



#OS  
helps

Final report  
June 2022

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# Introduction



**Moira Bayne**

CEO, Housing Options Scotland

**When Almond Housing Association approached us in September 2020 to ask if we would be willing to provide interim tenancy sustainment services it took us a bit of time to say “yes”.**

Though we were delighted to be asked and are always willing to help colleagues in the housing world, working solely with vulnerable tenants was a step removed from our expertise. Of course, we did say yes, and we could never have imagined almost two years later that we would have successfully provided a service to over 150 tenants.

In November 2020 we were very lucky to recruit Heather. She got HOS Helps off to a great start and was instrumental in setting up all the internal processes to allow us to function effectively. By the summer there was so much work that we recruited Tessa for a few weeks to assist Heather to reduce the backlog of referrals. In November 2021 Heather left us to take on a permanent role with Visit Scotland. Luckily, Tessa agreed to return and during the past 6 months has developed HOS Helps into a (literally) hands on service with a specialism in helping tenants with hoarding issues.

So, as we approach the end of June, Almond have decided to bring their tenancy sustainment service in house and HOS Helps will close its doors. We would like to thank everyone who has been involved with us: Sandy, Tracey, all the housing management staff and everyone at Almond for their kindness and forbearance. We would like to thank all the other agencies who have helped HOS Helps: the Aberlour Trust, the Scottish Welfare Fund, Drew from the Action Group and Vicky from Almond Enterprise. Finally the hugest thanks of all goes to the Almond tenants. It has been our pleasure to serve you and we will miss you!

# All time statistics

We have been delighted to support 160 clients as part of our work with Almond Housing Association. Though the service has been quite up and down in terms of the numbers of tenants getting in touch month by month, we are proud to know that we have made a difference to 160 people, and countless other friends and family members.

**160 total clients**

made up of

**21 in 2020; 100 in 2021; 39 in 2022**

Each case has been unique. In line with HOS values, this has meant we have approached each tenant and their circumstances differently, working with people in a way that suits them best. For some cases, this has meant working quickly and finding a resolution same-day; for other cases, this has meant working longer-term to build trust and tackle more complex problems.



**52 days**

**average time to resolve a case**



**Shortest case resolution: 0 days**

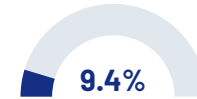
**Longest case resolution: 427 days**

## What support did people need?

As a percentage of total cases, the figures below show the most common requests for help the HOS Helps team received.



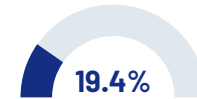
**Furniture / white goods**



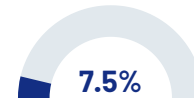
**Mental health support**



**Budget / finance help**



**Mobility / accessibility**



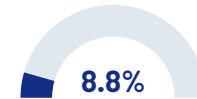
**Floor coverings**



**Energy bills / advice**



**Internal decorations**



**Moving house support**

The topics above do not cover all requests for help made through HOS Helps, just those which were commonplace. Other recurring but less common requests for support related to sourcing clothing for tenants and for repairs to the property. A significant number of tenants request support with multiple issues, and some tenants have revisited the service.

# Feedback for HOS Helps

With the help of one of our volunteers, we conducted an independent evaluation of HOS Helps. This evaluation included interviewing tenants who had received support - either from Heather, HOS Helps Development Worker (November 2020 - November 2021) or Tessa, HOS Helps Development Worker (November 2021 - present).

Feedback from tenants was overwhelmingly positive:

**100% of respondents**

**reported that**

- a) HOS Helps had been helpful**
- b) They would use the service again**
- c) They recommend the service**

As well as overwhelmingly positive feedback from tenants, staff from Almond Housing Association were also pleased with the service. They reported:

- An average score of 7/10 for the service, with some staff members scoring it 10/10
- A score of 7.5/10 when rating how smoothly the service had run
- Broad agreement that the service was important to Almond Housing Association in that it helped to resolve tenant issues

***"I would just like to say thank you for all of your help and time."***

***"Everyone is so nice and helpful."***

***"I have used the service on 2 separate occasions and can totally recommend this service as they were knowledgeable and friendly and very helpful."***

***"Housing Options has helped me massively with all sorts of stuff and I couldn't thank them enough for all their help. Thanks again."***

***"Everyone I've spoken to has been lovely and really helpful. Very happy with their service."***

***"When the lady I spoke to couldn't help with what I was needing she got me all the relevant information and passed me to the correct people!"***

***"Have had a couple of lovely people help me with a lot of housing needs and questions"***

John\* was refused help to furnish his new home from the Scottish Welfare Fund because he was in employment. John was on minimum wage and this was not enough to pay all the usual bills and sort out furniture and other decorations. Because John worked for a grocery shop, HOS Helps identified that he was eligible to apply for financial assistance from "Grocery Aid", an industry specific charity. HOS Helps applied for funding on his behalf and were successful. The money was spent on furniture to help make his new house a home. Also, our very own Gina from HOS donated some stylish units which were picked up from her home in Edinburgh and delivered to John in Livingston.

**\*John's name has been changed for anonymity**



## John's story

*Thank you so much for the units. I absolutely love them! Got my son to help move them in the flat whilst I figure out where to put them!*  
**-- Text from John**

We received a referral from Sam\* who was experiencing domestic abuse. They had been put in temporary accommodation for a period of time for safety reasons. Sam was reunited with their family and returned home but the house was in a very poor state and they had very little to build upon. A Scottish Welfare Fund application was made for carpets and was successful, however, the children lacked basic furniture in their bedrooms and fees for a school trip were unpaid with the deadline fast approaching. HOS Helps detailed this family's circumstances in a Aberlour application and we were successful in securing money for furniture and £100 for the school trip. The family were so overjoyed that they asked their housing officer to come and see the house and the difference that HOS Helps made.

**\*Sam's name has been changed for anonymity**

## Sam's story



*Just been out to visit Sam\*. They wanted me to see all the decorating and the difference the help has made. I can't believe the difference! Thanks for your help with this one.*  
**-- Email from Sam's Housing Officer**



## Jackie's story



Jackie\* was referred to HOS Helps because she was struggling to cope. On visiting Jackie it was clear she was not dealing with everyday life and had some serious hoarding issues.

Jackie was initially reluctant to engage with HOS Helps as she felt ashamed about her situation and was afraid of being judged. She wanted to make room in her home for living, but the problem had become so huge she felt overwhelmed by the task and did not know where to start.

Through spending time with Jackie, it became clear how much this disorder interfered with her daily life. Activities such as cooking and sleeping were severely impaired. In addition, the excessive clutter made it difficult to move around the property and tradespeople were unable to carry out regular maintenance and safety checks. Moreover, in terms of safety, it also restricted access to the emergency services if needed.

By reaching out to HOS Helps, we were able to support and assist Jackie with the practical task of sorting through the various collections she had accumulated. This was done over a period of time. Through liaison with Jackie's housing officer, we organized a bulk uplift which was carried out with the help of Almond Enterprise.

For the first time in five years, she will now be able to access her bedroom and sleep in a bed. And the tradespeople will be able to install the new windows that are needed for the property.

In our experience, tenants who are struggling with conditions such as hoarding are often anxious and depressed and lack the motivation to reach out for support. However, this often leads to neglecting other issues that need to be addressed or receiving the help you are entitled to.

HOS Helps identified that Jackie did not have a working cooker so we completed a Scottish Welfare Fund application for this and we await the outcome. We also submitted an application to the Aberlour Child Trust Fund to assist Jackie's daughter with some clothing and bedding and are delighted to say we secured £400. In addition, Jackie was struggling with fuel poverty and had debts and council tax arrears that needed to be addressed. HOS Helps made the necessary call to her housing officer who supplied some fuel vouchers during this difficult time. We contacted a debt advisory service and she now has an appointment with the West Lothian Council Advice Shop to discuss her finances and set up a payment plan for her debts.

Hopefully this tenant has taken the first steps to a better life.

**\*Jackie's name has been changed for anonymity**



# Reflections on HOS Helps

*HOS Helps Development Worker, Tessa Law, spoke to us about her reflections on the HOS Helps service.*

## What's been the best part of delivering HOS Helps?

It is a good feeling knowing that HOS Helps has the tenant at the centre of any help offered, and knowing that solutions are tailored and geared to what will work best for the tenant. HOS Helps has been totally dedicated to making a difference!

## What will you miss about delivering HOS Helps?

It is a very varied role and any situation can present itself, so I suppose the variety of the role and its unpredictability. I am very much a people's person and love to engage with the tenants so will miss this part of the job too.

## In your view, what is the strength of HOS Helps?

As a service, HOS Helps is independent of the housing association which it works for, and I think this helps when building rapport with tenants. Moreover, we have the support and expertise of the main HOS service to lean on. This means that we can act quickly without the red tape which other organisations sometimes meet when seeking answers and solutions to tenant problems. This, sets HOS Helps apart from other organizations or larger companies who employ in-house staff carrying out similar roles.



## 5 top tips!

Based on her experience of working with tenants, what top tips would Tessa offer to someone delivering a tenancy sustainment service? What principles and values are important for someone to show in the role?

- Never judge tenants - the role is about being there to help and support people, often through very difficult times of people's lives.
- Always demonstrate empathy with everything you do - even when it's difficult!
- Remember: practical help goes a long way - be solution focused and know that even progress on the smallest of tasks can be transformational.
- Work hard to build good relationships with other team members and outside bodies
- Stay motivated - your help, support and advice are always needed, and the workload never slows!







Produced by Ben Parker, Head of Engagement & Volunteering at Housing Options Scotland.  
Contact: [ben@housingoptionsscotland.org.uk](mailto:ben@housingoptionsscotland.org.uk).