

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

# Why Housing First Works

## Thinking about Housing First in Europe

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Turning Point Housing First  
Conference

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- Three drivers for Housing First in Europe
- Evidence from Pathways in NYC
- Perceived failure of ‘staircase’
- Costs
- Today’s presentation draws on ongoing and completed work on Housing First for Feantsa, the French Government, Habitact, OECD, SHP/LB Camden and the Simon Communities of Ireland

- Housing First model is globally influential
- Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal
- EU wide evaluation led by my colleague Volker Busch-Geertsema:
- <http://www.socialinnovationeurope.eu/node/2126>

- What is being developed in the name of 'Housing First' does not replicate the Pathways Model
- Instead we have three broadly defined models
  - Pathways Housing First
  - Communal Housing First
  - Housing First 'Light' or Housing-Led services
- A pattern that is also evident in the USA

- The original form
- Comparatively *rare*
- Immediate/rapid access to ordinary scattered housing, mobile support team providing ACT and ICM services
- Housing as **basic human right**, respect warmth and compassion, provided for as long as needed, **separation of housing and support**, consumer **choice**, recovery orientation and **harm reduction**

- Accommodation based services i.e. communal or congregate housing **everyone living in the *same building* which is only open to service users**
- Full range of services provided on-site
- Generally targeted on highest need groups
- **Separation of accommodation and support, harm reduction, respect, warmth and compassion**
- Finland and USA

- Immediate/rapid provision of ordinary **scattered** housing
- Floating *lower intensity* support using *case management only*
- No ACT team
- Separation of housing and support, harm reduction, consumer choice
- Can be used for homeless people with lower support needs
- Denmark, Finland, Portugal, UK...

- “Housing First” is, in practice, a term used to describe services other than PHF
- The idea that PHF can simply be *replicated* is problematic, PHF was designed for New York, there must be modifications of the approach to work in other contexts, particularly in other welfare/housing systems, PHF *cannot* be entirely consistent - Guy Johnson et al, AHURI, Australia
- There has been a ‘loss of control’ of the term



- There is growing evidence that services that are directly influenced by (but do not replicate) the PHF model are nevertheless more *effective* at providing sustained exits from homelessness
- Services developed *without* reference to PHF, which use many of the same ideas are also more *effective* at providing sustained exits from homelessness, e.g. TST under RSI, (initially) Finnish services
- The full ‘positive influence’ of PHF on services is not being understood if a narrow definition used

- PHF is effective in its own right
- And there is evidence that services that reflect or are influenced by PHF are more effective than traditional services
- Indicates that Housing First should perhaps be seen as a broader concept

- There are risks in what is happening with the definition of 'Housing First'
- The first 'danger' is that everything calls itself 'Housing First'
  - It may be debatable if CHF or HFL is 'Housing First' or not, but if following many or several core principles that is one thing, whereas...
  - A staircase/linear treatment model calling itself 'Housing First' is not Housing First
  - A service that insists on abstinence is not Housing First
  - A service that places no requirements on service users is not Housing First

- The PHF model is not looked at carefully because there is a wider, somewhat ambiguous definition of ‘Housing First’ that is used as a reference point
  - The UK response noted by Teixeira and Johnsen that we are ‘doing it already’ and have been for ages. Housing First is relatively absent from Whitehall thinking, compare that to France and the Nordic countries where it is core strategy
  - Important that core elements, securing and managing sufficient accommodation of acceptable quality, leasehold arrangements, financial management, separation of housing and support, harm reduction, choice and control, ‘welfare state in miniature’ are not lost sight of

- Inflated expectations from definitional ambiguity
  - What Housing First does - in terms of the services that directly and at least partially reflect the PHF model - is deliver housing sustainment, ending the unique distress of homelessness
  - Need to be clear - as Pathways is - that Housing First and related models are not a panacea. Issues around socioeconomic marginalisation, criminality health and well-being, drug and alcohol use will not be suddenly 'solved', though there is evidence that various Housing First models can produce gains on those fronts
  - Also need to be careful in the sense of how homelessness is seen, yes there are chronically homeless people/multiply excluded homeless people but there is growing evidence that this is a high cost /high risk minority in a larger homeless/housing excluded population

- Housing First service models end homelessness at an unprecedented rate for vulnerable groups, they deliver housing stability and a sustained exit from homelessness for most service users
- Debates about exact definition are less important than understanding that reflecting or adopting key elements of the broad philosophy of 'Housing First' does appear to enhance service effectiveness in ending rough sleeping and sustained stays in emergency accommodation

- There are arguments for focusing on the positives of Housing First as a broad philosophy that enhances service outcomes
- Not focus too much attention on what is or what is not 'Housing First' but at the same recognise **separation of housing and support, harm reduction, choice and immediate** provision of accommodation as fundamental - a service that does not do this is not a form of 'Housing First'
- Indeed CHF and HFL may sometimes work more effectively with some groups

- Thanks for listening
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