



Sophia

providing homes • supporting people

Trauma Informed Practice

Adapting Housing First



Introduction



Niamh Cullen
Head of Services



Emma Mannion
Area Manager

Over 20 years experience in homeless services across Ireland

Sophia's Vision

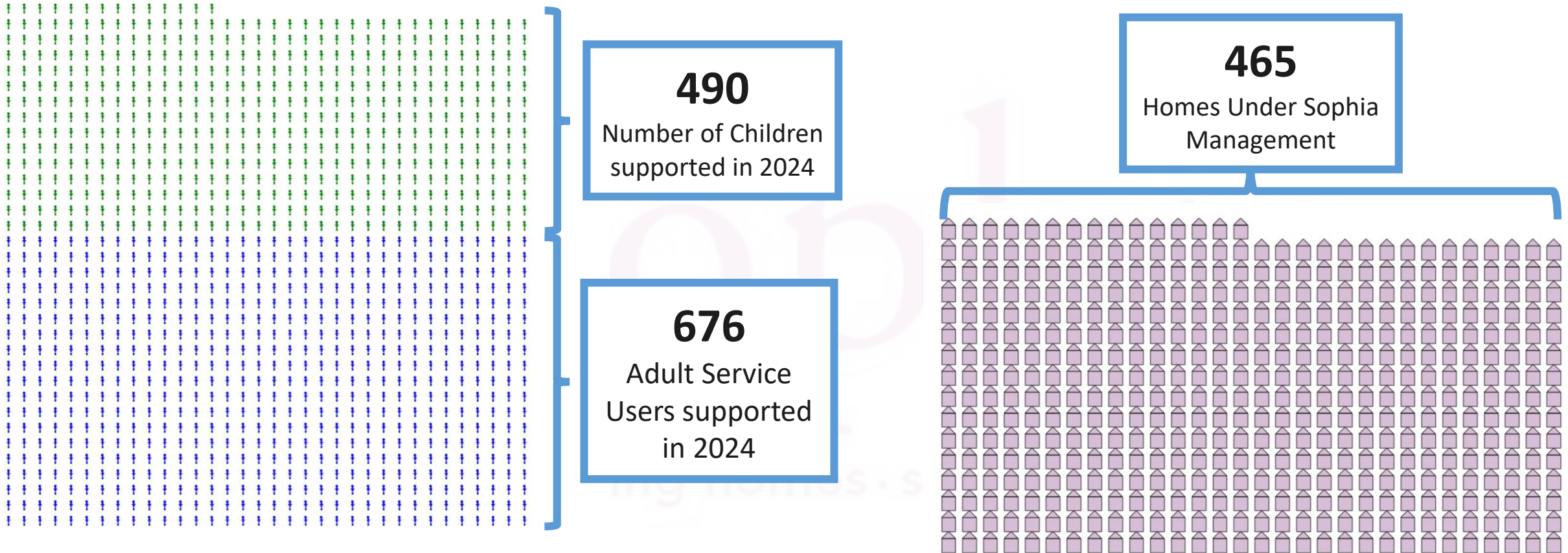


Our vision is to support **marginalized people** to **realize their potential** and **fulfil their ambition.**

Sophia pursues its vision through projects that enable people to make **positive differences** in their lives. Every project aims to be innovative and ensure services users feel **safe and secure.**



Overview: 1166 People Supported in 2024



Sophia support men, women and children who are homeless, to provide housing and support in relation to mental health, addiction, domestic violence and child protection.

As of January 2025, there were **15,286** homeless people in Ireland



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Adapting Housing First



Explore how Sophia effectively adapted and implemented the **Housing First** model within our services in Ireland

Agenda:

- 🏠 **Background** of Sophia's approach
- 🏠 What is **Housing First**?
- 🏠 Discuss **challenges** and adaptation strategies
- 🏠 **Erasmus+** programme on Adapting Housing First

Introduction

Background:

- 🏠 Sophia has from its foundation been exclusively focused on providing homes and visiting supports as the solution to homelessness which could be further developed and adapted.
- 🏠 Sophia has learnt from its own experience that when the model is adapted, that housing outcomes can also be delivered for people who have experienced Long-Term Homelessness and who also have multiple support needs.
- 🏠 Sophia has also invested in training with Dr Sam Tsemberis (Lead International Expert on Housing First)



What is Housing First?

An evidence-based model that:

- Provides **permanent housing** without preconditions



- Prioritises choice, **harm reduction**, and wraparound supports

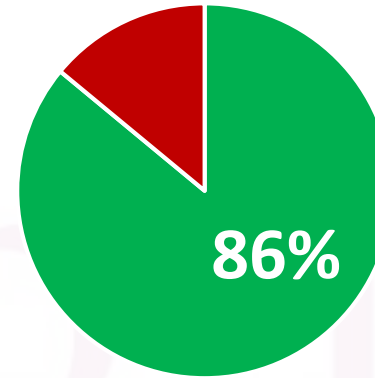
- **Key principle: Housing is a human right**, not a reward for treatment compliance



Why Housing First Works

Evidence from Ireland and Abroad:

 86% **housing retention** in Irish pilots



 **Reduced A&E visits**, Garda contact, emergency shelter use

 Improved **quality of life** and mental health



Quality Of Life

What are some of the challenges in Ireland?

 **Housing Supply Crisis**

 **Rural vs Urban Disparities**

 **Limited Mental Health and Addiction Services**

 **Funding inconsistencies across local authorities**



Core Principles to Maintain

 **Housing as a right**



 **No preconditions for access**

 **Harm reduction over abstinence mandates**



 **Voluntary engagement with services**

 **Integration into the community**



Adaptions to the Housing First Model

Housing First is **highly successful in addressing homelessness** and has been a model that has been **replicated in many countries**. There has also been **huge research devoted** to the programme.

However, where the research lacks focus is in relation to the fidelity of the programme when **trying to implement Housing First at a local level**. There are different factors that need to be considered in order to make it successful outside of the US.

1. Using **Single Sites** to provide homes as opposed to Scattered Sites.
2. Providing **homes with visiting support** to families and couples
3. The providers of support services and the role of the landlord being **the one organisation** as opposed to being separated out

Benefits of Adapting the Model

1. Having single sites **reduces isolation** and creates a **sense of community**
2. Critical incidents can be responded to **immediately with staff on site** to manage them, including overdoses that can be responded to immediately
3. Our residents can be supported to **manage their front door**
4. **Tenancy sustainment** rates were at 88% in 2024
5. It's important to develop different housing options to cover varying support needs. **One size doesn't fit all!**

Erasmus+ Adapting Housing First

Sophia partnered with other NGOs from across Europe: Y Foundation, Finland, Housing First Berlin, Arrels Barcelona.

This purpose of this project is to research **how housing first has been adapted across Europe to overcome these barriers** and what we can learn from these adaptations to overcome the barriers.



The Objectives of the Project

1. Research **how Housing First has been adapted** in Europe
2. Research staff **training needs** in these innovations
3. Hold a **training seminar** and workshops on innovations in Housing First
4. Hold training webinars where **best practices** are shared.
5. Target the training needs of **Peer Support Workers**
6. **Publish findings** in a research paper
7. Publish **training guidelines** for staff
8. Publish a **policy brief**



ADAPTING HOUSING FIRST
Adapting Housing First - Innovating Housing Staff

Adapting the Model...

In 2024, SMES Europa completed a research programme known as “**Persons First**” which was done in association with the University of Leuven.

The research recommended that emergency accommodation services need to move away from large scale hostels and provide **smaller services with private spaces.**

Sophia opened a service like this in December 2024: where each person has their own en suite room and the service also has 5 self contained apartments.

A further adaption and a development to use the resources we have to make a more **person made response**

Key Takeaways

1: Housing First works in Ireland

2: Needs ongoing adaptation

3: Balance model fidelity with flexibility

A Housing First Manual for Ireland

Sam Tsemberis, PhD
Pathways Housing First Institute



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Questions and discussion



www.adaptinghousingfirst.eu



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Thank you!

