

Concurrent 3: Australian Housing First experiences

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Axial Housing Pilot in the ACT



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Axial Housing – a Housing First Pilot in the ACT

- Launched in Nov 2019
- Partnership between Marymead CatholicCare, the ACT Government and Housing ACT
- Response to the ACT Government CSD Cohort Study which found that housing and homelessness services were failing 10% of clients who had high and complex needs, who could not navigate the sector, or were excluded from services due to the complexity of their needs, behaviours or inability to live in shared housing.
- Targeted people who had been sleeping rough for **2 - 30 + years** and who without support could not access or sustain safe housing.
- Included people with dogs, and transgender people (unmet need in the ACT system).
- Strict criteria
- Used the VI-SPDAT to screen for vulnerability, and SPDAT to track goals and achievements.
- With COVID, the numbers increased from 20 people to 36 people over 12 months.



WHAT DID WE DO?

- MCCG - Restructured to release 1 FTE from our existing homelessness services to pilot Housing First model with 20 people.
- ACT Govt - After 12 months funded an additional 1 FTE role to meet the additional 16 clients due to COVID.
- Case loads were 1 FTE to support 14-18 people at any time.
- Housing ACT - Head leased properties to MCCG. Took on risk regarding rent, arrears, damage, squatters and hoarding – which all occurred. Risks we were comfortable with as an established provider.
- Axial - Referrals from any door - including SELF REFERRALS.
- MCCG - Secured funding for a Community Mental Health Worker to build rapport with people sleeping rough and assist the providers to open doors to mental health services (a sector resource, not an Axial resource).
- Axial - Set up 36 houses with no funding for these initiatives.





90%



5%



5%



15%



10%

Accompanying
Dogs

10% Cultural / Linguistic Background

100% Presented Complex Mental Illness

Majority With Early Childhood Trauma History

Average Age 52 Years

Oldest Participant 69 Years

Youngest Participant 30 Years



Was what we did any different?

Axial followed the Housing First Principles:

- The higher the vulnerability and complexity, the more eligible the person for the support.
- Clients determined where they wanted to live (region/suburb), what housing they would like (high/low density, ground floor, garden unit, older persons).
- Focused on selecting housing that met their needs – as a determinant of a successful outcome. Not just accepting what was offered knowing options were limited.
- Continually knocked back unsuitable properties knowing acceptance would lead to a housing breakdown and return to homelessness.

- Worked with Housing ACT to release more options that met the clients' needs (culture change).
- Provided high levels of support, sometimes talking to clients 5 times a day. Staff were more tolerant of offensive anti social behaviour, ATOD use, squatters.
- The support and property teams were within the one organisation, working together to and intervening early to support clients to remain housed. The focus was on the sustained housing outcome. This could not have been achieved with a partner with a different risk appetite.
- **Axial is not about the housing, wrap around supports were key. Without both within 6 months the majority of participants would have returned to homelessness.**

Ernst & Young Evaluation

THE EVALUATION INVOLVED TWO INTERRELATED COMPONENTS:

- **1. ECONOMIC EVALUATION:** COST-EFFECTIVENESS
- **2. OUTCOME EVALUATION:** ANALYSIS OF THE INTENDED INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL AND COMMUNITY-LEVEL OUTCOMES.



What did the EY Outcome Evaluation find:

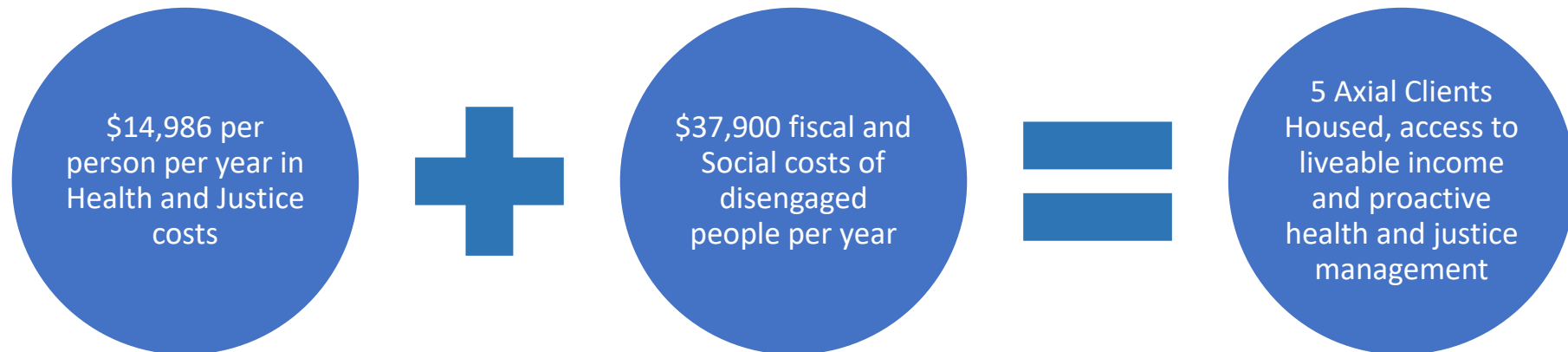
- Axial is working with the right people.
- Clients labelled the program as lifesaving.
- Axial was not typical of a Housing First Model due to the integration of support and tenancy/property management within one organisation. EY found this facilitated a flexible, agile and client centred program delivery model.
- The provision of wrap around supports was key to the success and sustained housing.
- The experience of the established homelessness provider contributed to their risk tolerance in housing and supporting people who had not succeeded in previous tenancies.
- The human-centred approach was instrumental in developing trusted relationships with people sleeping rough.
- Release of housing stock and appropriate allocation were key to success.
- Collaboration between Housing ACT and MCCG was essential - despite supply challenges.
- Access to the broader suite of support programs and relationships with other providers filled critical support gap for people.
- Staff to client ratios needed to be reviewed.



What did the EY Economic Evaluation find:

- More cost efficient than most other Housing First models nationally;
- For every \$1 invested in the Axial program, at least \$1.54 in avoided crisis support costs are returned (reduction in emergency, acute health, justice etc).
- These benefits are limited only to clients who had spent two years in the program and did not consider future costs and benefits. It could be expected that as benefits increase relative to costs over time, the BCR would be higher, and the Axial program would demonstrate even greater value for money.
- The Axial program compares favorably on a cost per client basis at \$12,828 (2022).

5 people can be housed through Axial at the cost of supporting one person through the current the health and justice system without a housing outcome.



Key learnings

Partnership with Housing is key to success:

- Need leadership within Housing and a clear priority for release of properties in line with the Principles of Housing First.

We need more housing options:

- Supply remains a challenge.
- Its not just about housing – the wrap around supports are essential.

We need to take more risks:

- Risk needs to be shared between Government and the NFP sector.

We need to work differently:

- Resources need to be redistributed and programs remodeled to be responsive to need.
- Existing models are old and no longer fit for purpose.
- Complexity is not some new wave sweeping the homelessness sector.
- Staff selection to work in these roles is key.
- We argue as a sector housing is a Human Right, then exclude people from our services. Are we, and our old models the problem?
- There remains a cohort of people whom this Housing First pilot did not work for. How do we help them?



Axial Housing Client Testimonial

“A police officer came to check on me and contacted Axial. Then a lady came and left a business card where I was sleeping, saying feel free to contact us.

I didn't... and then she left another business card another night and asked me to give them a call, so I did...

I didn't think it would do any harm”

<https://youtu.be/vIzjmWpbX-w>

THANK YOU



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