

## Seminar 15: Service Components of Housing First (Room: 01.15)

Chair: **Mike Allen, IE**

**Sara Lannin, Ivana Keenan, John Coonan, Cimara Witte, Elizabeth Peña, Gráinne Johnston, IE: Housing First and Peer Support Specialists: An Insight into Organisational Toolkit Development**



**John Coonan is an experienced peer support specialist and researcher with the Peter McVerry Trust. He holds a BSocSc (Hons) in Sociology, Social Policy and Social Justice and an MSc in Public Policy, both from University College Dublin. His personal experience with homelessness, combined with an academic background, allows him to provide insightful and practical support to participants, as well as contribute to various research projects.**

**Grainne Johnston is the Peer Support Project Coordinator with the Housing First National Office in Ireland. She has worked with the Housing Agency since 2017 within the Regulation Office, Local Authority Services and the Affordable Housing Unit. She previously worked within the Social Housing Sector in Northern Ireland for over 12 years and is a Chartered Surveyor (RICS). Grainne has qualified with a BA (Hons) Degree in Economics and Finance and a Diploma in Construction Studies.**

Within Housing First (HF), Peer Support Specialists (PSS) are employees whose job descriptions recognise their lived personal experiences as beneficial in understanding and motivating clients. Subsequently, the Irish HF National Office set out to assist organisations to integrate and deliver PSS services, by producing an organisational PSS toolkit. As a HF provider in Ireland, the Peter McVerry Trust (PMVT) undertook a comprehensive investigation into service users' and existing staff's experiences with PSSs.

This study aimed to provide insight into PSS programme delivery and outcomes within HF in regions managed by PMVT in Ireland. Between December-January 2023, 35 individuals were contacted in relation to PSS services; 8 HF participants and 27 stakeholders. The HF participants' satisfaction and the impact of PSSs on their lives was facilitated through a survey. While focus group consultations with stakeholders explored themes such as recruitment strategies, supervision, training, and impact of the PSS role in HF.

All HF participants agreed that their PSS helps them establish and achieve goals. Most HF participants said PSSs help them make healthier life choices, manage stress and mental health in their daily lives and reduce their risk-taking behaviours. All stakeholders highlighted the importance of PSSs on the lives of HF participants and HF services. PSSs were seen as pillars of support for HF participants, where the amalgamation of emotional and practical supports enhanced HF participants empowerment, recovery and social integration. Equally, knowledge drawn from PSSs greatly benefited HF support teams and served to bridge identified gaps in HF service provision.

The study highlights that peer-led ongoing support programmes could play a crucial role in transforming the homeless sector and ensuring the highest quality of person-centred care. These findings have important implications for the design and implementation of HF PSS toolkits, as well as for policymakers seeking to address homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe and beyond.

## Krista Kosonen, FI: Housing First, but What Next? How about Work?



**Krista Kosonen works as a researcher in Y-Foundation in Finland. Her current research focuses on projects that aim to prevent homelessness by providing work for tenants and facilitating housing transition. Krista received her Doctor of Arts degree in Design in 2018 from Aalto University. Her main expertise is in narrative identity, visualisation, and visual research methods.**

Housing First has shown that homelessness can be reduced significantly by providing a home first, without expecting changes in one's lifestyle. However, in many cases a home alone does not meet the needs of people who have experienced long-term homelessness. Having a home does not automatically increase wellbeing and the sense of belongingness, or make life more meaningful, even when adequate support is available.

Employment can be one way to break the cycle of homelessness. Work has a significant meaning that reaches far beyond income. It ties us to a community, creates structure for the day and provides an opportunity to use one's skills and learn new things. The work we do influences also on the way we see ourselves and what we identify with, and in this sense, work forms a part of our identity.

The presentation introduces an ongoing research Work for tenants that investigates the effectiveness of Y-Foundation's employment program Uuras. The program – established in 2018 – provides low threshold gig work and employment coordination services to all Y-Foundation's tenants free of charge.

The research has a narrative approach and uses visual methods. It focuses on unemployed, 18-55 year-old tenants that have contact with Uuras. The aim of the research is to find out the impact of Uuras on the participants' employment, wellbeing, and housing. The research produces in-depth knowledge of participants' work paths and factors that facilitate or complicate employment and dwelling.

The presentation gives an overview of this narrative study, presents a life situation map as a visual data generation tool, and discusses the data gathered so far. The data collection started in February 2023 and will continue until June 2026. The participants will be followed for 3 years or until they have been employed for one year.