



# From Hostel to Housing First

Experiences by the Salvation Army in Finland

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FEANTSA

POD MAATSCHAPPELIJKE INTEGRATIE  
BETER SAMEN LEVEN  
SPP INTÉGRATION SOCIALE  
MIEUX VIVRE ENSEMBLE





# Salvation Army shelter in Helsinki before renovation

- 236 beds for temporary accommodation
- 1-4 beds in one room
- Shared and crowded bathrooms and kitchens
- 7 duty officers, 1 counselor + secretary and director





# Government's program on long-term homelessness in 2008-2011

- Living is based on a normal lease
- Professional support services
- All shelters are closed down
- A program to convert shelters into homes
  - a roadmap to get financing and to develop a new operational model



# Salvation Army was worried for the changes



- Fears of the Housing First model: possibilities to control will decrease, how to deal with disturbance
- Harm reduction – an old temperance association
- Economic risks in a big renovation project
- Number of beds will decrease
- Change in client profile: only long-term homeless, how about people who have ended up homeless recently?
- Information and argumentation in understandable language. Both economic and theological reasons: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”
- We recognised that we can’t help those who really need help
- On the whole: a lot of discussions.



# Combining old strengths with new demands

- Home, work and participation in making decisions about oneself and the residential environment
- Housing First principle, low-threshold work activities, community training
- Acknowledging the force of the community. We had already learned in the hostel that the force of the community is always stronger than individual interventions by a worker
- In a close community it is possible to get support in basic skills in joining a community and acting in it. These skills are needed in social integration





# Renovated and new premises

- 112 flats and room for services in a block of flats in 2011 (Y-Foundation)
- A facility for short-term emergency housing (54 beds) in 2011
- 86 flats and room for services in the old shelter building after renovation in 2012
- A new block of 34 flats and room for services in 2014 (Y-Foundation, City of Espoo)





# A huge cultural change for tenants and the staff

- An open dialog instead of authority and control
  - in 2010 there was a shelter and 7 duty officers
  - in 2011 there were flats, 35 social and health care workers
- Tenants are taking part in planning and decisions about their lives
- Intention to understand the logic in tenant's action, deliberating and studying together
- Tenants are invited to be partners in development work, decision making and in sharing their expert knowledge





# Cultural change for the tenants

- An overnight change from control to active partnership
- Understanding one's rights as tenant and client
- It took a while to join a community in which things and decisions are made together





# Cultural change for the workers

- A joint decision of the staff was the basis for the change: this internal change process was started 2 years before closing the shelter
- Individual pathways to training for the staff
- Unskilled staff started training and work in emergency housing which became a learning environment for social support work
- Housing First philosophy and harm reduction were challenges for trained workers
- Learning the conformities of law in a community and integrating elements of community training with the harm-reduction approach
- Adopting the idea of both/and instead of either/or and tolerating incompleteness
- Giving up the position as an expert towards not-knowing



# Input in training

- Basic examination in social and health care as apprenticeship training for untrained staff
- One-year apprenticeship training in community education for the whole staff
- Group work-counselling for teams
  - work-counselling in community training
  - harm reduction
  - housing first



# All we had learned so far could be utilized in starting the congregate housing facility Väinölä in 2014





# Väinölä



- Tenants took part in selecting the staff
- A joint one-week initiation period for the tenants and the staff before moving in
  - the workers didn't meet each other before this week
  - true understanding of the basic idea, making house rules and planning decision making processes together
  - orientation in the functioning of a community
- Support workers are not allowed to deliberate tenant's treatment without the person being present
- A unique culture of working together and sharing responsibility was created
- Feeling of stability and security encourages to take new steps in life



Thank you!