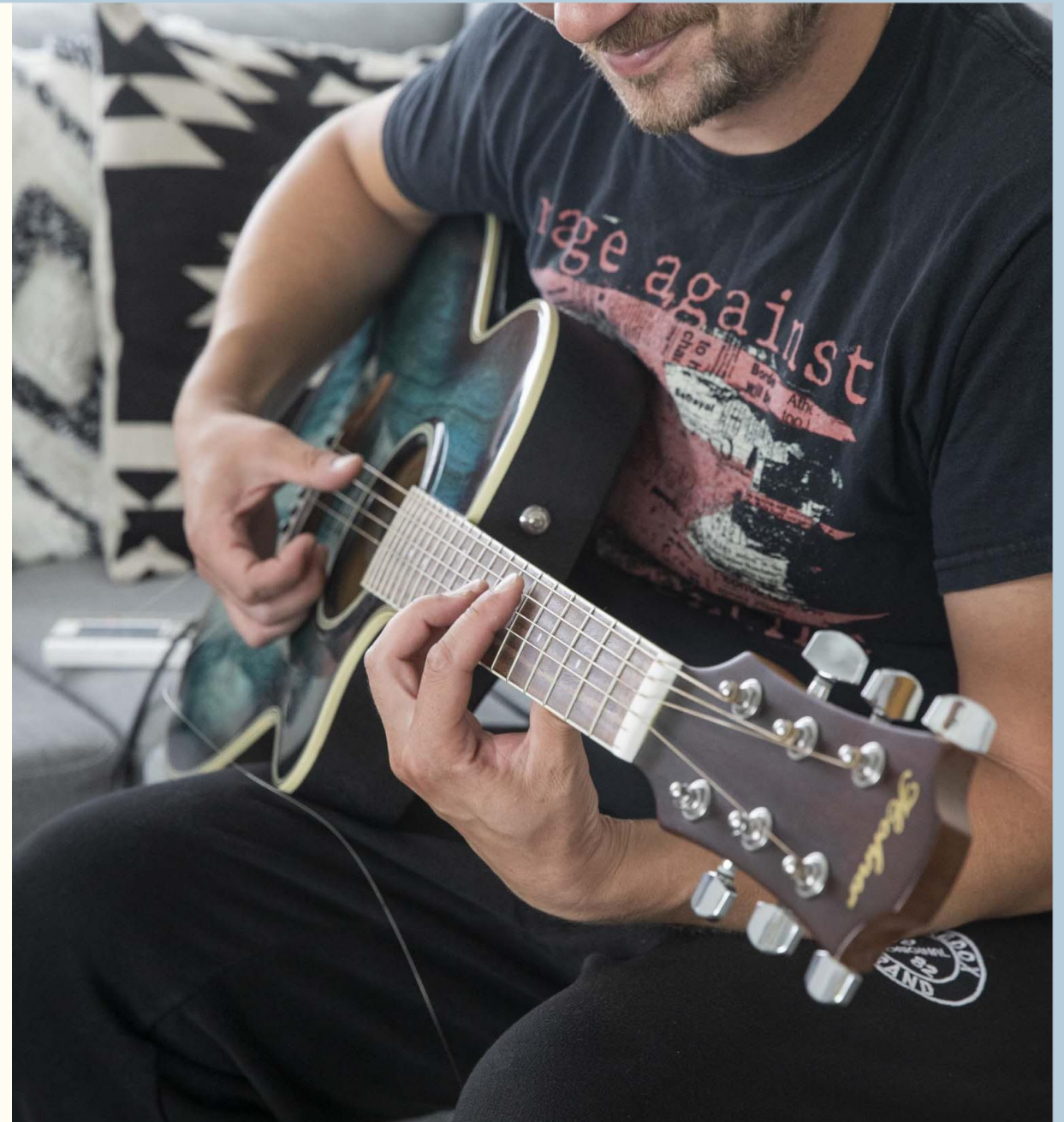


HOMELESSNESS
DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION
POLICY IN FINLAND:
HOUSING FIRST AND
PERSPECTIVES FROM THE
GROUND

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Y-Säätiö



**HOUSING FOR
SPECIAL GROUPS**

**ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL WELL-
BEING**

**AFFORDABLE
RENTAL HOUSING**

ADVOCACY

**FINLAND'S
FOURTH LARGEST
LANDLORD**

Home for all

**SPECIALIST
IN HOMELESS-
NESS WORK**

Homeless people have rarely been considered a target group of DI policies.

But...

...some services for the homeless have an institutional nature

...there are effective community-based alternatives to the traditional services when housing is coupled with support

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Finland pursued the DI of homelessness through national programmes to reduce long-term homelessness, the first was published in 2008.

It marked the transition from a staircase-based to a Housing First-based system.

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The new response to homelessness has involved:

- promoting rapid access to permanent housing through the conversion of existing shelters in supported housing units and the allocation of scattered apartments for Housing First
- introducing housing-related support with the primary goal of preventing the reoccurrence of homelessness and promoting social inclusion
- reliance on mainstream services and rental contracts
- prevention work for at risk groups: youths, released prisoners, and people under the threat of eviction

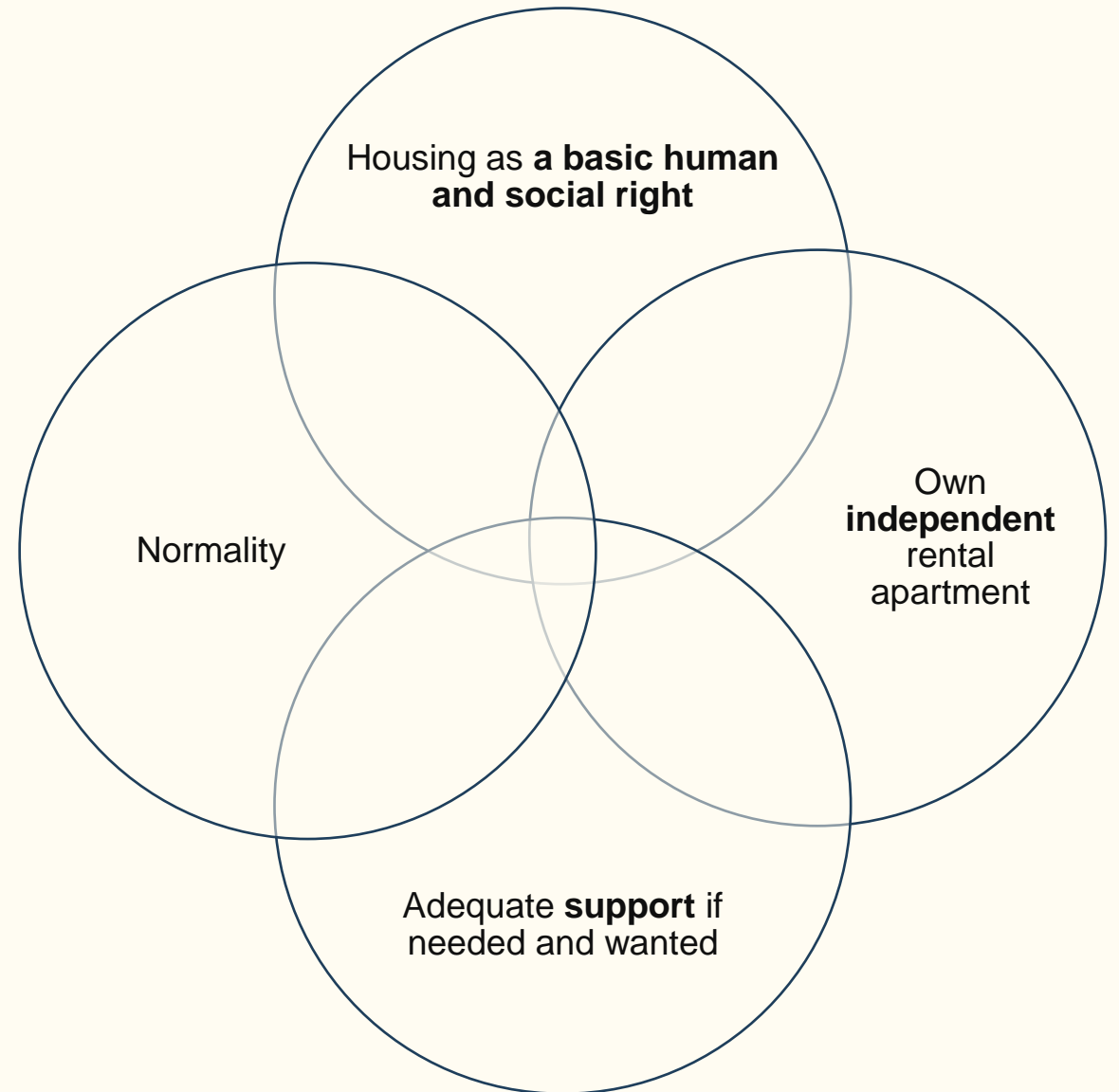
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Housing First in Finland



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The DI policy was inspired by the “Name on the door” report (Voutilainen et al., 2007).

The report described three main premises that justify and make the elimination of long-term homelessness a necessity. These are the ethical, legal and socio- economic perspectives.



Ethical perspective

“Every person has the right to be treated with **dignity**”.

This involves “having a place to be and a place to live” (**housing**) and “a shared responsibility to care for those who are unable or unwilling to do so” (**supporting community**).



Legal perspective

According to the Constitution (731/1999)

19.4§ - it is the duty of the **public authorities to promote the right to housing** and to support the independent organization of housing.

19.3§ - the public authorities must ensure **adequate social and health services for everyone.**

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Socio-economic perspective

Long-term homeless are heavy users of **services**, and the elimination of homelessness substantially reduces other **costs** to society.

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What is the perspective of the service workers on the DI policy and, in particular, on the ethical, legal, and socio-economic perspectives?



Methodology

- Qualitative approach: 11 semi-structured interviews centered around the ethical, legal and socio-economic perspective
- Interviewees are service workers in the field of homelessness that throughout their careers, have worked in institutional units (emergency accommodations, dormitories) and then also in Housing First services

Data analysis

- Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2016)
- Theory-driven (DI perspectives) and data-driven (patterns of meaning within the DI perspectives)
- Coding with Atlas

Literature underpinnings

- Deinstitutionalization and homelessness (Juhila, Löfstrand & Ranta, 2021; Juhila, Hall & Raitakari, 2015; Hall, Raitakari & Juhila, 2021)
- Finnish Housing First (Tainio & Fredriksson, 2009; Y-Foundation, 2017; Kaakinen & Turunen, 2021; Juhila et al., 2022, Turunen & Granfelt, 2023)
- Evaluation of Finnish programs to end long-term homelessness (Kettunen and Granfelt, 2011; Kaakinen, 2012; Pleace et al., 2015; Karppinen and Fredriksson 2016; Karppinen 2020; Kaakinen 2023)
- Housing social work (Granfelt, 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2022)

Ethical perspective: dignity

- Dignified life involves shelter, privacy, safety, self-determination
- Support according to needs is a prerequisite for a dignified life
- Big units should be avoided



Dignified life involves shelter, privacy, safety, self-determination

“Of course. You have your home space, you have your own name on the door. You can decide who comes in. Even the social workers can’t come in, it’s your place. And I think it’s a big, big thing.” (I7)

“I think it’s important that you have your own door and your own name on the door. And that gives some kind of independence for you.” (I1)

Support according to needs is a prerequisite for a dignified life

“I believe that we need many kinds of solutions because we have many kinds of people who are homeless. So... some need more support and for some scattered housing is just not enough. Their behavior is such that it's not tolerated in any normal housing company.” (12)

Big units should be avoided

“Of course, we also know that in this big housing complex... it brings also problems so that if you were living alone, you might be coping better than with this big bunch of people who are drinking together and bringing new stuff” (I2)

“What is living life with dignity? Because some of the units, there's 100 residents and everybody's doing dope 24/7. And there's lots of violence, lots of disturbances and their environment is dangerous. People are scared, the residents are scared, so I don't know... I don't see the dignity in that.” (I8)

Ethical perspective: community

- Traumas, adversity, and societal stigma make engagement with others in the community demanding
- Primarily a community of clients and workers
- Work (when possible) helps the creation of a different community
- Risk of isolation in housing units
- Risk of being the stigmatized other and an outsider and loneliness in scattered housing



Traumas, adversity, and societal stigma make engagement with others in the community demanding

“it's very hard and some of them are very shamed because of their situation. They are ashamed to meet family members or children and so on” (I6)

“those people living in units, they have people in the same situation, and it helps them to find important people inside the unit.” (I7)

Primarily a community of clients and workers

“I think in most cases the workers tell them where drug clinics or day centers for people with drug abuse are, but they don't tell what else you can do. So, I think it might be good to get to know the area where the people are going to move, what kind of services there are, what kind of hobbies, what kind of activities and where the buses go and so on.” (I1)

“they hope that they would have some so called normal social relationships... but it's quite difficult. That's why we have, for example, day centers so that they can find new friends and something to do” (I6)

“Quite many people stay in the same circle, especially if they are not able to recover. They go to the day centers, they have basically the same social networks.”(I4)

Work (when possible) helps the creation of a different community

“The best option would be that they would have some job to do during the day. But if they cannot work... maybe we would need some low threshold workplaces here in Finland.” (16)

“Work is many times really good. Even it's like “rehabilitative work”, you can have this supported work so that's good because it gives you something to do daily and it gives you the community. It gives you the social relationships and gives you also the feeling of success and managing things and doing things.” (18)

Risk of isolation in housing units

“I think it's better that people are entitled to have the same services than whoever living in this area because that keeps them connected more to the surrounding society and part of the society. Because if everything happens here in the bubble, and they don't have to leave this place.... It's not real life” (13)

“if we build strong community inside the unit then it's really difficult to... when your situation is improving and we are thinking about, maybe you could move to single apartment with no support then it's difficult to say is it the community that it's supporting the client, or can they manage? And it's really difficult to move out and to discuss with the resident. They don't want to move because they are feeling so strongly and feeling that they belong to our community.” (18)

Loneliness and risk of being stigmatized in scattered housing

“I think in scattered housing, many people have been suffering from loneliness. Nowadays, I think there are also two day-centers, some sorts of day centers or some kind of activities where you can go. But the threshold can be very high for a person who has been outside from the society for a long time.” (I2)

“I think the local community can be also something that excludes people. (...) There was a community project in xxx. And they started to create all kinds of activities for the people, so they could learn to know each other. The creation of this community was bad for people who were different, for people with mental health problems because those who were in a better position and worked together could share the news about their strange neighbors... And so... it wasn't integrating everybody.” (I2)

Legal perspective

- Helping clients understand and claim their rights is a task of support workers
- Legal rights are at the core of deinstitutionalization
- Contradictions



Helping clients understand and claim their rights is a task of support workers

“So... there is also lack of information and our system, it's quite complicated. (...) Somebody should tell you what benefits you can apply for and what services you can apply for.” (I6)

“I remember some service providers were planning or providing training for the tenants about their rights as tenants. Because many people were still thinking that they can be sent away for various reasons.” (I2)

Legal rights are at the core of deinstitutionalization

“Talking with one of the residents we asked, “What would you think like if we just closed all the doors, and you could get access to your own home just with the workers opening the door and there was set times like when you have to come home?” And they're like, “what are you talking about? Are you crazy? Have you lost your mind like this is not good! That sounds terrible. You can't do that!” But that was how it was... now more and more, I think that housing first does empower and help people to understand their rights.” (13)

Contradictions

“I think the system worked relatively well. Of course, there are other questions... like: if there we speak about normal rental contract and then there are limitations happening in these big units... for example... can you have guests? Can your wife move in?” (12)

“Also we are talking nowadays: those people who managed in their living in housing for students well and they are very active in the working activities and so on, should they move on? Because the city wants them to move on and some of them are able to take that step, but some of them absolutely don't want to take that step.” (17)

“What I meant was that it is a great thing to say that now you are empowered, you have the possibility to assert your rights. But do you? Can you really? Do you have enough courage? Do you want to be seen? Do you know what are your rights?” (15)

Socio-economic perspective

- The support is rigidly attached to the housing solution
- Facilitating access to services is the main task of support workers (while respecting client's choices)
- Services do not correspond to actual demands and needs



The support is rigidly attached to the housing solution

“In scattered housing, the situation is usually stable and much better, and there's no substance abuse or mental health problems so much involved, they're under control.” (I8)

“the housing support or the housing services are not flexible. You must change your home if you want to change the support because the support is attached to the place, not to the person.” (I11)

Facilitating access to services is the main task of support workers (while respecting client's choices)

“So the main thing that our workers help it's... they are like “side-by-side workers” to our customers... I don't know how else to say that... They are going with our customers to other services, and our workers speaks for our customers, on their behalf. So that's the reason that we can get the houses and apartments” (I10)

“I felt like that I am accepting that people are slowly killing themselves. And I can't do anything about that” (I5)

Services do not correspond to actual demands and needs

“...normal services don't have the expertise, they don't know life situations, they don't know how people behave, what kind of risks and problems there could be. Somebody knows but it's not a general knowledge when you go Health Centers. Long-term homeless people need specialized services.” (I4)

“it's quite high threshold for homeless people to go to normal healthcare services and that's why they use emergency services very often and it's very expensive” (I6)

“you are dependent on local services. And we all know that there is lack of mental health services or there is a barrier to reach that point where you can really get help so...” (I2)

Conclusions

- Almost all the interviewees have a positive opinion of the DI program while reporting weaknesses (e.g., inadequacy of community care services) that can be reconciled with DI in other fields
- Lease, support work and availability of different housing solutions have played a crucial role in the policy
- The creation of supportive community is challenging and seems to clash with the reality faced by this vulnerable population

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