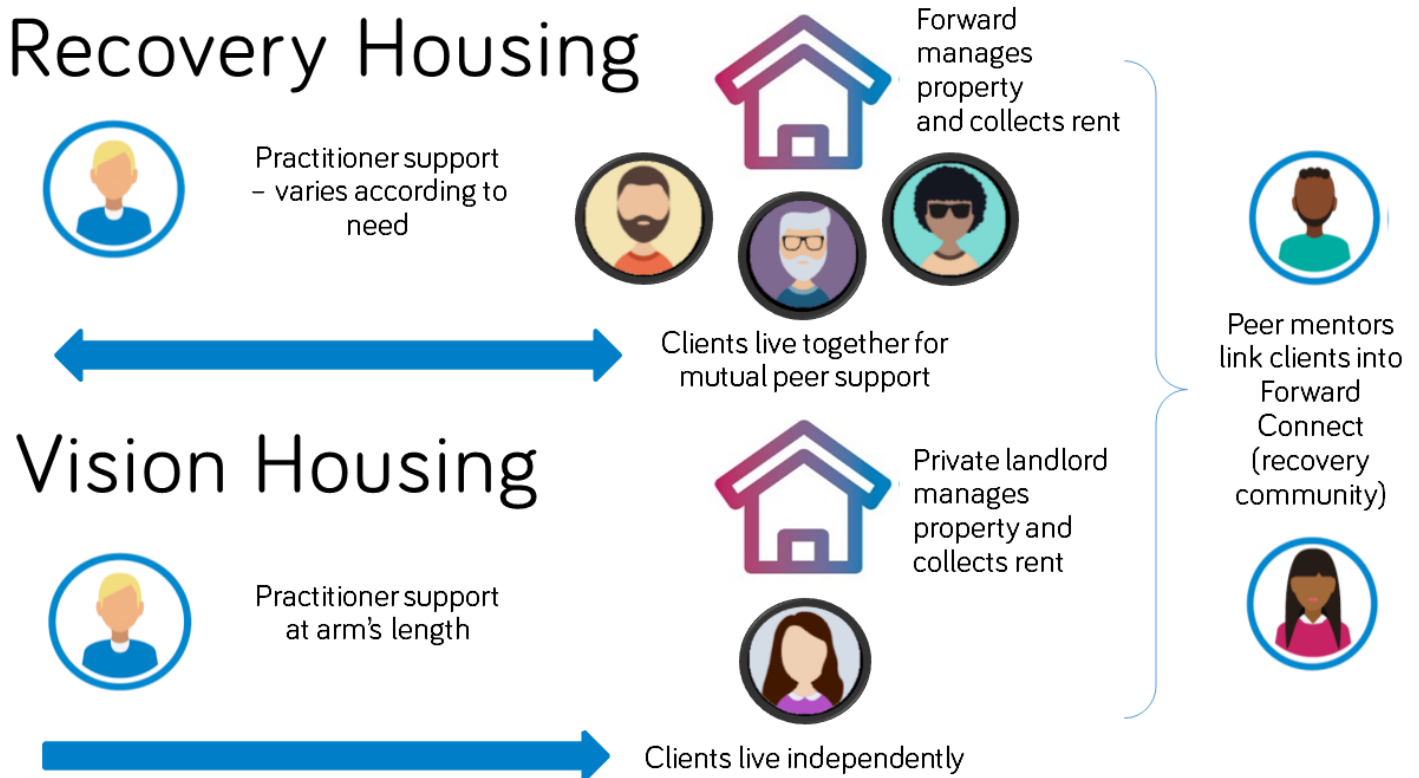


1. The Trussell Trust (2020). [“New report reveals how coronavirus has affected food bank use”](#).

Our approach

For many years, Forward has been helping clients who are leaving prisons to resettle in the community through partnership arrangements with hostel and 'supported housing' providers, who offer accommodation (mainly shared housing) to clients alongside professional care and support.

While continuing to refer clients to supported housing, over the last three years we have developed two alternative housing options for the people we support - 'Recovery Housing' and 'Vision Housing' - offering greater choice for people at different stages of recovery and rehabilitation. Common to both models are elements of peer support and mentoring that help individuals to sustain tenancies, informed by Forward's longstanding belief (as expressed in our Theory of Change) in the value of positive peer influence and networks of support to build motivation and sustain recovery.



Recovery housing

Who is it for?

Recovery Housing is for clients who are making good progress in their substance misuse recovery, who need more freedom than is offered in supported housing, but who want to continue to live in close contact with supportive peers. These clients have typically engaged in and made progress with other Forward programmes in prison and in the community (having previously endured years of entrenched addiction) and are now ready to take the next step in their recovery.

How does the model work in practice?

- ▶ Three or four people at a similar stage of recovery live together in the same house, supporting each other with the practicalities of living such as cooking, cleaning and gardening as well as motivating each other to maintain healthy lifestyles. The length of stay averages 12 months.
- ▶ The properties are let from private or social landlords, or sourced with partners and philanthropists; the properties are managed by Forward
- ▶ Forward Resettlement Workers and Peer Mentors (most with lived experience of recovery or addiction) regularly 'check in' with clients and support them if needed with accessing benefits and paying bills; they also signpost clients to other sources of support, provide advice about education, training and volunteering, and also counselling, mental health and emotional support.
- ▶ The service provided by Forward within the recovery housing model qualifies as 'intensive housing management' meaning clients are able to claim housing benefit to cover their rental costs, which includes services provided to ensure the sustainment of the tenancy or licence in addition to those a normal landlord may provide, making the model sustainable and not dependent on contract income or other funding.
- ▶ All residents are assigned an accredited peer mentor and linked into community sources of informal support – e.g. fellowship groups and our own Forward Connect recovery community (meeting online and face to face for mutual support through social activities and meetings).
- ▶ When people are ready to move on we support them in accessing our own private rented scheme (see next page) or with other options such as social housing, including assisting them with applications, viewings and interviews with landlords. Our team then supports them for a further 12 months to sustain their tenancy and take the next step in their recovery journey.

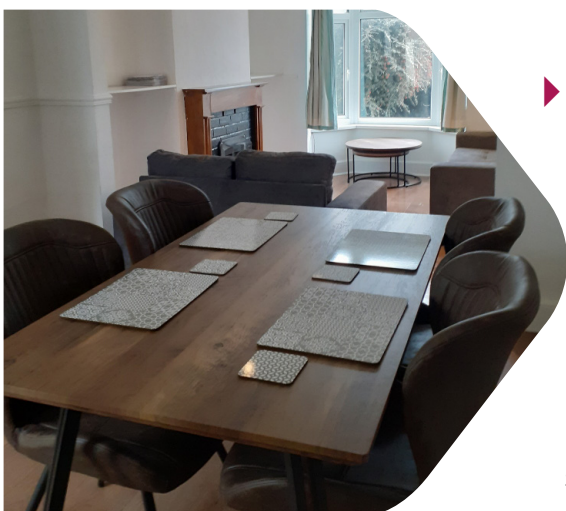


Where do they operate?



▶ Hull

Working in partnership with Goodwin Development Trust (a Hull-based charity that develops housing and support for disadvantaged communities), we opened our first Recovery House in Hull in July 2019. The house is primarily to support 'graduates' of The Bridges, our residential rehabilitation centre and treatment programme for prison leavers in Hull, and graduates of the ReNew Day Programme, part of the drug and alcohol recovery service that we run in Hull in partnership with Change, Grow Live. To date 5 clients have lived in the house as a vital next step in their recovery.



▶ East Kent

We opened our second recovery house in Ashford in Kent in December 2020. For many years we have delivered the drug and alcohol service in all 6 Kent prisons and also, from 2018, the community substance misuse service in East Kent. The house in Ashford (the first of many we plan to open in East Kent) will support those making progress through these services, for example graduates of our abstinence-based day programme in Dover, and will further strengthen the recovery community that we have created in the region.



Working in resettlement, no two days are the same. The team is small and we're always busy, but we are highly motivated to the best we can for our clients - many of whom are in recovery, homeless or ex-offenders, and really need a helping hand. To empower the client is the ultimate goal, from the initial assessment of needs, right through to property viewings, signings, and maintaining their tenancy. After we've helped them find a property, we support clients for a further 12 months to get them on the road to independent living. The work is hard, but when a particularly hard case has been housed and you see the joy in the client's eyes - when they take the keys and open the door for the first time and say 'thank you' - you feel energised and ready to go through the process all over again. To be that positive input in someone's life that helps them get back on track, in my opinion makes it all worth it."



Eric Walker, Forward Recovery and Resettlement Worker, London

Vision Housing

Who is it for?

Vision Housing is for clients (e.g. prison leavers) who are in stable recovery and ready to live independently. We also take referrals from partner organisations (e.g. homelessness agencies), probation and from local authorities to support vulnerable people through their housing options and rough sleeper teams, not all of whom have a history of addiction or offending.

How does it work?

- ▶ We conduct an assessment with clients who are referred to our service – for those meeting our criteria (e.g. in receipt of benefits or on low income, no active drug or alcohol misuse) we look to match them to a suitable property; for others we offer housing advice and refer them to partners (e.g. supported housing)
- ▶ To source properties, our team of Support Workers build and manage relationships with a network of private landlords, visiting and vetting properties to assure their quality. Clearly, many prospective landlords have concerns about letting properties to ex-offenders and people in recovery, fearing they are unreliable. We are able to reassure them by showing the many 'repeat buyers' within our network (landlords who have had reliable tenants who they are also helping to rebuild their lives), and by demonstrating our support and troubleshooting services.
- ▶ Acting as an intermediary between the two parties, our team also provides support for clients with everything from property viewings right through to guidance on how to sustain their tenancies; for clients eligible for Universal Credit we also ensure payments are received directly by landlords (when required we can support a client to set up a benefit claim pre release or on the day of release in order to access universal credit).
- ▶ Once clients start their tenancy, Forward offers up to 12 months of mentoring support (often a peer with lived experience of addiction or offending) including regular visits or 'check-ins' by phone or video call; we use a client-directed 'wellbeing tracker' to measure clients' progress in, for example, build social networks. Clients are also linked in with our 'Forward Connect' peer community and invited to attend events and meetings and peer-led activities.
- ▶ Funding for the end-to-end package of support costs is provided by local authority or other partners (who pay a fee as part of a Service Level Agreement) or charitable funders (e.g. Rayne Foundation and Taylor Family Foundation); charitable funds also enable us to offer 'move in' packs for clients including basic furniture, bedding, crockery and cooking equipment (we have supplied 75 of these since April 2020)



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"We at Champions are delighted to work with The Forward Trust as their care and dedication to their clients never stops to amaze, making it a smooth and easy rental."

(Champions Lettings)

Where does it operate?

Through our network of private landlords we provide access to accommodation across London and the South East (London, Surrey and Kent). In many of these areas we have Service Level Agreements with local authorities that provide fee-paying referrals.

We also work in partnership where possible, for example with the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner offering targeted support for Surrey residents leaving prison, and aiming to provide housing for 18 clients over a 12 month period. In addition we have piloted a project with Surrey NPS supporting up to 10 people between January and March into private rented accommodation.

Outcomes

Our model is based on the idea that, with the right level of practical and emotional support, those clients normally seen by landlords as a 'bad risk' can prove themselves as reliable tenants. The model is so far proving this theory correct – we currently have a 98% tenancy sustainment rate, a strong indicator of good outcomes for both landlords and tenants.

How we adapted to Covid-19

Responding to Covid-19 and lockdown presented our housing team and the people we support with significant challenges. When lockdown was first implemented, there was an increased risk of street homelessness (in particular for prison leavers) with people no longer able to 'sofa surf' with friends, which brought with it a health risk from exposure to the virus. In response, the government put emergency measures in place to find hotels for homeless people and also to enable people in temporary accommodation such as hostels to remain in situ while the pandemic lasted. While this provided effective short-term respite (in London, over 4,000 homeless people were accommodated in hotels, including prison leavers with only six Covid-related deaths compared to 86 in New York), long-term housing solutions were still needed and we offered our services to local authorities to support.

For our housing team, who source private rented sector accommodation for clients and provide a tenancy sustainment service, the greatest

challenge in responding to this demand was not being able to view potential properties in person due to social distancing rules. We quickly adapted our assessment and viewing processes, organising online viewings with landlords and providing pictures and videos for clients. Once in their tenancy, as with other parts of the organisation, we maintained remote support for clients seven days a week through telephone and video contact (providing smartphones and 'move-in packs' for those who needed them); our efforts were supported by volunteers.

Between March and December 2020, we supported 55 people into privately rented flats. We did this whilst continuing to support another 51 clients (housed pre-March) through the pandemic with tenancy sustainment and wellbeing support.





“ The Forward Trust have been instrumental in supporting our homeless clients into accessing appropriate housing and tenancy support, including people who face multiple barriers in trying to access accommodation. There is a never a flat refusal with The Forward Trust, instead they work on getting to know our clients, their support needs, their aspirations and what they could offer to help. They continually impress us with their joint working between different initiatives, organisations and schemes that help enrich the lives of those that they work with.”

(No First Night Out)

MORE THAN MY PAST

Outputs and outcomes

- ▶ **173 clients housed** through Vision and Recovery Housing models since April 2018
- ▶ **98% tenancy sustainment** for those Vision Housing clients (i.e. 98% of clients have remained in their accommodation for at least one year, with most remaining at the property and renewing/rolling over their tenancies)
- ▶ **A network of 25 private sector landlords** making available 3793 properties across London and the South East between March and December 2020 (many of our landlords have signed up to our [More Than My Past](#) campaign that tackles stigma and prejudice against ex-offenders and people in recovery)
- ▶ **2 recovery houses** with capacity to support up to 6 clients at any one time
- ▶ **9 per cent** improvement in tracker scores (self-assessment) for living skills, empowerment, motivation to work, impulsivity/problem solving, smoking, safe housing, physical health, mental health, drugs and alcohol, and social networks



Case Study

Maria* was referred to the housing service in April 2020 via Forward's prison substance misuse team. She had completed a long sentence and was missing her children. Maria was focussed on forging a relationship with her children in the community, as well as getting a job in retail. Social services had already confirmed she would be able to get access to her children on release, so we supported her with the practical steps to find a suitable place to live. We assisted Maria with an application to the local authority for housing, in partnership with the local probation service, and were thrilled when she was housed with her children on her release from prison. As well as this, we also provided a 'move-in' pack, and funding

for new mattresses for her children as they were finding the ones provided uncomfortable. Maria continues to be supported by the recovery team on a weekly basis and is really settled in the community. She continues to engage with her recovery meetings and is also there to support her children.

*not her real name



Case Study

I became homeless when my landlady retired and sold the house I'd lived in for four years. And because of the Covid-19 lockdown, I also lost my job. It was only a zero hour contract job in retail, but I loved the excuse to meet people and stay busy. Suddenly, I found myself jobless, with no money, no home and my mental health deteriorating. I was referred to The Forward Trust by Tower Hamlets Council, through the 'No First Night Out' (NFNO) scheme, and was appointed a Forward caseworker, Eric. I feel lucky to have had his support; he was there for me at all times, even if I called late on a Friday, and always had some calming words and advice to make me feel better when I was struggling.

With Forward's support, it took just eight days to find a place that is now my home. And it wasn't just a matter of putting a roof over my head, they helped me regain my self-esteem, my smile, and my mental health, too. I'm so grateful to the Resettlement Team at The Forward Trust for all they've done for me. I now look forward to the future.

- Asma, Forward Housing client



Case Study

Tim* was released from prison and due to move to an 'approved premises' in London. However, shortly before his release, Covid-19 changed everything. His approved premises was closed due to Covid and he was sent to one in another city over 100 miles away. This meant the logistics of him attending viewings for somewhere to stay more permanently was difficult, as his probation officer had to issue a travel warrant for him to travel to London each time he left his temporary accommodation. The Resettlement team helped secure viewings at short notice for when he was in London, found him a suitable property and supported him to move in quickly, when he had to bring all his belongings down from the approved premises with him. We

supported him with logistics for rent payments and we provided a 'move-in' pack to help get him started. We also linked him in with one of our volunteers, who does a weekly welfare check in with him. Once Tim settled into a property he was then able to get some work and is now in a really good place - so much so he would like to volunteer as a peer mentor with us.

*not his real name



Future plans

We have ambitious plans to further develop our housing provision, given the scalability and sustainability of our models and their proven impact; these include:

- ▶ To expand our Vision Housing service, working with both existing and new private sector landlords to increase the number of properties available, including in new geographic areas.
- ▶ To develop and expand upon our existing Service Level Agreements (SLA) with probation services, PCC's, local authorities and other charities.
- ▶ To partner with more drug and alcohol residential treatment services (rehab) to offer appropriate move-on accommodation in the private rented sector for those who are ready, focussed initially in Surrey, where we have a good database of existing landlords.
- ▶ To start up a stakeholder forum with our partner Homeless Link on how we can break down barriers to people being housed in the private rented sector and improve outcomes for all involved.
- ▶ To expand our tenancy training service, including the provision of online learning so we can run tenancy sustainment courses for clients.
- ▶ We are also excited to be working with Riverside Housing, a national housing association with a wealth of experience in assisting people to find and sustain meaningful tenancies, supporting some of their projects with specialist substance misuse workers.

Find out more: To find out more about our programmes and research, contact Carwyn Gravell at: carwyn.gravell@forwardtrust.org.uk.