Finland

The National Homelessness Strategy

Housing First is central to the national homelessness strategy in Finland. There is a national objective to end long-term homelessness, which is often experienced by people with high and complex support needs. Using a combination of communal or congregate approaches, which applied Housing First principles to single-site projects and scattered housing approaches, Finland has achieved a marked reduction in levels of long-term homelessness. More information about the Finnish homelessness strategy, which employs Housing First within a comprehensive strategy that also emphasises homelessness prevention, can be found at: https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/153258 (English and Finnish)

Väinölä Housing First

Väinölä Housing First is run by the Salvation Army with housing provided by Y-Foundation, an organisation which develops new social housing for rent in Finland. The housing is in individual apartments, which are all located in a single apartment block.

The support services provided are present onsite on a 24/7 basis. There is a staff team of 11 people, including social workers, health professionals, volunteer coordinators and a work coach, who helps users achieve social integration through paid work. The approach used is a case-management model, drawing both on the staff team within Väinölä Housing First and involving external service providers as necessary.

Housing First service users have the option – though of course are not required – to participate in a therapeutic community. The principles of a therapeutic community centre on:

- Offering a structured, psychologically-informed environment, i.e. a place where there are daily activities that are designed to promote health and well-being
- The therapeutic community itself is seen as a mechanism by which treatment and support is delivered, with an emphasis on improving the social support for and self-esteem of individuals within the community

Alongside offering case management and support, Väinölä Housing First encourages voluntary participation in the running of the service. All the cleaning and gardening work within the Housing First project is undertaken by the people who live there. The goal is to encourage social support and social integration through the experience of low-threshold work.

People living in Väinölä Housing First are also involved in events designed to promote their social integration within the community. There are open house events, inviting neighbours into the Housing First building and other work centred on informing and educating the neighbourhood about Housing First. People using Housing First also volunteer to keep the neighbourhood tidy, which is designed to promote positive relationships with the surrounding community.

Väinölä Housing First describes its own support priorities as focusing on:

- Housing sustainment
- Health and well-being
- Social integration

Outcome data, based on feedback from Housing First service users is collected every six months. **Success has been reported in housing sustainment and in promoting social integration**, particularly in re-establishing links with family and friends and in social integration with the local community. Results around drug and alcohol use and health have been reported as more variable, but this is not uncommon in Housing First services (see Chapter 1).

There are some debates within Europe and the USA about the use of a congregate or communal model of Housing First, which centre on the extent to which social integration (see Chapter 3) is possible when Housing First service users live together. Finnish Housing First services use both these congregate or communal models and apartments scattered in the community.

More information about Väinölä Housing First is available at: [http://www.pelastusarmeija.fi/paikkakunnat/espoo/asumispalvelu](http://www.pelastusarmeija.fi/paikkakunnat/espoo/asumispalvelu) (Finnish)

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