



FINNISH HOUSING FIRST POLICY — DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING WITH PEOPLE HAVING EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS

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HOMELESSNESS IN FINLAND

Nordic welfare state with 5,5 million inhabitants, extensive public sector with tax funding

In recent years, Finland has been the only country in Europe where homelessness has decreased

In 2018, there were 5 482 homeless people in Finland, of them 1 162 suffered from long term homelessness (last year's statistics not comparable)

Most (65%) sleep at friends or relatives, almost no rough sleepers

- Substance abuse, mental health issues, background in institutions
- Lack of affordable housing, rising housing costs
- Intertwinement of personal and structural issues → different paths to and from homelessness

38,5% of Finland's homeless live in Helsinki

HOUSING FIRST IN FINLAND

A profound paradigm shift in Finnish homelessness policy from 2008:

- *lease-based housing as a right*
- from a staircase model to “the right to your own door”
- conversion of shelters to supported housing units, no demand of sobriety etc.
- individually tailored support services in housing units
- increasing the supply of affordable rental housing
- preventive measures, such as tenant advisory services

”A cousin” of the US Housing First model, which is based on scattered housing

KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS

Strong political commitment in the Government and the Ministry of Environment

A collaborative effort, requiring strong commitment and tight co-operation from a variety of actors across sectors and levels

- required official (also financial) commitment from municipalities to adopt the new principle and re-organise their services accordingly

A networking project, entitled Verkostokehittäjät, ran alongside the Ministry-led programme. It gathered actors from around the country to share their experiences, difficulties and good practices frequently and in a very open manner. This deepened the ties between homelessness actors across Finland

A participatory and inclusive approach with an aim to gather all relevant expertise and knowledge

PARTICIPATION WITHIN HOMELESSNESS WORK

Participatory and inclusive approach both in policy design and service provision:

- changes in the service culture: "from being a guard to being a companion, from behind the plexi-glass to playing PlayStation on the same couch"

Expertise-by-experience – a means towards a variety of ends: cheaper and better-functioning services, more legitimate governance as well as 'empowered' participants

In practice experts-by-experience have been invited to:

- Ministerial steering groups and committees
- Evaluate existing homelessness services and housing units
- Take part in steering groups of building / renovation projects and in service re-design (service co-creation)
- Provide peer support and service counselling for others in similar situations
- Do advocacy work via media or through creative / artistic means

The aim is to "bring the voice of the homeless into service design, and to ensure that inclusion is employed as an overall principle throughout the HF policy" (Name on the Door, 2010, p.36, also Kaakinen, 2012, p.13).

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Tackling structural reasons behind youth homelessness and women's homelessness, homelessness prevention

"Bottle first –model"?: the importance of adequate and well designed support services

Authentic collaboration and true possibilities of having an impact: avoiding the risk of tokenism and "participation for its own sake"

Recognising and making use of multiple forms of knowledge and expertise concomitantly