Swedish Housing First

Unlike Denmark, Finland and Norway, Sweden had not introduced a national programme with a clear focus on Housing First by 2015. Housing First as a programme, philosophy, method and service had, however, been introduced and incorporated in local homelessness strategies and action plans. In addition, Housing First was also incorporated into strategic documents like the new directives on the treatment of substance misuse from the National Board of Health and Welfare.

The first two Housing First services in Sweden started in 2010 (Stockholm and Helsingborg) and have been evaluated. In 2013, the Housing First service in Helsingborg became a permanent part of the social housing programme in the city. At that time, the housing retention rate was 84%. The Housing First pilot is now being upscaled and the results of the pilot will be implemented within the social housing programme in Helsingborg.

In late 2015, 14 municipalities had Housing First services. They all follow the core principles of Housing First, but there are differences in their operational details. Performance is reported as universally good for all these Housing First services, both in terms of service-user satisfaction and housing retention rates. The target group of all the Housing First services in Sweden are homeless people from what is called ‘Situation 1’. Situation 1 is equivalent to category 1 and 2 of the FEANTSA ETHOS typology (rooflessness): people rough sleeping and people staying at night shelters.

Evaluations of Housing First are ongoing and will produce results that compare Housing First models. In Gothenburg, the Housing First service uses one ACT team and two ICM teams. In other municipalities, support is provided by social workers employed by social services. In one of the municipalities, the whole programme is run by a NGO. In two municipalities, so far, the support services are provided under contract from the City Mission by the social services. In this context, it will be very useful to identify what the key ingredients are in the support given that make Housing First work so well in Sweden. Housing First has been introduced in a context of ongoing, very significant, reform in welfare services and social housing systems in Sweden.

A formal network has been created for all those municipalities that use Housing First services. They meet regularly and discuss different aspects of Housing First. At the last meeting, commonalities and differences between the different services were discussed and a special session focused on how the different services worked with difficult cases.

For more information, see: http://www.soch.lu.se/en/research/research-groups/housing-first (English)