
Editorial

At the eighth annual European Research Conference on Homelessness, held in the Alice Salomon Hochschule in Berlin on 20th September 2013, a range of stimulating papers were presented on different aspects of how to move from shelter led to housing led services, and the nature of the supports required to sustain secure occupancy of dwellings for formerly homeless people. The *European Journal of Homelessness* is delighted to publish a select number of the papers presented at the conference and to further inform the debate on Housing Led / Housing First policies and practices in Europe.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the term 'Housing Led' was developed by the Jury of the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness "to describe all policy approaches that identify the provision and/or sustaining of stable housing with security of tenure as the initial step in resolving or preventing situations of homelessness" (2011, p.14). Thus, as formulated by the Jury, Housing First, a specific, highly successful intervention developed in New York, can be encompassed within the Housing Led approach to ending homelessness. Therefore, what unites Housing Led approaches is a belief that the provision of housing, with secure occupancy – which is a broader concept than the more narrow legal understanding of security of tenure (see Hulse and Milligan, 2014) – rather than shelter, is a fundamental human right and a prerequisite to solving other problems, such as social, health and employment issues. However, while policy makers and service providers are increasingly convinced of the merits of a Housing Led / Housing First approach, the provision of such housing is no easy task. A recent plan to end homelessness in Ireland by the end of 2016 elegantly outlined this dilemma, when noting that "the core of the necessary response is straightforward to conceive though in the present circumstances difficult to execute, namely, to provide permanent housing for the homeless" (2013, p.4).

In the papers presented in this edition of *European Journal of Homelessness*, further comparative material is presented on operationalizing Housing Led and Housing First approaches to ending homelessness in a range of different member states, and how different projects obtain secure housing for homeless people in challenging circumstances. Busch-Geertsema provides an overview of Housing First projects in a number of member states, noting that while the context of the projects varied considerably in terms of welfare services, availability of housing subsidies, access to different forms of rental housing, the retention rates in the five

projects were extraordinarily high. While noting a number of methodological limitations, the overwhelming evidence from the projects suggests that the provision of scattered site housing with appropriate support for homeless people, even for those with complex needs, is considerably more successful and potentially more cost effective than the provision of congregate facilities.

The next three papers explore various Housing Led projects, some with greater fidelity to the Pathways Housing First model than others, in Portugal, Hungary and Italy respectively. The variations in project delivery in each case study largely reflects various structural constraints, particularly around funding, but clearly demonstrate that the provision of secure accommodation in the private rented sector, with appropriate support for homeless people, is possible in diverse settings and cultural contexts.

Often, both policy makers and practitioners are wary, sometimes with very good reason, of importing models of service delivery from other jurisdictions arguing that while such a service provision may work in one particular jurisdiction, it will not always easily translate or take root in very different contexts. Certainly this was the case with Housing First, with many being sceptical that a model of service provision originating in New York would work in the European Union. However, the growing body of evidence is that it does work in member states of the European Union, albeit that further rigorous evaluative work is required.

Moving from concrete examples of the operation and outcomes of Housing Led approaches to ending homelessness, our final contribution provides a theoretical justification for adopting a 'Housing First' rather than a 'Housing Ready' model of service provision based on an exploration of how social exclusion is manifested in terms of positive and negative coping strategies. Lindovská argues that the Housing Ready model may unintentionally contribute to negative coping strategies which can reproduce and reinforce social exclusion, whereas the Housing First model can enhance positive coping strategies, which in turn can reduce social exclusion.

The next special edition of the European Journal of Homelessness will feature selected papers from the 9th European Research Conference on Homelessness, which takes place in Warsaw on the 19th of September 2014. The theme of the conference, 'Homelessness in Times of Crisis', will provide an opportunity to reflect on, and give examples of how the 'crisis' has impacted on homeless people across the European Union.

Providing a forum for robust debates on policy and service provision for homeless people was a key rationale for establishing the European Journal of Homelessness in 2007. We hope our diverse readership finds this edition of the Journal stimulating.

› References

European Consensus Conference on Homelessness (2010) *Policy Recommendations of the Jury* (Brussels: European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity).

Homelessness Oversight Group (2013) *First Report* (Dublin: Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government).

Hulse, K. and Milligan, V. (2014) Secure Occupancy: A New Framework for Analysing Security in Rental Housing, *Housing Studies* 29(5) pp.638-656.