
Accommodating Homeless Families in the Private Rented Housing Sector: Experiences from a Supported Housing Project in Vienna

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- › **Abstract** *This article presents the findings and analysis of the evaluation of Haus Felberstraße; a project in Vienna that offers supported transitional housing for homeless families with the goal of accessing accommodation in the private rented housing sector. The project was initiated with the goal of testing a new approach within homelessness services policy and the results are presented in the context of a discussion of the policy of the Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe (the homeless services in Vienna), its development and refer to the context of housing policy in Vienna. The results show individual factors that determine access to accommodation in the private rented housing market provide scope of action for homeless services. Immediate effective social support with a strong goal-orientation can influence and improve the capacity of vulnerable families in terms of stable housing. Empowerment and learning strengthens individuals. However, structural factors like rising costs for housing, lack of housing and low income levels and risk of poverty remain and require further policy development and political action that supports affordable housing.*
- › **Keywords** *Homeless families, private rented housing market, housing policy, social housing*

Introduction

This article describes the supported transitional housing project *Haus Felberstraße* in Vienna, established in 2009, with the aim of accommodating households in private rented housing. After an introduction to housing policy in Vienna and the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe* (the homeless services in Vienna), the article presents the findings and analysis of a three-year evaluation of *Haus Felberstraße*. The article draws on Nordfeldt's (2012) intersectional approach to understanding homelessness, which incorporates several levels of analysis, interpreting homelessness as the consequence of a combination of structural and institutional factors with individual trigger factors and different relations and interactions between these levels. Therefore, the evaluation results of the project *Haus Felberstraße*, which show outcomes on an individual/household level (homeless families), are contrasted with current developments on the institutional level as well as the structural level, including homeless policy and housing policy in Vienna, and are connected to a policy review of the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe*. Potential for enhancing the access to affordable housing in the private rented market for vulnerable families and for change on a structural level, the institutional and individual level in terms of empowerment and learning are identified.

Vienna's Housing Market

Vienna traditionally has one of the strongest municipal housing sectors in Europe. A total population of currently approximately 1 731 000 inhabitants (Statistik Austria, 2012) is accompanied by a supply of more than 220 000 city owned social housing units – approximately one fifth of Vienna's housing stock – and about 180 000 housing units built with municipality subsidies (Magistratsabteilung 24, 2012). Vienna's particular history of social housing goes back to the first decades of the 20th century (after World War I) when Vienna's social democratic local government (The Red Vienna) aimed to create a welfare system that provided improved housing and living conditions for the working class (Reinprecht 2007). According to Reinprecht (2007, p.36) '[a]mong the various programs developed in this 'Red Vienna' Period, the construction of municipal housing was the most ambitious and most prestigious. The Viennese municipality played a key role as both developer and owner. Social housing was built throughout the city, and thus had a long-term anti-segregation effect.'

In recent years, there has been a shift towards a greater marketisation of Vienna's social housing. The most recent municipal housing block was opened in 2004 (*Wiener Wohnen*, n.d.), since then no more city-owned social housing units have been built. Instead, Vienna's city administration – in addition to rent subsidies –

places emphasis on public private partnership and subsidises building new housing in exchange for a certain percentage of the newly built housing stock being placed at the city administration's disposal for allocation under various social criteria. This type of housing is often operated through cooperative housing associations. In 2010 the city administration spent approximately €600m in three areas of housing policy, which are: subsidies for new construction, refurbishment and subject subsidies (Wohnservice Wien, n.d.). Currently, the portion of municipal housing units in Vienna is as high as 26% (Magistratsabteilung 24, 2012).

While between 1981 and 2001 Vienna's population only grew slightly and more than 80 000 housing units were built, the growth of population exceeded construction activity from 2001 to 2006 (Magistratsabteilung 24, 2012). Vienna's population is now growing rapidly. During the period 2012 to 2030, population is estimated to grow by more than 13% (Statistik Austria, 2012a). In addition, housing costs are rising. While the proportion of average housing expenditures in Viennese private household budgets was 21.3% in 2004, it climbed to 22.7% in 2009 (Statistik Austria 2007; 2011). One of the reasons for this may be an increase in terms of housing quality which lead to higher prices, but makes it more difficult for low income households to find affordable housing (Magistratsabteilung 24, 2012). In 2010 18% of Austrians lived in households with unacceptable housing expenses, which means more than 25% of the household budget is used for rent according to Statistik Austria (2011a, p.127). In 2011 approximately 23 000 persons were on the waiting list for a municipal flat (Mörk and Mager, 2011). These data reflect a trend which O'Sullivan and De Decker (2007, p.96) have stated to be evident all across the European Union whereby: 'social housing programmes are either in decline or not of sufficient quantity to meet demand, it is likely that the private rented sector will assume a more prominent and expanded role than was envisaged twenty years ago.'

Homelessness and Homeless Services in Vienna¹

In 2011 there were 22 294 actions for eviction in Vienna, 2 789 were actually executed and led to an eviction. However, evictions in Vienna are decreasing, a key reason being the city administration's efforts in the area of eviction prevention. More than 80% of the users of the *Wiener Wohnungssicherung* (prevention of eviction services in Vienna) in 2011 experienced homelessness due to an eviction because of rent arrears. The majority of the users of prevention of eviction services are at risk of poverty (Magistratsabteilung 24, 2012). The *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe* provides a comprehensive and varied range of supported housing, regardless of reasons for homeless-

¹ When no other sources stated, data is taken from the internal reporting system of *Fonds Soziales Wien*. The authors want to thank Monika Nowotny for providing tables and figures.

ness.² The *Fonds Soziales Wien* is designated by the city of Vienna for strategic planning and funding of the services for homeless persons, which are operated together with more than twenty different non-profit organisations. Through constant efforts and due to a rising demand the standards have improved and capacities have been expanded. At the beginning of 2005 approximately 2450 places were available, whereas today a total of 5000 places are available for homeless persons.

Johnson and Teixeira (2010) classify homeless support systems into three different types: linear housing models, the 'Housing First' model and permanent supportive housing models. Linear housing models, although subject to strong criticism (Sahlin, 2005; Tsemberis and Asmussen, 1999), are the most common type in European countries and also in the US and Australia. The model provides that homeless people progress through several steps within the system, including emergency shelters, transitional housing and training flats before being given admission to their own 'normal' housing (Johnson and Teixeira, 2010, p.4). Sahlin (2005) uses the term 'staircase of transition' to describe this model: 'The higher an individual climbs, the more privacy and freedom he/she is awarded and the more 'normal' that individual's housing becomes, a regular rental flat typifying the ultimate goal' (Sahlin, 2005, p.115). The second type, 'Housing First' model, neglects the requirement of 'housing readiness' by placing homeless people directly into permanent independent housing while offering comprehensive support. This model was developed in the US and currently there is intensive testing in several European Countries. The third type, permanent supportive housing models, provides permanent affordable housing for former homeless persons including on-site support.

Following the typology outlined by Johnson and Teixeira (2010), the Viennese system is akin to the linear housing model, but one that provides flexibility when it comes to skipping one or several steps of the 'staircase'. In addition to that, Vienna also provides approximately 1100 permanent places in socially supported housing, which belongs to the third type. Since 2010, Vienna's city administration has also been putting efforts to adopt a 'Housing First' approach. Most clients still go through the 'staircase' system, maybe a couple of steps, or only one step, ideally resulting in being recommended for a municipal housing apartment through the *Soziale Schiene* (shortened process of being referred to a municipal housing apartment under the existence of social distress). But this resource is currently reaching its limits with approximately 2000 referrals each year (Mörk and Mager, 2011; Riesenfelder *et al*, 2012).

² Information about the structure of homeless services in Vienna ('Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe') can be found here: <http://wohnen.fsw.at/wohnungslos/#englisch>. The definition of homelessness in the Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe is based on ETHOS (<http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article120&lang=en>).

Among 8280 distinct users of the services of the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe* in 2011, there were 700 families (households consisting of at least one adult and one minor). This was 150 more families than in 2009. In 2011, 61.4% of the families that left a temporary supported housing place (excluding emergency accommodation for families) were accommodated in the regular housing market or a permanent supported housing placement³. As table 1 shows, of these families 77.9% moved into municipal housing; 10.7% left for a privately rented apartment with limited contract; 7.1% left for a privately rented apartment in with an unlimited contract and 17.1% moved into another form of supported housing within homeless services system.

Table 1: Families leaving an accommodation of the Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe in 2011 (emergency accommodation excluded)

Outcomes for families leaving supported housing		
Status	Total number	Percent of each category
Successful Access to Accommodation	140	61.4%
Owner-occupied dwelling or dwelling of co-operative association	1	0.7%
Municipal housing	109	77.9%
Private rented Housing for an unlimited period	10	7.1%
Private rented Housing for a limited period	15	10.7%
Sub tenancy	2	1.4%
Socially supported housing (permanent housing for former homeless persons)	3	2.1%
Removal within the system of homeless services	39	17.1%
Supervised housing in apartments	22	56.4%
Mother-child-facility	2	5.1%
Transitional accommodation	7	17.9%
Transitional accommodation for specific target groups	8	20.5%
Other	49	21.5%
Friends' apartment	3	6.1%
Partner's apartment	9	18.4%
Family's apartment	15	30.6%
Women's refuge	1	2.0%
Shared supervised flat (youth welfare service)	1	2.0%
Prison	2	4.1%
Other	5	10.2%
Unknown	13	26.5%
Total	228	100.0%
Deceased	1	
No data available	5	
Missing	16	
Total	250	

³ Accommodation into permanent supported housing placement in this case means that adult family members were placed in Socially Supported Housing, a type of permanent accommodation for former homeless persons within the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe*.

As the pathway to secure accommodation for homeless people in Vienna normally leads to municipal housing, the private rented housing market was virtually unused by projects offering homeless services. Furthermore, the experience of working with homeless families shows that the type of housing and tenancy is seen as a status symbol. The most desirable, but in most cases unrealistic (due to high financial barriers such as the deposit paid at the beginning of the lease contract) option for this group may be subsidised cooperative dwellings, however, municipal housing seems to be in vogue especially among migrant families in Vienna. In addition to obvious advantages such as low rent and secure tenancy, these families consider being provided with a municipal flat as a symbol of their status of integration and therefore being part of Viennese society. The motivation to move into private rented housing seems to be relatively low, families even put up with staying in temporary homeless accommodation considerably longer than necessary if this raises the chance of receiving municipal housing.

Due to the developments described above, which include stagnating resources in municipal housing, a pressurised private rental sector and a growing demand, in recent years the need to develop access to more sectors of the housing market for homeless families has grown. Furthermore, there are homeless persons and families that do not meet the criteria for access to municipal housing, e.g. in terms of length of stay in Vienna (main place of residence) or still having debts at the municipal housing department. As a policy development, the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe* has tried to work into the direction of giving access to the subsidised housing market operated through cooperative housing associations. Housing through these cooperatives increasingly became a suitable option for the middle class but through certain projects of the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe* vulnerable groups, mainly Convention refugees, have been granted access. The private rented sector was neglected until the project *Haus Felberstraße* was started in 2009.

The project *Haus Felberstraße* was created with the aim of accommodating homeless families into apartments in the private rented sector. As unstable living situations tend to be maintained into later life (Gould and Williams, 2010, p.173), it is seen as especially important to reduce the length of stay in temporary accommodation to a minimum for homeless families with children where eviction can not be avoided. For *Haus Felberstraße* provision is made for an average stay of eight months. Within this period, the support offered to the families covers securing income, household budget planning and assistance and coaching in house hunting in the private rented housing sector.

Project ‘Haus Felberstraße’: Supported Housing for Families

Haus Felberstraße offers assisted housing in temporary accommodation for homeless families. The project is operated by “wieder wohnen” GmbH, an off-shoot company of the city-owned *Fonds Soziales Wien*, providing almost 40% of the total services of the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe*. Through the scheme, 17 families in household sizes from two to ten persons live in separate, fully furnished apartments within one building, with on site support through a multi-professional team. The opening hours of the office are from Monday to Friday, in total 45 hours a week. There is no standby during the night, weekends and holidays. In case of emergency the families use public emergency services.

The team consists of 1.5 social workers, 1.5 social advisers (staff that support users concerning daily routine issues), one real estate manager, 0.5 maintenance staff and one team manager. Each family works mainly with one subgroup consisting of one social worker and one social adviser. The goal is that families learn to manage their household budgets and gain knowledge and skills concerning housing and move into an apartment in the private rented market within a maximum period of eight months. The support is based on three main phases: securing income, household budgeting and apartment search.

Phase I: Securing Income

After a family has moved into an apartment of *Haus Felberstraße*, a social worker, a social adviser and the family create a plan of support. The first step is to secure the family’s income. Whether it is settlement of debts, application for social security benefits or unemployment benefits, support is given concerning contact with the appropriate authorities and organising necessary documents. With more than two thirds of the users this type of support is given.

Phase II: Household Budgeting

Only with a secure income (at least minimum standard according to social security law in Austria⁴) can household budget planning be started, which is the second phase. Here, the families are introduced to the sub-goal of paying the user fee for the apartment at *Haus Felberstraße* at the start of each month in advance.⁵ If successful, a savings target is agreed with the family. The savings amount is based on the difference between the expected costs of housing on the rental market minus the current user fee. The payment of user fees and the amount of the savings,

⁴ Welfare minimum standards information as of 1th of January 2012 for Vienna: 1 Person €868.94; 1 couple €1 159.90; 1 couple with 1 child €1 172.92.

⁵ User fees are between € 197 and € 317 including running costs, electricity, heating, facilities, depending on size of apartment.

along with managing other household payments, is reviewed monthly. The ability to plan the family budget triggers for many users a positive 'teachable moment' and is essential for the users' confidence in the team and the services offered. On the one hand affordability of housing is checked and on the other hand, the families acquire savings, which can be used to finance deposit, commission and furniture for the new apartment. As experience shows, saving has a positive and motivating effect on the majority of the families. Families who have felt the steady pressure of financial lack discover that they can independently establish savings and thus gain some financial freedom. Users express emotions of 'pride in oneself', which creates self-confidence. If the family can verify compliance with the household budget, the third phase starts: the search for an apartment.

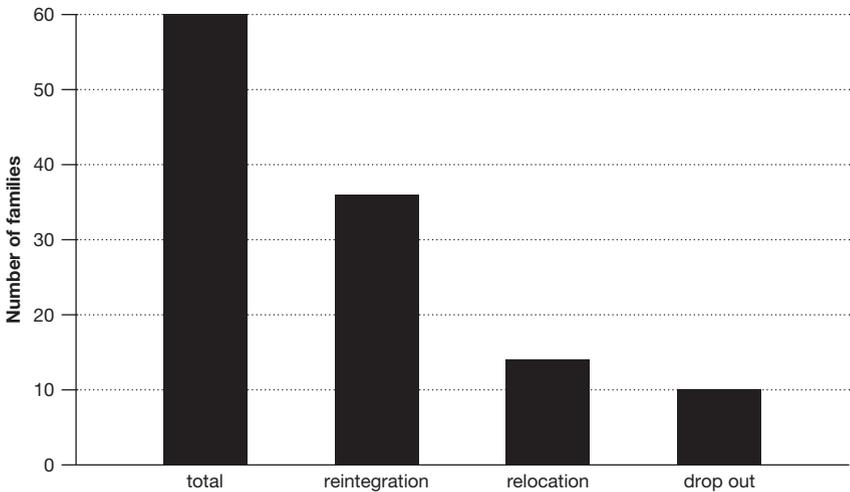
Phase III: Apartment Search

After five months and a saving amount of at least €1 200 each family gets an initial training on house hunting, conducted by the real estate manager who is part of the team. The specifications of the desired apartment are formulated. Families receive all-important information concerning househunting and concluding a contract. In the background the real estate manager of *Haus Felberstraße* looks for flats and also establishes cooperations on the real estate market. As a positive side effect, the real estate manager functions like an 'ambassador' of *Haus Felberstraße*, aiming to improve the public image of homeless families by conveying that these families are reliable contract partners. A family can meet the real estate manager on several occasions to review their search profile and prepare for the meetings with real estate agents and landlords. Depending on the ability of the users, they search independently after the initial phase. If a lease possibility opens up, the real estate manager reviews it. Initially, the wishes of the users in terms of size, facilities and location of the apartment in most cases exceed by far their financial capacity. The introduction to the reality of the housing market and accepting these conditions is a crucial part of the social work done by the team. Available financial assistance for deposit, commission and rent can be applied for at the social benefit centre. Empowerment of the users in terms of house hunting, apartment maintenance capability and financial management, which include a stable income and the ability to manage the household budget, are at the core of the service. To ensure sustainability of the service, further support is given in terms of social integration, such as support concerning employment, education and training and support concerning children and family matters.

Evaluation Findings

Since the launch of the project in July 2009 it has been evaluated every year.⁶ The following section aims to present a summary of the findings of all three evaluation reports. The findings are based on an analysis of the client documentation, standardised feedback from the users at the end of the support period and regular, systematic reflexion of user case histories through the support team. From July 2009 to July 2012, 69 families have stayed in *Haus Felberstraße*. 60 Families have left *Haus Felberstraße* – of them 60% were housed in a private rented apartment⁷), 23.3% were relocated within the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe* system and 16.7% dropped out.

Figure 1: Support finished in ‚Haus Felberstraße‘, July 2009 – June 2012.



58.3% of the families were single parent families. More than two thirds of the adults were female. From July 2009 to July 2012, 71 adults with 105 children were supported in *Haus Felberstraße*; 25 adults lived in partnership relations; 30 were female single parents and five were male single parents.⁸ Family sizes range from two persons to ten persons. The mean number of children per family decreased from 2.4 in evaluation period I to 1.8 in evaluation period III. The clients belonged

⁶ Evaluation Period I: 01.08.2009 – 30.06.2010; Evaluation Period II: 01.07.2010 – 30.06.2011; Evaluation Period III: 01.07.2011 – 30.06.2012.

⁷ This figure includes also 3 families, which could move into municipal housing.

⁸ For data processing reasons, these numbers include families with support ongoing until at least July 2012.

to 14 different nationalities. 61.4% of the users are Austrian, followed by 10.2% users from Somalia (mainly Convention refugees), 7.4% of Serbian and 5.1% of Russian nationality.

The mean duration of stay in *Haus Felberstraße* was 7.95 months, ranging from a minimum of three month to a maximum of 15 month. The support team identified various factors that influence the length of stay. Reasons for not meeting the time target of eight months stay in *Haus Felberstraße* included:

- Families needed a longer time for securing income
- The process of rehousing was interrupted by serious health issues
- Families preferred to stay within the system of *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe*
- House hunting took more than three month due to expectations of users or difficulties in finding landlords who accepted users as tenants.

Experiences from the project revealed challenges for homeless families in relation to the structural, as well as the individual, level. The main challenges in rehousing in the private rented housing market for the users of the project were:

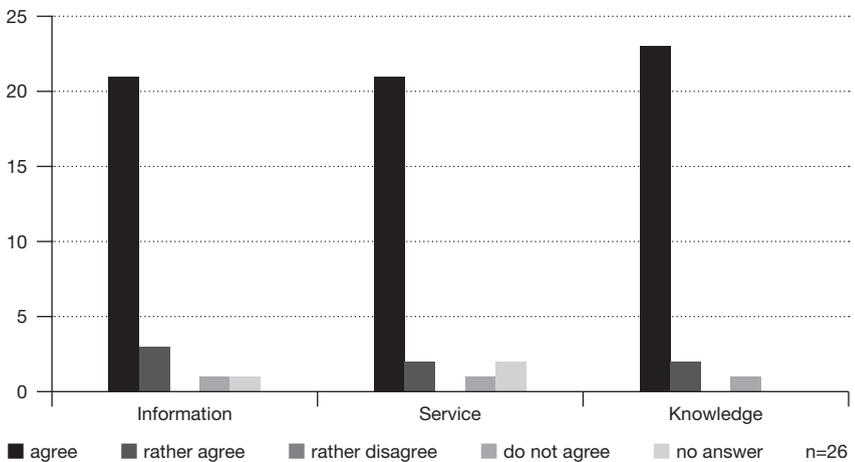
- Homeless families experienced discrimination as house hunters. They often didn't have a working income available and some cases had many children. Landlords were reluctant to give them rental contracts out of fear that rent arrears and conflicts in the neighbourhood would occur.
- Landlords did not want to rent small apartments to families and usually set one room per person as a standard.
- Rising rents made it harder for users to find affordable apartments.
- Homeless families had no experience with the real estate market. The leases were considered to be insecure and overpriced by the families. Social housing was seen as a safer option.

Generally, the users accepted the services very well after some initial scepticism. The basis for successful collaboration of users and staff was determined by social work methods, an appreciative and respectful attitude and work relationship. The team was initially faced with very passive attitudes from the users. The expectation of receiving help without having to make a contribution was very common and thus motivation was core to success of the service. However, not every homeless family who was referred to the project did accept the offer of being housed in *Haus Felberstraße* and 16 homeless families rejected the offer of receiving accommodation and social support in *Haus Felberstraße* for different reasons, including: the small flats in *Haus Felberstraße* did not meet the expectations of the families; the

objective of renting an apartment in the private rented market was refused (a municipal housing apartment, though not possible, was seen as the ultimate goal); and financial disclosure (settlement of debts) or saving money was rejected.

To incorporate the users' experience in the development of the service offered, user satisfaction is collected on a regular basis. The results show high approval of the services of *Haus Felberstraße*. Each rehoused family gets a standardised questionnaire at the end of the support. The questionnaire asks for levels of satisfaction with the supply of housing, social work, the house hunting and total service and 80.6% of rehoused families delivered the feedback questionnaire. Of those, 69% estimate the total service to be excellent, 17.2% good and 13.9% sufficient. In addition 26 families answered questions about house hunting. The statement '*The information offered concerning house hunting was helpful*' was agreed with by 80.8% of users (results showed in figure 2). The statement '*I found it useful to be offered the possibility of meetings with the real estate manager as an expert.*' was agreed with by 80.8% of the users and 88.5% of the users stated that they now know how to find an apartment and how to conclude a rental contract.

Figure 2: Feedback of users concerning househunting.



Conclusions

This section presents the conclusions from the experiences of the *Haus Felberstraße* team and lists different criteria for success and challenges in accommodating formerly homeless families in the private rented housing. These include scope of action on individual/household and organisational level as well as the identification of critical developments on the structural level.

Continuity and immediacy enhance empowerment

Financial security is a key factor for housing stability. Through the support supplied by the team and the measures taken, it was found that financial stability could be facilitated for users. The team's strategy can be summarised as: *request – promote – confront – show alternatives – present benefits*. The obligation to pay the user fee is constantly communicated as a top priority to the users. Detailed and repeated information concerning the consequences of non-compliance, which is that eventually housing and support will be lost, is given. Users are asked to actively present the payment receipt at the staff office to emphasise its priority. If the payment is not made, staff act immediately with a discussion of possible consequences in the event that payments cannot be met. A new deadline for payment and, if necessary, payment in instalments is agreed. The evidence is that the vast majority adhere to the new payment deadline. In most cases a change in behaviour among users is introduced, which includes at least the active reporting of inability to pay. The fact that users can access their savings to pay the user fee on time, instead of delaying the payment, reinforces the prioritisation of housing costs, provides the added value of flexibility through the savings and empowers the users in control of their financial resources. Highly motivated users have shown that their potential for making savings, even on a very tight budget, is much higher than assumed in advance. The understanding of savings and access to savings must be actively communicated to users. There is a potential for savings both through the user's consumer behaviour and also by using the various support for people with low income in Vienna, such as food banks and supermarkets with cheaper offers only accessible for this group. The close support setting allows spontaneous and direct guidance and increases the ability to initiate immediate and effective interventions. Through such controlled intervention users gain the experience that problems can be solved quickly and this reinforces positive behavioural strategies.

Motivation as a cornerstone

The will to change is the cornerstone of successful support on an individual level. Regardless of the problem areas the evidence shows that when there is a will to change, use of the social work services and personal responsibility can be achieved. Whether the motivation is already present or can be introduced is very dependent

on the self-perception of the users and their expectations of the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe* system. Self-perception and expectations need to be identified and analysed by the support team. A further aspect that influences motivation is differing expectations or perspectives of the users towards the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe* system. Some users accept the system as help in crisis and pursue the goal of leaving the system into independent housing fast. Other users see responsibility for housing provision, and also future housing solutions, as lying within the system. The option of *Haus Felberstraße* is especially suitable to users whose homelessness arose as a consequence of a life crisis such as divorce or death of a partner. Users who are motivated to change their behaviour have the capacity to understand the realities of their situation and take responsibility for their own life seem to derive the most benefit from the opportunity.

Accommodation in the private rented housing sector is possible

Even if the users of *Haus Felberstraße* are not perceived as optimal tenants, they do manage to rent apartments on the private rental market. This success is possible as a result of a variety of measures. The expectations of the users regarding the standard of the apartment have to be brought in line with the users' financial resources and the real estate market situation. Through discussion with the support team, and experiences while searching for an apartment, users are continuously confronted with this issue and normally experience a cycle of going from euphoria to frustration, resulting in acceptance of reality and adapting to the conditions.

Nordfeldt (2012) states that homeless families in Stockholm lack knowledge concerning the rental market. This, together with increasing demands by landlords in the private rented sector (guaranteed income, references from prior landlords, maximum number of children in relation to number of rooms, etc.) makes it very hard for vulnerable families to get established in the private housing market. The same is observed in Vienna. The *Haus Felberstraße* team assists users in the search for a home, demanding actions by the users and also proof of these actions. The necessary knowledge and assistance in how to approach real estate personnel and landlords is mediated. Experience has shown that the number of housing offers needs to be limited by the real estate manager for the reason that many acceptable housing offers were declined by users in the past. Limiting the number of housing offers promotes users decisions and illustrates the choice available. The limited time of eight months possible stay (extensions have to be justified) at *Haus Felberstraße* enhances the decision process of the users concerning finding an apartment.

It is evident that learning to act in the private rented market enhances the self-dependence of homeless families in terms of housing. Knowledge and competence gained through training may contribute to prevent further homelessness, even if changing living situations necessitate another move. In the case of *Haus*

Felberstraße the effect of learning cannot be reduced simply to the individual/household level. As described above, due to Vienna's strong tradition in municipal housing, homeless services in Vienna had largely ignored the possibilities provided by the private market for many years. Now, as the situation on the housing market comes under pressure, certain institutions within the homeless services system aim to widen their options by gaining knowledge of other sectors of the housing market. *Haus Felberstraße* did this by including a trained real estate agent with several years of working experience in the for-profit sector.

Even if the evaluation results of *Haus Felberstraße* look promising, there is a strong need to examine the sustainability of such services. Currently the retention rate of the families accommodated in the private rented housing market is not known. However, Hohenbalken (2010) has shown a tenancy retention rate of over 80% for a supervised housing project that offers a training flat for approximately two years with the goal of accessing municipal housing and Crane *et al* (2012) argued that people who have received training concerning household budgeting and financial management show high rates of housing stability.

Structural barriers remain and need to be tackled on the political level

As the results of the evaluation of *Haus Felberstraße* show, individual factors that determine access to the private rented housing market provide opportunity for homeless services. Immediate effective social support with a strong goal orientation can influence and improve the capability of vulnerable families in terms of stable housing. Empowerment and learning strengthens individuals. Yet structural factors such as rising costs of housing, lack of housing, low-income levels and risk of poverty remain.

For homeless families in Vienna it will be crucial that the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe* policy orientates towards the private rented market in projects like *Haus Felberstraße*. This will be a vital policy contribution in the future because capacities in the municipal housing stock are largely exhausted. One area that already has been explored is collaboration with cooperative housing associations, where several projects with a goal of accommodating migrants have been realised. The challenge of developing solid pathways for homeless people into the private rented market remains, not only for families going through the 'staircase' of *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe*, as shown in the example of *Haus Felberstraße*, but also for the planned implementation of the Viennese model of 'Housing First'.⁹ The model was developed in 2011/2012 by the city together with relevant stakeholders in the homeless services field and represents a strategy concerning 'Housing First', which

⁹ A description of the Viennese Model of Housing First (in German) can be downloaded here: http://wohnen.fsw.at/downloads/dokumente/201210_HousingFirst_DasWienerModell_Endbericht.pdf

directly places homeless persons into their own permanent housing, shortening the time in transitional accommodation. Therefore cooperation with stakeholders in the private rented market will be needed (Halbartschlager *et al*, 2012). In 2012 several pilot projects have started to test the model. It is possible that these pilot projects can benefit from the experiences of and lessons learned by *Haus Felberstraße* although whether the methods used are applicable to the pilot projects within 'Housing First' needs to be established. In the future more evaluation of projects – with a focus on methods and results – and dissemination of these results among service operators within the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe* system – is desirable. As shown above, currently the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe* is a highly dynamic field. During the years ahead, loose ends and current developments will have to be pulled together, with the aim of creating a more consistent, sustainable and outcome orientated policy.

Despite all the efforts of the *Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe*, which is part of the social security department within the city administration, it has limited power and limited responsibilities concerning housing policy and tenancy legislation. For the private real estate market to become a better option for the accommodation of homeless people, changes in housing policy are necessary. The financial feasibility of housing has to be protected and supported. It must also be ensured that landlords accept persons with low income as tenants. Even though political parties in Austria are currently bringing housing issues back to the top of their agenda, society will have to accept that the economic crisis may bring a change in the affordable housing standard in general.

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