

Seminar 9: Housing First and Housing Transitions (Room: 02.13)

Chair: **Volker Busch-Geertsema, DE**

Sarah Sheridan, IE: Evaluation of Focus Ireland Shielding Service



Dr Sarah Sheridan is an Independent Researcher with a particular expertise in homelessness, housing, equality, and related topics. She is also a visiting research fellow and lecturer in the School of Social Work and Social Policy in Trinity College Dublin. Previously she worked in research management roles in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and Focus Ireland. She is a Board Member of Threshold, a charity which aims to prevent homelessness and provides free, independent and confidential advice to tenants.

Research on Housing First shows that there is a small portion for whom the intervention is not successful (around 11 per cent). In these cases, tenancies are not sustained and the individual may return to a roofless or houseless living situation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dublin was regarded as a positive case study in Europe in terms of how state bodies and NGOs successfully protected the lives of the high-risk, chronic homeless cohort. Specifically, there was effective cooperation between health and homeless services to meet the needs of those who typically fall through the cracks of service support systems. One innovative service which emerged during this time was the Focus Ireland Shielding Service. This service sought to keep medically-vulnerable individuals with extensive homeless histories and substance misuse issues safe from the virus, by providing self-contained units, 24/7 tailored and flexible keyworking supports, and healthcare and drug services delivered directly to the residents in their accommodation. An evaluation of the service (Sheridan, 2021) showed that the service - which was originally set up to simply keep individuals free from infection - had in fact exceeded all expectations, including high rates of successful housing transitions (one third were permanently housed upon closure of the service), improved health outcomes and healthcare engagement, low rates of criminal justice contact and stabilised drug/alcohol use. Residents particularly appreciated the distinct style of keyworking that was operational in the service, which was characterised as flexible, lenient and empowering. This paper argues that the challenges and service innovations during the COVID-19 pandemic can provide insight into new methods of working with the chronic homeless cohort, for whom neither traditional nor Housing First service responses might be effective. Drawing from qualitative findings collected during this evaluation, the paper will consider the value of self-contained units of high quality, partnered with intensive 24/7 keyworking, which were underpinned by Housing First principles (specifically consumer choice and client-driven approach), can successfully meet the needs of the a very high-needs, long-term homeless cohort and, for a sizeable number, lead to successful housing transitions.

Riikka Perälä, FI: Housing First in Vulnerable People's Housing Pathways: An Example of Finnish Housing First Policy



Dr. Riikka Perälä received her PhD in sociology in 2012 from the University of Helsinki. Her research interests cover the position of vulnerable citizen groups in welfare and housing policies and services. In the homelessness field, she has investigated these issues in the context of Housing First policies and participated also in the development of policies in various expert groups. Currently, she works as a post-doctoral researcher in Y-Foundation, in a large research consortium, which investigates the housing pathways of residents in displacement processes. The other members of the consortium are University of Tampere and Turku. The project is funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

The presentation examines the meaning of Housing First based housing solutions for the housing stability and housing pathways of people with a background in homelessness. The context is Finnish Housing First policies, which has been



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successful in reducing long-term homelessness in the 2000s. The data is based on 17 qualitative thematic interviews with residents of supportive housing units about their current housing and housing history. The data was analysed from the perspective of housing pathway theory. Key findings in terms of housing permanence include the 24/7 support and voluntary work activities linked to housing in the supportive housing units, which create security and routine in housing and living. Moving into a supportive housing unit is seen as a key juncture in the housing pathway, where the unpredictability and daily burden of homelessness is replaced by the opportunity to live a more independent life. For some, the supportive housing unit is seen as the final and permanent stage of the housing pathway. Others wish to move to scattered housing, but do not necessarily feel that this is a realistic option. The relevance of the results for the development of Housing First policies is discussed at the end of the presentation.