
A strength based intervention for homeless youths: effectiveness and fidelity of *Houvast*

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Background

According to the latest official count, there are at least 8000 homeless youths in the Netherlands. Despite their complex problems, there is a lack of evidence-based interventions to improve their social status and their quality of life. *Houvast* [Dutch for 'grip'] is a strength based method grounded in scientific evidence as well as 'what works' principles. *Houvast* is aimed at improving the quality of life of homeless youths by focusing on their strengths stimulating their capacity for autonomy and self-reliance.

Objectives

Aim of this study is to test the effectiveness as well as fidelity of the *Houvast* method in homeless youths in service accommodations.

Methods

In this multi site, quasi-experimental study, 300 homeless youths are interviewed four times over a period of nine months. The experimental group consists of seven service accommodations for homeless youth in which the workers are trained in the *Houvast* method. The control group consists of seven matched service accommodations that provide 'care as usual'. By means of a structured interview, personal characteristics, social support, self-reliance, autonomy, substance abuse, physical and mental health, social status and quality of life are assessed at T0, T1 (3mths), T2

(6 mths) and T3 (9 mths). In addition, fidelity of the intervention is assessed in the seven experimental service accommodations by means of: analysis of recording forms; self-report questionnaires and direct observations of the work relationship.

Progress to-date

At present we are at the preparatory phase of this 3-5 year project. In the autumn of 2011, the seven accommodations that are assigned to the experimental condition will be trained in the Houvast intervention. At the end of 2011, data collection will start. We expect to present the first results on correlates of quality of life in homeless youths in service accommodation in the spring of 2013.