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# Not by the Book: The Emergence and Translation of Housing First in Sweden

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› **Abstract** *The emergence of Housing First in Sweden is described and analysed in the light of the deregulation of the housing market and the existing organisation of service delivery for homeless people. The spread and growth of Housing First in Sweden was promoted by Lund University during 2009. Although widely disseminated, implementation of Housing First has been slow. Only seven of Sweden's 290 municipalities have started, or decided to start a Housing First project. An important reason for this is that the organisation of service delivery with homeless people in Sweden is characterised by a path dependency, in which the 'staircase' model has become an institutionalised practise. None of the Swedish Housing First services has adopted Housing First by the book, but the core elements of the philosophy have been adopted. An evaluation of one of the Swedish Housing First services shows housing stability rates of around 80 per cent and that the tenants feel that their lives have improved in several respects.*

› **Keywords** *Housing First, housing policy, Sweden, secondary housing market, dissemination, path dependency*

## Introduction

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Interest in Housing First services as a response to ending long-term homelessness has grown during the past few years, not only in the US and Canada, but also in Europe. Housing First was first developed in New York in 1992 by the non-profit corporation Pathways to Housing (Tsemberis, 2010).<sup>1</sup> The increased popularity of Housing First services has been connected respectively to neoliberalism, marketisation of housing policies and the emergence of an evidence based practice movement (Hedin, Clark, Lundholm and Malmberg, 2012; Stanhope and Dunn, 2011; Willse, 2010). In particular, the themes of effectiveness and consumer choice, inherent to Housing First services, have been of great interest to policy makers (Stanhope and Dunn, 2011).

The aim of this article is to describe and analyse the emergence and translation of Housing First services in Sweden. Considering the fairly limited expansion of Housing First services so far, we discuss how this is to be understood in the light of the rhetorical drive towards evidence-based practise. In order to elucidate this phenomenon, we bring housing policy and the existing organisation of service delivery with homeless people into consideration. In the Swedish context, the spread and growth of Housing First services can be viewed as research driven. In many ways the stimulus for testing Housing First in Swedish municipalities was introduced by Lund University during 2009. The focus was on testing and translating the core principles behind the Pathways to Housing model, rather than importing an existing model without considering the local context. The reason for this was that previous research had identified many difficulties regarding the existing 'staircase' model.

Looking back over the last decade, it is evident that the ideas underpinning the Housing First approach were not new even in a Swedish context, but the years prior to 2009 were not the right time for change (Kingdon, 2003). In early 2001, the Swedish national homelessness committee published its final report with a policy recommendation that the right to housing should guide service delivery (SOU, 2001). The committee had introduced ideas similar to today's Housing First services by inviting experts from other countries that presented evidence from different projects; one of these was the so-called H13 project in Hanover (Busch-Geertsema, 2005). The H13 concept became extremely popular in Sweden, and many municipalities went to Germany to look into the project and thereafter they tried to import the model in very different ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Waegemakers Schiff and Rook (2012, p.5) argue that Houselink, a community organization in Toronto, has promoted housing as a right for people that had been discharged from psychiatric institutions during the last 30 years. It can also be argued that the Swedish housing policy since the 1940s has been built upon the idea of housing as a universal right.

Over the last decade, a growing body of research has shown the positive effects of Housing First services, particularly that Housing First can provide housing stability for people with a long history of homelessness with high support needs (Pleace, 2012; Waegemakers Schiff and Rook, 2012; McNaughton and Atherton, 2011; Pearson *et al*, 2009; Stefancic and Tsemberis, 2007; Padgett, 2007; Tsemberis *et al*, 2004). This group has been, and still is, mainly serviced by the shelter system in many countries (Knutagård and Nordfeldt, 2007; Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007).

On November 6 2009, the University of Lund arranged a national conference on Housing First with the express intention of raising the awareness of homelessness in Sweden, and at the same time promoting new ways of tackling homelessness. The idea was that the core elements of the Housing First philosophy could be valuable for policy making within the homelessness field in a broader sense, than only targeting a specific group of homeless people and providing them with clinical Housing First services (Waegemakers Schiff and Rook, 2012; Kertesz *et al*, 2009). The interest in the conference and the concept was very high, and two municipalities decided almost immediately to start up Housing First services on a small scale. The first one was in the capital of Sweden, Stockholm and the other in Helsingborg, a municipality in the southern part of Sweden. In order to distinguish different forms of Housing First services, the researchers from Lund formulated criteria that needed to be in place to make the service compatible with the Housing First services in other countries. Since most of the international research on Housing First is based on services in the New York model, the principles of Pathways to Housing were adopted: <sup>2</sup>

- housing as a basic human right
- respect, warmth, and compassion for all clients
- a commitment to working with clients for as long as they need
- scattered-site housing; independent apartments
- separation of housing and services
- consumer choice and self-determination

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<sup>2</sup> The principles were described as “Housing First according to Lund University”. Even though these were based on the principles of Pathways, the main reason for describing ‘Housing First according to Lund University’ was to make it possible to hinder the renaming process (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010). Suddenly any sublet tenancy was described as a Housing First apartment. Even shelters that were transformed from dormitories to single-bed rooms were described as Housing First. The major difference from Pathways to Housing was that Lund University promoted direct contracts in order to challenge the system with a secondary housing market. Previous research had shown that many people lived for years in these apartments without any need of support and they still were not allowed to take over the contract. It is also within the secondary housing market that the majority of the people defined as homeless live.

- a recovery orientation
- harm reduction (Tsemberis, 2010, p.18)

Some of the principles were adapted to suit the results from homelessness research conducted in Sweden. One of the challenges was how to incorporate the philosophy of the Housing First model into the secondary housing market and the 'staircase' model. One difference was that the idea of consumer choice was translated into a service user involvement perspective. The reason for this was that the idea of the client as a consumer has been criticised on the basis that a consumer has the option to choose the services that he or she can pay for, but a client does not have that option within the welfare system (Salonen, 1998). Before looking more specifically into the Housing First services developed in Sweden, we will discuss the Swedish housing system and how homeless people are provided for within this welfare system. Research on Housing First has primarily been conducted in the US, although this is now changing, and it is important to translate the ideas of Housing First to a national and even local context (Atherton and McNaughton Nicholls, 2008; Pleace, 2012). It is not only important to take into consideration how the housing policy is organised, but also the organisation and delivery of social services in a broad sense. The Housing First services developed by Pathways to Housing have targeted chronically homeless people, that is long-term homeless people suffering from severe mental illness often combined with substance abuse. Housing First services has been provided for other groups of homeless people, but it is not always clear how homelessness is being defined (Waegemakers Schiff and Rook, 2012; Pleace, 2012). The concept of chronically homeless people can also be contested since it implies that the person will always be homeless, and in that sense may construct the homelessness situation as an individual problem (Willse, 2010).

In order to clarify what we mean by homelessness in this article, we will use the definition adopted by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, which is divided into four categories:

1. Acute homelessness (4500).
2. Institutional care and category housing (5600).
3. Long-term housing solutions (e.g. the secondary housing market) (13900).
4. Short-term insecure housing solutions (6800) (NBHW, 2011).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The last survey was conducted during the first week in May 2011. In total, approximately 34000 people were reported homeless. The number of homeless people within each situation is specified in brackets.

The definition does not include, explicitly, inadequate housing. In the last few years inadequate housing situations among homeless families have been recognised in the research literature – especially poor quality temporary housing provided by the social services (Knutagård, 2009). These housing alternatives are supposed to be temporary – but homeless families have been living in damp, pest infested dwellings for many years. This has put social workers in an ambivalent position because they are: “often forced to choose [inadequate] housing solutions that they themselves regard as inferior, but still better than the situation in which the client is found. The form of housing to which the client is referred is then neither the most suitable nor the most desirable one, but what is available ‘here and now’” (Knutagård, 2009, p.291). This implies the necessity of a functioning housing market. We will now turn our attention to the specific housing regime in Sweden and discuss, briefly, the system shift in housing politics and the consequences it has had on the housing market.

## **A Corporatist Housing Regime**

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The Swedish housing regime can be described as a corporatist-housing regime (Bengtsson, 2006a). Rather than subsidized social housing, the Swedish model is based on public housing, where a large share of the rental housing market is owned by municipal housing companies (Schwartz, 1987; Pittini and Laino, 2011; Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2011).

One of the four pillars of the welfare state (Kemeny, 2001), housing has been described as the ‘wobbly pillar’ of the welfare state (Torgersen, 1987). That is, even if housing is seen as a universal right, housing is a market commodity and therefore it is market dependent (Bengtsson, 2001; Kemeny, 2006). Kemeny (2006) argues that this market dependency makes housing relevant to explore, since the relationship between the state and the market can elucidate the power relations that have an impact on housing. In the beginning of the 1990s, Swedish housing policy underwent substantial structural change. Housing policy was dramatically deregulated (Lindbom, 2001) and a very noticeable change for households in need saw the reduction of housing allowances. The only remaining policy after the dismantling was the so-called use-value system of rent regulation (Clark and Johnson, 2009, p.180; Hedin *et al*, 2012).

### ***The Swedish housing market***

A housing shortage exists in 135 of Sweden’s 290 municipalities. Eighty-nine per cent of the municipalities with housing shortage claim that it is particularly the case in the rental market (NBHBP, 2012). The decline in the production of new dwellings has put pressure on the existing housing market. The result is that overcrowding increases, but also speculation on the housing market, which could lead to a

potential burst of the housing bubble. There are differences between the housing systems in the Nordic countries. Sweden has the highest share of rental dwellings (40.3 per cent) and the lowest rate of owner occupied houses (36 per cent) in the Nordic countries (Bengtsson *et al*, 2006b; Statistics Sweden). Norway stands out as being the only social democratic home ownership society (Annaniassen, 2006). Bengtsson and Ruonavaara (2010, p.197) conclude that:

‘The point of departure of the Nordic project was the remarkable differences between the national systems of housing provision. Though housing policy in all five countries has been ‘social’, meaning that an important goal has been to provide decent housing to households of lesser means, the institutional arrangements chosen to achieve this goal differ fundamentally’.

At the same time housing researchers in Sweden pointed out that the Swedish housing market had become one of the most liberal markets in Europe. The reason for this is the lack of state regulation in the housing market (Lind and Lundström, 2007). This implies that the path dependency of the Swedish housing regime is undergoing dramatic change towards home ownership as the driving force (Malpass, 2011; Bengtsson, 2012; Ronald, 2008). The consequences of extreme home ownership policies, however, became obvious during the last crisis when the housing bubble burst in the United States – having a global impact in countries such as Ireland and Spain (Schwartz, 2009).

One trend in the housing market has been that the municipal housing companies have sold rental apartments to housing cooperatives. Due to new legislation, the municipal housing companies have to operate on a for-profit basis. As a consequence, the thresholds make it even more difficult to enter the ordinary housing market (NBHBP, 2010a; Olsson and Nordfeldt, 2008). Many municipal housing companies demand that the tenant should have a steady income, or a financial buffer of two or more down payments for the monthly rent. Many municipal housing companies do not consider income support as a steady income, which excludes an even larger group of people from getting a lease on the regular housing market.

## **Homelessness and the Secondary Housing Market**

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The model of homelessness intervention utilised by the majority of the municipalities in Sweden is often described as a ‘staircase model’ or ‘treatment first model’ (Sahlin, 2005; Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010). The logic underpinning this model is that homeless people are expected to qualify for housing by becoming housing ready. One of the arguments within this discourse is that the social services should not assist clients to fail the terms of the tenancy agreement by placing them in a flat of their own before the clients are able to live by themselves (Sahlin, 1996; Löffstrand,

2005; Knutagård, 2009). Instead, the homeless clients are placed in different forms of training flats where they are expected to “learn how to live” often without any real support in this “learning process” (Sahlin, 1998). The homeless clients are instead monitored and controlled by the social services in order to make sure that the homeless clients pay their rent and keep their apartment neat and tidy.

The difference between Housing First and ‘staircase’ / treatment model, is that in the former housing is seen as a necessity in order to make other changes on the path to recovery, while in the latter abstinence from alcohol and drugs is seen as a prerequisite in order to make the client progress within the staircase system. In Housing First services there is a clear distinction and separation between housing and support.

The secondary housing market can be defined as apartments that the social services lease from housing companies. These apartments are then sub-let to homeless clients. These types of contracts are often connected to different forms of special terms that dictate what the tenant can and cannot do in his or her own flat and the tenant does not have security of tenure. The lease is often on a monthly basis and the tenant can be forced to move with a week’s notice if they do not comply with the terms of the contract. The apartments in the secondary housing market are often spread out within the regular housing market, but in some cases the authorities rent blocks of flats where all the apartments are being used only for homeless clients.

**Table 1. The expansion of the secondary housing market in Sweden 2007–2012**

Year	Number of flats
2007	11 000
2009	13 400
2012	14 900

Source: The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning’s (NBHBP) housing survey (2008; 2010b; 2012).

On a national level the secondary housing market continues to grow (see Table 1.). A secondary housing market has been established in 228 municipalities (NBHBP, 2012, p.48). The evaluation of 23 projects funded by the Government’s homelessness strategy showed that the expansion of the secondary housing market was rapid (Denvall *et al*, 2011). Previous research shows that it is fairly easy to adopt a secondary housing market – however, once it is introduced it tends to grow and is very difficult to get rid of (Sahlin, 1996; 2007; Löfstrand, 2005; Knutagård, 2009; NBHBP, 2011b). Benjaminsen and Dyb (2008) argue that the evolvement of a secondary housing market in Sweden can explain the higher rates of homeless people, relative to the population, compared to the other Nordic countries.

The dilemma with the secondary housing market is that the rate of homeless people who will finally take over the tenure and get a regular lease is very low. Less than ten per cent of all clients are able to take over their own lease during a year (NBHBP, 2012). One reason for this is that homeless clients are often expected to live in their apartment for a two-year trial period before they are considered to be housing ready. For those who cannot comply with these terms, there are a range of different housing alternatives (e.g. hostels, shelters, category housing, transition apartments and training flats) organised as a 'staircase' model where the clients have to prove that they are ready for the next step. Thus, the emergence of Housing First services in Sweden should be seen in the context of the marketisation of housing policies, the deregulation of the housing market and the existing organisation of work with homelessness.

### **Dissemination and Implementation of Housing First in Sweden**

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As noted above, in 2009 a group of researchers at the School of Social Work at Lund University started work to disseminate Housing First as an innovative and knowledge-based model to combat homelessness in Sweden. By dissemination, we mean "active and planned efforts to persuade target groups to adopt an innovation" (Greenhalgh *et al*, 2004, p.582). Dissemination is differentiated from diffusion, which is a more passive spread of an idea. Implementation is achieved by mainstreaming an innovation within an organisation, and if the innovation has become routine practise sustainability has been accomplished (*ibid.*, p. 582). When analysing the emergence of Housing First in Sweden one could focus on the diffusion of the idea. But we can clearly see how key individuals within different organisations have played a vital role translating the concept of Housing First to fit their organisations (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson and Wedlin, 2008). Instead of using the more passive concept of diffusion, the active concepts of translation and editing can be used in order to put the actor in the foreground. These key actors can be described as champions or institutional entrepreneurs (Greenhalgh *et al*, 2004; Hardy and Maguire, 2008).

By organising conferences and publishing articles on homelessness and Housing First, this research reached a large number of municipalities, other agencies and organisations within the homelessness field. The School of Social Work also offered support to municipalities that were interested in setting up Housing First services. For instance, a network between the Housing First projects was established in order to facilitate a mutual learning process, discuss similarities and differences concerning methods used, challenges and lessons learned. Support has also been given to create common indicators and criteria for evaluating the projects. The work



has frequently given homelessness and Housing First quite a lot of space in newspapers and other media. Nowadays it is rare to discuss homelessness in Sweden without mentioning Housing First.<sup>4</sup>

In 2009 and 2010, more than 20 municipalities demonstrated an interest in establishing Housing First services. Politicians, housing companies, social service representatives and service user organisations among others, contacted researchers at the School of Social Work to discuss how to implement Housing First in their local context. Many municipalities also made official statements to the media that they were in the process of setting up a Housing First service in their municipality. The homelessness researchers were invited to several of these municipalities to provide information on Housing First at conferences, seminars and workshops.

Two municipalities, Helsingborg and Stockholm, started Housing First projects in 2010. Two years later Malmö and Karlstad followed, while three other municipalities were in the process of setting up Housing First services (Sollentuna, Uppsala and Örebro). The Housing First services in all these municipalities can be seen as pilots or small-scale services. None of the municipalities abandoned their existing organisation of work with the homeless, i.e. the 'staircase' model.

It seems that the dissemination of the Housing First approach has worked well, but the implementation process has been slow. In Denmark and Finland, Housing First services have been a part of their national homelessness strategies. No such strategy currently exists in Sweden. After the end of the last strategy, the government appointed a national homelessness coordinator to support municipalities in the work against homelessness. No funds have been allocated to initiate Housing First services. In contrast, €80 million have been set aside by the Finnish government for building new apartments in order to deliver on their strategy.

Why have only seven of Sweden's 290 municipalities started or decided to start Housing First services? What factors prevent the implementation of Housing First, given that it is promoted as an evidence-based and cost-effective method (Larimer *et al*, 2009; Gaetz, 2012)? The recent political climate favours evidence-based and cost-effective methods in health and welfare services – in other words – there should be preconditions for a successful implementation (Greenhalgh *et al*, 2004; Durlak and DuPre, 2008). However, this is not surprising. Implementing new methods in welfare organizations is a complex process (see for example Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984).

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<sup>4</sup> A Google search on the terms "housing first" and "hemlöshet"(= homelessness) gives 19 100 hits (January 2013).

The organisation of service delivery for homeless people in Sweden is characterised by a path dependency (Pierson, 2000), which makes it possible for the 'staircase' model to be reproduced regardless of the model's limitations (Denvall *et al*, 2011). An important basis for this path dependency is that the organisation of service delivery is strongly linked and structured around the secondary housing market, to which homeless people are referred and which also excludes them from the regular housing market. The 'staircase' model can be seen as an institutionalised practise that plays a key role in relation to the secondary housing market (Knutagård, 2009, p. 303).

The path dependency is reinforced by the existence of a range of actors in public organisations, as well as in private and non-profit organizations, involved in activities related to the 'staircase' model on the secondary housing market. Many municipalities have built up organisational structures with shelters and other types of short-term accommodations, which would be threatened if they introduced Housing First. In spite of the fact that social services see Housing First as a relative advantage, those that will not benefit from its implementation can contest the model (Rogers, 2003; Greenhalgh *et al*, 2004). Additionally, large portions of the services for homeless people have been outsourced to private and non-profit entrepreneurs, who have strong economic interests in the 'staircase' model. There are no reliable estimates of how much the services for homeless people in Sweden cost per annum. In Malmö alone, with 300 000 inhabitants, with 2 381 homeless people in situation 1–4, the various types of short-term housing solutions and shelters cost more than €19 million in 2012.

Another factor contributing to the path dependency is that service provision for homeless people is infused with moral perceptions about homeless people, which have an impact on how the services are organised (Sahlin, 1996). The core element of harm reduction within the Housing First philosophy challenges the traditional substance abuse work in Sweden, which is based on the requirements of abstinence and control.

We have conducted a review on the Internet of homelessness services in all of the 290 municipalities in Sweden. We investigated the municipalities' websites, searched for newspaper articles, blogs, etc. regarding homelessness and Housing First. In addition to the seven municipalities that already had set up or planned to set up a Housing First service, we found 18 municipalities where, during the last three years, they had had discussions about initiating Housing First services. We contacted representatives (politicians, social workers, etc.) from these 18 municipalities by telephone to inquire how the work on implementing Housing First had progressed. It turned out that the implementation process had stalled in all municipalities. The most common reason, as stated, was that the municipality did not have

access to apartments, and that the private landlords, as well as the municipal housing companies, were not interested in helping out with allocating apartments for the intended service. In some cases, we were told that the municipal representatives thought that Housing First would compete with their existing services, which they believed worked in a satisfactory manner. From an institutional perspective it is evident that the existing organisation of work with homelessness in Sweden can be seen as a mature field where widely shared norms and values exists with established patterns of how homelessness should be handled.

### **Housing First – The Swedish Way**

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As we have mentioned, four municipalities in Sweden have started Housing First services. In this section we will give a brief description of each (see table 2). The descriptions are based on a questionnaire that we sent out to the four services in November 2012. The Housing First services in Helsingborg and in Stockholm were up and running in 2010. The Housing First services in Karlstad and Malmö started during the second half of 2012. All services are financed with municipal funds. The Housing First services in Stockholm and Helsingborg should be seen as pilots. They are experimental projects that will go on for a couple of years. After the results from the evaluations have been presented and taken into consideration it will be decided whether or not the projects will be permanent services within the existing social service organisation.

The number of tenants who participate in the four Housing First services varies. In December 2012, Helsingborg had 15 tenants, Karlstad 3, Malmö 6 and Stockholm had 21 tenants. All services intend to increase the number of tenants. For example, in Helsingborg the goal is to have 25 tenants within the project period, but the allocation process is slowed down by the lack of available apartments. In all of the four Housing First services, the tenants are able to access support 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In many ways the support offered and the methods used are fairly similar in the different services. In Stockholm, Helsingborg and Malmö the social workers use Motivational Interviewing. In Malmö they also use Case Management, which is also the case in Stockholm. None of the four services use ACT-teams like Pathways to Housing. ACT-teams (Assertive Community Treatment) exist in both Stockholm and Malmö, but they are not incorporated in the Housing First services.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For a more elaborate descriptions of ACT, Intensive Case Management and Motivational Interviewing see the Housing First manual (Tsemberis, 2010)

**Table 2. Four Swedish Housing First Services.**

	<b>Helsingborg</b>	<b>Karlstad</b>	<b>Malmö</b>	<b>Stockholm</b>
Inhabitants	132 000	87 000	307 000	880 000
Number of homeless	878	260	2 381	4 059
Start	2010	2012	2012	2010
Project	Yes	No	No	Yes
Financing	Municipal	Municipal	Municipal	Municipal
Number of tenants	15 (the goal is 25)	3 (the goal is 10)	6 (the goal is 20)	21 (the goal is 30)
Type and extent of service to tenants	MI, 24/7	24/7	MI & CM, 24/7	MI & CM, 24/7

When we compared how the Swedish Housing First-projects related to the Pathways to Housing approach, we were guided by the criteria that Pleace (2012) used when he discussed various types of Housing First-services (see table 3). The aim of this comparison is not to test the services' fidelity, but rather to illuminate the similarities and differences between them.

The Swedish projects differ from the Pathways to Housing approach in two respects. First, the projects in Helsingborg, Malmö and Stockholm have explicit requirements that the tenants must be motivated to participate in the project. This means that a motivational interview is conducted in order to identify the tenant's potential for change. This selection of tenants does not imply that they have to be abstinent or willing to accept treatment. But the consequence of the referral process is that it is difficult to uphold a first-come, first-served practice. Similar to the Pathways to Housing approach, the tenant has to accept having regular contact with the social workers involved in the projects and to comply with the terms of his or her lease. Second, in these three projects, there is a trial period of one to two years before the tenants can get a lease of their own. During the trial period the tenant sub-leases the apartment from the social services similar to the system within the secondary housing market. However, there is a significant difference between the philosophy within the Housing First services and the secondary housing market. The Housing First services do not require abstinence from alcohol or drugs or compliance with treatment. In other words there is a clear distinction between housing and service. In these two respects the Housing First services in Karlstad is more similar to the Pathways to Housing approach – namely a first-come, first-served basis and with security of tenure from the start.

The Housing First services in Helsingborg and Stockholm target people with mental illness and problematic use of drugs and alcohol (situation 1), which is equivalent with Pathways to Housing. The primary target group in Karlstad and Malmö are also long-term homeless people with mental ill-health and problematic use of drugs and alcohol, but they can also have referrals from the other three situations of homelessness according to the definition.

**Table 3. Four Housing First Services in Sweden compared with Pathways to Housing (see Pleace, 2012).**

Service offered	Pathways to Housing	Helsingborg	Karlstad	Malmö	Stockholm
Target group	Sit. 1	Sit. 1	Sit. 1-4	Sit. 1-4	Sit. 1
Requirements to get housing	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Security of tenure	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Scattered-site housing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tenants have to stop using drugs	No	No	No	No	No
Tenants have to stop using alcohol	No	No	No	No	No
Harm reduction	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tenants have to use mental health service	No	No	No	Yes	No
Uses mobile teams	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Directly drug and alcohol services	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Directly psychiatric and medical services	Yes	No	No	No	No
Service brokerage	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Support to promote housing stability	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

With some exceptions, the Swedish Housing First services match the other criteria's of Pathways to Housing. This means that the apartments that the tenants get through the Housing First services are "scattered-site-independent housing" (Tsemberis, 2010, p.22). The projects are based on a harm reduction approach, which allows tenants to use drugs and alcohol. There are no requirements of the tenant to use mental health services, except in Malmö, where the tenant must comply with treatment if he or she is at risk of getting evicted. All projects, except Karlstad, use mobile teams in order to support the client in maintaining housing stability.

The support provided by the services is primarily delivered during regular business hours, but all Housing First services have staff available on call 24/7. All Housing First services provide service brokerage to support the tenants in their contacts with other types of agencies and organisations. The tenants can get direct psychiatric and medical services, and the Housing First services in Karlstad and Malmö also provides direct help with alcohol and drug services. It is important to note that the primary goal for the professionals within Housing First services is to support tenants in maintaining housing stability. In comparison to Pathways to Housing, the services provided in the Swedish Housing First projects are, in most cases, spread out within the existing organizational landscape. The possibility to swiftly deliver services that other agencies provide is more restrained than if an ACT-team is used.

Getting direct access to psychiatric services has been very difficult to achieve in a Swedish context, and the cooperation between social services and psychiatric services varies significantly between municipalities and also between different city districts within the municipalities.

## Promising Results

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The four Swedish Housing First services are currently being evaluated. Researchers from the School of Social Work at Lund University are responsible for a process evaluation of the Housing First project in Helsingborg, and one report has been published on the Housing First service in Helsingborg (Kristiansen and Espmarker, 2012). It is a qualitative study where tenants describe the impact Housing First has had on their lives, and how they view the social support that the Housing First services has offered them. The study is based on qualitative interviews with ten of the fourteen people who up to the summer of 2012, had signed a lease with the Housing First service in Helsingborg. Three out of fourteen clients had been evicted during the first two years of the project period. Even though the numbers are few, the housing stability rates are around 80 per cent. This is a promising result and it corresponds to the results from the Housing First service in Stockholm and from studies of Housing First services in other countries (Pleace, 2012; Busch-Geertsema, 2012). However, one should take into account that several of the eleven persons had lived in their apartments less than two years.

The preliminary results from the process evaluation show that the respondents felt that their lives had improved in several respects when given their own apartments. They stated that they have started to build up social relationships with people who are not homeless or using drugs. Most of the respondents who have children say that they now have better relationships with their children since they have a place to live and a place that they can turn into a home. Alcohol and drug use has declined, and some respondents say that they have decided to abstain from alcohol and other drugs. Several of the respondents are physically and mentally worn out after long period of homelessness. Some of them have chronic diseases, which became worse during their experience of homelessness. Having their own apartment gave them the opportunity to be able to rest, sleep and recover, which has improved their health.

Most of the respondents have not increased their incomes after they acquired apartments, but since they have pensions, income support or social security benefits their financial situation has improved. Having their own apartments means that they have somewhere to store their food and their belongings, and it enables them to plan ahead and to save up for the future. In terms of employment, some of the respondents have secured employment. But most of them are still not working,

which in most cases is due to injuries or chronic illness. Several of the service users say that they now have got the time and the opportunity to begin to engage themselves in voluntary organisations or leisure activities. Our findings are consistent with previous research. In a follow-up study of the re-housing of homeless people Busch-Geertsema notes that:

They have shown mainly positive outcomes even for many long-term and severely marginalized homeless persons – if those who need social support are adequately provided with it. On the other hand they prove that expectations should not be too high and – to put it drastically – re-housing usually does not make homeless poor people healthy, wealthy and – wise. Different degrees of relative autonomy and integration are achieved. (Busch-Geertsema, 2005, p.205).

The service users in Helsingborg present a positive image of the Housing First service, and the social workers involved in the project. Several of the service users feel that trust has been established between them and the social workers, which makes it possible for them to ask for help when they relapse or get into other difficulties without the fear of losing their tenure. The philosophy of Housing First seems to create the requisite conditions for establishing trusting relationships, which is an extremely important factor for success in social work (Kristiansen, 1999; Frank and Frank, 1991).

## **The Fine Line Between Translating and Renaming**

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One major challenge in a Swedish context has been the issue of security of tenure. In the secondary housing market, flats are sub-let to the homeless clients by the social services that rent the apartments from housing companies. Since Housing First services in Sweden have used the same form of contracts, with a few exceptions and different forms of contracts, some municipalities argue that they already have adopted a Housing First approach. By doing this they rename housing alternatives, that already exist, as Housing First type services without taking the principles of Housing First into consideration. Pleace (2012) concludes in his report on Housing First that ‘although there is some scope for flexibility, immediate access to housing, the separation of housing and support and a harm reduction approach are crucial elements of the Housing First philosophy and of the effectiveness of the approach’ (Pleace, 2012, p.45).

None of the Swedish Housing First services has adopted Housing First by the book. The core elements of the philosophy have been adopted, but the services provided have been adapted differently depending on the local resources within the organisational field. In this translation process, academics can play an important role stressing the crucial elements that Pleace (2012) puts forward. There is a need for

flexibility in the adaptation of Housing First services to a local context, but it is very easy for those working with homelessness to focus on ticking the right boxes in order to comply with the original model. But the nuances that play such an important role might be ignored. Therefore it has been important in a Swedish context to build up structures enabling mutual learning during the pilots. One challenge is to make the mind shift towards the underlying philosophy of Pathways to Housing.

## **Conclusion: Challenges and Implications for Practice**

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The four Housing First services that already have started and the three projects that are in the process of starting up Housing First services have incorporated the Housing First philosophy. They therefore have the potential to serve as interesting examples of how Housing First can be organised in a Swedish context. It is of course important to develop quantitative measures of outcome, but it will also require qualitatively oriented research in order to investigate the impact of Housing First, in various respects for those who are affected by the Housing First services – e.g. service users, social workers, landlords.

The continued development of Housing First in Sweden would be facilitated if there were better incentives for municipalities and organisations interested in establishing Housing First services. Organisational and financial resources are needed to stimulate the implementation of Housing First services, but the continued spread of Housing First in Sweden is not a question that can only be understood in terms of implementation. If so, we would have seen a more rapid growth of Housing First services in Sweden, given the shortcomings of the existing 'staircase' model that are so frequently adopted.

Sweden is experiencing a period of change within the welfare systems, having gone from a welfare state towards a welfare society (Hartman, 2011), and state involvement has been questioned (Rose, 1995; 1999). Since the 1980s, the governmental and collective responsibility for welfare and social development in Sweden has decreased considerably, while there has been an increasing emphasis on individual responsibility, decentralization and market solutions to solve various social problems (Dahlstedt, 2006). It is not an easy task in such a political climate to promote an understanding of homelessness as a housing policy issue and a question of rights, rather an a question of individual pathology. To do so requires new strategies and alliances, and acknowledging local differences in different countries, municipalities and organisations. It is not only a question of a new way of thinking about homelessness, it is also the challenge of providing services for homeless people that meet their needs, not the needs of service providers.



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