

Seminar 18: Reflections on Housing First (Room: TBD) - Chair: Freek Spinnewijn, BE

Ides Nicaise, Eveline Teppers, Luigi Leonori, BE: Person First: Towards Person-Centered and Integrated Services for Homeless People with Mental Health Issues

Staff of services for homeless people from 9 European countries participated in this learning network funded by Erasmus+ (2022-2024) upon invitation by SMES Europe (a network specialised in mental health services for homeless people). The project focussed on a person-centered approach and integration of services with maximum 'ownership' by users. HIVA (KU Leuven) provided scientific support. Building on the well-known Housing First alternative, Person First can be seen as a complement with a strong emphasis on 'human investment'.

In addition to an exploratory survey of 65 services, four study visits took place (Riga, Ljubljana, Helsinki and Athens), alternating with thematic webinars for a wider audience. The final report (publication date: July 2024) can be used for training and professional development.

Some key lessons can be summarized as follows:

- shelters will continue to play a role, but need to undergo a 'quality boost': smaller scale, person-centered, connected with a comprehensive support network and helping users in drawing up an individual integration plan. The duration of residence should be 'as long as necessary, but as short as possible'.
- homeless services should operate in integrated networks around four clusters (emergency support and social assistance; physical and mental health care; housing; and rehabilitation through flexible types of work, including peer work, peer mentoring and advocacy work.
- given the high incidence of mental health issues among homeless people, all professionals working in such services should have a basic training in trauma-informed care.

The report includes a set of policy recommendations at EU, national / regional and local level.



Prof. em. Ides Nicaise has a background in economics. He is a senior research manager at HIVA (Research Institute for Work and Society), a multidisciplinary research institute of the University of Leuven (Flemish Louvain). He specialised in social policy, more precisely the relationships between education, labour market policy and social inclusion (in rich as well as developing countries). He led the Belgian team of the European Social Policy Network until 2019 and currently participates in the coordination team of the Social Situation Monitor for DG EMPL of the European Commission. He also works occasionally as a consultant for the OECD and international NGOs.

Besides his professional activities, he is chair of ATD-Fourth World Flanders, the Flemish branch of an international solidarity movement between and with people experiencing poverty, and of the Belgian Combat Poverty Service, a centre created by law as an interface between the government, other stakeholders and grassroots organisations of people experiencing poverty.

Nicholas Pleace, Joanne Bretherton and Deborah Quilgars, UK: The Lived Experience of Housing First: Qualitative Research in the UK

This paper draws on a series of five research projects evaluating programmes and projects working within the Housing First model, across the UK, over the period 2010 to 2023. Drawing on the results of over 150 semi-structured interviews, using a common methodology, the paper focuses on the experiences, perceptions and opinions of people who were using Housing First to find a lasting exit from homelessness. The paper draws on this qualitative data to highlight a number of issues with the current debates and assumptions about Housing First in the UK and beyond. Talking with people with lived experience highlighted a generally very high degree of positivity about the support offered by Housing First services. These findings were in contrast to some statistical monitoring of Housing First outcomes, which has highlighted some variable performance from Housing First in delivering improvements in social inclusion, addiction and

mental and physical health, while still recording high rates of housing sustainment. However, the interviews also raised important questions about the quality of the lives experienced by people who had found housing stability through Housing First once they had exited homelessness. These questions arose in the context of deep and sustained governmental retrenchment from welfare spending, public health and social housing in the UK and centred on the ultimate viability of Housing First within the public service deserts that have been created across the UK since 2010. The paper also considers the wider implications of the findings in relation to the practicality and viability of Housing First across the highly variegated social protection and housing systems that exist at pan-EU level, also discussing possible implications for the European Platform to Combat Homelessness.



Nicholas Pleace is a Professor of Social Policy in the School for Business and Society, University of York and Director of the Centre for Housing Policy. He is a member of the European Observatory of Homelessness which operates under the auspices of FEANTSA.



Dr Joanne Bretherton is an Associate Professor in Social and Criminal Justice in the School for Business and Society, University of York and a Senior Research Fellow in the Centre for Housing Policy. She is a co-investigator in the Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre.



Deborah Quilgars is a Senior Research Fellow in the School for Business and Society, University of York and in the Centre for Housing Policy. Deborah is also a member of the NIHR School for Social Care Research.