

Seminar 8: Housing First (2) (Floor -1, Room 9)

Chair: **Lars Benjaminsen, DK**

Susanne Gerull, DE: "...you now have the possibility to create your own life again" Successes of the two Housing-First-Projects in Berlin/Germany



Susanne Gerull has been Professor of Social Work Theory and Practice at the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences (Berlin/Germany) since 2008, focusing on poverty, unemployment, homelessness and low-threshold social work. Prior to her doctorate, she worked as a social worker for homeless people in two social welfare offices in Berlin.

In October 2018, two Housing First model projects started in Berlin, which were designed to run for three years: "Housing First Berlin" (mixed-gender) and "Housing First for Women Berlin". The concepts of both projects closely follow the original approach of Sam Tsemberis and the eight basic principles described in the Housing First Guide Europe. The evaluation of the two Berlin projects was designed as a collaborative project between ASH Berlin and the two project sponsors. Based on the conceptual goals (which were essentially the same), an identical research design with a mix of quantitative and qualitative instruments was developed in a participatory manner with the staff. After two annual interim reports, the two final reports were submitted at the end of 2021 after three years of operation. The respective evaluation results were compared and discussed with the international state of research.

The results are impressive – even by international standards: Despite all the prophecies of doom, both model projects achieved the targeted rental contract rates: A total of 78 people (instead of 70 as required) were provided with housing secured by rental contracts. At 97.3% and 100% respectively over the entire term, a housing stability rate was achieved that is extremely good compared to other projects in Europe. With the occupation of their own apartment, the users' satisfaction not only with their housing situation but also with their employment situation has improved significantly on average, although the overwhelming majority is still unemployed and dependent on social benefits. In other areas of life, too, such as health and social contacts, the new life in rented accommodation had a predominantly positive effect. Typical statements by the interviewees in this context were that they now had the opportunity to shape their own lives again and could use the apartment as a springboard for further desired changes in their lives. This perspective alone had obviously led to greater satisfaction even where no improvement in the other life situation objectively had yet occurred. In addition to many positive responses in the interviews, the standardized final survey of all users also revealed a very high level of satisfaction with the support offered: 84% resp. 85% were very satisfied, the rest satisfied. The work of the two Berlin pilot projects has also advanced the professional debate on Housing First throughout Germany. It was possible to convince politicians who were still hesitant about the approach's prospects for success. The professional public relations work of the Berlin project sponsors via TV, radio, print media and social media has also convinced many landlords to offer apartments to the users of the model projects.

At the Research Conference in Bergamo, the results of the two evaluations and the success parameters identified in the evaluation will be presented and discussed.



Julia Kowol, Crisitian Merendeiro, Americo Nave, PT: A Practical Example of a Housing-First Response in Portugal: 9 Years of Implementation



16th European Research Conference

22nd and 23rd September, 2022



VENUE: University of Bergamo, Italy

Julia Kowol is a Polish psychologist based in Lisbon, Portugal. Finished master on clinical psychology in University of Opole in Poland. Since 2019 is working as a community psychologist in the “É UMA CASA, Lisboa Housing First” project from CRESCER, non-governmental organisation.

É UMA CASA, Lisboa Housing First program was implemented in 2013 as a response for people experiencing chronic homelessness and using licit and illicit drugs. Started as a pilot of 7 individualized and scattered houses, scale-up to 120 houses in recent years.

The program is a long-term and relationship-based response, where tenants are decision-makers guiding their recovery, being partners in advocating for the human right to housing. Based on a harm-reduction approach, this program meets people where they are and starts the support process from that point. Additionally, it helps people to gradually gain control over harmful behaviors while encouraging the use of addiction treatment and other health services. Staff includes peer-specialists who help maintain a client-driven approach, offering technical know-how based on life experience. Specific strategies have been created and implemented with tenants to respond to their needs facing alcohol consumption, inspired by Managed Alcohol Programs methodology.

Between February 2013 and March 2022, 131 people were enrolled in the program (75% male, 25% female, mean age 51 years), who spend on average 14 years in a homeless situation. Overall, 100% adopted harm reductions strategies to manage drug use, 55% are connected to treatment responses for drug use-related problems and 55% ended up abstinent. In terms of healthcare and social care, 71% are connected to healthcare services, 96% adhere to medication compliance, 89% are connected to social services, and 84% are documented. At the end of 9 years, 90% of people have been kept stably housed, not returning to the previous situation.

Lessons learned from 9 years of experience are valuable information based on practice to guide new implementations of Housing First methodology through European countries.