

## **Housing First Quality Recommendations**

In the past ten years, the Housing First principle has become the leading approach to dealing with homelessness in both North America and in Europe with Finland being one of the best examples of the comprehensive and successful application of the principle. You can find more information on the principle and its application in Europe, for example, in the Housing First Guide Europe <https://housingfirstguide.eu/website/>.

The aim of the quality recommendations is to highlight proven and successful ways of working in accordance with the Housing First principle, to complement and concretize legislation. The key laws guiding the work on homelessness in Finland are:

- \* Finnish Constitution (731/1999)
- \* Act of Residential Leases (481/1995)
- \* Act of Developing Housing Conditions (919/85)
- \* Social Welfare Act (1301/2014)
- \* Act of the Status and Rights of Social Welfare clients (812/2000)
- \* Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014)
- \* Personal Data Act (523/1999)
- \* Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999)
- \* Act of Private Social Services (922/2011)
- \* Act of Public Procurement and Concession Contracts (1397/2016)

The first set of guidelines for applying the Housing First principle in Finnish society was created in the Name-on-the-Door project in 2010-2012. The following five tenets were identified as the core of the Finnish housing first model: the philosophy of freedom of choice, differentiation between housing and services, rehabilitation and empowerment, integration into society and the structure of the Housing First model. The need to update and clarify the guidelines was highlighted when piloting floating support work between 2014 and 2015 in a co-operation between the Networking for Development project and the Paavo 2 program. Furthermore, more concrete guidelines were needed for client work on the application of the principle, and the appropriateness of certain tenets was questioned. Due to the feedback received, the process of compiling the housing first quality recommendations was initiated in 2016. The key objective was to update the guidelines to better meet today's needs and to support the application of the principles in practical client work and the planning of services. This further work was based on the outline made in the Name-on-the-Door project.

These quality recommendations were produced between 2016 and 2017 in a co-operation of a broad network of actors. The main forum has been an extensive team of experts in the Networking for Development project, which includes dozens of stakeholders working on homelessness in municipalities, organizations, foundations and with experts-by-experiences from all over Finland. The national Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland 2016-2019 (AUNE) has also been involved in the preparation of these recommendations. AUNE and the Networking for Development project organize peer reviews in which the relevance of the recommendations will be tested and may be further refined. In peer reviews, service providers will have the opportunity to obtain feedback on the realization of the quality recommendations and learn from other actors in the same field of work.

I recommend everyone to familiarize themselves with the recommendations carefully and to utilize them as part of the continuous development of operations. Quality recommendations are, above all, a tool for developing operations.

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## **1 Structure of the Housing First Model**

Clear structures, guidance and management create the prerequisites for systematic and successful operations, the realization of the Housing First principles and the individual needs of clients. The idea of continuous improvement drives the systematic development of operations.

1. The basic mission of the organization is clear to everyone in the organization and the values guiding the work are defined. The basic mission and values support the realization of the housing first principle and guide work in everyday life.
2. Client processes have been described and the descriptions also include practices of co-operation and the responsibilities of the actors.
3. The flats are located in areas with good public transport and as part of the community structure. The space solutions of the units also allow meaningful everyday activities to be carried out.
4. Employee resourcing is determined according to the needs of the clients and enables social rehabilitation of the residents. The person responsible for organizing meaningful activities is named and environmental work (neighborhood work) has resources allocated to it.
5. Personnel have at least a basic social and/or healthcare education and adequate expertise in the performance of their duties. Personnel have access to further training and work counselling. New staff will be familiarized with the principles of the work.
6. Pursuit of continuous improvement is an integral part of the work. The service provider collects feedback from clients, stakeholders and staff on a regular basis and the effectiveness of the service is monitored systematically. As part of the experimental culture, new ideas are tested at a low threshold in everyday life and feedback and results are actively utilized in the development of work.
7. Services for the homeless are based on client needs. People responsible for purchases ensure that they support the realization of Housing First and consider housing first quality standards.

## **2 Enabling Independent Living**

In housing first services, housing is based, per se, on The Act on Residential Leases, and the support services needed by the resident are agreed separately from housing. The goal is to secure housing.

8. In housing first the tenant has a lease based on The Act on Residential Leases. In exceptional cases (e.g. assessment units) housing is arranged in a way that better considers the customer's need for services.
9. Housing disturbances and other housing problems, such as rent arrears, are quickly addressed and people are supported to resolve the situation.
10. A service plan is jointly composed with the resident and it is regularly updated. If needed, the resident will receive service counselling and the personal worker will assist the resident to obtain to basic and/or special services.

11. The support service is flexible to the needs of the resident taking into account the equal treatment of the residents and their individual needs.

12. The continuation of housing is not linked to the receipt of services. Changes in the need for support do not, in principle, mean exchanging housing, and housing is ensured despite the end of the support.

13. Housing social work is also harm reduction. Participation in activities is at the discretion of the resident: the only responsibility that the tenant has is to manage their own accommodation and themselves.

### **3 Freedom of choice and opportunities to influence**

The resident can influence decisions about his/her life and give feedback. The feedback processes are clear, simple and reliable and the resident knows how the feedback is handled.

14. A resident is always invited to deal with matters concerning him/her.

15. The resident can influence the choice of housing (e.g. unit, scattered site housing, unit that allows/forbids the use of intoxicants).

16. The resident can influence the choice of services/activities that are most appropriate to him/her and is supported in making the choices.

17. The resident knows how to influence the issues of housing and community and the implementation and development of the housing services.

### **4 Rehabilitation and empowerment**

Rehabilitation and empowerment take place on a resident's own terms. Housing social work is presence work based on valued and equal encounter. It requires the abandonment of unnecessary power structures both at the organizational and individual level. Supporting rehabilitation and empowerment, the employee's role is to see and acknowledge even the smallest moments of success.

18. The interests and goals of the residents are actively discussed with the resident and new perspectives for rehabilitation are sought in dialogue.

19. The knowledge and ability of a resident is considered in everyday life and the resident is consistently given encouraging feedback on his everyday activities and successes.

20. Appreciation of the mutual trust and community spirit of all actors is reaffirmed. Residents are asked for feedback on a regular basis.

21. Residents are encouraged to take responsibility for their own lives whilst ensuring that the resident knows where help and support is available.

### **5 Integration into society and communities**

Home is the foundation for organizing life, experiencing participation and becoming part of the environment. Integration into the community starts from involvement in one's own life. Integration is also influenced by the ability to seek and receive help.

22. The resident can experience housing as a home, e.g. leases and administrative solutions support the continuity and permanence of housing. Possible changes will be implemented considering the needs of the resident and adequate support will be provided to the resident if situations change.

23. The resident receives support in participating in matters relating to his/her own life and in attachment to the surrounding community as well as in strengthening his/her contacts with natural networks such as family members.

24. In housing units, environmental work is done systematically and residents play a key role in its implementation. Residents and workers promote tolerance and prevent stigmatization in local communities and nationwide.

25. Stakeholders are jointly and actively seeking new opportunities to support inclusion and integration.