

**HOUSING
FIRST ITALIA**

Experimenting Housing First in Italy: competences and challenges for social work

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Housing First in Italy

- Projects: 33
- Regions: 10
- Apartments: 176
- Cases in HF n: 510 (167 minors)
- Operators: 110 professional and 40 volunteers

Research questions

- Which is the role that operators are playing in implementing the Housing First Model in Italy?
- Which is the role that operators are playing in supporting the recovery issue, the empowerment and autonomy of users?
- Community social work / individual Case manager

The role of operators is not really a research object within the HF implementation process.

BUT we know that:

“The implementation of Housing First Programmes requires a change in the way we approach housing and social work – a “mindshift”

■ Feantsa, special ed. “Social Work in Services with Homeless People in a Changing European Social and Political Context, Summer 2014

Research questions

- Can the operator “**make the difference**”?
- **Which kind** of operators are we talking about?
- **Who** are the Care managers? Social workers? Sanitary professionals, homeless operators?

Method and instruments

- Explorative qualitative analysis
- Semi-structured face to face interviews with 10 social workers involved in delivering HF projects

- 10 interviewed operators
 - 5 social operators (professional qualification)
 - 2 social workers
 - 1 social scientist
 - 1 operator
 - 1 with no specific qualification
- Average age: 35 years
- Experience in working with the homeless:
 - 4 with no experience
 - 6 with a relative long-term experience

How social workers accepted HF experimentation?

■ As an opportunity

- to enrich the range of services for homeless with the aid of a new typology of intervention
- to review and renew their own personal experience involving homelessness and to challenge their own capabilities in addressing this issue.

Which specific skills are needed for HF?

■ EDUCATIONAL:

- long-term experience with the homeless or adults with multiple exclusion (no inexperienced operator)
- health-services competences (cfr. quelle dell'educatore professionale sanitario)

■ RELATIONAL

- The ability to be reflective, analytical and self-critical on one's own professional behavior
- The ability to mediate and negotiate with the homeless
- The ability to understand, foresee and accompany the homeless

Competences acquired in delivering HF projects

- To respect and manage the time needed by the homeless to carry out activities and pursue a personal change
- To be **less impositive** and more on a par in the relations with the homeless
- To **evaluate** the assistance projet for the homeless from a overall **global perspective** considering every aspect globally and not singularly
- **To reduce the risk of turning homeless into a chronic condition** rather than to eliminate it completely

Changes in social workers' practice

- A greater re-focus on the practice relative to the relationship with the homeless. This change is motivated by the absence of the traditional contract for negotiating interventions of assistance with the homeless and predefining the relationship between the social worker and the homeless

(The rental contract, added with only some conduct-related regulations, is considered too weak for negotiating with the homeless)

How social-workers apply the HF principle of consumer choice and self determination

- For some operators it is very difficult to apply for others it is a habitual practice
- Social workers are required:
 - **to reflect constantly on their activities**
 - **To manage the uncertainty and risk** related to the choice and self-determination of the homeless
 - **To respect the timing of the homeless and wait for their reaction, change and development without judgement**
- It is fundamental to work in couples in order to balance the assistance intervention and to work in a team for sharing, confronting and supervising

How social-workers practise the HF principle of recovery?

- By preparing the homeless to an autonomous choice and self determination
 - Both the social worker and the user may have developed inner expectations of impositive or reward/punishment behaviors
 - sometimes the recovery is pursued indirectly by showing the homeless the negative impact of alcol/drug/game abuse on their job/house maintenance
- By managing the anxiety
 - of seeing the homeless damaging themselves and having to wait without intervening, until their behaviors leads them to a mortal risk

Conclusions

■ Relevance of Community (social) work

- *«Social work has a clear-cut community dimension ... the community is the space where people can really exercise their rights, hence the need for professionals to redefine social policies by empowering people in community dynamics. We need to incorporate this focus into our professional work, which still leans too heavily on managing state benefits and mitigating the undesirable effects of a society that engenders poverty and inequality» (Bezunartea Barrio, 2014)**

Conclusions

■ New relations with users

- «...it is the very relationship between social workers and the people who use our services that needs a rethink and reform. [...] the most fundamental changes we can make are to share more power with our service users, to transform our role from fixer to facilitator ...»
(Brünjes, 2014)*

Conclusions

- Relevance of supervision (reflective practice, work group, équipe)
 - «... reflective practice is a key part of effective interventions in the homeless sector (Marguire, 2014)*

*Feantsa, special ed. "Social Work in Services with Homeless People in a Changing European Social and Political Context, Summer 2014