

Chapter VIII

The emergence and dissemination of Housing First in Sweden

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The development and dissemination of Housing First programmes have been slow and without national

Background

Even though the Swedish housing policy since the 1940s has been built upon the idea of housing as a universal right, many people are today homeless or find it difficult to enter the ordinary housing market in Sweden. In the most up-to-date mapping of homelessness in Sweden (The National Board of Health and Welfare, (NBHW) 2017) an estimated of 33 000 people were defined as homeless and it has been an increasing trend since the 1990s. There have been five national homelessness surveys in Sweden, beginning in 1993 followed by 1999, 2005, 2011 and 2017. In every survey the definition of homeless persons has changed, which makes it problematic to compare the data (Knutagård, 2018). Although resources have been allocated to solve the problem the prevalence rate has increased.

The up to day situation

The total number of 240 municipalities (83 %) are reporting housing deficits (The Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (NBHBP), 2019), which makes it hard for the social services to counteract the homelessness situation. Still the social services have an important preventive role in counteracting homelessness. There are especially two types of preventive interventions used, outreach work and preventive eviction work. More than half of the municipalities carry out outreach work aimed at those at risk of losing their housing.

For those already homeless the municipalities social services try to remedy this through different housing interventions making up for a secondary housing market. In 265 of the 290 municipalities (NBHBP, 2019) a second-hand market has developed consisting mainly of more or less temporary housing solutions, usually arranged in a model based on a stepwise thinking. The main part of these housing interventions are apartments including special rules and who are rented by the social services and then subleased to

homeless people. The social services have become a major landlord, managing around two percent of Sweden's total amount of rental apartments (Wirehag, 2019). The number of that type of apartment were January 2019, 26 100 (NBHBP 2019). Although the goal is that those who are the subject of this type of intervention, which is usually referred to as the staircase model, should in time be able to obtain their own housing, few achieve this goal (NBHW, 2012).

Housing First in practice

In several countries, the Housing First model are today a national strategy for homelessness work, but not so in Sweden. In the lack of governmental guidelines Sweden's municipalities and county councils (SKL) have developed a national network working for and disseminating the method that meets once a year (SKL 2019). 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 ([www. http://housingfirstguide.eu](http://housingfirstguide.eu)).

The university of Lund (www.soch.lu.se) has since 2009 and later The Sweden's City Mission been driving forces in the dissemination of the Housing First idea. The project "Abolishing homelessness with Housing First" was started by City Missions in the spring of 2018, and through cooperation with important researchers and Lund's University knowledge, education and dialogue about Housing First are disseminated (<http://www.bostadforst.se/om-projektet/>).

Since 2016 researchers at Karolinska Institutet (KI) and Mid-Sweden university also have been part of the researching and dissemination of Housing First in Sweden.

The use of the Housing First model has been encouraged in a rather haphazard way from a governmental perspective as a complement to the existing way to work with the homelessness problem in different publications and websites: a magazine from Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL, 2015), a report from The Government Offices (2014) and a website and reports from the National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW, 2009; 2011b; 2015). Although widely disseminated, the actual implementation of Housing First has been slow over all.

The programme has, however, been introduced and incorporated in local homelessness strategies and action plans. One reason there are sort of a resistance against implementing Housing First could be given the extent of the staircase-oriented homelessness work in Sweden, there are also strong organizational and financial incentives to defend the staircase model (Knutagård & Kristiansen 2013). The question many municipalities are struggling with is how do we adapt the prevailing way to deal with the homelessness to the Housing First model? How can we incorporate some core principles without having to re-model or terminate the staircase model?

Two cities, Stockholm and Helsingborg, started Housing First projects both in a small scale 2010 and slowly over the years the number of apartments have increased. The number of Swedish municipalities who have started a Hosing First programmes so far varies between 29 (NBHBP, 2019) up to 64 (23 %) (SKL 2018) depending on informant. Usually the number of apartments only cover a small number of the actual homeless population in respective municipality. Data from the NBHW's 2017 mapping, showed

that the number of people receiving Housing first as a housing intervention at national level was only marginal (245 people or less than one percent of all people living in homelessness) during week fourteen of 2017 (Wirehag, 2019).

In a modified table (see below) we can see that there is a relatively large overlap in the municipalities between the two models, where municipalities providing the Staircase model also provide Housing first (Wirehag, 2019).

Type of municipality (N=290)	Housing first	Staircase model
Large cities (n=24)	58.3%	70.8%
Commuting (n=130)	15.4%	34.6%
Smaller cities (n=81)	7.3%	27.2%
Rural (n=55)	7.4%	20.0%

In all municipalities, the overall organizational principle in the form of the staircase model has remained and Housing first has been small-scale projects or pilot projects (Knutagård & Kristiansen 2013, Uhnöo 2016).

An interesting conclusion about the dissemination and implementation of Housing First programmes in Sweden could be that it is not done through a “Top-down push process” (Macnaughton, et al., 2017) with clear governance from the state but rather the opposite. This might in the long run force researcher to acknowledge the importance of paying more attention to the community context which might led to the development of more interactive and integrative approaches (Ibid.).

Housing First in Swedish research and evaluation reports

Below follows a summary of published research material about Housing First in a Swedish context.

- Bothén, L., Blid, M., Beijer, U. & Källmén, H. (2019) Comparing the effect of Housing First against the Staircase Model on recovery. Submitted to Nordic Journal of Psychiatry.
- Knutagård, M. & Kristiansen, A. (2013) Not by the book - The Emergence and Translation of Housing First in Sweden. European Journal of Homelessness _ Vol. 7, No. 1.
- Källmén, H. & Blid; M. (2016) Free from Homelessness: Is “Housing First” the Solution? - A Comparison with the “Staircase Model”. A Feasibility Study. Int Arch Addict Res Med, Vol. 2:1
- Knutagård, M. and Kristiansen, A. (2018) Nytt vin i gamla läglar - Skala upp Bostad först, boendeinflytande och om att identifiera och stötta ”the missing hero” RESEARCH REPORTS IN SOCIALWORK 2018:1 School of Social Work Lund University
- Pleece, N. (2016). Housing First Guide. Europe. FEANTSA, Bryssel. Published in Swedish with an introduction by: Knutagård, M. (2018) Bostad först – en handbok. Europa Swedish edition. Sveriges Stadsmissioner och Égalité bokförlag.

Evaluations of Housing First programmes

A number of evaluation reports have been published concerning Housing First projects in different municipalities. Below are most of them listed:

Stockholm

Källmén, H., Blid, M. & Jalling, C. Utvärdering av Bostad Först för hemlösa i Stockholms stad och Helsingborg. En jämförelse med Boendetrappan Slutrapport.

Källmén, H. (2018). Effektutvärdering av Stockholms stads version av Bostad Först. Jämförelse med boendetrappan. STAD, CPF, Stockholms Läns Sjukvårdsområde/ Karolinska Institutet.

Bothén, L. (2018). Comparing the effect of Housing First against the Staircase Model on recovery. Karolinska Institutet

Helsingborg

Kristiansen, A., & Espmarker, A. (2012). Sen är det ju mycket det här att man får vara ärlig också och det är man ju inte van vid... Bostad först ur de boendes perspektiv. (Working paper-serien; Nr. 4). Socialhögskolan, Lunds universitet.

Kristiansen, A. (2013). Utvärdering av Bostad först-projektet i Helsingborg Slutrapport .

Knutagård, M., & Kristiansen, A. (2018). Nytt vin i gamla läglar: Skala upp Bostad först, boendeinflytande och om att identifiera och stötta "the missing hero". (Research Reports in Social Work; Vol. 2018, Nr. 1). School of Social Work, Lund University.

Västerås

Björkman, Å. (2016). Bostad Först Implementering av en modell för att motverka hemlöshet. Mittuniversitetet Östersund.

Kalander, P. (2017). Uppföljning av Bostad Först. Västerås Stad

Göteborg

Uhnoo, S. (2016). UTVÄRDERING AV BOSTAD FÖRST GÖTEBORG. Göteborgs universitet.

Uhnoo, S. (2017). Utvärdering av BODIL-projektet. Ett lokalt bostad först-projekt i SDF Askim-Frölunda-Högsbo. Göteborg stad 2014-2016.

Karlstad

Folkesson, P. (2017). Bostad Först i Karlstad. FoU Välfärd Värmland 2017:1

Örebro

Aronsson, P. (2015). Bostad Först, Örebromodellen. VERDANDI ÖREBROKRETS.

Here follows a brief summary of the main results of the above evaluations:

The results show mainly positive outcomes for many long-term and severely marginalized homeless persons which in turn have generate both humanitarian and socio-economic benefits.

Trusting relationships have been established between service users and social workers which are crucial for recovery and change for participants. Further, the results also show an average moderate to high positive change in several important areas of life and an average high to very high satisfaction with the support the service users have received.

Most municipalities have incorporated the Housing First philosophy and the core principles but with variations depending on the local resources, especially when it comes to securing tenure and offering a first-hand contract from start.

An issue widely discussed in the reports are how much the Housing First programme actually can promote a recovery process including additional problems such as addiction and health problems.

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- McNaughton, E.; Nelson, G., Goering, P. and Piat, M. (2016). Moving Evidence Into Policy: The Story of the At Home/Chez Soi Initiative's Impact on Federal Homelessness Policy in Canada and its Implications for the Spread of Housing First in Europe and Internationally. *European Journal of Homelessness*, Vol. 11, No. 1.
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