

11 Good Practices on the Integration of Youth Work in Services for Youth Homelessness



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Introduction

The experiences of, reasons for, and routes out of homelessness among young people are often different from those of adults. It is therefore necessary to adopt youth-orientated interventions which consider the transition into adulthood to be as important as to that into independent housing. This requires a mindset shift: rather than being a homeless service that works with young people, the starting point is being a youth service where young people happen to be experiencing homelessness.

Youth work might prove a useful tool in this regard, since it provides a framework to make sure services are adapted to the specificities of young people, by recognising their needs in a way that empowers them.

The added value that youth work brings to better support young people experiencing homelessness is not new to FEANTSA. In fact, this collection of good practices builds on a [reflection exercise drafted on this topic](#), as well as a [study session organised in October 2024](#) to develop the youth work competencies of professionals working on youth homelessness.

In the following pages, readers will find a diversity of examples from across Europe which support young people experiencing homelessness in different ways: some are youth services, while others are homelessness services, some provide more intensive care, others focus on prevention, etc. However, all of them integrate in one way or another interventions and/or principles rooted in youth work, which can be of inspiration for other organisations working on youth homelessness.

This means that the good practices of this collection do address several of the youth work functions as classified by the Council of Europe:

1. On relationships with and outcomes for young people

- Accompany young people in their personal, social and emotional development.
- Provide relevant learning opportunities for young people.
- Support young people's agency in making sense of the society they live in, and in engaging with it.
- Support young people in actively contributing to the development of a culture of human rights and democracy in their communities and societies.

2. On self, practice and field of youth work

- Develop reflective and evaluative youth work practice.
- Co-create, co-implement and co-evaluate youth work projects and programmes.
- Nurture connection to youth work field

- Contribute to the visibility and recognition of the role, impact and value of youth work for young people and their communities.
- Contribute to the development of policies and programmes to work better for young people.

3. On community and society

- Develop a systemic and future-orientated approach to youth work practice.
- Support the integration of youth perspective in other spaces.

Each one of the organisations included in this collection addresses a different combination of youth work functions. This diversity is illustrative of the many ways youth work can be integrated when supporting young people in homelessness, depending on the contexts in which organisations operate, their resources, the groups of young people they work with, or other factors. Hopefully, this will motivate other organisations to reflect on which functions they currently cover and which ones they could address, as well as how their supports can be more youth-orientated by integrating youth work interventions.

Regarding structure, the descriptions of good practices consist of five sections: an introduction to the organisation, a short overview of homelessness in general and youth homelessness in the national and/or local contexts of each organisation, a more detailed explanation of the service, a focus on the role played by youth work within the service, and some final words on the impact and factors considered important for a successful transferability. Whenever one of these sections is missing, it is because information was insufficiently available or because it has been included in another section. Finally, it is a deliberate decision not to explicitly mention which youth work functions are addressed in each good practice: readers are invited to go through them without a pre-determined categorisation in mind.

FEANTSA would like to thank all the organisations and individuals who have contributed to this report with their time and knowledge. We sincerely appreciate their efforts in combatting youth homelessness and in upholding the rights of young people facing socio-economic exclusion. This compendium is also a way to recognise their great work and, by extension, that of other organisations which support young people in homelessness, often amid many difficulties.



Betonne Jeugd

Location: Antwerp, Belgium

Website: <https://betonnejeugd.org/>

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Brief description

Betonne Jeugd works for young people in poverty or socially vulnerable situations, aged between 0 to 30 years old. They offer a safe base, a warm and welcoming place where young people can drop in to relax, play football, cook together, and simply be young.

Young people find a listening ear in each other, but youth workers are always there for them as well. Betonne Jeugd does not start from an assistance or aid perspective, but from the world and leisure time of the young people. Because above all, a young person must be able to be young.

Context

They work with young people in a variety of situations: some have left home because of conflicts with their families, others have parents who are unable to support them once they reach adulthood. Some have received support from the child-protection system, although they haven't necessarily been placed in institutions. In terms of housing, around half of the young people live in various types of social services, and the other half live in their own housing. Most of the youngsters are Belgians, only one or two every year are from other countries.

Service

The organisation was set up in 2003 in a small community centre of Antwerp, due to a demand from parents in the neighbourhood. It began with just three volunteers and continued to work like this until 2013, when the organisation started receiving public funding, which allowed to hire staff and make the service more sustainable.

Each week they are in contact with around 50 young people, and more than 150 over the course of a year. They are a walk-in youth centre which is open three days per week. Some of the activities they organise include cooking workshops and leisure activities chosen by youngsters, such as swimming, theatre workshops or bowling. Weekend excursions or a camp (once a year) are also organised.

Trust and respect are a fundamental part of their work, even more consid-

ering that many youngsters have had negative experiences with other institutions in the welfare system. There is a continuous listening process to know what kind of work or help the young people need and, according to this, the staff suggests tailored support or activities. The young person can then decide whether to accept the support, decline it, or come back to it at a later stage. Sometimes they refuse, and that is entirely their right.

Participation of young people is also a driving principle. Periodically, 'work groups' are organised with 12 to 14 people, where they sit around a table to discuss problems they have concerning housing, income, schooling or the job market, and try to find solutions together. Peer support is also very important. Young people who have been involved with *Betonne Jeugd* for a long time and feel ready often support others; by becoming volunteers, offering advice, listening, or showing newer members how to support one another.

The organisation has always worked with young people in socially vulnerable situations, but since 2017 there has been a big increase in the number of those who are experiencing homelessness. Currently, between 50-70% find themselves in one of the ETHOS categories. Young people have developed trust-based relationships with professionals and volunteers, which makes them rely on *Betonne Jeugd* during these precarious situations.

Betonne Jeugd acts as a bridge between young people and the organisations that make up Antwerp's social sector, be it on housing and homelessness, drug use, young parents, or other areas. Young people are put in touch with the right organisation only when they feel ready, without any pressure. Work is organised according to the level of the urgency: for those with moderate needs, there are workshops with other organisations so they get familiarised and start developing a connection with a professional rather than with the institution; for those with more urgent needs, a case manager becomes involved and there is focused, multidisciplinary work together with the local social services centre or *Opgroeien* (the Flemish agency for children and young people).

Role of youth work

The principles and tools of youth work have been present at *Betonne Jeugd* from the beginning, and they continue to be. It began with volunteers working solely in a youth-work capacity, without the 'bridging' role of connecting young people with social institutions and organisations in Antwerp. The collaboration with 'De Ambrassade', which is the Flemish centre of expertise and support for youth work and youth policy, is also important in this regard.

The human rights and social justice frameworks are also embedded in their organisation. The aim is to empower young people and to give them more opportunities so they can make choices about their own lives.

Impact and transferability

There is a significant difference in young people between the moment they arrive and when they leave *Betonne Jeugd*. Youngsters will have made long-term social relationships, learned new skills and increased their self-esteem and sense of agency. This is because they feel it is 'their place'

and develop a stable social network that remains consistent over time, even through conflicts. Oftentimes, the work is about ‘undoing the damage’ done on these youngsters before moving forward.

The support network of young people is like pieces of a puzzle that fit together. Betonne’s youth centre is one of them: youngsters are welcomed without judgement, and when they have arguments with their relatives or case workers, they come to the centre. Young people are given a voice, tools and skills, and the opportunity to make mistakes – if they fail one time, the second time they’ll know how to succeed.

Another important impact is at the policy level, by putting the problem of youth homelessness in the political agenda of Antwerp and Flanders, lobbying together with other organisations like the children’s rights centre or the university KU Leuven. The priority is not just about providing resources to solve this problem, but also to prevent it from happening at all, considering the consequences of homelessness in young people, including on their mental health.

For organisations looking to implement a similar project, key factors to consider are the staff, a safe location, and a stable source of income to hire qualified professionals and to ensure long-term services. Having the right staff is crucial for building trust-based relationships with youngsters, while also being clear about boundaries and what is acceptable or not, without resorting to punishment.



Caritas Vilnius

Location: Vilnius, Lithuania

Website: <https://www.caritas.lt/>

Contact details: Donatas Nagumanovas,
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Brief description

Caritas is an international Catholic organisation that helps people in poverty, regardless of their race, religion, gender and nationality. Caritas Lithuania brings together almost 3,700 volunteers and 395 employees, and provides food, medicine, clothing, and other essentials. Caritas also works with people experiencing homelessness, violence, or addictions; has a network of children's day centres and family support services; and works with migrants, refugees, prisoners, and unemployed individuals in reintegrating into society.

Context

Youth homelessness in Vilnius is not very visible, but those who work with vulnerable young people know that many of them do not have a place they can truly call 'home'. Usually, they are couch-surfing at friends' when they have arguments with their parents or guardians, or stay in over-crowded accommodation where they don't have a private space for themselves.

Most of the young people supported are care leavers. They are adults who often don't have the skills to provide for themselves and live independently, and the institution where they stayed refers them to Caritas so they can continue receiving support after their 18th birthday. Other young people live in vulnerable families at risk of social exclusion.

Housing is provided only for people aged 18-24 years old, due to funding limitations from the municipality that prevent extending this age range. However, there are supports other than housing which are available for people aged 14-29.

Service

In the same building, there is an open space in one floor and an apartment in the floor just above – the 'Youth Community Home'. This apartment has a shared kitchen, two bathrooms and six individual bedrooms. Young people can live there until they reach 24 and they usually don't stay longer than two years – otherwise, they would be institutionalised. Young people who are not

accommodated in this apartment can go to the open space voluntarily, to spend time with each other and do leisure activities.

Staff from Caritas encourage them to make changes in the apartment, like moving furniture from one place to another, or to adapt their rooms as they see best, such as by painting walls, putting a shelf or a table, etc. This makes youngsters to feel more comfortable in the apartment, and to empower them to take decisions about their lives.

Importantly, it is not only about providing housing. In the team, there is a manager, a psychologist, a social worker and a youth worker. All work both in the open centre and the apartment, though the youth worker spends more time in the open centre. They also organise leisure activities outdoors, like going to the cinema, because this allows for a bonding time where young people can be freer and build a stronger relationship with the professionals in the service.

Additionally, an 'Alternative training centre for youth' was set up to provide educational opportunities for these youngsters, who are often traumatised by negative experiences with the formal education system. Growing up, they were often disregarded by teachers and other adults, so the goal is to value them for who they are, regardless of their grades or performance in school. Alternatively, some young people are referred to vocational training courses where staff is sensitive to their needs and traumatic experiences.

There are partnerships with other institutions, like the 'Vilnius social club' -which does street work and refers some of the young people they encounter to Caritas-, the care system or youth centres in the city. However, many of these partners have a problem with staff rotation that makes it difficult to build trust and a strong relationship with young people, since many professionals leave after a few months, because of low salaries and short-term contracts when professionals are completing their studies.

Role of youth work

Youth work is highly embedded in the service. Young people are met no matter the point they are at, professionals put themselves at the same level and carry out their work following young people's needs and pace, only if and when they are willing to do so.

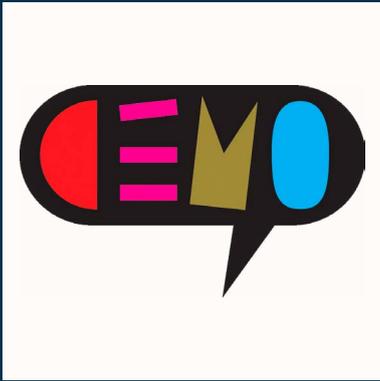
The goal is to show them that staff in Caritas is different from the adults who were present in their lives before and who failed them. It's about accepting them without judgements; to make them feel they are important to the professionals in the service. For example, sometimes young people show anger because it scared the adults they had before – a protection mechanism. Staff in Caritas accepts this anger, realise where it comes from and importantly, they don't turn away from young people. It is a better response to say 'we didn't like that reaction, but we're ready to talk about it and to keep involved with you' – this way, they know they can rely on the staff regardless of any of these reactions.

Impact and transferability

The young people supported understand that professionals in Caritas will be there for the long term – some people who left the service ten years ago are still in touch. This is especially important with people who are under treatment for their addictions or who have mental health issues. For example, a young person who had an episode of self-inflicted harm feared not being accepted anymore in Caritas' apartment. Nevertheless, he moved back and after many conversations with him about this episode, he moved forward and left the programme at a later stage.

If professionals are an 'authority' in the lives of these young people, it shall be used to encourage and empower them rather than to push them down. With time, young people increase their self-esteem and skills to live independently, as well as their emotional resilience.

Regarding transferability, it is important to consider that doing this job requires a lot of skills and competencies from professionals. These are better learnt by spending time with young people, rather than in university or formal education. The results are only visible in the long term and it is key to be flexible to provide youngsters with the right support they need. Disengagement of young people is also a challenge: even if they don't know what to do in their future or where to go, it is important that professionals are present for the moment young people are ready.



CEMO – Centre d'Éducation en Milieu Ouvert

Location: Brussels, Belgium

Website: <https://www.cemoasbl.be/>

Contact details: Olivier Gatti, olivier.gatti@cemoasbl.be and Sébastien Godart, sebastien.godart@cemoasbl.be

Brief description

CEMO (*Centre d'Éducation en Milieu Ouvert*, in English 'Education Centre in Open Environment') is a non-profit organisation with an agreement of non-commissioned youth assistance. It provides accessible, free services to all children and young people in Saint-Gilles (one of the municipalities in the Brussels region) aged 0 to 22 and their families. CEMO is also the "Youth Service" of the social services department (CPAS, by its acronym in French) of Saint-Gilles.

The association organises individual support measures, collective projects and community actions. With a multidisciplinary team, they aim to respond to any request concerning a young person, whether made by themselves, their families or a third party.

Context

Young people are under-represented in the statistics and counts of homelessness in Brussels, because they are more likely to be in 'hidden' forms of homelessness, such as sofa-surfing. It is only when they can't make recourse to their networks when they seek support from public- or private-run services, like that of KAP (*Kot Autonome Provisoire* or Provisional Autonomous Room), which is the project on youth homelessness run by CEMO. Only in the last year, 180 young people requested to enter KAP.

According to data, youth homelessness in Brussels consists of the following profiles: about a third are care leavers, another third are young migrants and the other third were not in contact with services for youth assistance before, despite many have lived in a difficult family environment for years (this is often the case for young LGBTIQ+ people). Since problems with drug consumption or mental health are also sometimes present, CEMO's generalist service is helpful to provide an integral support, with the space and flexibility to adapt to every person's needs.

Service

CEMO was established more than 40 years ago by the CPAS of Saint-Gilles, to work with minors in social exclusion so they could avoid being placed in state care. It also worked with those who were in state care to prepare the transition after it and towards autonomy. Throughout this time, the organisation evolved to cover more areas, such as street youth work, prevention, family mediation, or young people facing precariousness.

The KAP, which focuses on homelessness, is open for young people between 16-25 (higher than 22 to allow for more flexibility with the young people), including young mothers. They are living in 20 to 25 apartments spread over different municipalities of the Brussels region and managed by social rental agencies (AIS, in French). The duration of the stay is variable, but usually goes from three months to one year, although this can be extended in some cases. The CPAS or the service for youth assistance provide young people with the income needed to enter the accommodation of KAP. The social rental agencies take care of the renting formalities and CEMO focuses on the psychosocial work.

The goal of this housing is to improve the development of autonomy and to provide supports adapted to every young person. Each individual work plan is co-created with the young people so they feel safe and supported, with the freedom to make mistakes. During the stay, work not only focuses on practical things like learning how to make food or pay the bills, but also on life projects, reconnecting with education where possible, building or strengthening a support network outside that of KAP, etc. After 6 months in these apartments, young people begin to look for their own housing with support from the staff. In view of the diversity among the young people they meet, CEMO is also considering putting in place new means of support, such as Housing First for Youth.

Role of youth work

KAP works with a group of young people who are 'in-between': too old to receive appropriate support from child protection services, yet too young to access mainstream, adult-centred homelessness services. This is also why they accommodate people from the age of 16, because there are young people who already left home at this age and are living rough, often avoiding homelessness services that they find stigmatising. The project is therefore made to support these youngsters in social exclusion in their transition to adulthood, with the necessary housing stability, also because not all of those placed in state care do always have the tools to have a successful exit of public institutions.

Providing young people with safe accommodation is important, as it allows them to work on other aspects for when they leave KAP, like autonomy, self-confidence, trusting relationships with adults and other young people, reflection on their situation and their aspirations, etc. In this regard, young people take responsibility of their own decisions (with staff support if needed), which also allows them to experiment and make mistakes. This way, they know how to learn from them and to move on with this experience they had.

This project operates on the individual, collective and community levels. Since being autonomous also involves being engaged in society, it encourages young people to create bonds and solidarity both among themselves and with the wider community. A good example of this work is the artistic project 'Toi(ts) la nuit' (2023-24), where young people living in KAP could express what it meant for them to live in this accommodation. An exhibition was organised to disseminate with society and policy makers the realities of youth homelessness.

Impact and transferability

Impact is very difficult to measure. When they exit the accommodation, young people participate in a post-KAP project for six months to build a new network around them. They also exchange and provide feedback on the positive and negative aspects of the project. In contrast, there is not much information on the young people's trajectories in the longer term, but some of the outcomes include better knowledge of the welfare system and of their rights and obligations, increased stability in their lives, and greater resilience and self-confidence to take the next steps.

Among the young people for whom there is information, some have successfully started or continued studies, others have become parents, others are in precariousness but with certain housing stability, etc. This shows there are still many structural barriers that one organisation alone (like CEMO) can't completely overcome. For example, affordable housing in the private rental market in Brussels was much easier to find some years ago than at present, and welfare benefits were easier to access as well. On the other hand, in recent years knowledge about the youth sector and the specific features of youth homelessness has increased.

Regarding transferability, the staff and the relationships they build with young people are crucial. Stigmatisation should be avoided, and young people should feel trusted and safe, as well as have the flexibility to experiment and discover their own aspirations and plans. For example, to engage with the education system is not mandatory, since young people who enter KAP may need to recover first from very traumatic experiences.

Staff should be mindful of the young person's current situation and adopt a multi-axis approach: intersectional, preventive, multi-sectoral and directed towards deinstitutionalisation. Looking at individual-collective-community levels is also important. Services should be able to question themselves and to not be rigid with rules or other procedures when working with young people.



Children in Wales (Getting Ready Project)

Location: Wales

Website: <https://gettingready.childreninwales.org.uk/>

Contact details: Bethan Wilson,
bethan.wilson@childreninwales.org.uk

Brief description

The Getting Ready Project, coordinated by the organisation Children in Wales, provides support for young people to safely transition from care. The aim is to empower young people by enhancing their knowledge and understanding of their rights and entitlements when planning to leave care. This is done through the provision and creation of online resources produced in partnership with care-experienced young people. All their resources are specific to each local authority, taking into consideration geographical and social differences.

Context

Youth homelessness in Wales has always been an issue, especially among those who have been in prison or who are care-experienced. However, this has deteriorated in the last decade, since there has been an increase in the number of young people experiencing homelessness and who are also facing mental health difficulties or engaging in drug use. The cost-of-living crisis has also contributed to this rise in youth homelessness. In addition, for a small country like Wales there is a high proportion of children and young people placed in care, which translates into a higher risk of homelessness later in life.

Service

They work with young people aged 14 to 25 who are care-experienced and living in a variety of settings across Wales, e.g., hostels, shared apartments or independent flats. The Getting Ready project started as a complement to an existing scheme for care leavers living with their foster parents, to address an information gap in their transition to independent living. The focus is on prevention of homelessness, which is why young people from the age of 14 can participate. The support can be extended until they are 26 if needed.

The project is active in six areas in different parts of Wales, thanks to partnerships with six local authorities. In each of them, a Padlet is created

to put together all useful information and local resources relevant for care-experienced young people, together with workshops about topics that would be beneficial for young people when going into independent living. These workshops can be about managing a tenancy, budgeting, looking for employment, or drafting a CV, but ultimately the content depends on the needs identified by the local authority and a consultation made with young people themselves. As a result, both the Padlet and the workshops are tailored to each local reality, since the support methods and local structures can differ greatly – for example, between South Wales and North Wales, where transport and job opportunities are more limited. Co-producing the workshops with young people ensures these are adapted to their needs and aspirations.

Currently, there are three people employed by Children in Wales working on this project. However, the aim is to scale it up to cover all Wales, which will require more staff. The take-up with local authorities has been very positive and having strong partnerships with them is a key success factor. However, bigger local authorities have a caseload per social worker which sometimes makes it difficult to invest time in activities like this project

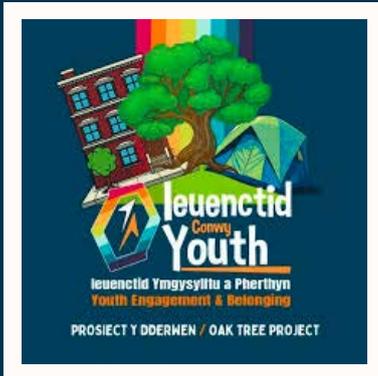
Impact and transferability

Firstly, young people have an increased level of confidence in living in their own, by having in one place the information and resources they may need, which are accessible anywhere. They feel more educated about what rights and services they are entitled to, and in some local authorities, they have even higher rates of sustained tenancy than those young people who did not take part in the project.

Secondly, social workers and other professionals from the participating local authorities have a 100% positive response about being better equipped to support young people. They find the resources helpful in their work and use them very often.

Regarding transferability, the partnership work is a fundamental part of the project, both with local authorities and young people. Good communication skills will make sure that resources are adapted to the needs of each local authority and that are centred around young people. Adaptability to the different local realities and recognising there is no one-size-fits-all solution are therefore crucial for the success of the project.

On the other hand, digital poverty prevents many young people from accessing resources on Padlet, online forums or training courses. Those who can't afford internet or devices are prevented from participating fully in society and accessing the opportunities which would help them, especially when many charities and youth organisations have moved several activities online.



Conwy Youth Engagement and Belonging

Location: Conwy County, Wales

Website: <https://www.conwy.gov.uk/en/Resident/Education-and-Families/Conwy-Youth-Service.aspx#OakTreeProject>

Contact details: oaktreeproject@conwy.gov.uk

Brief description

This is an 'open access' youth service for all young people aged between 11-25 years living within Conwy County, in Wales. Professionals work across different educational settings, in one-to-one format with young people, or in group sessions in youth clubs and other settings. They provide a transitional service from adolescence to young adulthood, building relationships with family and schools to support young people during their development. Since the service relies on voluntary engagement, there is a lower threshold than in statutory services, and therefore, it is more accessible to vulnerable families.

Context

Youth homelessness has been on the rise in Wales for the last years, and in this regard, prevention has been given more importance. In 2019, the Welsh government started funding their project to move housing support for young people from statutory homeless services to youth services. This is already a big change in perspective, since the main focus of a housing officer is the barriers to accessing housing, while youth homelessness requires a different mindset, i.e., to look at the needs of the young person in a holistic way, and not only on housing.

Service

Staff refer young people in need to supported accommodation and, within these settings, they work closely with individuals to prepare them for independent living once they leave the housing programme. In addition, in the last 12 months the project delivered more than 750 accreditations for courses and around 900 local accreditations (which are part of modules or qualifications) for young people.

Their approach is based on both non-formal education and on the strengths of young people, rather than only on their needs. Regarding the former,

activities are organised outside the classroom in youth groups; using peer learning or detached youth work to meet young people on the streets; in community spaces or in youth clubs.

This type of activities is very useful for young people to open up and start the work to support them. Importantly, in all activities, young people are given a voice: members of the Conwy Youth Council sit on a scrutiny panel, they are involved in national campaigns to make policy changes (in transport or education, for example), or resources and activities are first double-checked with young people. This has been valuable in addressing systemic barriers, recognising misalignments in departmental procedures, and promoting coordinated approaches to better support young people.

In addition to the supported accommodation, the housing support for young people involves:

- Counselling and advice on housing options with a focus on prevention rather than emergency homelessness services.
- Workshops in educational settings to raise awareness of housing rights and youth homelessness.
- Support with conflict resolution and household difficulties, helping young people navigate challenges at home.
- Open access youth centre provision, offering trusted adults, positive role models, mediation, and family support.
- Life skills sessions covering topics such as taxes, housing costs, utilities, gardening, and mental health. This helps build trust and enable early identification of wider support needs (e.g. in school, housing, or wellbeing).
- Dedicated one-to-one support for families living in emergency accommodation.
- Temporary transport support for young people who relocate but wish to continue attending their current educational setting.
- Shared cooperative housing model, where youth services provide free support to enable young people to take up full-time employment and move towards independence. This complements the prevention work by supporting sustainable exits from homelessness.

Partnerships with other organisations are made whenever there is a lack of specific expertise, to streamline the process and work better together. Considering the broad age range which is covered (11-25 years old), a young person may be accompanied for many years, but with different levels of intensity and for different aims.

Role of youth work

The impact of youth work in supporting young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness is clear and significant. Unlike housing officers, who often work reactively, responding to crises and operating within strict

parameters such as a minimum age of 16 or a 56-day support window, the project's approach is fundamentally different.

Youth work is proactive. Staff engage with young people from as early as 11 years old, enabling the possibility to address issues such as family conflict or school disengagement before they escalate. Their work is relational and holistic, recognising the full context of a young person's life. This requires time, trust, and consistency, far beyond a 56-day intervention.

Crucially, this service focuses on voluntary participation. Young people choose to engage with the service and staff meet them on their terms, whether that is in a youth club, on a walk, over an ice cream, or during a home visit. This flexible, youth-led approach helps to rebalance the traditional professional–young person dynamic, fostering trust and empowerment. Through these relationships, young people are supported to access their rights, build resilience, and participate fully in society.

Impact and transferability

The impact of the service is very positive. Many young people re-engage with education, secure housing or employment, and develop confidence and independent living skills. Around 80% report that they no longer require support, reflecting one of the core aims of the service: to reduce long-term dependency on support systems.

However, some young people may experience housing difficulties again in the future. To avoid the need for them to restart the process with unfamiliar professionals, staff continue to offer support where needed, maintaining continuity and trust.

In terms of transferability, meaningful consultation with young people is essential. It helps identify barriers, whether in housing or other areas, and builds trust, particularly where previous experiences with professionals may have been negative. Early intervention, prevention, and a non-formal educational approach are key to avoiding the “revolving door” of homelessness, where young people cycle in and out of services over extended periods.

Sustained investment in prevention and staff retention is vital. Building a trusting relationship between a young person and a professional takes time, and frequent staff changes can undermine progress. Stability in staffing supports more effective, long-term outcomes.



Fundació Putxet

Location: Barcelona, Catalonia/Spain

Website: <https://www.fundacionputxet.org/en/home/>

Contact details: Josep Maria Garcia-Picola,
fundacionputxet@gmail.com

Brief description

Fundació Putxet works with young people in homelessness through a multi-faceted support: social, educational, occupational or psychological. They have three main goals: to provide material and moral security to these young people, to work on their inclusion (social, occupational, psychological) and to prevent conflicts and disruptive behaviours.

This work is carried out through the following values: autonomy and auto-narration from young people, intersectionality, consideration of the integral dimension of a person, trauma-informed care, strengths- and aspirations-based work, interculturality and having a strong bond between young people and professionals.

Context

According to the data collected by Barcelona city council, in May 2024 there were 4105 people experiencing homelessness in the city: 1245 people living rough and 2860 in accommodation for homelessness, out of whom 64% were living in public or commissioned services.¹

The same data record that between 18 to 20% of them are below 25 years old. However, counts conducted by FACIAM² estimate that around 30% of people living in homelessness in Spain are below this age. This gap may be explained by the difficulties in recording young people in statistics, since many live in informal settlements or tents in isolated parts of the city, or are squatting without making use of social or mental health services.

A specific problem for Barcelona is that surrounding towns in its metropolitan area lack the infrastructure or capacity to support people experiencing homelessness, resulting in them being referred to resources managed by Barcelona Council. Another important aspect is the impact of migration policies in explaining youth homelessness.

1 <https://www.social.cat/noticia/22819/neix-soas-nou-servei-orientacio-atencio-social-sensellarisme-barcelona>

2 FACIAM is a Spain-wide network of 18 non-profit and social organisations working with people in homelessness or housing exclusion. Fundació Putxet is one of its member organisations. More information: <https://faciam.org/que-es-faciam/>

Service

The service on youth homelessness was set up in 1996-97 for young people living rough and without family support, many of whom were care leavers. Throughout the years, the situation evolved and now Fundació Putxet mostly works with migrant men and former unaccompanied minors who left the care system without a stable housing option. The age range goes from 18 to 29 years old.

This and other non-profit organisations cover a need which is unmet by municipal social services. Migrants in homelessness can access a specific service during their first two years in the city, and after that time they should make use of the general services for homelessness. However, in both cases, families with minors and women are prioritised, which results in many isolated young men sleeping rough. This is precisely the profile Fundació Putxet works with, regardless of whether they have been in Barcelona for less than two years or longer.

Currently, they work with 35 people living in 8 shared apartments – half are owned by the same Foundation and the other half are lent by other organisations. There is also a smaller project for people who can't live in shared accommodation and financial help to rent rooms in the private market, when capacity in their accommodation is reached already.

The length of stay is not limited to adapt to everyone's pace. For example, some people may need only 3 months if they already have a residence permit and integration in job market is easy, while others may need 18 months. In any case, every young person has an individualised socio-educational plan with several objectives, which is revised every three months. This plan includes activities on training, building competencies or skills, in educational establishments or elsewhere.

The support model is inspired by Housing First, complemented with community and mentoring support, either from peer workers or volunteers. This means there are high levels of intimacy and freedom in housing: there are no schedules, people have the keys of their place, they set their own apartment-sharing rules, etc. However, this approach requires a level of autonomy that may not be present in some young people, which is why there is also a semi-autonomous apartment with more supervision from social educators – in line to adapt resources to each person's needs, since those with less autonomy have a higher risk of social exclusion and of being expelled from other accommodation services.

The community work involves engaging with the neighbourhood: the local group of 'castellers', a public service for the elderly who live alone, a social laundromat, food banks, or educational activities on human rights in high schools or with the University of Barcelona. This helps combat isolation among young people, but also encourages their participation in society and reduces dependency on social services.

Additionally, in recent years this support has been enriched by the implementation of methodologies from the EU-funded 'Futuro8Co' project on youth homelessness. For example, an 'auto-narration' tool to go through the past, present and future of the person; care and self-care tools like the 'soul map' or 'care pact', to make youngsters more self-aware of their feelings and

behaviours, but also the different axis of discrimination that have an impact on them; or a 'compass' to measure their autonomy in 33 different areas, which is completed together by staff and young people, both when they enter the accommodation and when they leave it.

Role of youth work

Intangible aspects are just as important as tangible ones such as housing or employment. For example, the sense of belonging to a neighbourhood or an association, being enrolled in education, participating in the community or having their skills valued. This goes in line with the goal to support people as a whole and not only in their housing situation.

Importantly, this can sometimes mean recognising the right of young people to make mistakes. Staff should then reconsider their role, accompanying the young person through their process even if they disagree with certain decisions, and avoid decisions that reinforce power imbalances. Staff should 'let go' of the artificial role assigned to them by society or their employer to reduce this power difference, and identify the prejudices and stereotypes towards themselves and the young people they support. In this regard, supervision in the service with a psychologist is very useful because, while discussing about the young people making use of the service, professionals are also talking about their role and the kind of case work they do.

Impact and transferability

In Fundació Putxet, quality is prioritised over quantity. They estimate around 80% of the young people they support have successful exits of homelessness. Over 90% have been in the process of obtaining a residence and work permit, while 60% have obtained it. Almost 100% of youngsters believe their mental health improved, 60% have gained work and 25% an internship, but impact is also visible in other aspects, like more self-awareness of their health and caring for it, or in the communication with staff which becomes more horizontal.

In their opinion, community work, an intersectional approach and trauma-informed care are the three key elements for success. Participation in the community is important because it improves social inclusion at all levels and can be a helpful tool for other goals like employment – a young person playing in the neighbourhood football team will likely find a job offer before one who does not.

Finally, in order to improve their work, more financial resources would be needed – doing quality work requires more time and flexibility, which translates into more expensive services. If tenders for commissioned services are only granted on the basis of the most economic option, then quality of work is at risk. Having a more efficient process when assigning public grants would also be helpful, to avoid delays or periods of uncertainty about the continuation of services. Another aspect that had a negative impact on the Foundation's work was the digitalisation of migration procedures: since most of the young people struggle with digital tools, it is case workers who take care of procedures, while before young people could go in person to the migration office.



Galway Simon Community

Location: Galway, Ireland

Website: <https://galwaysimon.ie/>

Contact details: Aisling O'Hara,
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Brief description

Galway Simon offers a range of services to meet the needs of people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of it, from Housing First units to street outreach or prevention.

The youth programme targets young adults aged 18 to 25 living in Galway city and county - those in supported accommodation, those living within the community and those living in their own tenancies. The aim is to strengthen each individual's independent living skills and competencies so they can go on to live fully independent lives.

Context

The latest available data for Ireland show that, in September 2025, there were 16,614 people utilising State-funded emergency homeless accommodation on a regional and county basis. Out of them, almost 12% are aged between 18 and 24 (N=1,974), which is over four times more than in September 2014.³ In the case of the West of Ireland region, which is where Galway is located, a total of 633 people were in emergency accommodation in April 2025.⁴ However, the total number of people in homelessness might be higher, since statistics don't record people making use of sofa-surfing or in overcrowded or sub-standard accommodation.

Only during the first half of 2025, Galway Simon supported 120 young people between 18 and 25 who were either in homelessness or at risk of it. They are mostly referred from other services, like local youth groups, local authorities, the aftercare service of Tusla (the state Child and Family Agency), mental health groups, etc. Some youngsters self-refer to Simon prevention services, too.

Service

Galway Simon works in two different areas: prevention and supported housing. Regarding the former, the aim is for young people to not make use of emergency accommodation at all. This is done through assistance with rent arrears, solving discrepancies with landlords, accompanying youngsters to

³ Homelessness Statistics and Figures Ireland - Focus Ireland

⁴ About Homelessness | Galway Simon Community

open their housing application, mediation to prevent family breakdown, or a combination of housing benefits with social support to sustain tenancies – especially for those young people with difficulties in managing independent living skills.

The service of supported housing started in 2016-2017 with a cohort of young people leaving the Tusla care system. This programme expanded and now it includes 26 people, of which about a half are care leavers. Generally, there are two young people in every apartment or house to allow them to acquire the skills needed for flat-sharing, which can be challenging sometimes. This service is only for people aged 18 to 25, but before reaching this limit a plan is drafted to safely move out of the accommodation.

The average stay in supported accommodation is of 18 months, but sometimes it takes longer because of the housing crisis in Ireland, which makes it very difficult for young people to access private-rented accommodation and leave Simon services.

The accommodation is transitional but with independent living – people have their own keys, make their groceries and cooking, there is not staff in place at night. The consistency of doing small things over time can bring change: daily interactions, making the bed, go to courses, etc. is a so-called ‘ordinary magic’. The goal is to not have the need to seek support again in the future, by learning how to live independently or how to sustain a tenancy, building links with the community, or looking for a job by themselves and not through homelessness services.

The service includes support from the social integration team at Simon, which explores all avenues in education or employment with youngsters, most of whom are in either one of these or both. During the first week going to education or employment, young people are accompanied to reduce anxiety or build self-advocacy, which is not done in the case of older adults in other services.

This adaptability is also present in case work, which is done informally by going for a walk or car ride, rather than with official appointments at office which can be seen as more ‘confrontational’. A trauma-informed approach is also adopted, which requires more time and effort, being the reason why a maximum of 10 youngsters is assigned to each worker.

Role of youth work

To avoid recurring experiences of homelessness in the future, relying only on social work is not sufficient, especially with young people who might have faced instability in their lives, for example if they moved between many foster homes. It is then necessary to embed the principles of youth empowerment and youth work: an individualised approach, to look at all connections surrounding the young person, to make sure they are respected and connected with community, etc. It is a socio-ecological or holistic model with the core being the young person’s needs.

It is important to work with young people in a way they understand, and to address both their individual needs and the wider context of young people. Staff should be seen as a ‘navigator’: they see where the ‘traffic jams’ or any obstacles might be and can warn young people about them, but they are

ultimately 'driving' their own way and taking decisions on their 'journeys'. Young people have therefore the space and time to figure out what they want to do in the future, and their participation in the service is really important to engage in activities they want to do. Feeling respected and validated in their decisions helps young people in building trust with themselves.

Impact and transferability

The housing outcome is perhaps the most important one, since Simon's mission is to ensure everyone have a place to call home, and housing stability is crucial to allow work in other aspects of a young person's life. However, it is not the only important impact. Most young people experiencing homelessness feel they don't belong in society because they were displaced, but after the trust- and relationship-building work with staff, they regain this sense of belonging.

Improved resilience and physical and mental well-being, self-reliance and the ability to engage and participate in society, or to engage in educational opportunities, are also relevant results of the service.

To work in the best possible way with young people experiencing homelessness, case workers should be trained in trauma-informed care and be knowledgeable of the impacts of adverse childhood experiences in a young person. A background in youth work or understanding what youth development means can also be very helpful, to make sure youth voices are heard and that staff 'take a step back' when needed to best support young people.

One of the things that could help Simon Community in their work is the allocation of at least 10% of the social housing units to young people in homelessness, and to increase the tenancy support for those who are at risk of it. Other things to consider are the undiagnosed neurodivergence of many youngsters in homelessness, and the intergenerational reproduction of homelessness – the parents or grandparents of some of the youngsters supported did experience homelessness, too.



GISDA

Location: Gwynedd County, Wales

Website: <https://www.gisda.org/en/>

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Brief description

GISDA is a charity established in Gwynedd County (Wales) since 1985, offering young people experiencing homelessness, vulnerability or disadvantage the tools and support they need to unlock their full potential. The types of supports range from accommodation to qualifications, life skills, leisure activities, or tailored support for a personalised plan, among others.

Context

The Gwynedd County, in the North of Wales, is a rather remote area of small market towns, a dispersed population, and many holiday homes, which has led to a rise in housing prices. Young people are particularly affected by these dynamics and in the last years, the number of those experiencing homelessness has increased. It is mostly hidden, however, as many rely on sofa-surfing or various temporary accommodations, such as travel lodges, Airbnb, or bed and breakfasts. For example, the use of temporary accommodation by people aged 16-25 in 2024 has doubled from the previous year, and for those under 17 it was four times more than in 2023.

The use of temporary accommodation is a result of the lack of housing and the long waiting list to access council housing, which can take several years. In addition, because the allocation policy is very strict regarding local connection, many young people are excluded from this resource. In the recent years, GISDA has also seen an increase in the number of care leavers, LGBTIQ+ young people, and those with complex issues in school seeking their services.

Service

GISDA supports young people facing vulnerability who are aged between 16-25. There are no specific criteria apart from age, meaning support is available for young people fleeing violence or family breakdowns, care leavers, young parents, people with neurodiversity or LGBTIQ+ people.

The core of the work is the provision of accommodation, with a total of 38 beds for young people in hostels, flats for independent living, houses rented from social services, or houses for young parents. Support in the transition to independent housing is also important, since research shows that 60%

of people experiencing homelessness in Wales were in homelessness first before turning 21.

However, accommodation alone is not enough to ensure long-term stability in young people's lives. That is why a wide range of support is provided to address other needs: self-confidence, budgeting, employability, trainings, mental health issues, etc. All of these are offered together in the same places, called 'Hubs'. They are open to any young person, and advice is also provided on obtaining food vouchers from social services, one-to-one support, or registering to the local authority as homeless to access specific services and benefits. There is a 'no wrong door' approach, meaning that help is available as much as possible for any matter, to avoid referring people to other services since it can be disengaging.

The work is done through a methodology called the 'Me Model', put in place eight years ago. This model consists of an individualised support package built on psychologically-informed environments (PIE), empathy and trauma-informed approaches. In practice, this translates to staff working with young people during a walk, doing creative activities, and respecting every person's timing, since people may need more or less time on their journey out of homelessness. People aged 16-25 experience many transitions in their lives, and staff should be mindful of this and be able to support in these multiple transitions.

Lastly, GISDA collaborates with specialised organisations to offer technological support or housing solutions, pay for utilities, or provide sexual health services, though local authorities remain the most relevant partner. In the case of care leavers, every person is assigned a professional from 18 to 25, and social services commission GISDA to provide this support. There is also a lot of work with the housing and education departments, in this case by going to schools to have workshops on preventing homelessness, awareness-raising about this issue or on gaining life skills.

Role of youth work

Youth work is embedded in many of the activities carried out by GISDA, and its values also underpin the 'Me Model'. There is also a project to engage young people supported in broader societal challenges and help them take actions in this regard. It consists of two youth boards, one in the north of the county and one in the south, to raise young people's concerns in the local areas, consult with police or with officials from local authorities, or to influence initiatives of the Welsh government like the Homeless Bill. Young people also participated in a Youth Parliament and successfully campaigned to reduce the cost of public transport in the county for people under 21.

Impact and transferability

One of the most significant achievements is the reduction of youth homelessness in the area, with estimates suggesting that around 90% of the people they support do not go back to homelessness after leaving GISDA. Improved mental health and life skills, through outdoor activities or creative work, are also underlined. Another important aspect is giving voice to the young people to express their concerns and demands at policy level, for

example by engaging with the Welsh government or by contributing to the Homeless Bill or to changes in public transport. This has increased young people's confidence, helping them feel valued and recognised as individuals with skills and abilities - beyond their experience of homelessness.

For GISDA, it is considered crucial first to establish the organisation's values and core goals, and then to build a strategy to implement these at practical level, within the work procedures. As an example, this was the origin of the 'Me Model' - they worked with PIE methodology before but it didn't completely fit. Staff is also very important: they need to be trained properly, adapt to young people's pace, and have team-bonding activities to keep motivation high. Staff should also be flexible since the support needs to be tailored to every young person. In other words, it is about recognising that "young people are driving the car and you're sitting in the back".

Finally, core funding from local authorities -rather than project or temporary-based funds- could improve the support provided. Other factors to consider are more understanding and appreciation of young people's needs, community engagement, changes in the school system so it is inclusive for all young people, and availability of affordable housing. In some cases, young people were stuck in the accommodation provided by GISDA even if they didn't need it anymore, because of lack of affordable housing in the area.



MoSt association

Location: Split, Croatia

Website: <https://most.hr/>

Contact details: Ivo Puljek, ivo@most.hr

Brief description

MoSt is an NGO with activity at local, regional and national levels in Croatia, providing support to children, young people and citizens of other age categories based on the values of volunteer work, humanity, solidarity, respect for diversity and human rights.

Regarding their work with children and young people, it is based on three different programmes: POP and POP+, with a focus on prevention of destitution, and POST, which is specialised in young people leaving the care and justice systems.

Context

Currently, through fieldwork and collaboration with institutions and organisations in Split, MoSt has identified 74 people who are in homelessness or at risk of it. Out of them, 35 individuals are staying in a shelter (30 men and 5 women), while 12 women are staying in a safe house. The beneficiaries residing in the shelter are mostly older adults (65 years or more).

There are 27 individuals living on the street. Most are men with severe addiction issues -including alcohol, drug, or gambling- and many also face significant mental health challenges.

Service

The POP programme was the first to start in 1999 and has continued since. It offers psychosocial support and educational activities for young people aged 11 to 18 living in vulnerable families, but who do not have major behavioural problems. Activities are organised during the free time after school with a peer support group, and the psychosocial work consists of individual and group counselling with children and parents, assistance with learning and school, or workshops.

The POP+ programme, which started in 2015, continues this prevention work but more intensively, since its target is young people aged 11 to 18 with 'risky behaviours', i. e., school drop-out, poor school performance or having committed misdemeanours or crimes. Interventions focus on individual and group counselling with young people and their families, as well as on assistance with learning.

Finally, the POST programme supports young people aged 15 to 25 who leave institutional care (care homes or prisons). It started in 2015 to cover the needs of young people who made recourse to the MoSt emergency shelter after turning 18. Through counselling, group work, workshops on independent living, and employment support, this programme helps preventing homelessness or regaining stability after experiencing it. This work is based on:

- Individual counselling with the active participation of young people, interactive methods with discussions about cognitive behaviour and motivation, and self-direction – young people can propose topics of their interest to discuss.
- Group work among service users, to share experiences, advice and learn from each other. For example, these are useful in knowing what to keep in mind when looking for a place to rent, or the rights and duties of tenants.
- Mentorship: every young person is assigned one mentor before leaving institutional care. This is usually a volunteer who spends their free time with the young person and helps them with finding a job, writing a CV, etc. Mentors play an important role as an adult figure whom young people can trust and turn to for support, even after exiting the POST programme.

To maximise the impact of their work, MoSt coordinates with the local centre for social welfare and the organisation responsible for minors without parental care. They have also recently partnered with criminal institutions to make a smooth transition for young people leaving institutional care.

Furthermore, there is a collaboration with schools in the area. They allow staff in MoSt to make the connection with parents in need of the preventive work, and sometimes the interviews and counselling sessions take place in school premises. On the other hand, MoSt informs school staff about any relevant information they should know about the children or young people supported and their parents.

Role of youth work

Since the beginning of the POST program, there have been a number of cases in which young people leaving the care system end up in a shelter for people experiencing homelessness. In these situations, MoSt staff intervene immediately so that the young person can leave the shelter as soon as possible and start living independently.

Some of the interventions have included psychosocial counselling, motivating them in their job search, retraining for a specific occupation, and assistance with writing a CV, among others. The results of these interventions motivate the team in MoSt to work with young people much earlier, in order to prevent them from experiencing homelessness in the future.

Impact and transferability

Apart from the more tangible results, such as finding a job or a place to rent, the most important impact for MoSt is that young people begin to believe

in themselves again. When they are living independently, going to the bank themselves, buying the food they want, or using their salary as they wish, they regain a sense of autonomy that enhances their motivation and self-confidence. Young people also know they can count on MoSt for both good news and bad news, they'll be there for them.

Some key factors are underlined in their work: responding to the needs identified by young people at that moment, focusing on their strengths and with ongoing support if needed –including during afternoons, weekends or after leaving MoSt programmes. Additionally, staff need to have patience and empathy to understand the situations young people come from, and to support the decisions taken by young people even if they do not agree with them. Young people should feel they will not be judged or punished if they make mistakes, instead professionals should give them second or more chances.

Finally, MoSt identified their work would be more effective with the following measures:

- A more stable financial support from the national government in Croatia and the city of Split.
- An apartment for young people in crisis situations, to have a safe place until they find a job or an accommodation. As of now, these youngsters are placed in an emergency shelter for people in homelessness of all ages comprised, which is not adapted to the specific needs of young people.
- More support for care leavers in their transition out of institutional care, be it juvenile justice or state care for minors.
- A database or list of employers who do not discriminate against care-experienced young people or those leaving prisons. Now staff rely on personal connections with specific companies, but this has its limitations.



Progetto Tenda società cooperativa sociale

Location: Turin, Italy

Website: <https://www.progettotenda.net/>

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Ambrosoli, francesca.ambrosoli@progettotenda.net

Brief description

Progetto Tenda is a social cooperative founded in 1999 in Turin, Italy. They facilitate the socio-economic inclusion of vulnerable people and promote access to fundamental rights, helping them to overcome all kinds of discrimination. Their target groups are refugees, asylum seekers, people in homelessness and victims of sexual and labour exploitation.

They are members of FIOPSD, the Italian umbrella association of organisations working with the homeless and applying the Housing First methodology. They are also members of Anello Forte, the regional umbrella organisation for groups working to protect victims of sexual exploitation, and coordinate RART, the network of organisations working in the reception and integration system of migrants in Turin.

Recently they have joined the PAL Network, a European association with the mission to foster collaboration between grassroots organisations, civil society and institutions in sectors such as education, social policy, career development, equality, inclusion and diversity, particularly regarding vulnerable groups and minorities.

The work on homelessness reaches on average 350 people through several programmes: Housing First units for people having lived on the streets for many years, 'rapid re-housing' projects to prevent homelessness, temporary accommodation and support for families who lost their homes or are at risk of it, as well as community interventions.

Service

Regarding the support provided to young people in homelessness or at risk of it, it is based in four areas:

- Housing First units after referrals from the local social services, to avoid rough sleeping. Although it includes adults of all ages, in the last years there has been a big increase in the number of people aged 21 to 25, who are care-experienced, have problems with their families, sofa-surf, or have stayed in shelters. The Housing First model is then adapted to accommodate the needs of these young people.
- Temporary accommodation for young people leaving prison, organised in two flats and four beds in total. These stays are mandated by the judge as an alternative measure to detention; hence the duration of the stay depends on the judge's decision, but this is usually between 6 to 9 months. This stabilised accommodation allows young people to rebuild their relationships, look for a place to rent, get support with documents, etc.
- Housing for Italian and former unaccompanied minors leaving the care system, with two apartments to accommodate a maximum of eight people. This is for young people who, after turning 21 (the age when they must leave the care institution), are not ready to live independently or have not found a place to live yet.
- Support and housing for families with housing emergencies or at risk of eviction. Although young people are not the main focus, families often have children or teenagers who are also in need of support.

Overall, the approach from Progetto Tenda is to work not only in finding a job or a place to rent, understanding tenant's rights and duties or budgeting, but also on more personal needs. A lot of importance is given to conversations to understand where youngsters come from, find common goals with them, explore the reasons behind their behaviour or reflect on how they experience their emotions.

In this regard, the goal is for the young person to feel seen and appreciated. Staff create links to gain their trust and are people they can refer to not only for the duration of their stay in the service, but also afterwards. This is even more important for people who were unaccompanied minors, since they don't usually have a solid social network in Turin. For example, some workers are still in touch with people they supported in 2019. Lastly, several professionals are involved with young people, so they get to know different ways of working and can ask for advice depending on the skills or relationship with each professional.

On another note, collaboration with various specialised services, such as those for justice or unaccompanied minors, is important to adapt the work to the specific needs of the young person and to improve overall support. Partnering with organisations providing cultural activities for free, or with employment services, is also underlined.

Role of youth work

Youth work informs different activities of the work with young people. For example, non-formal education is used in workshops to cover the information needed to rent a place: how to find apartments, what to ask landlords or agencies, the payment of utilities, or what are the tenant's rights.

Active participation of young people in the support they receive is also encouraged. Their feedback is taken into account by staff, for example some of the house rules and the organisation of the home life are the result of a participation process that involves everyone. Likewise, they may personalise their rooms, propose changes in the house furniture, or in the colour of the walls, etc., and they are involved as much as possible in the process of furnishing the house, for example organising a day of 'moving together' and buying second-hand furniture. This allows young people to take more ownership of their living space.

On another note, peer work and learning from young people who were previously supported by Progetto Tenda are also important, since they can bring additional information and trust.

Making young people participate in society and being knowledgeable about social challenges is also addressed. For example, one of the apartments where the young people live, and which the cooperative manages, was confiscated from the mafia and assigned through a public tender. To raise awareness among the young residents on this issue, a workshop was organized by Libera, an Italian association committed to the fight against mafias. The workshop led to this apartment being named after an innocent victim of the mafia.

Impact and transferability

The different housing projects with young people have a direct impact not only in preventing homelessness by providing a safe place, but more importantly, in giving young people a period of time so they can regain stability in their lives, reflect on what they want to do in the future, and explore their strengths with learning-by-doing. After their stay in the accommodation, young people increase their self-confidence and are more skilled in dealing with bureaucracy, with the process of renting a place or navigating the job market, or sustaining tenancy.

Another important aspect is that, during this stay, youngsters are asked to pay a fictional rent, which is essentially money they put aside as savings. These funds can then be used when moving out of the service or if they lose their jobs, which prevents them from destitution.

Regarding transferability, professionals should always keep in mind that young people experiencing destitution or homelessness rarely have a linear progress. It is necessary to adapt to the pace and decisions made by every young person, and to expect changes in priorities or setbacks, e. g. if a young person loses their job and seeks support again. Having financial resources is also important to organise workshops on various topics, provide furniture that young people need, or fund schooling and driving lessons.

In addition, Progetto Tenda invests in the continuous training of its staff

at the European level through its membership in FEANTSA, and actively contributes to the exchange of practices with organisations across Europe. This international learning dimension encourages the cooperative to adapt and replicate its intervention model in different European contexts, recognising that -despite national specificities- young people facing homelessness share many similar challenges. Engaging in cross-border dialogue is therefore enriching and stimulating, helping identify new approaches to innovate and strengthen the overall quality of support provided.



Wiener Hilfswerk

Location: Vienna, Austria

Website: <https://www.hilfswerk.at/wien/wohnung-slosen-und-fluechtlingshilfe/wohnungslosenhilfe/mobil-betreutes-wohnen/>

Contact details: Julie Freylinger,
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Brief description

The 'Mobile assisted living' is one of the programmes on homelessness run by Hilfswerk, to enable people to move into their own affordable apartment or to secure their existing apartment in the long term.

This programme includes a youth care component with comprehensive, individually and needs-oriented supports for young people living in families, to develop and implement their personal future plans.

Context

Data from 2023 show that 11,400 people in Vienna received assistance for people experiencing homelessness. About 20% of them were under 30 years old, while 37% of the city's population under 35 were at risk of poverty.

Assistance for people experiencing homelessness is provided by the Vienna Social Fund, in collaboration with other social services. Its aim is to provide housing support through a suitable form of accommodation. The city housing market is very particular in this regard, since social housing is spread all over its 23 districts and about 25% of the city's population live in these units. To gain access, residents need to have a 'housing ticket' proving their income is lower than a specific threshold required by the city authorities.

Service

Wiener Hilfswerk started the service for young people out of a need identified in their work with families and single parents. They recognised young people needed a more specialised support, alongside measures to prevent them from entering homelessness services. The young people supported are aged between 14 and 24 and live with their legal guardians in their own homes. Between 50 to 60 young people are supported every year, but these numbers may fluctuate since participation is voluntary and demand-led – some people may need more support during a specific period of their lives and then less, even if there are regular check-ups after exiting the service.

Support begins at age 14 as a preventive measure, since from this age it is possible to schedule appointments with young people without requiring mandatory consent from their legal guardians. From the age of 17, discussions start on whether youngsters want to move out, what is important to

know to live independently, how to make the transition out of their current place of residence, etc. Only a few of the people supported are over 20, since most of them want to move out when they turn 18 through accessing social housing.

Wiener Hilfswerk can only support people receiving homelessness assistance and who are entitled to benefits from the city's Social Fund. Many of the people supported live in social housing flats owned by the city, including those with a 'special ticket' for youngsters aged 17 to 30 when it is their first flat. However, the criteria to access this is very strict, requiring at least two years of continuous residence in Vienna and having lived in the family home for at least ten years. While this resource is very useful for young people at risk of poverty, as the flats are much cheaper than the average, the eligibility criteria can sometimes be difficult to meet, especially the 10-years condition.

Activities can take place in different forms, e.g., appointments in the office, visits to the young people's homes, accompanying them to other places or to have leisure activities, etc. The individual work consists of help with school-work, accompaniment to doctors or job interviews, or advice in writing CVs, but it is also about leisure activities like going to the cinema or to eat, etc. These are very useful for building trust and a connection with professionals. Occasionally, there are also group activities with two or three young people – such as with siblings as part of the support for the whole family.

The support to young people is provided by three youth workers – and youngsters can decide which worker is assigned to them and change at any time-, while adults or parents are supported by social workers. This complementarity is useful for the team, since youth workers can bring into discussions the perspectives, needs or concerns of the young people. The team holds weekly meetings and regular intervision moments, along with two moments for supervision with the whole team every year and seven meetings/year for supervision in small groups.

Lastly, there is a networking with other socio-pedagogical organisations and homelessness support facilities. Depending on the young people's concerns, Hilfswerk works together with other organisations and institutions for young people to have a broader network of services and resources they can access to.

Role of youth work

Youth work is adopted as a reference model guiding the activities, in line with the socio-educational approach of the service. Some of the staff working with them have a background in educational sciences, which supports the integration of this educational component into social work. Non-formal and informal education play a big role, alongside the leisure activities organised with young people.

Importantly, this support is voluntary and demand-led, which increases the trust with professionals and the engagement with the programme. Thematic activities are organised depending on the topics which come up in discussions with youth workers. For example, on racism or discrimination since many of the youngsters supported have a migration or refugee background. Values are addressed in these conversations also as a way to understand Austrian society.

Impact and transferability

One of the most important outcomes is that young people feel seen and heard, that they get the attention and value they don't always have at home. This is also an important aspect of the support to independent living, as well as a prevention to enter the 'poverty cycle' or homelessness services.

For young people, it is also important to receive guidance in securing their first home and in establishing a connection with a social worker once they begin living independently. Staff from Wiener Hilfswerk accompanies them with the new social worker, and remains accessible to talk about more personal matters, while the social worker deals with housing or finance issues. Young people know very clearly whom to approach depending on what they need.

Precisely, this one-to-one support is very important for young people to open up and build a relationship with staff, so they are not only approached in emergency situations. A part of this work also involves letting young people know when they are making a mistake, which also helps in building a trustful relationship. Support is tailored to the needs and circumstances of every young person, which results in a more individualised approach to youth work (rather than a group-based one). Many of these youngsters don't have the confidence to participate in group activities, so this setting is also adequate for them.



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