

Theresa May and Andy Street visit Walsall project providing Housing First to homeless people



Former Prime Minister Theresa May joined West Midlands Mayor Andy Street this week as they visited a programme which helps tackle homelessness in Walsall.

The Housing First programme run by housing and social care provider GreenSquareAccord, provides people who have experienced homelessness, chronic health and social care needs, a stable home and ongoing support to help them rebuild their lives. Accommodation is provided by GreenSquareAccord and a number of other social landlords including whg in a partnership approach.

Theresa May and Andy Street met with some Housing First service users to learn about their personal stories and the difference the programme has made to their lives.

During the visit Mrs May spoke with 28-year-old David Armishaw, who found himself homeless after losing his shared accommodation in 2020 and sleeping in Walsall town centre. David, who now lives in Pelsall, said that without the project he would be either dead or on drugs. He added: "Housing First helped me turn my life around so much."

Mrs May said: "So often in the past the assumption has been you just give someone temporary accommodation and they'll sort themselves out.

"But actually, giving them permanent accommodation and then working with them to sort out what may be a complex set of issues is the way that delivers.

"From what I've seen today this can turn people's lives around completely. It's a benefit to them individually and also to society as a whole."

Council Outreach Officers work closely with GreenSquareAccord to identify people who may be in need of support. Once a person is identified and they are happy to receive help, they are given a tenancy, and GreenSquareAccord provides them with the support they want. The service not only offers people a home, but it also provides support

which is flexible to the needs of the individual, links to mental health and substance abuse support services where required, as well helping people register with a GP.Â

Ruth Cooke, Chief Executive Officer of GreenSquareAccord said: â  Building better lives is at the heart of what we do and we are delighted to see the positive impacts our Housing First programme is bringing to both the people we support and the local community.

â  Ending homelessness is not just about providing accommodation. We are incredibly proud to offer this life changing approach providing permanent homes and tailored support to enable people to rebuild their lives.â  

Theresa May and Andy Street discussed the project with Paul Wright, Operations Director for Specialist Support at GreenSquareAccord, and Fay Shanahan whg  s Corporate Director of Operations.

Paul Wright Operations Director for Specialist Support at GreenSquareAccord said: â  Our Housing First approach is making a real difference to people  s lives. There are many factors that can lead to an individual becoming homeless. Providing permanent accommodation offers a foundation of stability, which coupled with ongoing personalised support is enabling our service users to maintain their tenancies and make positive choices in their lives.â  

â  The visit from Theresa May and Andy Street was a tremendous boost and is testimony to the success of our service in Walsall. and I am delighted that Mrs May has offered to discuss future funding for Housing First with Eddie Hughes MP, the Minister for Housing.â  

whg  s Corporate Director of Operations Fay Shanahan said: â  Through our work with our partners we are making huge strides in addressing the rough sleeping crisis in the Midlands. However, the challenges of homelessness have not gone away and in fact our focus now needs to be on the problems of hidden homelessness.Â It would make a huge difference to Housing First if the Government could commit to funding this initiative beyond the current deadline of 2023.

â  The Housing First project is such a vital initiative and I was delighted that Mrs May was able to see first-hand the real impact projects like this are making to not just get people off the streets but also to transform lives so dramatically.â  

The West Midlands Housing First pilot is a Â£9.6m initiative launched in 2017 that is overseen by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Homelessness Taskforce. The project aims to house over 600 rough sleepers across the West Midlands. Since it started more than 400 people have been supported across the region with the Walsall scheme - run by Walsall council along with GreenSquareAccord and whg - being the most successful to date providing housing and ongoing support to 76 individuals.

Andy Street added: "All seven councils in the West Midlands have taken part in the scheme, but Walsall in particular has really embraced it â   the result being a staggering drop in rough sleeping in the borough.â  
