

Eco-Social Approaches in Housing First for Youth: The Critical Role of Social Workers in Europe/Approcci eco-sociali nell'housing first per i giovani: il ruolo critico degli assistenti sociali in Europa

Mattia Mansueto (KU Leuven)

This paper explores the role of social workers (SW) within the Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) programmes in Europe, using an eco-social theoretical framework. The study examines how SWs facilitate access to housing and provide continuous support to homeless youth, integrating social and ecological sustainability into their practices. The research underscores the significance of the eco-social approach, which balances human well-being with environmental considerations.

Through qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 30 social workers across five different European countries, the study identifies the multifaceted challenges faced by SWs, including institutional, organisational, and individual barriers. These challenges often stem from inadequate organisational support and resources, complicating the implementation of HF4Y principles. The analysis highlights the critical role of SWs in bridging gaps between various professional figures and advocating for systemic changes to support sustainable, long-term solutions for youth homelessness.

The HF4Y model addresses the growing housing crisis affecting at-risk and homeless youth in Europe. This study offers a comprehensive European analysis of the environmental aspects of HF4Y initiatives, highlighting the increasing understanding of the link between social issues and environmental sustainability. The research aims to uncover the challenges and opportunities for research, practice, policy, and education in social work within the current context.

The literature suggests that social work can contribute to ecological sustainability and social justice by integrating the ecological environment into practice, developing an eco-social practice, and promoting transformative ecological and social change. Furthermore, the inclusion of environmental justice in social work practice can address the current social challenges.

Previous studies have identified common challenges faced by social workers in HF4Y projects, emphasising the need to integrate environmental considerations. These insights are crucial for developing socially and environmentally sustainable housing solutions, ultimately improving the quality of life for youth. This highlights the close connection between social work and environmental responsibility in the modern context.

The findings emphasise the necessity of a holistic strategy for addressing youth homelessness, advocating for a more ambitious approach that recognises housing as a fundamental human right. The

results underline the importance of environmental aspects in HF4Y projects aimed at homeless and at-risk youth. This research highlights the need for a holistic and sustainable approach to supporting services for young people, showing the crucial role of social workers in addressing these emerging challenges within the themes of victim, guilt, and changemakers.

In conclusion, this research paves the way for a more environmentally conscious approach to addressing youth homelessness in Europe, contributing to the broader discourse on eco-welfare and the integration of social and environmental policies. This paper will be of interest to social work practitioners, policymakers, and researchers focused on housing, youth homelessness, and sustainable social work practices.