

# Learnings from the Support For Tenancy And Recovery Targets Project (START): Housing and Support for Mental Health Service Users (MHSU).

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## Introduction

The prevalence of mental health difficulties among the homeless population has been extensively documented. Mental Health Service Users (MHSU) often encounter various barriers such as stigma, discrimination, lack of support, complex application processes, and inadequate services or support. Ensuring MHSUs have access to housing and support to live independently is a crucial aspect of their recovery, as recognised in Irish and international policy and research. The basic concept that informs this is that clinical support alone is insufficient to help sustain tenancies and that a separate and distinct form of housing support is required. Mobile support workers assist in the transition and sustainment of mainstream housing for MHSU. This type of model is usually referred to as 'floating support'. There are several housing models of this type in Ireland including Supporting Tenancy And Recovery Targets (START). The START model was developed as an interagency housing and support model between local authorities, mental health services and approved housing bodies to provide and/or sustain secure tenancies with support for MHSU with identified housing needs.

## Method

In 2022 an evaluation of the START model was undertaken by a research team at SETU. The evaluation implemented a cross-sectional mixed methods case study design:

- Online questionnaires (n=26) with Stakeholders (Mental Health Services, Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies) involved in the START Project (n=26).
- Postal questionnaires (n=23) with service users.
- Individual semi-structured telephone interviews (n=9) with service users.

## Results

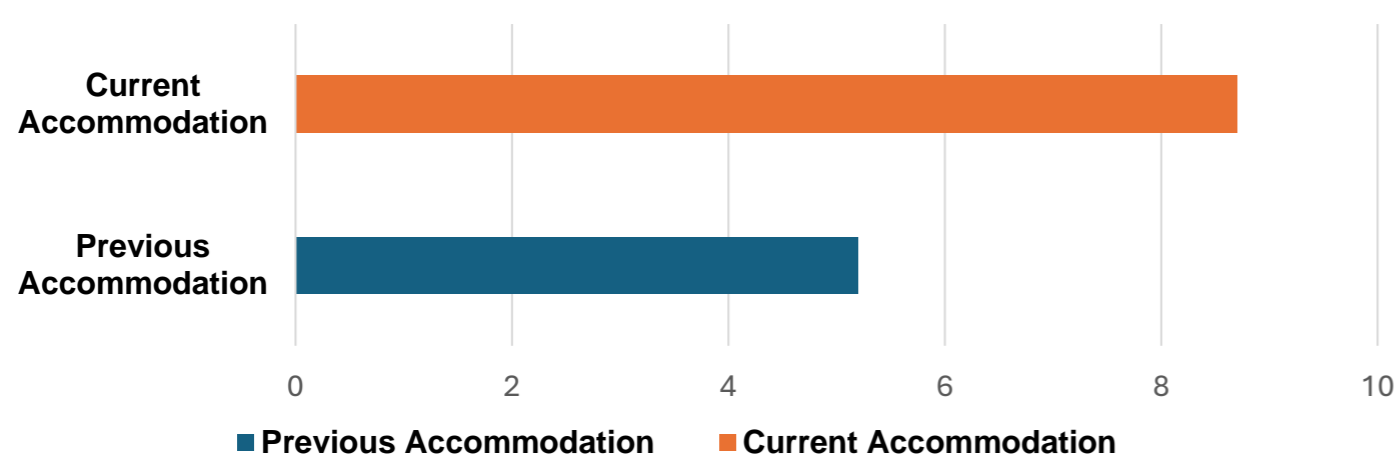
### Stakeholder results:

The START model facilitated collaboration between stakeholders fostering an effective working approach with a shared "willingness from all partner agencies to make the START programme work" with a "shared vision" and "commitment" to secure, maintain, and sustain tenancies for participants. Challenges included limited housing stock and insufficient training for stakeholders.

### Service user results:

Conveyed predominantly positive views about their current housing. They emphasised feeling safe and secure, and valued amenities such as having their own space and a back garden for pets. Proximity to town and positive interactions with key workers and landlords also contributed to their overall satisfaction with their housing.

Satisfaction Comparison: Previous vs. Current Accommodation



## Results

### Overall Views of the START Programme:

Service users unanimously praised the START Programme, describing it as life-changing and exceeding expectations.

"...There is not one thing I could fault from beginning to end (Service User 2); I love it here, wouldn't change it for the world" (Service User 4).

### Transformative Effects of the START Programme:

Participants reported significant improvements in mental health, confidence, and quality of life.

"I can't say enough good things about [START]. Everyone [involved in START] was great and helped me... it has changed my life and has been a great help. I just love it...the help I got and the information and the accommodation that I got connected with. The project (Support) worker was amazing and helped me so much. I couldn't have asked for anymore help" (Service User 6).

### The Role of the Housing Support Worker:

Housing Support Workers (HSW) were hailed as instrumental in facilitating successful transitions to independent living.

"[HSW] helped me to get my confidence back... they go above and beyond because they want to see you succeed." (Service User 2)

## Conclusion & Recommendations

The evaluation of the START model highlights the importance of tailored housing and support models such as the START model in addressing the housing needs of MHSU, preventing homelessness, supporting recovery, and increasing independence and quality of life through providing secure tenancies and comprehensive support. Key findings indicate that the model has significantly benefited both service providers and users, leading to improved housing stability, reduced admissions to acute services, and enhanced community integration.

To enhance the START model recommendations include:

- Securing ongoing funding,
- Maintaining support structures like HSW role.
- Conducting further research on long-term experiences of MHSU once housed and their inclusion and participation in their community.

## Aim of Upcoming Research

Despite the evaluation's positive findings, its cross-sectional design provided only a limited understanding of the long-term experiences of MHSU once housed. Research currently underway employs a longitudinal qualitative participatory design to explore the lived experiences of START participants. Specifically, it seeks to investigate the value of the START model as a response to preventing and/or responding to long-term housing and homelessness needs experienced by MHSU. It also aims to explore how the relational needs of participants, specifically, their inclusion and participation in their local community are experienced, supported and sustained.

