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# Homeless in Europe

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**Tried and Tested: Social Innovation  
as a Means for Making Better  
Progress on Homelessness**



FEANTSA

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## Tried and Tested: Social Innovation as a Means for Making Better Progress on Homelessness

The process of designing and implementing new products, services and models that meet social needs more effectively than alternatives and create new social partnerships is known as “social innovation”. Such practices have long existed. However, the idea of having a social innovation “field” is a new concept in Europe. Promoting a social innovation agenda means supporting innovative practices that are proven to have met a particular social need and seeking ways to implement successful, small-scale initiatives on a larger scale (“scaling up”). A basic distinction between social and other innovation is that production is driven by social imperatives rather than economic and financial ones. A European social innovation agenda can provide a framework for introducing this difference.

Social innovation can come from many places – individuals, groups, NGOs; national, European and international economic and financial markets and governments, for example. It can happen in diverse fields, such as fair trade, urban farming, restorative justice, housing and homelessness. It involves consulting all stakeholders, including non-typical partners like the initiators of “grass-roots” projects and users of social services, and using their input as a basis for policy-making.

Any consultation must involve the existing social NGO sector in order to benefit from its expertise. Established social service providers are experts about the needs they seek to meet, and have insight into the limitations of existing approaches.

Indeed, so we can recognize the strengths and weaknesses of new approaches, it is important that the move towards innovation be backed up by sufficient testing of new ideas, so-called “evidence-based policy development” or “social experimentation”. This ensures that all aspects of ideas are adequately assessed. The robustness of evidence about innovative approaches’ success will determine their credibility.

Finally, homelessness is an area where there are real possibilities for social innovation. The need for innovation in the homeless sector is also crucial - homelessness exists across the EU, even in states with highly-developed welfare systems, and there

is increasing awareness that traditional approaches do not provide long-term solutions to homelessness. Testing innovative ideas which could meet homeless people’s needs better should identify more effective and sustainable ways of ending homelessness in Europe. This is already happening in some contexts.

The following articles give an overview of social innovation and experimentation as they are understood in and outside Europe, and focus specifically on how these tools can be used to address homelessness.

The European Commission has committed to new approaches to public service provision, and promotes social innovation. Many of the Europe 2020 objectives include social innovation imperatives. Agnès Hubert, Policy Adviser at the Commission’s Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA), answered our questions about the Commission’s position and future objectives regarding social innovation and its policy implications. Part of the Commission’s role is supporting social innovation projects and finding better ways to measure the social value of initiatives. Ms Hubert stressed that social innovation should not replace public services but that it can be effective in a participatory process, and supports a systemic change towards addressing social issues through targeted policies.

As it has undertaken to mainstream social innovation, the European Commission has launched a European Social Innovation pilot which provides a network for social entrepreneurs and the public and third sectors to exchange expertise on social innovation. The Social Innovation eXchange (SIX), along with its recent endeavour, Social Innovation Europe (SIE), aims to develop a productive space for exchange and learning in order to develop innovative solutions to challenges. SIX Project Developer Connor Friesen and Louise Pulford, Head of SIX, tell the social innovation “story”, explaining SIE’s role, and note its relevance to homelessness – touching on Housing First approaches and social enterprise and giving examples of what SIE has done so far to promote social innovation with regard to homelessness.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We would like to give you the chance to comment on any of the articles which have appeared in this issue. If you would like to share your ideas, thoughts and feedback, please send an email to the editor, [suzannah.young@feantsa.org](mailto:suzannah.young@feantsa.org).

The articles in *Homeless in Europe* do not necessarily reflect the views of FEANTSA. Extracts from this publication can be quoted as long as the sources are acknowledged.



Of course, it is necessary to test social innovation projects and not to jump head first into “doing social innovation” without being mindful of its risks. Stefano Galliani, FEANTSA AC Member for Italy and Coordinator of the Housing Community for Homeless People at the *Nuovo Albergo Popolare*, Bergamo, warns against forgetting the person-centred and community-centred approach to assisting or housing homeless people, and implementing a socially innovative idea without testing it adequately and without trying to understand the life trajectories of the people involved. He outlines programmes in Italy which respect and involve the individual and lead to greater health in the community.

With this in mind, we see that the credibility of socially innovative programmes can be enhanced when they undergo evaluation and testing. This is known as “social experimentation”. J-PAL, a network of researchers using “Randomised Evaluations” to answer questions on poverty alleviation, is a consultant for the Commission on social experimentation. H el ene Giacobino, J-PAL Director, describes J-PAL’s work and gives a detailed explanation of social experimentation. Measuring approaches’ effectiveness helps policy makers choose wisely and spend funds usefully. Being able to prove policies’ effectiveness can even be necessary to sustain funding – useful during a crisis. Ms Giacobino notes how similar methods have been used for decades in medicine and calls for the same level of professionalism when evaluating social policy.

An example of social experimentation in the field of homelessness is the partnership-working method developed by HACT, the Housing Action Charity. HACT Projects Director, Andrew van Doorn, describes the method, which involves working with service users to understand what they want and need, and then tests new solutions, taking risks and creating an evidence base and opportunities for others to replicate what has been proven to work. HACT understands housing providers have a role to play in innovation – they are committed to neighbourhoods and use their strengths in creative ways. This long-term vision is important: it takes time for ideas to be tested and for funding to make models sustainable. Mr Van Doorn stresses that even in times of restricted funding, the passion and imagination that HACT nurtures at grass-

roots level can enable small ideas to become nationally and even internationally sustainable solutions.

One innovation that is currently being tested is the “Housing First” approach to homelessness. Homeless services in Europe are largely dominated by what is termed the “staircase of transition”, informed by a notion that re-housing requires staged transition through different residential services. Volker Busch-Geertsema, Researcher at GISS and Coordinator of the European Observatory on Homelessness, shows that a critique of this approach has developed recently and presents a project funded by the European Commission PROGRESS programme that will evaluate and promote mutual exchange on the “Housing First” approach. This approach is about empowering homeless people to sustain their tenancy, promoting stable living conditions, and preventing repeat homelessness. The project, Housing First Europe, will test and evaluate Housing First projects in five European cities, leading to greater clarity on the potential and limits of the approach, as well as the key elements of Housing First projects.

“Housing First” originated in the United States. Nan Roman, President and CEO of the USA National Alliance to End Homelessness, presents the Housing First principle as it is perceived in the USA – Housing First providers focus on helping individuals and families move into permanent housing as quickly as possible, based on the premise that social service needs can best be addressed after they move in to their new home – and its innovative qualities, such as being “consumer-driven”. She also describes the positive results of USA Housing First experiments for residents and communities, the method’s applicability to differing target groups and measures for determining the effectiveness of Housing First programmes by capturing outcome data, including individual or family housing outcomes.

In Europe, as it was in the USA, the political context is of utmost importance for furthering progress on social innovation and social experimentation, and in allowing room to experiment with methods such as Housing First. A. R egnier, V. Girard, C. Laval and P. Estecahandy describe how the French political context was conducive to creating the momentum needed to start a series of Housing First experimentation



projects in France. They discuss the French understanding of the Housing First paradigm and describe the long-term, multisite experiment with Housing First principles in three French cities in 2011 and 2012, with particular reference to the Marseilles experiment.

Another, longer-running example of housing-based projects that tackle homelessness in France is the *Igloo* project, an approach based on practical action to help disadvantaged families access mainstream society and employment through their involvement in designing and building their future home. Patrick Kamoun, Secretary General of Igloo France and Advisor to *Union Sociale pour l'Habitat*, describes the *Igloo* approach and a local project in Mulhouse, as well as partnerships with different businesses that take part in the work training aspects of the project and studies carried out as part of the *Igloo* initiative.

The homelessness sector is open to using social innovation and experimentation. It can also involve non-typical partners to reach its goal. An example of this is the Hope in Stations project, which involves railway companies in fighting homelessness, increasing mutual learning between and quality standards of services for homeless people in European railway stations (in Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg and Poland). The project is funded by PROGRESS and experimentation is currently underway. Katharina Triebner and Sylvie Le Bars from the Europe Unit at *L'Agence Nouvelle des Solidarités Actives*, the body running the project, discuss its socially innovative aspects, present the common tool tested by all stations and taken up by many – a “social contact person” – and describe plans to train staff to recognise homelessness and familiarise them with the tools they have to assist people.

Another example of interagency working comes from The Netherlands, in the form of *Eigen Kracht-conferences (EK-c)* (Family Group Conferencing). Experience with this decision-making model has been gained in various fields, including the situation of homeless people. Lineke Joanknecht and Mariëtte Dirkzwager, regional managers of *Eigen Kracht* projects, explain the conferences, discuss recent developments, describe using the method with young people and adults, analyse the part played by professionals and give recommendations on how this approach can be used by organisations wanting to help people regain control through the *EK-c* method.

A different type of social innovation – social inclusion through sport – and an example of “scaling up” is presented by Benoît Danneau, Social Worker for Remise en Jeu and Director of the Local Organisation Committee of the 2011 Homeless World Cup (HWC) in Paris. Starting at local level, with something as small as a football, it is possible to facilitate social inclusion. Mr Danneau describes how every player is treated as an individual, how sport can help raise players' self-esteem and contribute to their physical wellbeing, and how players develop team-working and other transferable skills. The HWC social project involves homeless people and other stakeholders in decision-making. The article presents the *Centre national d'inclusion par le sport et la culture* (National Centre for Inclusion through Sport and Culture) as a positive result of the HWC, which will continue working towards the social inclusion of its beneficiaries long after the competition is over.

FEANTSA thanks all the authors who have contributed to this issue of the magazine.



# The European Commission, Social Innovation and Social Inclusion: An Interview with Agnès Hubert, Adviser at the European Commission Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA)

The European Commission's Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA) is an internal think tank in the Commission which operates directly under the President's authority. It connects Commission policy-makers with those parts of society that can fruitfully contribute to the development of policies (think tanks, academia, civil society, churches and communities of conviction) and provides the President with strategic thinking and policy advice. Its strategic input and reports concentrate on the early stage of the policy cycle, thereby helping to shape policy options in the medium and long term.

In July 2011, FEANTSA spoke to Agnès Hubert, BEPA adviser since 2005, about Social Innovation and Social Inclusion. Ms Hubert is responsible for gender, social issues and fundamental rights in BEPA. She is the author of the recent report entitled *Empowering People, Driving Change: Social Innovation in the European Union*.<sup>1</sup>

The following is a summary of her answers to FEANTSA's questions.

## THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

To move towards achieving the goals of the EU2020 strategy – to “foster sustainable growth, secure jobs and boost competitiveness”<sup>2</sup> – the European Commission has announced its intention to support social innovation through various EU programmes but in particular within two of its “Flagship initiatives”: The Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion<sup>3</sup> and the “Innovation Union”.<sup>4</sup>

In the former, social innovation is to be promoted “to find smart solutions in post-crisis Europe, especially in terms of more effective and efficient social support”. The latter places social innovation at the centre of the EU research and innovation strategy. As firmly put by Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, “innovation must go much wider than research, science and business. We need it to flourish not just in our laboratories,

factories and boardrooms, but also in our schools and community centres, our hospitals and care homes. It can help meet the unmet needs in society”. She was taking part in the launch of a two-year pilot project on social innovation called Social Innovation Europe<sup>5</sup> which will provide expertise and a networked ‘virtual hub’ for social entrepreneurs and the public and third sectors. The initiative is financed under the EU's Competitiveness and Innovation Programme,<sup>6</sup> which aims to encourage the competitiveness of European enterprises.

## BEPA AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

BEPA's support for the Commission's social innovation initiative took off in 2009, when it was asked by President Barroso to organize a workshop on Social Innovation, bringing together stakeholders, social entrepreneurs, NGO representatives, social partners and civil society actors to analyse examples of social innovation and past European experience and assess the opportunity to strengthen the promotion of social innovation in EU policies. The objective was to explore the possibilities offered by social innovation to boost the new approach of the Commission's Renewed Social Agenda.<sup>7</sup> The President was very encouraged by his discussions with stakeholders and, to follow up on the workshop, asked BEPA to draw up a report on the state of play and on the recommendations made by members of the workshop.

BEPA's report, released in July 2010 and entitled *Empowering People, Driving Change: Social Innovation in the European Union*, outlines the rationale for social innovation, how it can be defined, and what the Commission had been doing so far in a variety of policy areas (social, health, regional policy, agriculture, research, information society, etc). It also analyses obstacles to the development of social innovation and suggests a set of 40 recommendations.

When asked about her views about social innovation in relation to the fight against poverty and social exclusion, Ms Hubert said that while social innovation should not replace public services, it has been proven,

1 [http://ec.europa.eu/bepa/pdf/publications\\_pdf/social\\_innovation.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/bepa/pdf/publications_pdf/social_innovation.pdf)

2 Action in the social field is primarily the responsibility of Member States. Member States devote 26% (2005) of GDP to spending on social policy. But this spending could be done in a more targeted and efficient way. The EU is helping coordinate efforts to promote active inclusion, including labour-market integration, making work pay and lifelong learning as part of the fight against poverty. The Commission is also working to ensure that single market and competition rules facilitate the development of good quality, accessible and sustainable social services, including social economy enterprises.

3 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=961>

4 [http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm)

5 <http://socialinnovationeurope.eu/>

6 <http://ec.europa.eu/cip/>

7 The Renewed Social Agenda (<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=547>), launched by the Barroso Commission on 2 July 2008, represents a new commitment to social Europe and consists of an integrated approach that brings together various policies. It seeks to empower and equip Europeans to deal with rapidly changing realities shaped by globalisation, technological progress and ageing societies and help those who have difficulties coping with these changes.



**Social innovation is now being favoured as a way to introduce a systemic change towards valuing social as much as economic considerations.**

in a large number of occurrences and projects in the EU Member States and beyond, that it was effective in meeting unmet social needs as part of a participatory process – involving people affected by difficult social situations to design and implement solutions to the problems they meet. It is generally more effective than ‘top-down’ solutions that are more costly. While fragmented, social innovations contribute effectively at reducing social inequalities (for example the Projecto Geração (Generation Project) in Portugal, which was financed by EQUAL, or “second-chance schools” in France). This is particularly true in times of credit crunch. Social innovation is an effective way to address social exclusion in the eyes of BEPA, but should not be the only measure used. While social innovation most often stems from local grassroots initiatives, the European Commission’s role is to help identify the barriers and obstacles to their development and scaling-up. The work of the social economy in addressing social issues should be highly regarded and room should be made for the thousands of young people in particular whose ambition is to work on meaningful activities by creating social enterprises or engaging in cooperatives, NGOs and foundations. These new actors should be nurtured and rewarded in their efforts.

### **SOCIAL INNOVATION AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE**

When drawing lessons from progress made during the 10 years of the Lisbon Strategy (2000-2010)<sup>8</sup> the European Commission questioned the belief that had been for the last ten years that if growth was created, social problems would automatically decrease. The impact of the 2008 economic crisis further revealed that growth should not be the only answer to the reduction of poverty and the gaps between rich and poor may even be getting wider.

In this context, social innovation is now being favoured as a way to introduce a systemic change towards valuing social as much as economic considerations and attempting to address social issues through targeted policies. A difficult challenge for the European Commission is now to develop better ways to assess and measure the social value of initiatives, and not just their economic value. This will be made easier in the wake of the “beyond GDP” communication of 2008.<sup>9</sup>

Social innovation is also considered as a means of meeting previously unmet social needs. Ms Hubert believes that social innovation can have an effect on previously existing, persistent inequalities as well as on the effects of the crisis – through engaging in a systemic change in the way we address issues, whilst still supporting other policies as well. The BEPA report underlines the complementarity of the three approaches to social innovation: to address urgent social issues; to address societal or structural issues including ones that have an impact on the quality of life for poorer people, such as the environment; and how to engage in systemic change (see BEPA report p.26) She insists that what is important about this change is that it is not just an objective, it is a participative process – involving the people most directly affected and giving them the resources necessary to implement change.

### **SUPPORTING SOCIAL INNOVATION PROJECTS**

As extensively described in the BEPA Report on Social Innovation, the European Commission has a long history of promoting action to stimulate and monitor innovative experiments and networking models in the social field (Chapter 6 and annexes). This action has, however, been dispersed in many policy fields, and does not systematically address the issues and difficulties met by social innovators. The EU 2020 Strategy and the two flagship initiatives mentioned earlier provide a wide coherent framework, but BEPA is now entrusted with the task of monitoring the development of initiatives in this field by different services of the Commission. Support for innovative experiments is being continued under the PROGRESS Programme<sup>10</sup> and the pilot project “Social innovation Europe” has developed a website<sup>11</sup> and is researching new ways of funding and nurturing social innovation. Also, in the framework of commitments made in the Single Market Act, Michel Barnier, Commissioner Responsible for Internal Market and Services, is currently leading his team for the preparation of a communication for facilitating the development of social enterprises.

Another part of the philosophy of the “Innovation Union”, mentioned above and endorsed by Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn, is that it is not possible to have an innovative society if innovation is not

8 [http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs\\_2009/pdf/lisbon\\_strategy\\_evaluation\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs_2009/pdf/lisbon_strategy_evaluation_en.pdf)

9 <http://www.beyond-gdp.eu/newsletter-archive.html>

10 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=327&langId=en>

11 <http://www.socialinnovationeurope.eu/>



embedded in society. This means that innovation should not be reserved for “people in laboratories”; rather it should be used to address social concerns such as the ageing society, young people’s social exclusion, and homelessness. Within its research on social sciences, the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme has undertaken to develop a platform on social innovation, in addition to financing research projects on social innovation in the public sector, in addressing inequalities and in ageing.

### **FUTURE OBJECTIVES**

President Barroso has recognised that social innovation in Europe is hampered by: insufficient knowledge of users’ needs; fragmentation of efforts and resources; poor diffusion and little scale-up of good practices and poor evaluation of action and policies. Following recommendations made in the BEPA report, the European Commission is working on these four issues.

Firstly, the Commission is focusing on empowering users and working on a more coherent strategy for implementing social innovation, not only in Commission Programmes but also involving Member States, including regions and municipalities which are often at the forefront of action in this field. Secondly, the Commission acknowledges that a lot of good ideas exist but people are prevented from developing them because of a lack of resources. Currently it can be risky to start with an idea without the appropriate means to take it further, which can mean monetary, legal or fiscal resources. The Commission is working to change this. Thirdly, there will be a Commission Communication in October on a Social Business Initiative, which should facilitate the emergence of social business as a mainstream instrument, which in turn should help in scaling up successful projects.

The Commission Communication on the Single Market Act Initiative<sup>12</sup> also suggests that a discussion with stakeholders should be ongoing. Finally, with regards to evaluation, Ms Hubert mentioned that the European Commission needs to and is currently developing a “toolbox” of ways to measure the value of social innovation and social action. The statistical tools that it currently has focus on economic value. Thus, in order to collect the right data, the instruments to measure need and to measure the social value of initiatives must be developed.

### **HOMELESSNESS AND SOCIAL INNOVATION**

Ms Hubert acknowledged that social innovation can be a useful way of addressing homelessness in Europe. For example, she had been impressed by the action of a French social innovator who presented a project to a workshop organized by DG Internal Market and Services. The innovator, François Marty, and a team of marginalized persons are developing environmentally-friendly social housing as part of a financially sustainable project that works with municipalities to tackle housing shortages in France.<sup>13</sup> Ms Hubert also recognizes that projects such as the Housing First concept could be useful to address issues of housing homeless people. She believes that in the current absence in Europe of a federal homeless policy as exists in the USA (the home of Housing First), supporting ‘bottom-up’ projects is an efficient way of ensuring that attention is given to social needs and the expertise of those who have experienced these needs is tapped into. Another social innovation project that has received PROGRESS funding is Hope In Stations (HOMEless PEople in European Train Stations), which is currently testing the impact of social intervention and the provision of services for homeless people in several European train stations.

<sup>12</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/smact/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/smact/index_en.htm)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.chenelet.org/qui>



# Homelessness and Social Innovation: Making Room to Share Insights and Clearing a Path Towards More Impactful Innovation

By **Connor Friesen**<sup>1</sup> and **Louise Pulford**,<sup>2</sup> *Social Innovation Europe and SIX*

“You begin ending homelessness with a home” states Rosanne Haggerty, founder of the Common Ground programme to counter homelessness in the United States, “but you don’t end there.”<sup>3</sup> With these words, she sums up a social innovation which is having an increasingly large impact on the way we think about homelessness, worldwide.

The Social Innovation eXchange (SIX)<sup>4</sup> along with its recent European endeavour, the Social Innovation Europe Initiative (SIE),<sup>5</sup> work to find, develop, and disseminate ideas like this every day—social innovations which re-arrange our social relationships in order to create solutions and address unmet social needs. Some will be more impactful than others. Some will generate new policies and programmes internationally while others will remain local. Regardless of their eventual reach, however, SIX and SIE work to ensure that these innovations have a space in which to develop and have access to a clear path towards scale and impact. Rosanne Haggerty’s story, though it takes place long before the advent of SIX and SIE, can help us to understand what types of support social innovations need in order to grow to international scale.

In 1991, Rosanne converted New York’s infamous Time Square Hotel into the largest supported housing development for formerly homeless people in the United States at a remarkably small cost relative to less permanent solutions, like homeless shelters. In 1999 she replicated her success by transforming the Prince George Hotel. In doing so, she effectively constructed two large-scale bodies of proof that “you begin ending homelessness with a home” with massive public visibility. She showed the community of stakeholders, in no uncertain terms, that there was a new way to address homelessness, that it was inexpensive, that it was permanent, and that it was replicable.

The “Housing First” model cannot be attributed to Rosanne alone. The innovation influenced a number of thinkers and actors at the time. Nevertheless, her work in New York, and the subsequent impact of the

model on US policy (ie: the HEARTH Act),<sup>6</sup> practice (in the move away from shelter-based programmes in cities from San Francisco to Salt Lake City to Seattle), and the understanding of homelessness worldwide (as evidenced by the Vienna Platform on Health and Homelessness Conference on Housing First in March of this year<sup>7</sup> and Housing First pilots in three French communities),<sup>8</sup> shows us the potential power and reach of an innovation that is given the opportunity to demonstrate its success to its community.

And this is only one of the innovations working to address homelessness globally. The examples of effective and innovative responses to homelessness range from informal, mutually-supportive communities to established enterprises like the Big Issue<sup>9</sup>—a London-based social business which launched its first magazine with a distribution network of 10 homeless vendors, and which, 20 years later, publishes weekly editions across the United Kingdom, as well as publishing spinoff organizations in Australia, Japan, South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia, Malawi and Namibia, helping thousands of homeless people, globally.

The innovation story of attempting to find a solution to homelessness is much like the stories that accompany other big societal challenges—there are pockets of inspiration, great ideas, and really effective programmes all over the world; these programmes and ideas have the chance to interface, communicate, and generate collective knowledge and narratives at events such as the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness,<sup>10</sup> but these conversations are difficult to sustain in a dynamic way, between events. SIX and SIE aim to create a space where these conversations are continuous, where outliers with great ideas can jump into the discussion at any time, and where we can generate a coherent and constantly adapting narrative about what the real problems are, in light of the most recent evidence, and generate solutions. The examples we have named above are just a few of the many creative and effective interventions all over the world, and they are some of the better known ones. But there are so many more good ideas to be shared

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3 <http://www.ashoka.org/node/4417>

4 <http://www.socialinnovationexchange.org/>

5 [www.socialinnovationeurope.eu](http://www.socialinnovationeurope.eu)

6 <http://www.hudhre.info/hearth/>

7 <http://www.gesundheit-wohnungslosigkeit.at/plattformtreffen/fachtagung-22011/vortraege/housing-first/>

8 [www.socialinnovationeurope.eu](http://www.socialinnovationeurope.eu)

9 [http://www.bigissue.com/History\\_34.php](http://www.bigissue.com/History_34.php)

10 <http://socialinnovationeurope.eu/node/2125>



and learned from. Until we speed up the process of learning and sharing between countries—until we make a continuously lively space for exchanging good practice and learning, we cannot face challenges like homelessness with our full capacity.

SIX and SIE aim to nurture and develop this space, as well as to pursue this narrative in order to innovate solutions and responses to priority challenges such as homelessness.

Created in 2008, SIX is a global community of over 3000 individuals and organisations – including small NGOs and global firms, public agencies and academics - committed to promoting social innovation. Our aim is to improve the methods with which our societies find better solutions to challenges such as ageing, climate change, inequality, healthcare, and homelessness. SIX is now the world's primary network bringing together individuals and organisations involved in the field of social innovation. SIX's global reach allows us to promote learning across sectors, fields and countries. The combined expertise of our networked members is formidable and, by communicating and disseminating their ideas across the network, SIX helps all of its members to benefit. Collectively, our membership represents a vast resource to the field of social innovation. In essence, SIX connects innovators to increase their capacity—and the capacity of the field of social innovation in general— to innovate better, smarter solutions, worldwide.

Although SIX's remit is global, our most exciting recent progress is on the European front. SIX is beginning to have a marked influence on European social policy in relation to social innovation. In 2010, the Young Foundation and SIX delivered a report entitled *Study on Social Innovation to the European Bureau of Policy Advisors*. Following this, the Europe 2020 Strategy recognized the need to support social innovation: "We must champion social innovation. We must develop a better understanding of public sector innovation, identify and give visibility to successful initiatives, and benchmark progress."<sup>11</sup>

In order to turn this resolution into a reality, the European Commission called on organizations to run a Social Innovation Initiative for Europe. SIX was appointed by the Directorate General for Enterprise to lead a consortium, which includes Euclid Network and the Danish Technological Institute, to set this initiative, simply called Social Innovation Europe. The initiative is well underway—the first of three major thematic reports examining support structures neces-

sary for social innovation to flourish in Europe is now complete, and the initiative's website ([www.socialinnovationeurope.eu](http://www.socialinnovationeurope.eu)) is rapidly becoming a clearinghouse for the latest news and insights on innovation, as well as a wide-reaching directory of events and organizations. The initiative's events series aims to take this conversation offline, and solidify connections in a way that only face-to-face meetings can. This project will build on SIX's strength—connecting innovators across countries, languages and sectors from the local level to the international—in order to create a streamlined, vigorous social innovation field in Europe, and propel Europe to lead the practice of social innovation globally. In short, we aim to connect in order to inspire and to enable.

### **SOCIAL INNOVATION EUROPE: A SPACE FOR INDIVIDUALS TO SHARE WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T**

The value of learning networks must be in the people, and the space they have to share ideas and experiences with each other. Why is one project more innovative than another? How can we tell which responses to social issues like homelessness are actually the most helpful and which are the most traditional? How do we know which innovations have the strongest evidence base if some projects always shout louder than others? And what about the innovations we don't know about? There are many different ways of doing things, and many examples of doing things well, but they aren't having a big impact. The social innovation field needs critical and rigorous analysis, and the first step to achieving this is creating a safe space where people can talk with each other and discuss these issues.

Both SIE and SIX are designed to connect innovators with each other to increase their own capacity to innovate new solutions to old and entrenched social problems. In a European context, SIE offers a space where individuals and organizations with the energy and passion to address priority issues in their respective fields, can cross national borders, disregard sector boundaries, and find truly inspiring solutions together. Social Innovation Europe offers a real value in its ability to disregard silos and promote learning across the lines that divide us.

Over the coming months, Social Innovation Europe plans to work with established service providers within sectors like homelessness to identify the meaningful innovation that is taking place in a regional context and to identify what is possible.

**Social Innovation Europe plans to work with established service providers within sectors like homelessness to identify the meaningful innovation that is taking place in a regional context and to identify what is possible.**

<sup>11</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/innovation-union-communication\\_en.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/innovation-union-communication_en.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none), p.3.



Social Innovation Europe is well placed to promote these innovations and new ideas, and to advance the field. The initiative's online hub creates a virtual space where innovators can share research, analysis, news and insight, as well as list events, and organizations. There is already a body of work building up on SIE surrounding Housing First and the broader issue of homelessness. We have conducted an exclusive interview with Juha Kaakinen,<sup>12</sup> the leader of the deeply effective National Programme to Reduce Long-term Homelessness in Finland. We have collected outcomes from the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness,<sup>13</sup> as well as impassioned arguments from FEANTSA<sup>14</sup> on the role of established players in addressing the issue of homelessness alongside the social innovation community. Academic treatments of the various pathways out of homelessness,<sup>15</sup> sit beside an in-depth interview with the head of Barka UK,<sup>16</sup> whose programme of repatriating homeless Polish migrants in London has drawn commendations and criticism from the community.

On [www.socialinnovationeurope.eu](http://www.socialinnovationeurope.eu), European social innovators are never more than a few clicks away from knowing who is working in their field and in their region. Users can comment on one another's contributions and create connections with those doing similar work. Crucially, innovators can share both successes and learning experiences. Through the SIE events series, innovators can take this conversation offline, and pursue truly productive conversations on priority issues such as homelessness with experts and practitioners in the field. The success of SIE will be realised only when people engage meaningfully with the content.

## SUPPORTING THE BEST IDEAS TO GROW

But what happens after innovators have come together and created a truly great idea? How can that idea become an effective reality that really makes a difference to people's lives at scale? In Europe, and indeed worldwide, we lack social structures and systems which can take small ideas and help them to grow. We need to clear an upward path between the pockets of good ideas and the social norm.

Homelessness is a good case in point. A comprehensive ecology of support is needed to help the good early-stage ideas to develop a solid evidence base, grow to a large scale and have a bigger impact. We need to support intermediary services and organisations to provide translation services between sectors and regions, in order to maximise the synergies of business, public sector and civil society, and create new partnerships, across sectors and traditional silos. By fostering an ecosystem of organizations that facilitate our cooperation, we can work together to make sure the best ideas grow to their full potential.

## A JOINED-UP INNOVATION STORY

Even when our system effectively supports the sharing of ideas, and builds capacity within individuals and organisations to develop and scale innovations successfully, we still need to ensure our actions are joined up. Communication between organisations and across sectors is key. And we need to trust each other more, avoid unhealthy competition and replication of programmes and networks with similar activities. When the problems are so complex, we need to make finding solutions simple. We need a more joined-up approach.

Essentially, the field of social innovation in Europe needs to develop so that it is mature enough to tackle the multitude of challenges society presents it with. Many of these challenges will relate to or stem from the perennial problem of homelessness, and we hope that many of the solutions will stem from our cooperation through SIX and SIE.

<sup>12</sup> <http://socialinnovationeurope.eu/node/2206>

<sup>13</sup> <http://socialinnovationeurope.eu/node/2125>

<sup>14</sup> <http://socialinnovationeurope.eu/node/2130>

<sup>15</sup> <http://socialinnovationeurope.eu/node/2127>

<sup>16</sup> <http://socialinnovationeurope.eu/node/1858>



## Social Innovation: Mirror of the Power or Real Change?

By **Stefano Galliani**<sup>1</sup>, *FEANTSA AC Member, Coordinator of an Accommodation Community for the Homeless at the Nuovo Albergo Popolare, Bergamo, Italy*

What is “social innovation” today? This is a question that has to be asked at a time when the rights, freedom and resources that we took for granted are being challenged by the prevailing cultural models and political decisions. It is also a direct question for those working on homelessness because one of the major risks is giving the “social innovation” label to actions that actually maintain the existing social model, with no change to the relationships and powers that govern the “polis.” When institutions or individuals react to a call for proposals with a nice project, perfectly adequate to the call (but without an idea of change behind and only with the intention to earn money), that offers no alternatives to the main processes that determine social exclusion today: a gradual fragmentation of social ties, a drive for independence with a loss of a sense of belonging to a territorial community, a market rationale for every exchange of goods and services, reduction of fundamental rights (housing, health, work, social protection).

I shall refer to my direct and daily work experience (from 1984 to the present) with homeless adults in a provincial city in Italy (Bergamo) and to the Mediterranean culture with which I am plagued, to propose a number of reflections.

My definition of “social innovation,” will be what I consider to be the aim of a strategy to end homelessness: restoring spaces of freedom to people living in poverty whilst building forms of active citizenship at the same time. Every action which does not pursue these objectives at every level tends to perpetuate the established social model and its forms of exclusion.

In our discussions, the issue of innovation is often connected to the concept of “Housing First”: a weighty proposal for countries of Southern Europe, which have little inclination for structural interventions and few housing resources for the underprivileged segments of society. The Housing First strategy is based on a simple premise: providing accommodation is the best way to meet homeless people’s needs. Alongside this, the aim is to provide advice and support for independent living as a way to give back rights and opportunities to everyone.

Undeniably, being homeless means being deprived of a fundamental right. But can we use housing as our main solution to the complex social processes involved? Can we consider such a response suitable for the existential crisis that homeless people experience? What connections are there between the Housing First approach and the reconstruction of spaces of freedom and citizenship as the way to

combat homelessness? I shall try to set out a number of thoughts on the matter.

The definition of “freedom” is a topic of extensive discussion. What is interesting is trying to understand where the problem of freedom lies for a homeless person. I believe that psychology can provide some clues to the relationship between housing and freedom. Certain studies show that the home is principally an “internal” construct for a person.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, to arrive at a concept of freedom, it is necessary to construct, with the person, the idea of a home, where the door (or the interface between interior and exterior) protects the private domain as well as being a means of communication with the outside world. This may seem self-evident, but does someone who loses his or her home see the “private” sphere become “public,” and experience the other as a threat because s/he might take something away from him/her?

From this perspective, the first element connected to housing for a truly “innovative” strategy concerns providing guidance and support to people so that they may free themselves from the bonds of their own experiences of suffering. If no attention is paid to this factor, even the best type of housing can become the worst type of punishment. A fundamental right becomes a weak right. The person is not able to use this right and therefore enjoy true wellbeing. That is what I think of when I remember the faces of those people who, when they were in a new house, failed to “free” themselves and fell back into problems, addictions, or even found in suicide the only answer to a life of suffering.

A second necessary element: giving individuals back spaces of freedom means knowing how to work on the idea of “boundaries”. Anthropology and education help us to understand how there can be no freedom without awareness of the fragile nature of our existence. I would define it as a rule that runs counter to Western society’s economic, technological and scientific models that set human limits – a dynamic by which many homeless persons are affected... and are victims of!

In fact, the forms of hardship experienced by homeless people reflect and amplify the social processes under the “normal” circumstances in which we live. The loss of a collective sense of “fragility” leads to an increase of social vulnerability which, at personal level, is translated into a loss of resources (income, work, home) and social ties. Awareness of being able to name our own fragility remains key to constructing

One of the major risks is giving the “social innovation” label to actions that actually maintain the existing social model.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. The studies of R. Papadopoulos on refugees: “*Therapeutic Care for Refugees: No place like home*” (London: Karnac, 2002 Tavistock Clinic Series).



**“Social innovation” means knowing how to ask the territory why it offers inadequate, ghettoising and stereotypical housing solutions.**

a real evolution in our life trajectories. I therefore consider “social innovation” to be the ability to regain the awareness of our “limits” against a culture that asks everyone to be fully able to solve their own problems (forgetting what is possible for every person).<sup>3</sup> The same applies to action in the context of place. “To innovate” means to take action within a territory in the “ecological” sense, in order to determine new forms of exchange and mutual assistance between the citizens of a local community, by intervening to find ways to promote health in the local community.<sup>4</sup>

The connection between “limits/fragility” and “housing” relating to homelessness comes into play in this binary relationship: the ability to help people find the best place and the housing most suited to the life conditions that they can fulfil turns fragility into an experience of mutual assistance. Delivering houses alone is not enough. Particularly for accommodation only for him/her self!

All this relates to my own experience of working with homeless people: the hardest thing for a person marked by the rupture of his or her closest social ties (at any point in his/her life) is having a home for oneself, just for oneself. Even in places that appear far removed from the home model (a station, a square, a prison), we find dynamics of belonging, of closeness between people (albeit even in pathological or unconventional forms). Relational codes and complicity develop in all contexts and are deeply rooted in the very nature of man, who remains a “social animal.”<sup>5</sup> Now, a service network that cannot help people identify the most adequate accommodation for them and offer forms of cohabitation and mutual assistance as a trial living situation, risks creating new uneasiness – an uneasiness often visible in those who have experienced loneliness.

In parallel, “social innovation” means knowing how to ask the territory why it offers inadequate, ghettoising and stereotypical housing solutions. Those are sources of new loneliness and dangerous “time bombs.” Rather they should endeavour to develop forms of belonging in the territorial context that will enable even persons suffering from serious social “fragility” to move from “house” to “home”. As such, homeless services can offer the “city” opportunities to enrich the experience of people who do not find

responses to their sense of fragility in the current relational model – a difficulty experienced more and more by all citizens at all stages of life.

This is where the connection between “innovation” and citizenship comes from – where “innovation” is first and foremost the capacity of the services to plan, together with public institutions, more appropriate housing models and forms of active participation by citizens to promote health in the local community.

Homeless services have been discussing and experimenting with participatory processes for some time now. This is a “mandatory” issue for those working with people who live in social exclusion; but also because the same services often risk being seen as marginal, outside the social processes, separated from the more structured welfare system.<sup>6</sup> We can therefore have an important and certainly “innovative” role to play in this field – above all on models that can now define real processes for participation in the “polis”.

To debunk a stereotype: participation does not mean merely being active in a public group; but rather giving room for the expression of ideas and actions from excluded segments of the population to change the prevailing economic and relational models. It is necessary to go from major projects to the development of a smaller, diffuse, local economy; from the trade of goods only on an economic basis to the development of mutual assistance and reciprocity in daily life. These characteristics can even enable people with scarce resources (e.g. income) to assume leading roles in a relational circuit. Engaging in “social innovation” is therefore the capacity to bring concrete experience that gives value to the experience of persons who are most excluded from the local communities. This helps to recognise the added value of homeless services to the places where they are situated, as they are capable of offering possible alternatives to make the cities more “livable” and participatory.

These are, very briefly, some of the quality elements for defining a strategy or an experiment as being capable of “social innovation.” It seems to me, in fact, that in certain experiments with high visibility and media impact, the analysis (at times in a way that is highly suspect) gives recognition to elements of innovation that should be better analysed.

3 Statistics prove the unsustainability of the current Western social model through the considerable increase of depressive forms in the population and forms of pathological dependency (use of psychotropics, narcotics, pathological gambling, etc.); the most extreme form whereof is, in certain ways, represented by homelessness.

4 “Health” in the broad sense, as used by the United Nations

5 Cf. the works of Aristotle, 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and all the focus on the issue in subsequent centuries.

6 For instance, the services are often involved in temporary projects, not within structural frameworks, and with resources obtained through charity and donations, rather than transfers from resources from the Public Body.



Only the connection between the experiences of a homeless service provider and its impact on redefining social and economic processes in the place where the service operates becomes a fundamental indicator for understanding the real degree of innovation. Often, however, “innovation” is defined as nothing other than the separation between the so-called “normal” society and a group of persons suffering from pathologies and thus “deviants” on which the intervention is focused, who need particular environments that are separate from the local community where they can receive care and undergo rehabilitation – without considering nor criticising how the social model has affected the individual’s life story.

In Italy, as elsewhere, there are spectacular experiments of services and structures with high media visibility, in which the sequence of treatments is based primarily on erasing the previous personal life story, the total subsequent “reprogramming” in compliance with “strong” values, and the testing of those values only within the structure itself, with scarcely any added value for the nearby communities.

For the persons who comply therewith it is a good welfare opportunity – a positive personal change. But if we want to develop an alternative social model, such experiments cannot be considered “innovative” because they perpetuate a separation between “normality” and “diversity”, worlds which do not intermix and which have to remain quite separate from each other to guarantee success. But this is simply an old model that reproduces an old “health-care” tradition that we thought had been abandoned (isolation hospitals, closed psychiatric hospitals).

Conversely, the experience of certain services, such as for instance the *Nuovo Albergo Popolare* in Bergamo<sup>7</sup> as well as some of the other FioPSD services,<sup>8</sup> shows how ways of capitalising on users’ resources can provide added value to the entire community.

These are, briefly, experiments where the life story of the homeless individuals in regard to spaces of “freedom” and active citizenship manages to create opportunities in a geographical area which benefits the area. These include:

- Multi-disciplinary projects (with public and private institutions) to build more cohesive districts and cities with projects and proposals for mutual assistance between the residents of districts of the city (neighbourliness projects)<sup>9</sup>

- Volunteering opportunities (e.g. looking after public parks, helping formal services for young people or the elderly, etc)
- Proposals for alternative modes of production and consumption (production of organic vegetables, relations with the GAS,<sup>10</sup> etc.)
- Parties, cultural events and training courses proposed to the city<sup>11</sup>
- Accommodation in co-habitation between homeless persons and/or between homeless persons and “common” people (e.g. young university graduates)

Through these experiments, homeless persons can construct a new image of themselves and in doing so, make visible and concrete to the city the re-conquest of active citizenship for collective wellbeing. In this way, the provision of independent accommodation becomes part of an open-ended and sustainable evolution for a life story marked with difficulties.

An approach, in other words, that complexifies Housing First projects, because:

- it brings people in close relation with the territories to which they belong
- it offers a new social representation of housing exclusion
- it promotes a new social representation of solutions that would make it possible to prevent and to overcome such hardship.

This approach is not based on the difficulties of a single individual but question the model of social relations; they do not work in the absence of (economic, structural) resources, but try to formulate hypotheses of new forms of relations and of an economy in the city from which all can benefit in an outlook of collective limit and fragility.

In this sense, “social innovation” can be defined as the professional experiment endeavouring to promote forms of living together in the local community: a community that attempts to give value to the condition of social fragility, because it sees in itself the seeds of that fragility; and a city which lives the experience of the connection to generate new connections and to be stronger through solidarity.

7 [www.nap.bg.it](http://www.nap.bg.it)

8 [www.fiopsd.org](http://www.fiopsd.org)

9 In the city of Bergamo, for instance, there are social housing and social cohesion projects “Emergenza dimora”, “Piccola polis”, “abitare la Malpensata” in which homeless individuals are directly involved.

10 GAS (Gruppi di Acquisto Solidali) are groups of families of a circumscribed territory which give preference to self-production and organic products, ethics (because made without exploitation of the workers and at Km zero).

11 E.g. training courses at the University where homeless people are in charge of the students (by tutoring or teaching) to allow for a better understanding of homelessness.



## Researchers Against Poverty

By **Hélène Giacobino**,<sup>1</sup> *Director, J-PAL Europe*

*“The failure of anti-poverty programmes is not necessarily due to its being a difficult issue but from it being rushed: things are quickly and ill thought through. Also, many public policies are defined in terms of an imagined public, not the public as it is. The reason for that is a total misunderstanding of the grassroots”.*

*Esther Duflo*

**Impact evaluations are the best way, and often the only one we have, to know whether a policy (or project) has really had the desired effect.**

There have always been organizations concerned with people experiencing poverty.

Governments worldwide design programmes aimed at alleviating poverty.

Resources are finite and must be used wisely. But how can we tell if what is being done is useful? Which project really delivers the goods? Which will give the biggest return on investment in terms of impact?

By measuring the effectiveness of different measures, rigorous evaluations help (public or private) policy-makers to make more informed choices and spend the available funds more wisely.

### A NETWORK OF RESEARCHERS

It was to address this need that J-PAL – the Poverty Action Lab – was founded in 2003 by Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee, professors of development economics at one of the top US universities, MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). Today, J-PAL has up to sixty affiliate research economists from across the world involved in around fifty countries.

J-PAL has three aims:

- to support researchers in evaluating anti-poverty programmes, whether run by governments or NGOs;
- to train researchers and front-line partners in randomized evaluation, which is the only method used by J-PAL to assess programme impacts,
- above all, to spread the results as widely as possible to bridge the frequent gaps between research and real life.

The J-PAL Europe regional office was launched in Paris in 2007 (at the Paris School of Economics). It is my privilege to head it. Most of the 17 European researchers are currently engaged in projects on employment and education in Europe, while others are involved with developing countries.

Our aim is to make evidence-based recommendations on policy options and implementation based on a rigorous approach.<sup>2</sup>

### WHY EVALUATE IMPACT?

It is hard to tell whether decades of anti-poverty programmes have produced progress or not.

So, scepticism increases, and the better-off can argue that as the funds are being wasted, there is no point in giving or spending part of their taxes on it. Proving that programmes are effective can therefore help motivate people to finance action on poverty. This is particularly important in times of crisis ...

But evaluation has a negative connotation: often used to reward or punish, it elicits fear. And yet, it is above all a learning tool for testing new ideas which can then be scaled up if proven to work.

For example, insecticide-treated mosquito nets are the most effective way of tackling malaria in Africa. But should they be given out free so that everyone may have one or for a small charge to make people value them more? Only the organized field evaluation showed that distributing them for free was better. Today, millions of mosquito nets are handed out free of charge to reduce this scourge.

Impact evaluations are the best way, and often the only one we have, to know whether a policy (or project) has really had the desired effect. Providing clear and compelling answers makes it possible to rise above the sterile debates that excuse inaction. But it requires an objective and rigorous method.

### HOW CAN WE EVALUATE IMPACT?

Programmes evaluated by traditional methods and found to be effective have very often proved disappointing when scaled up. Why is this?

Take the case of evaluating a training programme aimed at helping unemployed young people to develop their employability skills:

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<sup>2</sup> Our website [www.povertyactionlab.org](http://www.povertyactionlab.org) provides access to methodology factsheets, and descriptions of past and ongoing evaluations. It is currently in English and Spanish and will soon be available in French.



- A before and after comparison does not allow room for all the external factors that can affect participants during the study period. For example, if a factory has opened meanwhile, the unemployed youngsters will find jobs more readily even if the training programme was inadequate. But the programme will be taken to have produced good results in view of the observed fall in unemployment. Therefore, the real impact of the training programme will not have been evaluated ...
- Nor will a comparison of voluntary participants/non-participants work well, because there is every likelihood that young people who voluntarily go on vocational training will be different - more highly motivated, for example. Here again, will the ultimate success of such a volunteer be related to his or her own abilities or to the training?
- Determining the real impact, therefore, means being able to compare what happens with the programme there with what it happens if it is not there.

The experimental (or randomized evaluation) approach used by J-PAL researchers is the social sciences equivalent of the clinical trial in medicine: the potential beneficiaries of a programme are randomly distributed between two groups – one that will participate in a programme (test group) and one that will not (control group).

The programme is implemented in the test group. The control group will not be involved in the programme (initially, but may benefit from it when testing is completed). Comparing the results of these two statistically identical groups, the programme effects are clearly identifiable, ring-fenced from all other external factors that might have affected its impact (such as motivation, social status, etc.).

This makes it possible to rigorously measure parameters that were previously not readily quantifiable and to identify hitherto unsuspected causalities.

This method was first implemented in economics in the 1960s in the field of vocational training, then education.

### **UNDERSTANDING IMPROVES PREDICTIONS**

The initial aim of our experiments was to determine whether specific projects were effective or not. We later sought to understand why they worked or not.

For example, while preventive medicine is highly effective and cheap, the finding is that people experiencing poverty do not use it much, and then have to spend far more money on treatment.

An experiment run in India has shown that our natural human tendency to “put off ‘til tomorrow what one can do today” when no immediate benefit is perceived or received explained the lack of vaccination take-up. Simply offering a kilo of lentils to families who took up vaccination increased the vaccination rate from 2% to 38.3% ...

Understanding this universal mechanism of human behaviour has led to changes to other programmes which enabled them to deliver their aim.

While not all good ideas are always good, some are and sometimes even exceed expectations! Rigorous evaluation gives that certainty: we have repeatedly been surprised by results which, gleaned by a less rigorous method, we might have hesitated to take into account.

And yet, randomized evaluation is not the latest recipe for magicking away poverty: it cannot always be used (on ethical grounds or project size, for example). Only the evaluation of previously well-defined questions will produce meaningful results and a universally beneficial advance in knowledge.

### **WE NEED HIGH EXPECTATIONS!**

Similar methods have been used for decades in the medical field: before a drug is marketed, it is tested on a group of randomly selected patients, while a second group receives a placebo.

By comparing the observed effects on the two groups, scientists can objectively determine whether the drug is beneficial or not. Millions of euros are invested to achieve this result which is essential to people's safety.

We need to apply the same standards and scientific rigor in assessing social programmes. Randomized evaluation is a first-class way of objectively demonstrating that a project is delivering the promised objectives. Undertaking to assess the impact of measures implemented and accepting that we may be mistaken (but at least through the evaluation, will have learned something!) is what will give us really effective social policies.



# HACT – A Catalyst for Change in the UK Housing Sector for Over 50 Years

By Andrew van Doorn,<sup>1</sup> Projects Director, HACT, UK

Last year, in 2010, HACT, the Housing Action Charity,<sup>2</sup> celebrated 50 years of working for the poor and disadvantaged in the UK. Unlike many of the charities that sprang up in the 1960s to tackle homelessness and social disadvantage, including Shelter (the housing and homeless charity), which HACT helped to found, it has remained a relatively small concern and yet its influence continues to be considerable.

HACT's modest offices in East London provide a base for a small team of staff and associates, but it is through its partnerships with around 400 housing providers and voluntary groups in the UK that HACT makes its presence felt. It does this by acting as a catalyst for new ideas, providing the funding, expertise and support to test them out and then sharing the learning across the UK voluntary housing sector.

The ripple effect of this approach enables HACT to be influential well beyond its size. Over the last 50 years it has led to the development of innovative new solutions to long standing problems faced by many of the country's most marginalised communities; from older people to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities and from refugees and asylum seekers to homeless people.

## FROM LOCAL GRANT GIVER TO NATIONAL POLICY SHAPER

Founded by the National Federation of Housing Societies (now the National Housing Federation), HACT's first impact on the post-war UK housing crisis was in distributing funding from other, more established UK charities and trusts to provide support services to vulnerable people in poor housing.

In 1966, public awareness and concern over the shortage of good quality affordable housing was heightened by the landmark TV drama-documentary *Cathy Come Home*. HACT was involved in the establishment of Shelter, and played a key role at this time in distributing grants from Shelter's powerful public fundraising campaigns to fledgling housing associations, many of which have gone on to become the flagship organisations of the sector in the ensuing years.

Addressing homelessness, poor housing, poverty and social exclusion have been the hallmark of HACT's work ever since, but always with an emphasis on partnership working to build the knowledge and capacity of others.

A key element of this partnership approach involves working with homeless people and other service users to understand what they want and need, then being prepared to try out new solutions on the ground, take risks and create the evidence base and opportunities for others to replicate what has been proven to work.

The scope of HACT's work ranges from providing the funding for small community based groups to deliver practical help and support where it is most needed, through to influencing policy makers and decision makers to ensure that the funding and policy frameworks needed for new ideas to take root nationally are also put in place.

## RESPONDING TO HOMELESSNESS THROUGH THE '80S AND '90S

The late 1980s saw a dramatic rise in the number of people, of all ages and backgrounds, sleeping rough on the streets. Homeless families were crammed into stressful and unsuitable bed-and-breakfast hotels whilst, for others, the only housing option available was overcrowded and poorly managed bedsit-style properties.

HACT's response to this housing crisis included:

- Leading the sector-wide appeal in 1987, which raised over £800,000 for the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. The money raised benefited numerous organisations including London Connection and also helped to establish Homeless International;
- Providing funding for a range of initiatives aimed at a variety of homeless groups, from young people to BME elders and families. These included drop-in centres, night shelters, short-life housing projects, housing advice and advocacy services and cafes;
- Funding advice services to single homeless people through CHAR, the National Campaign for Single Homeless People.

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In 1997 HACT, in association with Age Concern, an organisation protecting the rights of older people, published *Homeless Older People: A Forgotten Generation?* This influential report of homelessness in later life led to the creation of the Coalition on Older Homelessness with Help the Aged (another older people charity) and Crisis (the UK-wide single homelessness charity) and a three-year programme to support around 20 projects to address the problems of homeless older people.

At a time when the national focus of homelessness in the UK was more towards young people and families, this showed HACT's willingness to challenge the sector to think more broadly. It helped to encourage housing and support providers to engage with an inadequately served group of people in their 50s and older, many of whom had been homeless for most of their lives and were either living on the streets or languishing in hostels with little more in the way of personal support.

The learning from these projects was embedded through HACT's funding of a working partnership with Homeless Link (the umbrella of homeless organisations in the UK).

HACT's work in developing new housing solutions for homeless people continued throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium with further projects aimed at refugees and migrants from other European countries and women fleeing domestic violence.

### **HACT TODAY – LEADING, INSPIRING AND ENABLING SOCIAL INNOVATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS ON THE GROUND**

So what of HACT today?

The charity continues to work with people locally to challenge and inspire new solutions for homeless people and other marginalised groups. Often this involves questioning the way in which services have been run for years and encouraging people to work differently in the future.

Responding to the UK government's Personalisation agenda, which aims to give service users more control over the way their personal care and support budgets are spent, HACT has been running a programme called *up2us*. This looks at ways of bringing together groups of service users to enable them to influence the type of services available to them through their combined purchasing power.

This includes a pilot project with Porchlight, a homelessness organisation in Kent (a Southern UK county), which aims to give young people more choice and control over the type of support services they might want to purchase collectively, from training and education to social activities and other forms of support.

This drive towards giving service users more control and choice over their support services creates challenges for service providers but also considerable opportunities for new and creative thinking, and HACT is well placed to help drive this agenda forward.

At the heart of this change is enabling homeless people and others to engage in services in very different ways so that they come to be seen as people with assets, value and worth rather than people with only deficits and needs.

HACT's inter-generational programme, *age2age*, includes an interesting project called Homeshare. This works in rural areas to provide a mutually beneficial match between older people with lower levels of support needs, living in an under-occupied property, with a younger person who would otherwise struggle to provide a roof over their head. The arrangement offers benefits to both parties, with the younger person typically offering companionship and practical support to the older person who might otherwise struggle to maintain their home and live independently. It also builds bridges across the generations, allowing respect and understanding to develop on both sides of the age divide.

Again, this arrangement looks beyond the obvious needs of both groups and focuses instead on what each can offer to each other and the 'assets' that they can bring to the relationship. It is not a new model, having been delivered in parts of the UK and throughout Europe and the World for years. It has never worked, however, in rural communities in the UK, so HACT is piloting it here to understand why and to see if it can work. This is important as social innovation isn't always about doing something completely new. Sometimes it is about taking tried and tested approaches and applying them in new areas and with new people.

One of the key outcomes that HACT has demonstrated through projects such as this is the broader impact of bringing groups of people together at community level in this way. Building bridges between groups that wouldn't perhaps interact under the same

**Often [HACT's work] involves questioning the way in which services have been run for years and encouraging people to work differently in the future.**



extent under normal circumstances typically provides the foundation for joint working across a whole range of other areas. It opens up dialogue and provides a springboard for other conversations to take place.

Sometimes providing a space for these conversations is as important as delivering support on the ground. After many years working with projects aimed at refugees and migrants, HACT established the Housing and Migration Network.<sup>3</sup> HACT brought together this time-limited and independent network of well connected senior policy makers and practitioners to look at how to improve the housing circumstances of new immigrant communities in the UK. It is from this network that new relationships will be built and new ideas generated that respond to the dynamic flows of people in and out of the UK.

### **SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS THROUGH HOUSING PARTNERSHIPS**

HACT understands that its innovation model is very much built on the strength of housing providers, who play a significant role through their substantial presence in many of the UK's poorest and most deprived communities. They are committed to those neighbourhoods for the long term and as such they are able to use their strengths in very creative ways. In many cases, they provide a firmer and more sustainable foundation for social innovation than some other organisations whose presence is determined by a time-limited funding stream.

Just as important as responding to the changing environment of the day is maintaining an eye on the future. Social innovation doesn't always happen overnight and sometimes it takes time for ideas to be tried and tested and for funding to come into those models to make them sustainable in the long term. A good example of this is Care and Repair services for older homeowners who struggle to maintain their properties. HACT was instrumental in pioneering this concept in the 1980s but it wasn't until 2003 that Care and Repair was mainstreamed across the UK. This emphasises the twin importance of having a forward looking focus whilst investing in the models now that will create the solutions of the future.

Above all, what HACT has demonstrated over the last 50 years, and continues to do so today, is that when organisations and people are given sufficient freedom to innovate and take risks as well as the capacity and resources to share those innovations with others, amazing and revolutionary ideas can happen with very small amounts of money. Even in times of restricted funding, the passion, drive and imagination that HACT is able to harness and nurture at grass roots level can enable small, locally tested ideas to become national and even internationally sustainable solutions.

<sup>3</sup> <http://hact.org.uk/housing-and-migration-network>



# Housing First Europe: Testing a Social Innovation in Tackling Homelessness

By Dr. Volker Busch-Geertsema,<sup>1</sup> *GISS, Bremen, Germany*

The plight of homelessness exists across the EU, even in developed welfare states. The need for innovation in the homeless sector is therefore crucial, especially with the increasing awareness that the shelter system and other types of temporary accommodation are not providing long-term solutions to homelessness. Housing First approaches to homelessness are considered innovative and are thought particularly to be effective in tackling long-term/chronic homelessness, which is why they have received broad interest in Europe. The approach was originally developed in the United States and has been used predominantly to tackle chronic homelessness, especially of people with mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse. Housing First, as it was pioneered by the organization Pathways to Housing in New York, has demonstrated high degrees of success in both housing and supporting those who are homeless with multiple and complex needs (Tsemberis et al 2004, Padgett et al 2006, Tsemberis 2010 a and b). In contrast with 'staircase' approaches, which predominate in many European countries and which require homeless persons to show evidence of being 'housing ready' before they are offered long-term stable accommodation,<sup>2</sup> Housing First projects place homeless people directly into long-term self-contained housing with no requirement that they progress through transitional programmes. But Housing First does not mean "housing only": Substantial and multidisciplinary social support is provided to the re-housed homeless people assertively, though it is not a condition for them to participate in and comply with therapies or show sobriety and they cannot lose their tenancy for failing to do so.

In most European countries there is still a widespread belief that homeless people with complex support needs cannot sustain a tenancy. The Housing First model has proven in the US that the opposite is true, namely that the vast majority of this particularly vulnerable group can sustain a tenancy as long as appropriate support is on offer. The Housing First model is also said to be innovative in terms of cost-effectiveness, because re-housed clients make much less use of emergency shelters, of emergency medical services and are less likely to cause costs with police and the penal system. The services can also

be provided cheaper than in traditional institutions for homeless people if no specialist accommodation has to be built. The Housing First approach is about empowering homeless people to sustain their own tenancy (with or without support), promoting more stable living conditions, and preventing repeat homelessness.

In Europe, the Housing First approach to homelessness is currently being tested in a number of cities and some evaluations are going on at the local level already. A number of articles and small studies have been published recently assessing tentatively the potential (and the probable limits) of the Housing First approach for implementation in European welfare contexts and underlining the need for testing and evaluating such projects in various local and national settings across Europe (Atherton and McNaughton Nicholls 1998; Busch-Geertsema 2010; Johnsen and Teixeira 2010; McNaughton Nicholls and Atherton 2011; Pleece 1998 and 2011). While different intervention methods to re-house homeless persons with complex problems have been tested and evaluated in the US (Coldwell and Bender 2007; Nelson et al. 2007), this has never been done systematically in any European country.

An application to the 2010 Social Experimentation Call in the framework of the PROGRESS programme of the European Commission (DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) for an evaluation and mutual exchange project called *Housing First Europe* was recently selected for funding. *Housing First Europe* will start 1<sup>st</sup> August 2011 and is planned to last for 24 months. It will test and evaluate Housing First projects in five European cities from a European perspective, leading to greater clarity on the potential and the limits of the approach, as well as the essential elements of Housing First projects. It will also facilitate mutual learning with additional partners in five "peer sites" cities where further Housing First projects are planned or being implemented and with a steering group including FEANTSA and HABITACT as European stakeholders, experienced researchers, representatives of national homelessness programmes and Sam Tsemberis, the founder of *Pathways to Housing* in New York.

The Housing First model is [...] said to be innovative in terms of cost-effectiveness, because re-housed clients make much less use of emergency [...] services and are less likely to cause costs with [...] the penal system.

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<sup>2</sup> For a critique see Sahlin 2005 and Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin 2007.



The main contractor of *Housing First Europe* is the Danish National Board of Social Services (with Birthe Povlsen as the main person responsible) and coordinator of the evaluation and exchange strands will be the author of this contribution, Volker Busch-Geertsema, who is senior research fellow at GISS (Association for Innovative Social Research and Social Planning) in Bremen, Germany, and also the coordinator of the European Observatory on Homelessness. The partnership involves a wide range of stakeholders including NGOs, service providers, local authorities, universities and public authorities. The five Housing First projects (or "test sites") to be evaluated are in the following cities: Amsterdam, Budapest, Copenhagen, Glasgow and Lisbon. The five "peer sites" taking part in three of the five project meetings are in Dublin, Ghent, Gothenburg, Helsinki and Vienna. The last meeting will be the final conference which will take place in June 2013, probably in Amsterdam and will be open to the public.

For comparability purposes, *Housing First Europe* will focus on test sites which have a rather strict definition of Housing First according to the original US model, namely projects:

- With self-contained living units (e.g. not hostel accommodation);
- Where tenants have some form of secure tenure;
- Targeting people with mental illness/drug/alcohol problems or other complex support needs (i.e. who could not access housing without support);
- Providing pro-active support (but housing is not conditional on acceptance of this actively offered support);
- Where access is not conditional on stays in other types of transitional accommodation or any other type of "preparation".

*Housing First Europe* will be implemented through two principle strands:

1. A Research and Evaluation strand which will assess the Housing First projects and draw conclusions on the effectiveness of the approach: Key research questions will allow for detailed information about the organization of the local Housing First projects, access criteria, profile of actual clients, flow of clients through the projects and information about length of stay and numbers and reasons for drop-outs, support provision and support needs, costs involved, effects in quality of life etc.

2. A Mutual Learning strand which will bring together different stakeholders to discuss the results of the assessments, and will generally facilitate exchanges on different Housing First projects across the EU and beyond (USA, Canada). Meetings (of the steering group and project partners) will be used to discuss commonalities and differences between the projects and common challenges, which will contribute to develop mutual understanding on Housing First concepts.

Differences in existing Housing First approaches will be discussed and analyzed concerning for example the role of choice, the type of housing provided (scattered site versus congregated housing), the type, duration and intensity of support provided. The difficulties and successful approaches of support agencies to get access to regular housing, to manage financial risks for service providers etc. will be documented. It is planned to develop recommendations for dealing with typical challenges of the approach (like relapses of service users into street life, neighbourhood complaints, non-payment of rents, unmet support needs and rejection of support, social isolation, worklessness, substance abuse etc.) and for possible use of the approach on a wider scale.

By the end of 2011, the main details of the test sites and further information about the project will be available at the *Housing First Europe*-webpage. Information about the internet-address will be published widely as soon as the website is online.

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## What Is Housing First?

By Nan Roman, *President and CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness*,<sup>1</sup> USA

The combination of housing linked to services can help a wide variety of people exit homelessness more rapidly.

Housing First is an approach, developed in the USA, that is built on the principle that a short experience of homelessness and rapid stabilization in housing are best for homeless people and most effective in ending homelessness. Housing First places homeless people in housing quickly and then provides or links them to services as needed, rather than the more customary approach of services first, then housing. While not assuming that housing is sufficient to solve all the problems that people have, Housing First does assume that housing is a necessary platform for success in services, education, employment, and health: in short for achieving personal and family well-being. It also has the benefit of being consumer-driven: housing is what homeless people want and seek.

The Housing First approach focuses on a few critical elements.

- There is a focus on helping individuals and families access housing *as quickly as possible* and the *housing is not time-limited* (it is not shelter, transitional housing, etc.).
- While some crisis resolution and housing search services might be delivered in the process of obtaining housing, core services to promote well-being and housing stability (treatment, education, child development, etc.) are primarily delivered *following* housing placement.
- The nature and duration of services depend upon individual need and *services are voluntary*.
- Housing is not contingent on compliance with services; however consumers must typically comply with *standard requirements of tenancy* (paying the rent, etc.).

Housing First has most often been used to describe an approach for assisting homeless people with serious mental health and substance abuse disorders. In this context it has been contrasted with a “housing readiness” approach in which people are required to achieve sobriety or treatment compliance as a precondition of receiving housing. However, the principle of Housing First is also applicable to people with less significant or more temporary problems, such as families or individuals who are homeless for economic reasons. Typically such people are temporarily housed in shelters or transitional housing, often at relatively high cost and for relatively long periods of time (up to two years), while they receive services that will make them “ready” for housing. However, an increased focus on housing placement, even with relatively small amounts of housing subsidy and linkage to commu-

nity-based services, is a more effective strategy with a lower cost for this population as well.

### WHAT DOES A HOUSING FIRST APPROACH ENTAIL?

While there is a wide variety of program models, Housing First programs or systems typically include the following activities.

#### *Assessment and Targeting*

Individuals and families receive an in-depth, up-front assessment before being referred to or receiving services from a Housing First provider. This allows providers to ascertain both the needs of the consumer, and whether the available program(s) can meet those needs. The level of assistance programs are able to provide most often shapes who a community can target for Housing First services.

Evidence indicates Housing First is appropriate for most, if not all, homeless people. The combination of housing linked to services can help a wide variety of people exit homelessness more rapidly. This is supported by research that demonstrates that most formerly homeless families, including those with significant challenges, will retain housing with the provision of a long-term housing subsidy. It is also supported by evaluations of Housing First interventions with chronically homeless individuals, which have found that many who have remained outside of housing for years can retain housing with a subsidy and provision of wraparound supports. Finally, it is supported by emerging research that lower-need individuals and families who become homeless can exit homelessness rapidly and avoid repeat episodes with even small amounts of housing subsidy and linkage to community services.

#### *Permanent Housing*

There is substantial variation in how Housing First providers meet the housing needs of the individuals and families they serve.

Some Housing First programs provide only minimal financial assistance, such as assistance with security deposits and application fees. Other programs are able to provide or access longer-term or permanent housing subsidy.

Some Housing First programs rely solely on apartments in the private rental market. Others master-

<sup>1</sup> Questions or inquiries can be sent to Catherine An, [can@naeh.org](mailto:can@naeh.org)



lease apartments that they then sub-let to program participants, or purchase or develop housing themselves for sub-lease to participants.

There are models in which the Housing First program is the legal lease holder for some initial period of time in which the individual or family is involved with the program. When program services end, the tenant takes over the lease. In other program models, the family or individual holds a lease with a public or private landlord from the onset.

To get people housed, Housing First programs have to help people overcome barriers to accessing permanent housing. This includes helping them to resolve outstanding credit issues, address poor tenant histories, collect needed paperwork, etc. It also involves actively helping them identify housing by reaching out to landlords, housing management companies, public housing authorities, civic organizations, and religious congregations.

To gain access to scarce housing units, Housing First programs must be responsive to the concerns of landlords, housing operators, and developers. Strategies include giving landlords 24/7 access to program staff to address tenant problems; provision of enhanced security deposits; and commitment to quickly re-locate tenants who are in violation of the lease. Some landlords end up prioritizing Housing First tenants because of the financial and administrative benefit they realize from the partnership with Housing First organizations.

All Housing First providers focus on helping individuals and families move into permanent housing as *quickly as possible*, based on the premise that social service needs can best be addressed after they move in to their new home.

### **Low, Moderate or High Intensity Supportive Services**

The services provided to Housing First participants vary according to need. Sometimes Housing First programs assist only with crisis intervention and re-housing, and then link the new tenants to services in the community. On the other end of the spectrum, those tenants with more intensive and chronic problems may require long-term, housing-based services. The goal is to provide just enough services to ensure successful tenancy and promote the economic and social well-being of individuals and families. The capacity of programs to provide supportive services following a housing placement is largely determined by, and determines, who is targeted for Housing First services.

### **Outcome Measures**

Determining the effectiveness of Housing First programs relies on capturing outcome data. Among the primary outcomes that should be assessed in a Housing First program are individual or family housing outcomes. How rapidly are families being re-housed? Are individuals and families remaining housed? Do families or individuals re-enter shelter?

Programs may want to capture outcomes on family or individual well-being. Programs serving families may include employment and earning outcomes and school performance of children. Programs serving chronically homeless individuals might examine increases or decreases in hospital stays, involvement with law enforcement, or engagement in employment. Cost reduction can also be an important metric.

It is also critical to examine the impact of Housing First in reducing overall homelessness in the community or city. This can be done through regular counts of homeless people. Another possible metric is to assess whether the average length of a homelessness episode is being reduced.

### **MOVING FORWARD**

A growing body of research documents the effectiveness of the Housing First approach when used in working with homeless people who have serious behavioral health and other disabilities. This research indicates that the approach is effective both at placing and retaining people in permanent housing and at reducing the costs associated with these individuals within the health care and judicial systems.

Housing First also works for people with less intensive needs. Recent research in the United States demonstrated the high cost of shelter and transitional housing stays for homeless individuals and families, especially relative to the cost of housing. A significant recent U.S. investment in Rapid Re-Housing<sup>2</sup> (a variation on Housing First that does not typically include long term rent subsidy but rather short term infusions to quickly return households to housing) will provide much more information on the efficacy and cost of this intervention for a wider group of homeless people. The Housing First approach, across all populations and categories of need, is clearly having an influence, and communities across the United States are beginning to re-engineer their homeless and mainstream systems to focus on the promotion of housing stability.

Moving forward, we continue to embrace the Housing First approach as one that will help us end homelessness much more rapidly for individuals, families and the nation.

2 \$1.5 billion over three years for the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program.



# An Original French Experimentation With The US “Housing First” Model

By A. Régnier,<sup>1</sup> V. Girard,<sup>2</sup> C. Laval,<sup>3</sup> P. Estecahandy<sup>4</sup>, France

Three things that play into one another can be cited by way of introduction:

*Paris, Winter 2006:* The sight of a tent village of homeless people pitched on the banks of the Saint-Martin Canal made a big impact. Not only did this headline-grabbing action by the *Les Enfants de Don Quichotte* voluntary organisation call the authorities to account once again over the urgency of the situation but was also a scathing criticism of the sector's effectiveness and adaptability to the changing face of extreme poverty. The initiative triggered a real awakening to the need to develop a new approach.

*The close link between homelessness and poor health:* with an estimated life expectancy that is 30 to 35 years less than the general population combined with a worse quality of life, homeless people are at incomparably higher risk of psychosocial, physical and sexual violence. Where severe mental illness is concerned, the SAMENTA survey found that 30% of street homeless people in the Paris region suffer from a severe mental disorder. But while this does not mean that mental illness and social exclusion necessarily go together, the study does find that “(...) For individuals with a severe [mental] disorder (...) being disengaged from care and support goes together with a higher rate of experienced violence than for the rest of the homeless population (...).”

*Finally, a consensus among all front-line workers* that the very people who need high levels of support and care slip through the net of mainstream-government and voluntary provision which are often ill-equipped to deal with them.

Repositioning these facts within a policy shift, this article focuses particularly on what makes the “A Home First” programme different: developed at the interface of two public policy issues – care/support for homeless people and persons living with severe psychiatric disorders – the programme falls within both the social welfare and mental health spheres.

## HOUSING FIRST: A NEW STRATEGY IN EUROPE AND FRANCE

The so-called “Housing First” approach has helped reduce the number of street homeless people in Europe, particularly in the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries which are models to be further explored (Damon, 2009). At the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness held under the Belgian

Presidency of the European Union with the active participation of France in late 2010, the Housing First approach was accepted as the right way to go to put an end to long-term homelessness in Europe.

In France, the government appointed FNARS (Fédération nationale des associations d'accueil et de réinsertion sociale) in November 2007 to organize a consensus conference to map out the broad lines of a new public policy for homeless people. Among the principles formulated at it were an adapted response to the individual situation, breaking down institutional barriers, multidisciplinary, and continuity of care. Then, at the end of 2007, the Prime Minister tasked MP Etienne Pinte with reporting to him on emergency shelter and access to housing for homeless or poorly housed people, and his recommendations led to the launch of the “National Priority Development Project 2008-2012 for Temporary Accommodation and Housing”. A strong political will to provide new answers had been generated.

The alarming finding is that the traditional “staircase” approach is locking homeless people into a specific accommodation system and failing to deliver real access to ordinary housing, i.e., a proper home. A series of consultations were held between government agencies and professional and voluntary communities, from which a new strategy was framed. At the outcome of this consultation, discussion and rethinking process, the French “Housing First” strategy was unveiled by the Secretary of State for Housing on the 10th November 2009. Access for all to a long-term home of their own has emerged as the prerequisite for inclusion in society and the community. Housing is the key element for a proper return to the mainstream for the most excluded. Also, since the DALO Act 2007, the right to housing has been an essential right of individuals which must be underwritten by government.

The new strategy also draws on a socio-economic approach that must now underpin public policy: user rights and participation, giving responsibility to stakeholders, appropriate responses based on evidence, cost/benefit assessment of provision and social cost.

The “Housing First” approach draws on front-line experiments already being run in France for a number of years, like halfway houses, appropriate housing solutions combining community life with private spaces, but its origin and the principles of the programme go beyond just housing.

- 1 Alain Regnier is a Prefect, interministerial delegate for temporary accommodation and access to housing provision for homeless and poorly housed people, and runs the “A Home First” national programme
- 2 Vincent Girard is a psychiatrist, the author of the report on the health of homeless people handed in to housing and health ministers in January 2010 ([http://www.sante.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Rapport\\_sante\\_des\\_personnes\\_sans\\_chez\\_soil.pdf](http://www.sante.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Rapport_sante_des_personnes_sans_chez_soil.pdf)) and a coordinator of the research component of the “A Home First” programme
- 3 Christian Laval is a sociologist and a researcher, and is a coordinator of the research component of the “A Home First” programme
- 4 Pascale Estecahandy is a doctor, head of a medicalised care service for homeless people in Toulouse, and the national technical coordinator of the “A Home First” programme



## A MORE SPECIFIC APPROACH FOR PEOPLE WITH SEVERE PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS: THE "A HOME FIRST" PROGRAMME

The "A Home First" programme as developed in France since January 2011 enjoys strong political support because it incorporates the national strategy requirements. It has a long-term timeframe against benchmarks that are both global and local from New York to Marseille.

### Global ...

The mental health aspects of this programme run in an unbroken line of theory, but also clinical practice and public policy. The WHO, for a decade (Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope" WHO 2001), and the most progressive segment of post-war European psychiatry (Italy, England, France) have advocated care in the community as opposed to hospitals or specialized institutions, wherever possible. This means developing the support provision needed for outpatient care of disorders and proper inclusion of people in the community. "A Home First" derives from the "home treatment" movement that has developed over the past thirty years in the Anglosphere. "Home treatment" is about providing services that can treat the patient away from hospital for as long as possible in his/her usual place of residence. More recently, "Housing First" models have proved their credentials in the USA, the most successful being the "Pathways Housing First Program" started in the early 1990s in New York under the leadership of Dr. Sam Tsemberis (the model adopted by the French programme).

### ... versus local

A particularly innovative experiment was developed in Marseilles between 2008 and 2010. A large swathe of the Marseilles population is classed as poor - over 35% live below the poverty line. Between 5 and 10,000 homeless people live on the streets and in public spaces, mostly in the centre of town which also "hosts" a large number of first-generation minorities, most from the former colonies but also from Europe. This concentration of poverty gives the impression of a town straddling the border between the first and second worlds, the North and the South.

Following on from a first active engagement around drug abuse problems (1990s) the mid-2000s saw a second wave of active engagement more focused on the growing number of people with severe psychiatric disorders living (surviving) and dying in the very centre of Marseilles. Working to the principle that having a "home" is more important than having access to care, a motley alliance of professionals and ordinary people opened a squat right in the city centre. A former 15 room rent-by-the-hour hotel in a street prostitution

area 200 metres from the first district borough hall, it was soon in a position (with help from many voluntary organizations - Médecins du Monde, TIPI, Fondation Abbé Pierre, Salvation Army) to take in an average of 35 to 40 people a year. A peer worker - himself formerly homeless - lives on-site to book in users who have first been seen in the street by an outreach community mental health team, who are also involved in the squat, and work out a treatment plan with the squatters who are all "mentally ill", and homeless but have to take on big responsibilities because there are no professionals on hand in the evening or at weekends. All occupy a room of their own for an indefinite period and organize their private lives as they wish. Wherever possible, their individual choices and time frames are respected. There is no obligation to undergo treatment or stop using alcohol or drugs. Nor is there any requirement to have a plan to return to the mainstream or even to leave the provision. Faced with this act of civil disobedience, the health and social services soon chose to forge an alliance with those behind it.

In September 2008, Habitat Alternatif Social (HAS), a specialized support-into-housing voluntary organization, enabled the squat to be made legal as a "treatment" facility. This was the city's first ever legalized squat.

Meanwhile, the same community mental health team, with the help of HAS, started providing mainstream housing for long-term street homeless people with severe psychiatric disorders - the vast majority of whom wanted a flat or a studio flat like anyone else. Between January 2010 and July 2011 more than 18 people were housed, all street homeless people with severe psychiatric disorders, most with substance abuse issues and some with serious physical ailments. Another characteristic is that most had already unsuccessfully tried conventional health care provision.

The support offered is based on the providers' expertise but also represents a new approach to psychiatric care, unknown in France - "recovery-oriented care", a movement and concept originating in the USA with its roots in the civil rights movement, "survivors of psychiatry", and engaged activist caregivers and researchers.

In December 2008, the Minister of Health had a meeting with the residents, talked to them and asked psychiatrist Vincent Girard to produce a national report on the health of homeless people. The recommendations of that report, handed in in January 2010, included trialling a "Housing First"-type programme in France.

**The "A Home First" programme [...] has a long-term timeframe against benchmarks that are both global and local.**



### **A 3-YEAR EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAMME RUN ON FOUR SITES: LILLE, MARSEILLES, TOULOUSE (IN 2011) AND PARIS (IN 2012)**

The French "A Home First" programme is being run on four sites in France - Lille, Marseilles, Toulouse in 2011 and Paris in 2012. It has an experimental component, and a research and evaluation component. 200 volunteers will be recruited on each site according to three criteria: homelessness, severe mental disorder and high-level support needs. Of these 200 people, 100 will go into the experimental programme while the other 100 will carry on in mainstream provision as the control group. Both groups will be followed-up over 24 months by the research team. Assignment to the groups is by random draw (the randomized method).

The experimental component gives 100 participants in each city immediate access to ordinary housing and support to stay in it from an intensive follow-up team. Each participant will then gradually, at their own pace, make use of the available community resources (health, social, cultural, vocational training, etc.).

The evaluative research component assigned to Research Unit EA3279, led by Professor P. Auquier, will investigate the value of the programme to participants and the cost/effectiveness for health and social institutions compared with other existing care provision. The scientific rigor of the research done will be ensured by an independent, national, scientific, advisory body (IRESF).

The experiment will cover 800 people in all on the 4 sites for 3 years, supported by 40 professionals and followed-up by a consortium of research teams.

### **Tentative Conclusion**

This programme pulls together various public policy issues (housing and mental health), innovations in professional and non-professional practice, as well as research. However, the most important focus is the homeless people themselves. Ultimately, it is about recognizing the abilities that unwell and homeless people acquire and using them to develop new bottom-up policies that aim to address the needs and demands of homeless people themselves rather than those who speak on their behalf.

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## Working with Future Residents: The Igloo Approach

By **Patrick Kamoun**,<sup>1</sup> *Secretary General of the Igloo France Association, Advisor to Union Sociale pour l'Habitat, France*

Igloo (*Insertion Globale par le LOgement et l'empLOi* – Global Integration through Housing and Jobs) has nothing to do with building products or processes. It is an approach that starts first and foremost with the needs and circumstances of an individual or family with the aim of helping them access housing and jobs. It is mainly based on practical action to help deeply disadvantaged families into society and work through their *active involvement in designing and building their future home*.

The person (man, woman or young family member) has an active hand in building or renovating their future home as an *employee* (either with a mainstream business under social clauses, or an employment and training firm). Once the works are completed, they can get skills training or be hired by the company directly.

Funding for an Igloo operation, the process of getting people into work and social support for families comes from the French mainstream system. In terms of overall cost, an Igloo approach is infinitely less costly than years'-worth of social services for a disadvantaged family.



A family relocated to Chelles. The father was hired by the company that carried out the work.

The approach is the product of long-running cooperation between the *Union sociale pour l'habitat* (a socially-motivated housing partnership), the *PACT* network, *Fédération Nationale des Associations de Réinsertion Sociale* (Federation of associations working on social inclusion), *Caisse Centrale de la Mutualité Sociale Agricole* (a social insurance fund) and five French trade union confederations (CFDT, CFTC, FO, CGT and CFE-CGC).

The 2010 outcomes: 400 homes built or improved, which means almost 850 people housed with 38% of heads of household employed under permanent contracts and 65% on a career path. The association has carried out a study on home ownership among very low income groups and set up a working group on fuel poverty focusing on practices, methods, and aspects of learning that can help turn housing occupants into proactive energy managers. Igloo's contribution to implementing the environmental solidarity pact is to inform people about the practical measures advocated by the French state where social policies and environmental policies intersect.

### MULHOUSE ENGAGES WITH THE APPROACH

*Mulhouse City Council* has launched a major Igloo project as part of its policy to renovate old city centre buildings. It is coordinated by the *Espoir* (Hope) Association. The project clients - three social landlords (*Néolia*, *LogisEst* and *Habitat et Humanisme*) - offer sixteen homes financed by subsidised inclusion rent loans at means-tested rents.



Chelles: 6 high environmental performance houses developed by the *Office Public d'Hlm Marne & Chantereine Habitat* under the Igloo programme in a social housing district in Chelles.

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The aim is to get families to reclaim a full place in society by involving them in designing their home and doing the work on it.

A binding agreement is entered into by the family, the landlord, the city council, and the project coordinating association.

The scheme is for a complete renovation of the sixteen homes, half- to very high energy efficiency standards – to keep tenants’ service charges low – while Habitat et Humanisme is demolishing and rebuilding from new two timber-framed houses.

The *Espoir* association’s selection criteria are: local Mulhouse families claiming minimum welfare benefits in housing difficulty, interested in the housing on offer, with one out-of-work family member who is ready to sign up for a career in the building industry through skills training and ready to do some of the work on his or her future home under an employment contract. The aim is to get families to reclaim a full place in society by involving them in designing their home and doing the work on it. The families will occupy the homes as tenants. The project will lift one third of the families out of emergency provision, while for others, the Igloo housing will be better adapted to family resources and composition. The family structures are very different: five couples with children, three childless couples, two lone parents with children and four people living on their own.



Mulhouse, property awaiting renovation.



An IGLOO family – now-settled “travellers” - outside their home in Dompierre sur Authie. Project run by the Synéco voluntary organisation.

The individualised training for work aspects are being run with different businesses. The partnership with the *Association pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes* (Association providing adult vocational training) provides skills training in construction (low-energy homes, training projects). Work experience placements are included in the training which is done with traditional building general contractors.

The “*Sens Scrupule*” (“ScrupulUS”) voluntary organisation provides a range of support for families (self-advocacy group, access to culture). Families will move into the Igloo housing between the end of 2011 and April 2012. Social gatherings have been held during the project when the future neighbours in the building have got to know one another, especially through the joint training. Links to the wider community have been established in partnership with the community centre. Issues of energy management, budget management and, more generally, physical preparations for moving into the homes will be tackled in a future collective action.

Mulhouse City Council will evaluate the project on completion to make it an added tool working towards the inclusion of disadvantaged people.<sup>2</sup>

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# The HOPE in Stations project - Homeless People in European Train Stations

By **Katharina Triebner** (Project Officer) and **Sylvie Le Bars**<sup>1</sup> (Head of Europe Unit, Agence Nouvelle des Solidarités Actives, France)

Railway stations are a natural magnet for homeless people in Western cities as a relatively safe and anonymous environment affording access to certain resources (shelter, food, begging opportunities) and a place for socialization to people sleeping rough in urban areas.

The presence of homeless people in Europe's railway stations is a concern for the authorities, voluntary welfare agencies, station users and railway infrastructure managers alike, all of whom have different but potentially converging aims. But different policies, practices and solutions are applied in each EU Member State to what are often similar problems. Also, there is scant shared data at European level on the population of homeless communities in train stations.

The homeless people found in train stations are a socially-alienated group experiencing extreme exclusion (from continuing difficulties in accessing rights and services). They also include a growing share of vulnerable foreign European or non-European nationals.

The "HOPE in Stations" project is designed to improve practical understanding, knowledge sharing and the quality of support provision for homeless people in the train stations of European capital cities. It is one of the first European, transnational, social-experimentation schemes funded under the PROGRESS Programme. It brings together partners from seven European countries, three of which are actively involved in the scheme evaluated: France (Paris-Nord-Est Magenta), Belgium (Brussels Central) and Italy (Rome Termini). Four other countries are involved in the project as well: Luxembourg (Central Station), Germany (Berlin Zoologischer Garten), Spain (Madrid Atocha) and Poland (Warsaw Central).

The project runs for two years from January 2010 to December 2011 and is split into three stages: analysis of the present situation and observation of the seven sites; implementing measures at the three experimentation sites; and finally, overall assessment of the scheme (see "Project Implementation")

## THE PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The underlying issue is to improve integration of homeless services in railway stations.

The project objective is therefore to test out European train stations as places providing organized homeless services. Central to this is establishing a social focal point in the three experimentation sites to coordinate action for homeless people. The project objectives also include developing exchanges of good practice and inter-partner comparison of the different organizational set-ups. Finally, the project is meant to result in the development of a common knowledge base on the condition of homeless people in the stations of European capital cities.

## INNOVATIVE ASPECTS OF THE HOPE IN STATIONS PROJECT

1. The preliminary situation analysis in the seven partner countries and comparison of the new welfare provision in three of the countries actively involved in the social experimentation (France, Belgium, Italy)
2. Trialling a new in-station social focal point scheme backed-up by ex-ante (before) and ex-post (after) assessments
3. Producing a common knowledge base combining social and policy analysis at European level
4. Foregrounding the social responsibility of railway undertakings, which is the basis of the new social services scheme
5. Linking up and striking a balance between station security and homeless people's social needs.

## PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

### Analysis of the Present Situation

Stage one of the project – analysis of the present situation and observation in the seven partner stations – ran from January to September 2010. This preliminary analysis for implementation of the scheme consisted of a socio-political analysis (led by Professor Julien Damon, France) and social mapping of homelessness

The "HOPE in Stations" project is [...] one of the first European, transnational, social-experimentation schemes funded under the PROGRESS Programme.

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in stations (done by the Italian laboratory ISFORT with support from national researchers).

The socio-political analysis contextualised in-station homelessness and policies on it in the seven countries participating in the project.

The social mapping enabled an initial typology of the organizational model in each station to be drawn up. This gives the figures of the enumerations of homeless people in the stations involved, provides an overview of the measures taken for them and of the homeless service providers and how they interact. It was produced out of the work done by four national researchers who collected data on and administered surveys of stakeholders in in-station homelessness.

### **A New Organization Around a Social Focal Point**

Stage two, from June 2010 to September 2011, aims to establish the welfare provision as such, embodied by the in-station social focal point – an individual or authorised voluntary welfare agency given tools and tasks common to all three experimentation sites to improve the integration of social services for homeless people.

This second stage is nearing completion. The actions carried out were:

- Establishing social focal points in the three experimentation site stations to coordinate homeless service actions and organizations;
- Identifying weaknesses, needs and good social work intervention practices in each station;
- Proposing and discussing with the voluntary welfare agencies involved an integrated services model based on the role of the social focal point ;
- Gradually building a consensus among the partners on a common strategy for improving the situation of homeless people in train stations.

### **Overall Evaluation of the Scheme**

The general evaluation of the scheme started in September 2010 and will end in December 2011 when the final scientific results are reported back and recommendations made on possible forms of services for homeless people in railway stations.

It is based on two scientific investigations using the methodology of Austria's ZSI laboratory: research among homeless people to identify their needs and uses made of services available to them; and research among service providers to measure their level of integration through an analysis of the network of providers in the three experimentation sites.

### **A JOINT EXPERIMENTAL SCHEME: THE IN-STATION SOCIAL FOCAL POINT**

The social focal point established in the three cities actively involved in the project is responsible for coordinating homeless service actions and organizations. The five joint tasks defined by the project governance bodies are:

- Coordinating soup runs in and around the station;
- Implementing a monitoring tool for in-station social work interventions;
- Opening a single contact point for all voluntary welfare agencies, and if possible, a first intake point for homeless people in the station;
- Setting up focus groups for dialogue with the homeless people;
- Running a training session on in-station homelessness for railway staff.

### **DESCRIPTION OF RAILWAY STAFF TRAINING ON HOMELESSNESS IN STATIONS**

This joint training on homelessness in stations identically implemented at the three experimentation sites in the same period is for railway staff in regular contact with homeless people in and around the station. It is therefore chiefly for security officers, station personnel, passenger service staff and maintenance personnel.

The purpose of the training is to enable participants to develop a method of action, i.e., to acquire the appropriate attitudes and reflexes to dialogue and work with homeless people. Owning that method of action should make delivery of homeless services easier through improved coordination of actions and stakeholders. The operational objective is to enable staff to analyse the causes of street homelessness and extreme vulnerability in stations and be able to:

- Identify people in these situations in the course of their work duties;
- Identify the institutional and voluntary players involved to gain a better understanding of the issues of homelessness in stations;
- To make contact with the services available to them;
- Make initial social contact with them and refer them to the appropriate social services.

The social focal points were closely involved in the training sessions so that it was clear to station staff who their contact people were. Between January and May 2011, 50 station employees were trained in Paris, 59 in Rome and 21 in Brussels. Further training sessions are likely to take place in France and Italy.



This joint training scheme is being evaluated through: questions throughout the sessions (“Action Plan”); an end-of-session evaluation questionnaire; and individual interviews done by national researchers with voluntary agency participants to assess the impact of training on professional practice two months after the training.

### **SOCIAL EXPERIMENTATION AS A TOOL FOR INCLUSION OF HOMELESS PEOPLE**

Social experimentation is a relatively new form of public policy measure in Europe. According to the European Commission, it is intended to:

- Deliver innovative solutions to social needs;
- Be run on a small scale due to the uncertainty of its impacts;
- Be implemented under conditions in which its impacts can be assessed;
- Be reproducible on a larger scale if it yields convincing results.

Social experimentation is less about the method used to analyse the action than its ability to lay the conditions for assessment, such as to enable a consensus to be formed around its outcome and a common knowledge base shared by the all stakeholders on the effectiveness or otherwise of the action concerned. The issue of homelessness seems particularly appropriate for this.

Social experimentation enables a social problem to be treated on a small scale in a way largely absent from public policy. One of the key aspects of social experimentation, as with the broader category of social innovation, is the aim of bringing a new response to a hitherto unmet need.

### **THE OUTLOOK FOR THE HOPE IN STATIONS PROJECT**

Although the final project evaluation is not yet finished (final results to be given in December 2011 in Paris) it is at present possible to say that key in-station social work intervention services add a real net benefit.

In France, for example, the railway operator has seen a positive impact on interaction between stakeholders (security services, voluntary welfare agencies, shopkeepers) from the social focal point's work over the past 12 months. The SNCF<sup>2</sup> has therefore chosen not to await the final evaluation outcomes in order to establish a second similar position with responsibility for station areas in the south of Paris.

In Brussels, there are plans to extend the focal point's duties (initially limited to Central Station) to other stations in the capital and possibly also to other stations in Belgium.

The partnership between businesses, public authorities and voluntary welfare agencies is seen by all as particularly innovative and beneficial; the project partners are looking at ways of taking the HOPE project forward, still focused on the perimeters of the big European train stations. The French, Belgian and Italian railways have embarked on a new project called “WORK in Stations” led by Agence Nouvelle des Solidarités Actives, which has been put to the European Commission. This project aims to identify the economic potential of stations and promote inclusion through economic activity in and around station perimeters. Its target group is anyone excluded from society and work.

Also, at the last HOPE project Steering Committee, the partners attended a “Housing First” workshop at which Professor Dennis Culhane of the University of Pennsylvania gave a presentation on the “Housing First!” concept that has been enshrined in American public policy for a number of years.

The Italian railway company, Ferrovie dello Stato, plans to combine integration through economic activity with “Housing First!” by turning disused railway stations in Italy into housing through community work projects.

**The partnership between businesses, public authorities and voluntary welfare agencies is seen by all as particularly innovative and beneficial.**

2 France's national state-owned railway company



# Regaining Control: Dutch Experiences With Family Group Conferencing For Homeless People

By **Lineke Joanknecht**,<sup>1</sup> *Regional Manager Eigen Kracht Amsterdam*, and **Mariëtte Dirkzwager**,<sup>2</sup> *Regional Manager Eigen Kracht Rotterdam, The Netherlands*

The *Eigen Kracht Centrale* has gained experience with people who stayed in shelter and care facilities and who were offered an EK-c.

In The Netherlands, the *Eigen Kracht Centrale* has been active since 2000, organizing and introducing *Eigen Kracht-conferences*. *Eigen Kracht-conference* is the Dutch name for Family Group Conferencing, which originated in New Zealand. '*Eigen Kracht*' translates as 'Own Power/Strength'. Experience with this decision-making model has been gained in various fields, including the situation of homeless people. In this article, we will give an account of recent developments, we will give an explanation of *Eigen Kracht-conferences (EK-c)*, we will talk about the experiences with young people and adults, we will pay attention to the part that professionals play and, finally, we will give recommendations, backed up by research.

## EIGEN KRACHT-CONFERENCE

At an *Eigen Kracht-conference*, the decision-making process (what is the matter, what has to happen, what is needed to make it happen), is in the hands of the central person and people from the personal circle who are invited to think along. The result is a plan. The underlying idea, the *Eigen Kracht Centrale* vision, is very simple: everyone is part of society and everyone can/has to participate. Everyone keeps his/her autonomy and control over his/her life. Everyone has the possibility to get support from their own social network, from family, friends, neighbours and co-workers, especially when there are problems and particularly when multiple (social care) institutions play a part.

The *Eigen Kracht-conference* is organized by an independent coordinator. This trained (fellow) citizen facilitates the process, sees to it that the central person states a transparent question (what do I want), helps the central person to widen the circle to get more people to think along, discusses the restraints that the central person feels to ask other people for help, and discusses how to deal with these worries. During the whole process, the control remains with the central person. The coordinator contacts people that are mentioned by the central person, usually one name comes up first. During the preparations, the focus is on the future: it is not about what went wrong in the past but what improvements can be made from here onward, in the direction indicated by the central person. The people who are going to attend the conference are asked what information they need to make a plan. The coordinator asks professionals to provide this information at the conference. In consultation with all involved, the date, time and location

are decided, also what food will be available (and how it will get there); no family meeting without food and drink.

The EK-c itself consists of three parts: during the first part, professionals offer the required information. The second part is called 'private time', people make their plan in the absence of the coordinator and professionals. During the third part, the agreements made in the plan are shared with the professionals and decisions are made on cooperation. Another item is the way in which progress is secured. This way, the central person and his or her network stay in control.

## DEPLOYING EK-c FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE

In past years, the *Eigen Kracht Centrale* has gained experience with people who stayed in shelter and care facilities and who were offered an EK-c. The information from the various projects and conferences will be presented in this article. EK-c has been deployed with women that stayed in a women's refuge house, reported to a domestic violence support point, with young persons (either waiting for a place in a shelter or already staying in a shelter with the intention of making a plan for what happens next) and with adult single men and women in Rotterdam and Amsterdam who stayed in a long-term care facility. Here, we will mainly go into the experiences of EK-c, in cooperation with social care, for young persons and adults in long term care facilities. In all cases, the conference was proposed by the social care worker and if the central person went along, an informative discussion would take place with an EK-coordinator. If that discussion went well, and the central person wanted to proceed, the preparations were started.

## EXPERIENCES

Concerning the use of EK-c in the group of people that make use of care facilities, we noticed several issues that are important for people when it comes to taking control of their own life:

- The present situation of the central person
- The relation of the central person to his/her social/family network, which may be vulnerable or non-existent
- The view that the central person has of the future
- The nature of the relation between the social care worker and the central person
- The role and task perception of the social care worker (and the organization he/she works for)

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## CONTROL IN THE HANDS OF THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES

People in shelters, and care professionals in related organizations, have lost the perception that one has control over one's own situation, that one is able to make a difference, that people in one's personal environment are willing and able to think along where it concerns one's situation. This is what coordinators experienced when they initiated a first encounter. Young persons pointed out that, especially where housing is concerned, or financing, or education, or work, their friends could not help them; for this, they needed professionals. And they did not want to involve their parents or other family members: 'I'll get in touch with them when I've straightened things out, when I have a place to stay, a relationship, an education, a job, nice clothes; I'll show them that I got my stuff together'. Although this shows the intention to get things right, that control will be regained, there is a transition time in which the care worker is placed in control, and the care worker in turn is eager to go along: 'I'm going to help you to ...'

In talks with adults it proved that they were often resigned to their situation, they had no expectations and they had no view of a future beyond tomorrow or next week. An absence of perspective, in fact. After some persuasion they could formulate what they longed for: first and foremost it was contact with a mother, sister, brother. This was immediately followed by a remark: 'It will be difficult because so much had happened', 'I let them down too often', 'I don't know if that is still possible'. And after further probing: 'I would like to leave this shelter', 'I would like to prepare my own food', 'I would like to sleep in a room with fewer people, and, if possible, in an assisted independent living project, in my own room'...

## THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL WHERE YOUNG PERSONS ARE CONCERNED

What young persons say is that the offer of an *EK-c* at the moment when you are actually in trouble is too late: if you were told that this option is available when you are at the verge of leaving, or if you've just been placed out of home, you might salvage something. They mentioned that, most of all, they would like a parent or a relative to take the initiative for a conference, would like them to say: 'we want a solution, we too want things to go well with you.' If the young person has to take the initiative, this may be possible in the first week, after that, they start thinking: 'I'll do it on my own'. Professionals may take this as a starting point to make *EK-c* the first option. There is a conviction that people need other people from their own circle to think along and help to make a plan. So, professionals are very important to help young people to restore the connection to their own network (people who feel involved and can bring the parents and the young person together: this may be an aunt,

a brother or sister, a neighbour, father of a friend, a teacher) and to invite that circle first to think along about a plan for this young person in this condition: are there other options? Before social care workers take it upon themselves to do everything and start making arrangements ...

Once young persons are living in a shelter, professionals, from their position, may say: 'you are here now, we will help you get started with finding directions, but, no matter what, you need your people to help you along. Take action!' We noticed that it is hard for professionals to bring this convincingly, and when a young person indicates that he or she doesn't want to get in touch with his/her friends/family, a social care worker will wait a while and start working even harder to get things done. It is of the utmost importance to bring about a change in this attitude. In The Netherlands, *Federatie Opvang* (Shelter Foundation) has initiated the project *Take Off*, to investigate the possibility of cooperation with *EK-c*: they want to bring about that change.

## THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONALS WHERE ADULTS ARE CONCERNED

When talking about control in the hands of the client and involving people from the network, professionals emphasize that much has happened already in the lives of their clients when they finally end up in a shelter: they have experienced and tried all sorts of things; they are scarred by disappointments and negative experiences with themselves and others. Often, addiction plays a part, mental health as well. Professionals are anxious to involve family members; what if nobody wants to? fear of further disappointment, fear that people make big, unrealistic plans (independent living), fear that professional contribution is undervalued, fear that addiction and other problems will be taken too lightly. All this makes it hard for a professional to put the control in the hands of the residents of the shelter and have faith that the network can mean something for them. To ask for their plan, and to ask who can play a part in that plan.

## EXPERIENCE WITH CONFERENCES

The experience gained so far in situations in which, despite all obstacles, a conference took place (25 times) are reassuring: people do show up, an average of four to six participants, mainly family members. The preparations took about 10 weeks, which is longer than for conferences in other areas, as so many things had to be overcome: shame, reluctance to involve others, fewer people that could be contacted because the central person had alienated them by harming them financially, physically or mentally, people from the network who hesitate whether to get involved again. Mostly, the plans are not spectacular, but they are a start to regaining control, and they are supported by people who were, until recently, only marginally



present (a birthday card, season's greetings, a phone call). The plans are about a (often small) next step: 'I want to live with fewer people in a room', 'I want to cook my own meals', 'I want to participate in more activities', 'I want to have the feeling that I count, by being able to participate'. Another recurrent theme in the plans is the way in which contact with the family will be maintained, intentions are put to paper and help is offered. Addiction and mental problems are tackled in the plans as well: either to work on them or to make agreements on how to deal with it in contact with the environment. The plans that are made at the conference closely align with the questions laid down beforehand by the central person. The fact that the coordinator 'speaks the same language' proves to be a decisive factor in the preparations. When these results get known more widely, they may ease the reluctance of professionals to offer a conference. It is obvious that deploying an *EK-c* does not harm anyone!

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS THAT WANT PEOPLE TO REGAIN CONTROL BY MEANS OF *EK-C*

The various projects in which *EK-c* has been used in cooperation with shelter projects, of which some cases were researched, resulted in the following recommendations:

1. An active role of the care worker in the *EK-c* process is a determining factor for success. The care worker can motivate and support residents in the process leading to a conference.
2. Communication is important. Make sure that all parties (organization, social care workers, clients) are well aware of the purpose and proceedings of *EK-c*, that each party knows its parts and tasks and knows what to expect from the other parties.
3. The preparations are a process; during this process all kinds of things are set in motion and in the own circle action is initiated. Even if no conference is held, those involved indicate that the central person has entered a positive development of new personal strength.
4. Give *EK-c* a place in the treatment (start with *EK-c*, or determine at which moment it will be held).
5. It is important to have a dedicated person in the organization, as well as supervision of and support for the social care workers during the process, because it is a new working method. It is necessary to have a mandate at board level.
6. Implementation of a new work method of professionals stretches beyond the time that is usually allocated to a project.

### CONCLUSION

An *EK-c* can be helpful to restore control to people who are at risk of being placed in shelter accommodation or who are already staying there, through making an action plan to that end. The key factor in this is the social care worker. The workers are asked to place their trust in the process and in the central person and his or her network.

### EVENT

In Utrecht, **from 19th October up to and including 21th October 2011**, the European congress 'Democratizing Help and Welfare' will take place. The core theme will be **democratizing help and welfare in Europe**, and the important role that may be played by the vision that underlies Family Group Conferencing. <http://www.familygroupconference2011.eu/en/program/>

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## Taking New Social Practices On Board – Football: Thoughts On A New Take On The Future ...

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One big challenge for future social work with homeless people will be whether we can engage with a kind of individual and collective social support that lets them project themselves beyond their daily lives into planning for the future. The use of team sport - football in this instance - in welfare services for over 18 years in France's Paris region has prompted social enablers to look at how a chance to have fun and unwind can help build a relationship with people facing difficulties that takes better account of their circumstances.

### INITIATED BY A HOMELESS PERSON...

What started out as a somewhat off-the-cuff activity was initiated by hostel residents wanting to engage in sport at the weekend – a bad time for them given how few official facilities are open. It gradually spread and all the charities came together in 1999 to stage the first solidarity tournament.

The idea for it all came from homeless people, who were also behind subsequent developments in the project that had meanwhile become a formal voluntary organisation. The “*Collectif Remise en Jeu*”<sup>1</sup> alliance was set up in 2006 to brand and systematise the idea, and to set a professional seal on our social support technique. Sport is a growing feature of community-based schemes and we are gradually rolling out a range of football-related initiatives:

- The Solidarity Tournament: held annually at the end of the sporting season. It is the founding activity of the football-based approach.
- The Interassociation Championship: established in September 2005, it brings together voluntary organisations and teams of partners and the public to compete in 10 football matches between September and June.
- The Homeless World Cup: the first was held in Austria in 2003. This world street soccer tournament takes place every year under the slogan: “A Ball Can Change the World”. More details of that later.
- World Day for the Eradication of Poverty: at the request of Paris City Hall, we played a friendly against local politicians and MPs near the Eiffel Tower on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2006. The idea of the match was to give people a reality-check on the many faces of vulnerability to poverty: homeless people are not just those you pass on the street every day, but have a wide variety of faces and life courses.

- The holiday getaway: organized at the end of the championship with the aim of bringing the agencies together and getting right away from poverty for a weekend, often at the seaside. It is an opportunity for people to get together, let their hair down and party.

### SOMETHING SPECIAL...

As its name suggests, the *Collectif Remise en Jeu* results from something started by a group of individuals later built up by voluntary agencies. It was created by 7 founding members: *Secours Catholique*, the Emmaüs association, the Nanterre-based *CASH*, *La Mie de Pain*, *AutreMonde*, *La Péniche du Cœur* and *l'Association des Cités du Secours Catholique*.

All the founding members were originally represented on the Board of Directors by an individual. Over time, the Board was expanded to include other resource persons. Homeless people also have two seats on it, and also set up an independent body called the Players' Committee in 2008 comprising an official and representatives of the players involved in the sports-based approach. The aim is to get the players involved in the organisation's development. The players discuss any and all football-related topics, like suggesting an agenda item for the next Board of Directors, talking about the fixtures calendar or a new action to run. Its strength is its independence; its interest lies in the natural link created with the Board through its two representatives. Every effort is made to include the homeless people in the formulation, discussion and decision-making process; what we experience during the year on the sports field is carried over into the individual get-togethers and meetings. The aim is to develop a means whereby the social welfare answers that are meant to help them get their active support. It is not now about doing for, or just doing with, but also being done by ... the idea is to empower homeless people through sport by getting them to take over some parts of organising the activities.

### PASSION IS THE STARTING POINT...

What sets team sports – specifically, football – apart is to start from a centre of common interest that sets out to act on public perceptions by getting people together around sport. Individual identities are foregone because that is not what is most important at that time. A person ceases to be a homeless person in order to become - for a time at least - a player

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<sup>2</sup> In football terms, literally a “throw-in”, but can also mean “back in contention”, “back in the game” – Tr.



and part of a community once again, and going on from that, a group identity is re-forged that creates a sense of belonging. The reason for getting together for social workers is not to address a need connected with daily life on the brink of poverty, but to develop the conditions for a broader coming together around a common desire that will be shared. What football has going for it is to facilitate participation: you may not be Beckham or Ronaldo, but you know how to kick a ball.

The teams get together each week in line with serendipitous meetings on the street; the language we talk is football. We play together without wondering who the other is; we discuss tactics; we re-learn to live with simple values – unlike what often happens on the street, where the same old approaches wear homeless people down and gradually slot them into a routine and then a settled lifestyle. Homeless people get to know social work agencies until they have had enough. This - when the link is severed with the social worker - is called social invalidation.

### **GOING ONTO THE EFFECTS OF SPORT...**

The point about playing sport is to provide homeless people with time away from hardship in which to recharge their physical and mental batteries. One of the first effects of playing sport often found is on people's own body image: the homeless person learns over again to look at their body, display it, make it something to talk about. The body is part of the slow reconstruction of self-image. It also expresses the idea of limits related to lack of practice: the body may be the starting point for looking at the social situation.

Secondly, the group has a constructive and motivating influence on individuals engaging with the sports process. They are no longer "homeless alone" but living as part of a group that conducts its affairs by reference to fixtures. The code word on the pitch is sport and the prowess each person demonstrates. The operative rules are those of union, the challenge of working together in pursuance of a collective strategy, an ability to accept defeats ... players undergo a rebirth from being supported in their sport; they no longer face their situation alone. They are often heard to say *"they can't wait for the week's training because it gives them an energy boost."*

Then, regularity contributes to radical change. Generally, agency-run activities take place weekly. This is an important reference point for them to plan both for the activity and their own life. They structure their time usage and step up their improvement on the sports field. The sports coach plays a unifying role while coordinating the activity to give them the desire to come back. The game famously takes priority over practice, and that is precisely where players invest most of themselves.

Finally, the competition. Training has its limits, as do serendipitous encounters. The competition lets them pitch themselves against real teams and compete for a result. Becoming a competitor is healthy when it involves respect for one's opponent and team-mates. Ranking encourages them to give their individual all in working for the team.

A final word on the rules of group life. We clearly want to play football in a sense of solidarity and respect for everyone. Coaching and social support lets us keep a close eye on the possible excesses of football. The challenge is to instil a way of relating to individuals and the group that also operates on the field. Any foul results in a penalty imposed by the sports coach taken up by the social coach.

### **ENDING WITH THE EMERGENCE OF A DEMAND...**

The social worker is enriched by the human relations in this informal setting which leads him to look at the homeless person's situation with greater understanding in a professional setting. The value of sport, but also of this outreach social work, is to run a joint social integration and inclusion action in parallel. The individual and the group interact through the opportunity given to play sport together in continually re-formed groups.

While the person facing adversity needs to satisfy their basic needs each day, they also need a voice in a setting that does not primarily stem from their situation. Self-fulfilment comes from something peripheral to their situation that strengthens the human being's desire to excel himself or herself and contemplate the future under the group's non-judgemental and often understanding gaze.

3 [www.remisenjeu.fr/cdm/coupe-du-monde-2011](http://www.remisenjeu.fr/cdm/coupe-du-monde-2011)

4 [www.remisenjeu.fr/cdm/international-conference](http://www.remisenjeu.fr/cdm/international-conference)



The homeless person remotivates himself or herself through sport under the gaze of the group and with the coaches' guidance. It is an upwards momentum, because they are engaging with the movement themselves. The amount of energy expended but at the same time re-harnessed makes them want to change their situation. Getting the body working helps to get the brain working. In teams, it is not uncommon to see others as an example to follow; to that extent, a person engaging with inclusion tends to draw others along. The process of change, or at least questioning, comes from the homeless person. S/he feels strengthened by the group and becomes more self-confident. S/he also feels that s/he exists and occupies a role in the team. The momentum developed by the group brings on individual initiatives and makes changes of status easier: someone can go from being a player to a captain, coach, administrator, volunteer ... the sociological concept of a career becomes meaningful when the homeless person is invited to participate and given responsibility.

The challenge is to move forwards along a desired roadmap for inclusion worked out on a one-to-one or group basis. Playing sport and coming together around a group merely serve to reinsert the homeless person into a process of positive change.

### THE HOMELESS WORLD CUP AS A FOCUS...

A Homeless World Cup has been held every year since 2003. It was thought up by two social entrepreneurs – one Scottish and one Austrian. Their initial idea was to bring homeless people from the world over together around a common focus. Now this World Cup – whose first edition in 2003 brought together 18 countries – is taking place this year in France in August with 53 countries.<sup>3</sup>

In our application, we wanted to give greater meaning to our approach. Which is why, apart from the sporting competition which will pit 48 men's squads and 16 women's squads against each other, we shall be organizing an international conference on homeless services in the world at which homeless people, social enablers and researchers will give us a different take on poverty issues.<sup>4</sup>

We also plan on setting up a National Centre for Inclusion through Sport and Culture after the event which will run short-stay remotivation schemes aimed at achieving social diversity through multiple sport and cultural opportunities. The idea is that the centre – which will be open throughout the year to anti-poverty agencies already engaged or wanting to engage with an approach to social inclusion through sport and culture – will offer homeless people and social enablers an opportunity to get together in a setting away from daily poverty concerns to get acquainted in a different way, to meet other people and businesses with a view to taking their life in hand and getting in touch with the world of work.

### AND FINALLY...

This approach which has been going since 1993 aims to spread new social practices around to offer different but mutually supporting ways for homeless people to change the course of their future.

Over time, team sports have become a tool to improve understanding about homeless people that we are trying to spread around France. Anything that fosters social diversity and destigmatised interaction offers hope that change or movement in perceptions will promote greater social inclusion. Football has attributes that can bring homeless people closer to the general public and create the conditions for that reaching out. It is a means and driver of new dynamics in which inclusion becomes an active way of bringing people together that transcends differences.

To be innovative, social work must heed the voice of and give a rightful place to homeless people; but innovative social work must also talk to the public at large. That is the precondition for regenerating our know-how and practices.

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For more information see:

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The Connection at St Martin's runs an art workshop called Art Space. This space has no boundaries and is user led giving homeless people the opportunity to express themselves and their identity through art. Every year The Connection holds two Art shows which give homeless people the opportunity to exhibit and sell their work.

The Connection: <http://www.connection-at-stmartins.org.uk>  
Art Space: <http://www.facebook.com/homelessart>

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