Housing First: A Social Innovation to Tackle Homelessness

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The Problem

- Homelessness is...
  - A persistent social challenge
    - 410,000 homeless people on an average night in the EU
    - Recent increases in most MS (at least 15)
  - A highly damaging experience for individuals
    - Social exclusion, stigma, violence, negative impact on physical and mental health, life expectancy, employability, addiction….
  - Costly for society
    - High health and criminal justice costs for those with complex needs and high levels of service use (health, temporary shelter, criminal justice…)
    - “Managing” homelessness is costly over long term
    - Homelessness closely associated with long term exclusion from the labour market
A Solution

**Housing First**

- Originates from US but increasingly implemented in EU
- Innovative service model for people who
  - Have been homelessness for a long time
  - Have complex support needs (e.g. mental health, addiction)
- Key elements:
  - Rapid access to self-contained housing units with security of tenure
  - Priority given to user choice, respect and empathy
  - Recovery orientation and harm reduction
  - Flexible, open ended offer of “floating” support
  - Client-centred approach and individual support plan
  - High degree of staff availability to users
Staircase of Transition

- Homeless
- Shelter placement
- Transitional housing
- Permanent housing

Level of independence

Treatment compliance + psychiatric stability + abstinence

Tsemberis slide, 2010
Housing First Model

- Homeless
- Shelter placement
- Transitional housing
- Permanent housing
- Ongoing, flexible supports

Tsemberis slide, 2010
Housing First Works

- High levels of housing retention and improved capacity to live independently
  - Studies consistently report more than 80% of service users stably housed after 2 years
- Stabilisation and reduction of drug and alcohol use
- Improvement in mental health
- Some evidence in terms of progress towards employment
  - Need to be realistic as the target group is very far from the labour market upon entry into Housing First projects
- Increasing evidence in relation to social inclusion
  - Some studies show that service users’ perception of inclusion increases when housed through Housing First
  - Persistent loneliness and isolation are problems that many people who have been homeless continue to experience
And seems to be cost-effective

- In some cases, reductions in social and health service use translate into cost offsets and savings.
- In any case, strong outcomes means Housing First is probably worth the investment.