



Faculty of Business and Law<sup>1</sup>

# Interim Year Two Report

Freedom 2 Work: pilot project evaluation

De Montfort University, Leicester  
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# Executive Summary

*Freedom 2 Work (F2W) is a simple, person-led response to anyone facing homelessness. F2W enables the person to be part of the solution, to contribute and build resilience. By drawing on clients' talents and encouraging self-reliance, F2W offers a protected way back into the world of work.<sup>2</sup>*

The project commenced in 2016 and this is the second year interim evaluation report to record progress against objectives so far.

The key ingredients of F2W, as in year one, are:

- Shared property
- Back to work advice and workshops with local employers
- Building up rent credit scheme
- Intensive support for wellbeing and life skills

## Accommodation

- 54 people have been on the scheme in total in the shared units of accommodation
- 14 people were identified as current F2W clients at end June (this lower number is accounted for because a handful of new clients were in the process of being registered onto F2W and into their properties.
- 4 are in the process of being prepared for a new tenancy
- 31 people have 'graduated' from the F2W project into different types of accommodation (some move-on), employment and education outcomes
- 2 had been evicted for non-compliance with tenancy agreement
- 3 had ceased to be on the scheme for not engaging with F2W conditions
- 25 were currently being case worked at end June 2018 (this is because some F2W type support is given to those in 'move-on' units – this will be further delineated for year three).
- There are 22 property units; two may be swapped with move-on units to enable all F2W to be in closer proximity to each other and the team. Units are rooms in shared houses, or bedsits in shared spaces above shops.
- The properties in the core F2W project are owned by two key sets of landlords: (1) Walton Charity and (2) A couple who own a range of 'above the shop' flats and shared residences who 'buy-in' to the aims of F2W and who see the value of having properties managed for them.
- The key element in allowing 'freedom to' is the control over the management of the property and the rent account by F2W staff at Elmbridge – this is vital to the flexibility at the heart of the project.

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<sup>2</sup>Reflective 'book jacket' description of the F2W project provided by the Chief Executive Officer of Elmbridge Rent Start and the lead driver of the project.

## **Employment/ Training**

Across the client group at the end of the year two period, from the Making it Count data over 60% of caseloads have achieved paid work; many others were involved in voluntary work, education or training.

## **Building up Rent Credit**

Looking at the total cohort over the two years – 54 clients – 39 made solid commitments to pay varying sums (5 of these are about to make first payment against commitment) with a total £5012 saved by clients to date.

## **Wellbeing and Support Needs**

The 'Outcomes star' model started to be used in year two. There are only two points of data currently, but this set will grow in year three. Mirroring the journey measure in year one on wellbeing, the vast majority of clients, in very many areas of their life, reported improved wellbeing.

## **Conclusions and Learning Points**

- The 'Freedom' in the F2W is still very important in year two, for clients to feel 'free' of wider constraints around accommodation and wellbeing - to be able to go into the world of work; but it is also for F2W service providers to feel 'free' to be responsive and flexible to meet individual clients' needs. However, this 'freedom' has been managed and constrained more in year two, with a better understanding of the 'conditions' of F2W and the need for participants to comply with those or move from the project (sometimes into other ERS schemes).
- During year two there was a stronger focus on the adherence of clients to the commitment to save for a future rent deposit; this was more strongly embedded from halfway through the second year. The benefits of the commitment to save were felt by the F2W team to go beyond the financial, and to reflect the wider commitment to the values of F2W resulting in higher levels of engagement by clients.
- A key learning point from year two centred around client engagement with the support on offer, and how this drives outcomes. For some clients, a lack of engagement was a problem – a willingness to progress with F2W needs to be a starting point. To this end, the project team decided to implement 1, 3 and 6-month tenancy reviews that would look into client's progress, efforts to save and overall engagement to review how appropriate F2W is for them.
- The cohort and property stock size (22 property units and approx. 20 clients) appears to be optimum for the proper delivery of integral F2W interventions. At the end of year two there were only 14 F2W case-worked clients, but this has been explained due to 11 transitions from the scheme in the last quarter of the year alone. An optimum of approximately 20 clients is still the most appropriate.
- The wide-ranging, multiple needs and the precarious lives of clients prior to coming to the F2W project, means that intensive support is needed for some. However, these are not the depth of need that require a supported living scheme, but a more flexible approach taken by F2W which reflects the knowledge of F2W colleagues of their area and the people living in it.
- Clients continue to report that there was value in being listened to and in the personal and trusting professional relationships built between clients and the F2W team. Being 'listened to' was a theme returned to time and again in the survey and in face-to-face meetings.

- Proximity of the housing stock in the F2W was noted as important to the support aims of the project in year two. It is necessary for clients to be in relatively close reach of the support team for flexible and regular support.
- Shared living, again whilst not immediately aspirational, continued to bring additional value to some clients who felt that living with others had built their confidence and produced strong friendships. It was also noted in year two that peer support from F2W 'graduates' through volunteering roles, or just through informal advice to those going to 'move-on' accommodation in their area, was very important for continued support and wellbeing. A genuine 'cohort' identity was observed in some conversations between the evaluation team and the clients.
- The evaluation team observed that the F2W cohort – certainly a core group of participants and graduates – see their peers as 'family' they continue to provide informal advice, they stay involved through volunteering with the F2W team – there is a genuine wish to 'pay back' to a scheme that helped them when they needed it most.
- During year two, there was more considered use of additional property in Elmbridge Rentstart (ERS) management, as 'move on' – this gave clients the freedom to feel continued support and it gave the F2W team the freedom to bring clients involvement in F2W to an end – as they graduated on, but still with support where it was needed.

### **Recommendations for Year Three**

1. Work done on record keeping towards the end of year two will help the F2W keep a very clear track of the fundamental conditions for being part of the scheme (1) commitment to save for future rent deposit, (2) engagement with the support offered by the F2W scheme and (3) commitment to get back into work, training or education. The evaluation team will work with F2W colleagues on compiling a destination folder, which collates the data for ongoing analysis.
2. The stronger focus on adhering to the commitment to save should continue in year three. It is recommended that ideas around reminder and congratulations communications messages to clients are introduced in year three and that the savings data is recorded in the final destination spreadsheet on a client by client basis.
3. We are now in a position to define the support model, in terms of what F2W offers clients, the internal structures (resources) and external relationships that facilitate this. This in turn will feed into structured capturing and analysis of the costs required to fund those resources and outgoings required to sustain those external relationships. This will give us a clearer picture of the ongoing running costs of the F2W model.
4. It was decided to follow the optimum size of (22 properties) F2W all the way through the three years of the project, rather than to try and scale up within project. It is recommended that in year three where additional properties may be available for Elmbridge Rentstart that these are utilised as move on properties or for the wider non F2W client base. There will continue to be pressures of scalability and the final report conclusions will reflect on some of the issues related to that.
5. The use of the industry standard 'outcomes star' to measure self-reflection of need and growth of confidence in certain skills was used more in the latter part of year two and meant a limited number of data points for the year two evaluation. It is recommended that the F2W team continues to use the outcomes start tool in year three and this will provide better consistency for the end of project report in July 2019.
6. The central tenet of 'listening' and being flexible for clients should continue in year three. It is the embodiment of the 'freedom to' in the project and vital to the support element. It is recommended for year three that all touch points of support are recorded in the destination

spreadsheet for all clients for year three, in order to provide data on the costs related to the project.

7. The evaluation team notes the intention to 'swap out' two of the units in the wider ERS management portfolio for two others closer to the F2W team for year three of the project.
8. It is recommended that during year three, and following findings in the surveys with stakeholders and particularly with landlords in year two, it is recommended that F2W promote its role (especially its successes) in working with housing providers, emphasise its skills in managing shared accommodation and highlight the savings to build rent credit initiative. This could be achieved through (i) participation in local authority-led private landlord forums, (ii) engagement with local bodies representing private landlords such as branches of the National Landlords Forum and the Residential Landlords Association, and (iii) working with local lettings and management agencies. This does not necessarily mean that F2W goes beyond its current optimum of 22 properties during the final year of the project, but instead in talking with stakeholders helps to demonstrate the 'brand' of F2W graduates as PRS ready. It may be possible for ERS to manage more properties to be used as 'move on' properties or for non-F2W properties, an additional benefit of the reputation of F2W locally and regionally.
9. The additional benefits of the wider 'move on' stock should continue to be evaluated in year three. During year three, the destinations of graduates from year three need to be more critically evaluated to show the distinction between those who move into the PRS or other property directly. For those who go into move on, the intention of this would be to establish what the reason was for the move on destination – whether need for further ERS associated support, or for another housing market related reason.
10. The additional benefits of shared accommodation should also continue to be monitored in year three. This is not a formal 'intervention' of F2W and the model should not be reworked to incorporate it as such; instead the potential benefits of sharing accommodation to build resilience and combat isolation should be explored and reported on as they occur (not all F2W clients reported sharing as a positive benefit).
11. F2W is now one part of a three-part platform to enhance sustainable access to the PRS for more vulnerable people. The CEO of Elmbridge Rent Start has articulated that F2W is one leg of a three-legged stool to support this. The three legs are: (1) F2W (2) credit worthiness through improved credit rating of clients (3) landlord appeal of the scheme and its graduates. This observation from the CEO reflects the findings from the landlords and other stakeholders around 'landlord appeal' and there is further work to be done on 'badging' this appeal neatly and making this clearer to landlords during year three.