How CONNECT worked with Positive Steps to help service users in unsuitable housing

# Summary and key learning

CONNECT have worked with the housing charity Positive Steps to successfully find suitable housing for people seen by the EIP team or on discharge from mental health acute wards.

* Working collaboratively with a third sector organisation gives an alternative option to suitable housing.
* Positive Steps were able to find suitable housing for the three service users within a short timeframe.
* CONNECT and Positive Steps have been able to support service users in unsuitable housing.

# Situation

Scottish Government’s 2018 report ‘[Housing and Homelessness in Scotland](https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2018/06/health-homelessness-scotland/documents/00536909-pdf/00536909-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00536909.pdf)’ found that around 30% of people who had been assessed as homeless had evidence of a mental health problem at some point during the study period, which is higher than the comparator group composed of people from the most and least deprived areas of Scotland who had not experienced homelessness.

CONNECT is an Early Intervention in Psychosis (EIP) team which serves the population of Dundee and is a pathfinder site as part of the national EIP programme. The team opened to referrals for people experiencing a First Episode Psychosis (FEP) in August 2022, and currently has a caseload of 25 service users.

EIP services provide a whole-person approach, with an emphasis on social and psychological recovery alongside medical recovery and stabilisation of psychotic symptoms. A core component of EIP services is engagement and assertive outreach. The lack of suitable housing can hamper the service’s ability to provide this and therefore maintain therapeutic engagement with the service.

The symptoms of psychosis can put a strain on existing relationships and housing situations, for example turning night into day and/or cannabis use. It is extremely challenging for both service users and EIP services to focus on recovery without shelter and a safe space to live, for example psychological therapy may be paused whilst a person’s basic needs are not met.

The EIP team have so far worked with the existing system by supporting a service user with administration, but they had still not been housed after waiting 6 months for a suitable housing solution. As such the team explored other avenues for this.

# Approach

[Positive Steps](https://positivesteps.org.uk/) are a charitable organisation that recognise the multiple barriers that people can face when trying to sustain independent living, including: mental health, learning disabilities, substance use, offending behaviours, homelessness and poverty. They provide tenants fully furnished temporary accommodation to make the transition into their home easier. Positive Step own and lease from social landlords approximately 80 flats, which they offer to people referred to the service who would benefit from supported living.

Tenancies are available for as long as the tenants need to gain the living skills required to successfully maintain a tenancy and they are then supported to move on to permanent mainstream accommodation when they are fully independent. There is no time limit to the support offered. Housing support is provided to make the transition into a new tenancy as sustainable and successful as possible, by building up good household routines and encouraging good self-esteem and confidence.

CONNECT learned of Positive Steps through their third sector network. Positive Steps Housing Support Service has not previously had a close working relationship with an NHS service. Positive Steps report that their experience of working with CONNECT is positive, with CONNECT’s responsive and frequent communication reflecting well on the EIP service.

Positive Steps have so far provided appropriate accommodation for 3 people being seen by CONNECT. This has included a person at risk of homelessness, where their accommodation was detrimental to their recovery, as well as someone who had been asked to leave the family home and who was living in homeless accommodation at point of referral. Positive Steps are able to make direct contact with CONNECT if they have concerns about service users and CONNECT contact Positive Steps if they are trying to locate service users who haven’t attended appointments.

Any member of the CONNECT team can refer a service user to the service. Contact with Positive Steps has been made via the peer support worker, who is frequently the original referrer, however key workers support the service user throughout and oversee the process.

# Impact

“It’s been positive, helpful and understanding, it was fast with good communication.  I would have been too anxious without support from [CONNECT’s healthcare support worker] at the first meeting… I would still be waiting for a council house and have no space which was mine.”

CONNECT service user

Working with Positive Steps has allowed CONNECT to quickly find suitable accommodation for service users following periods of homelessness. It has also allowed the EIP service to reduce the amount of administrative work they undertake when supporting service users looking for housing. Getting appointments, completing applications, and liaising with other departments all take time, during which service users can feel disheartened at the prospect of long waiting lists and the impact unsuitable housing can have on recovery and their ability to meet basic needs.

"Following psychosis having somewhere safe to live is paramount to promoting good recovery. This is a basic human need. Positive Steps has been crucial in supporting some people's recovery journey, and both services have worked really well together by maintaining ongoing dialogue."

CONNECT team lead

The first service user referred to Positive Steps had experienced 6 months of homelessness before referral and were housed by Positive Steps within two months of the referral. All 3 service users were housed within two to eight weeks. Feedback from service users is positive: they have appreciated being housed in more suitable accommodation, alongside good communication and positivity from Positive Steps side. They stated that the combined support of Positive Steps and CONNECT has reduced their anxiety and helped to prevent them becoming more unwell. One former CONNECT service user who was discharged is still in accommodation provided by Positive Steps and receiving ongoing support, ensuring that they can benefit from stability in housing after transitioning out of the service.

“You supported me through psychosis recovery, homelessness and getting a flat. It was the worst time of my life and I am thankful for the support.”

Former CONNECT service user

# Next steps

CONNECT are looking forward to further developing their work with Positive Steps.

* Positive Steps also offer a crisis response outreach service whom the EIP team have previously worked with and will continue to facilitate joint working where appropriate.
* CONNECT are looking to share information about the EIP service and provide training to Positive Steps to help them identify psychosis. The staff at Positive Steps could be in a prime position to spot people who may benefit from a referral to the EIP team. The EIP team is keen for their Positive Steps contacts to feel empowered and comfortable in proactively flagging potential FEP cases to aid early identification.
* Where service users are on an inpatient ward, the EIP service is looking to work with Positive Steps as early in the referral process as possible to facilitate early discharge from hospital.