

Seminar 7: Housing First II

Chair: Freek Spinnewijn, BE

Nienke Boesveldt, Marte Kuijpers and Juul Mulder, NL: A Longitudinal Service-User Perspective on Dutch Housing First Implementation



Dr. Nienke Boesveldt is Lead Researcher at the University of Amsterdam in a 5-year longitudinal study in Dutch municipalities on Preventing Recurring Homelessness, De-Institutionalization and Decentralization. After a social policy career on Homelessness in Amsterdam, she wrote her thesis on 'Planet Homeless: Governance Arrangements in Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Glasgow'. Her research interests are peer-research, welfare-state, governance, comparative studies and social-economy. She also teaches students and runs Executive Programs on Homelessness and Mental Health for Dutch policymakers.

Marte Kuijpers MSc, is involved in the project as a researcher at the University of Amsterdam. She completed her master's degree in Social Policy and Public Health at Utrecht University with a study into the social context for repeated homelessness. Her interest in the research was fueled by her previous work experience at a work collective for (threatened) homeless people in Nijmegen. Over the past two years, she has interviewed both stakeholders and clients in various municipalities. She hopes that the research will bring experiences in the field and policy a little closer together.



Dr. Juul Mulder, University of Amsterdam, has a background in psychology. She obtained her PhD from Utrecht University in 2008, researching the role of music preference in the psychosocial development of young people. In the years that followed, she conducted years of research into the quality of judicial behavioral interventions, including the theoretical underpinning, implementation in practice and verifiability of goal achievement. She also recently worked as a counselor in a sheltered housing facility, among others with people with double diagnoses. With these broad experiences in the chain, she is a nice addition to the research team.

The Housing First method appears effective in rehousing homeless persons with severe needs permanently (Tsemberis, 2011), but upscaling the method appears challenging (Pleace and Bretherton, 2013). Since 2005, the Netherlands has seen gradual, local implementation, initiated by municipalities and NGO's. To date, national accreditation is lacking, and we see programmes calling themselves Housing First in small pilots and large-scale projects of whom some show clear deviations from the evidence-based, much trialed HF template.

Longitudinal semi-structured peer-interviews with 43 service-users of five different programmes provide insight into client experiences with Dutch implementation of HF, over time. Participants find having their own - permanent - housing the basis for further recovery. Social living environment may be experienced as very pleasant, but social connection is not self-evident. Intensity and involvement of support differs greatly, also within certain projects. Satisfaction with support is very high, but not necessarily equipped to provide tailor-made support to participants that find asking for help difficult and distrust others, especially related to addiction, psychological challenges and social contacts. Alternatively, we found cases in which much support and care (> 5 times a week) is provided to persons detoxing in their own house. Lastly, we saw cases in which unrealistic expectations are raised with service-users about rules relating to rental-agreements and extra slack given, resulting in complex legal procedures with support services withdrawing themselves from the client remaining housed.

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We conclude client-experiences with implementing housing first show clear differences. Also, in our wider study on homelessness and mental health (> 250 participants) we more often do not come across Housing First participants than that we do. This may indicate this approach is still only there for the lucky few. We reflect on organizational difficulties and the need for raising additional methodological expertise. For such trajectories mixed financing is required, but challenging to realize.

Jordi Sanz, ES: Does Housing First Catalyse a Better Life? Quantitative Findings from a Randomized Controlled Trial in Barcelona



Jordi Sanz holds a PhD in sociology from Lancaster University. He joined Ivàlua (Catalan Institute of Public Policy Evaluation) in 2009 as an analyst in public policy evaluation, where he mainly works in evidence generation and program evaluation. His interests are in qualitative methods, evidence brokerage and impact evaluation.

Primer la Llar has been the first Housing First project promoted by a local government in Spain. Now that the project is finished we have submitted three papers to this 15th European Research Conference. The first, on the implementation of the Housing First model by the Barcelona City Council. The second, on the impact evaluation carried out by the Catalan Institute of Public Policies (IVALUA) and the third, on the qualitative longitudinal research carried out both with the participants and the practitioners by a research team of the University of Barcelona. The experimental design of the programme randomly selected 50 participants out of 120 eligible candidates with the aim of understanding whether the Housing First programme improves participants' quality of life, self-recovery and social relationships. Nineteen months after randomization, participants who were randomly selected to participate in the Housing First Program were, on average, in a better situation with respect to their quality of life, self-recovery but not in terms of their social relationships. Twenty-seven months after randomization, although positive correlation persists, even statistically significant effects detected in the first measurement vanish. Therefore, our work indicates that while unconditional housing might be beneficial from the very beginning, in the midterm it is not enough to maintain quality of life and self-recovery of participants. Our recommendation is that, once housing stability is achieved, other services (e.g., support in job search, education, and socialization activities) are needed to accelerate the transitions that participants strive to make in their lives. This paper finishes with a set of learning and development recommendations for social policies against homelessness.