

19th SEPTEMBER, FRIDAY

14h00 – 15h20

SEMINAR SESSION 4 - Participants will be asked to select one of these 6 parallel seminars

Seminar 22: Prevention of Youth Homelessness Based on Work with the Family (Room: X) - Chair: Eoin O'Sullivan, IE

Sarah Sheridan, IE: Youth Family Mediation in Preventing Youth Homelessness: The Importance of Early Intervention

Family conflict has been identified across numerous research studies as a leading cause of homelessness among young people, often overlapping with structural disadvantages such as poverty, parental unemployment, experiences of care or residential instability, early school disengagement and/or unresolved support needs such as mental health. Youth family mediation services aim to reduce the overall severity of family discord, offering a structured environment where disputes can be resolved swiftly with the goal of repairing communication and enabling reconciliation between family members. While there is relatively limited research evidence on whether youth family mediation services effectively prevents youth homelessness, the data on school-based interventions that have emerged through Geelong Project and Upstream Cymru, for example, offers compelling results when twinned with a screening process that identifies young people at heightened risk of homelessness.

Focus Ireland Youth Family mediation was established in 2016 and has since supported more than 150 young people and their families in the Dublin region, receiving referrals primarily through child protection and community-based services. This paper presents findings from an evaluation of the service, drawing on qualitative interviews with families and stakeholders as well as an analysis of service level data. The evaluation found positive results in terms of enhanced communication, conflict de-escalation, continued engagement in school and, for some young people, reducing the likelihood to leave home prematurely. It also demonstrated effective and positive interagency collaboration between child protection and homeless services. The evaluation signalled when mediation was provided at an early point – i.e. before a conflict has escalated to 'crisis' levels – optimum results were achieved. This strongly suggests that if youth family mediation is to be scaled up to avert more young people from entering homelessness, families should be targeted at an earlier point – ideally well before they come to the attention of child protection or homeless services.



***Dr Sarah Sheridan** is an Independent Researcher specialising in homelessness and service evaluations. Her PhD focused on women's experiences of homelessness in Ireland. She is a Visiting Research Fellow in the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin. Previously she worked in research management positions in Focus Ireland and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. She is a board trustee in the tenant support charity Threshold.*

Nia Rees, UK: "It Started at Home": A Critical Examination of Family Mediation as an Intervention to Prevent Youth Homelessness

This paper is part of a wider study which critically examines a highly dominant, yet under-researched approach to the prevention of youth homelessness – mediation, a political priority in Wales and the global north. Dominant service responses have received limited academic scrutiny within international literature. This study begins to address this fundamental gap by critically examining mediation as an approach to youth homelessness prevention. Mediation services seek to support young people and their families to bridge differences that risk unplanned exits from home. Fundamental to the approach is the maintenance/re-establishment of ties with family, aiming to prevent homelessness. This paper draws upon findings from participatory research undertaken in the case study country of Wales, addressing this fundamental gap in understanding. It focuses upon in-depth biographical interviews and an innovative network activity with young people at risk of homelessness, who have experienced family mediation. Semi-structured interviews with mediation workers also drawn upon to comprehend the inner workings and complexities of mediation. Focusing upon themes of conflict, care, networks and home, this paper offers a rare critique of the emerging homelessness

prevention paradigm - challenging the conceptualisation of prevention by considering the importance of the extent to which interventions enable ontological security and feeling of 'home'. In addition to offering insights into the way in which relationships, connections and network interactions are re-established through the processes of mediation for young people at risk of homelessness. It employs the notion of the 'dark side of home' and Adverse Childhood Experiences to uncover the role of unmaking home in the lives of the young people undertaking family mediation. It fills a gap in research within housing/youth studies by critiquing this intervention, innovatively drawing upon these concepts. By critiquing the dominant intervention mechanism of mediation, this research has direct implications for service provisions in Wales and internationally.



Dr Nia Ffion Rees, *Independent Housing Research Consultant/ Lecturer, School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University is an Independent Research Consultant; and a Lecturer at Cardiff University. Her areas of interest lie within housing insecurity, homelessness, youth studies, and inequality. Her recent PhD examines the dominant responses to tackling youth homelessness – mediation, offering a rare critique of this intervention mechanism. Nia has undertaken research at a global and local level in Tanzania, Peru and Wales, with impact on service provision for homeless young people. Nia appreciates the contributions of service users/peer researchers, uplifting their voices through participatory research. Nia is an active member of the Housing Studies Association and works closely with IJOH, End Youth Homelessness Cymru; Youth Experiential Learning Simulation Wales; Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.*