
Editorial

As we enter the winter period, many cities across Europe are preparing 'cold weather strategies' to provide additional services, usually in the form of extra shelter beds, for homeless people to ensure that they are not exposed to extreme weather conditions. The provision of shelter beds, often in congregate, dormitory style accommodation is a fairly standard policy response to extreme housing exclusion, and often justified on the basis that it is a temporary and reasonably immediate response to the needs of those sleeping rough. Part of the justification for this form of provision is that many homeless people are incapable of maintaining their own accommodation, because of their addictions, mental health difficulties and other pathological traits.

This perception of homeless people, as Devereux and Schmidt present in their 'think pieces' in this edition of the *European Journal of Homelessness*, is often maintained by the presentation of homeless people in the media and in NGO fund-raising campaigns. This is particularly the case around Christmas time, and as Devereaux argues, such presentations 'circulate hackneyed well-worn understandings of homelessness which do little to challenge existing assumptions or propose long-term solutions.'

The provision of communal or congregate accommodation in 'shelters' as a response to homelessness has dominated policy responses over the past two centuries. Indeed, in the early 1930s, Edwin Sutherland and Harvey Locke coined the term 'shelterization' to describe the negative consequences of placing people in such facilities when studying shelters for homeless people in Chicago. The lessons of history are rarely heeded, and in the contributions by Löffstrand in respect of Gotenburg, Diebäcker and colleagues in relation to Vienna, Arapoglou and colleagues in relation to Athens, and Mostowska in respect of Dublin, Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Stockholm, the negative consequences for homeless people of having to adapt to shelter living and develop strategies to survive in such atypical living circumstances remain the case today.

These contributions add to the debate on the utility of providing shelters as the primary response to homelessness, particularly when our primary response to, for example, a disability, wither physical or mental, is not to cluster such individuals in a congregate setting, but rather to provided an individualized range of supports. Shelters had their origins in the early 19th century and their emergence was in parallel with the construction of a range of other institutions to manage the poor

including workhouses, prisons and a vast array of asylums and penitentiaries. The failure of these institutions to reform or rehabilitate, to desist or to deter was clearly evident by the end of the 19th century, but it was to take several decades before the majority of these massive mausoleums of misery gradually fell into disuse and disgrace. The papers in this edition of the EJM, highlighted above, draw our attention to the historical continuity in service provision for homeless people and the need for a vigorous debate on this type of service provision.

Alongside confirmation of the limited efficacy of providing shelters as a response to homelessness, we have increasingly robust evidence that those who experience homelessness are not just those beloved by the media and charity fundraisers; the stereotypical rough sleeper, rather homeless people are a heterogeneous population, with rough sleepers in a minority. It would seem to be an erroneous policy to cluster this heterogeneous population in congregate settings and expect this policy and practice response to aid their exiting from homelessness.

This is all the more incongruous when we have increasingly compelling evidence of what works best to ensure people exit homelessness. Kostianen, in the case of Helsinki, shows that the majority of people who exit homelessness do so without service supports. They simply require access to affordable housing and financial assistance in meeting their housing costs. While those with more complex needs will require additional supports, they firstly require housing with support. Methodologically sophisticated research clearly demonstrates the vastly superior housing retention rates when housing is made available first to homeless people, rather than after a series of interventions designed to make them ready for housing. In their contribution, Aubry and colleagues argue that not only are Housing First approaches superior to Housing Ready systems, but in addition the greater the adherence to Housing First principles, the higher the rate of success.

However, in order that Housing First principles can be adhered to, access to housing is required. Van den Broeck and Heylen in their contribution, show how vulnerable households are often discriminated against in a range of covert ways by estate agents when attempting to secure private rented accommodation. Sahlin in her analysis of homelessness policy in Sweden highlights that in the absence of a social rental strategy, with housing policy focused on market based provision, homelessness strategies will have minimal impact. Indeed, homeless strategies, absent the provision of affordable housing, are merely illusionary with no expectation that their objectives will ever be met. They may also act to confirm a popular perception that homelessness is an intractable problem, with little Government can do to end this human tragedy.

The motivations of the individuals who provide services to homeless people are varied, but many organisations are overtly faith based; in some cases this was the motivation for the historical establishment of the organisation, in others a motivation for their on-going involvement with the provision of services to homeless people and some a mixture of both. In her 'think piece' Fitzpatrick notes that, to date, those who work with homeless people or engage with public policy and research on homelessness, who are not motivated or inspired by 'faith' are relatively silent in public discussions. She argues that the secular and sacramental should be given parity of esteem in any discussion, and secondly, that a debate on 'faith' and how faith shapes homelessness service provision is both necessary and overdue.

The edition of the EJH also includes two papers on a perennial issue covered by the EJH; how to measure homelessness and the extent of homelessness. Contributions from Sales on measuring homelessness in Spain, and from Smith on comparing research methodologies for counting homeless people in North America and Brussels and Denmark add further depth to this on-going discussion.

The Editorial Team of the EJH hope that you find the contributions stimulating and provocative, informative and illuminating. Next year we mark the 10th anniversary of the Journal with an additional edition of the Journal, one where we will focus on reviewing the impact of research on homeless services from a range of different perspectives.