

A Way Home project

Recommendations & Conclusions after final A Way Home conference

(18 & 19 of February 2020)

The 18th and 19th of February, the A Way Home partners held a 2 days conference. The first day we presented the main conclusions and recommendations of the A Way Home project to an international public of 120 participants (government representatives, care service providers, federations, researchers, education, social housing, ...) These conclusions and recommendations were enriched by 6 workshops sessions on concrete programs working on different levels of prevention to end and prevent youth homelessness, given by international colleagues coordinating or supporting local and national A Way Home coalitions.

The second day, we presented the results of the Antwerp A Way Home coalition – Mind the Gap - to 150 colleagues from all over Flanders working in diverse sectors who want to set up to a local A Way Home coalition. During the workshops we presented the main [Mind the Gap actions](#).

The Austrian partners; Diakonie de la Tour and the Carinthian government; unfortunately had to cancel their local conference due to the Corona crisis.

Recommendations and Conclusions presented at the Final Conference

Strength-based after care policies

The voice of youngsters

Youngsters with an experience in care were involved during the whole project. The most crucial recommendations they gave to us are:

- Youngsters mention the relationship with the care worker as a precondition for succesful care leaving. This implies a permanent guidance, a trusting, warm and respectful relationship, available when needed and easy to reach and being able to keep in touch after leaving youth care
- The professional attitude that youngsters expect from care workers is positive, flexible and participatory: Guidance should be adjusted to the needs of the individual, letting the youngsters co-decide, listen to their wishes and being open and transparant about decisions, importance of a positive and strength-based point of view
- Youngsters need guidance in legal and administrative literacy, creating and upholding sustainable mental/emotional resilience, using leisure activities and holidays as a boost for self-worth and confidence, finding out who they are, getting lifestyle related tips and tricks, creating and managing a trusting network, preparing the step to adult care if needed and life coaching and connecting to future activities (work, study, ...)

Recommendations to care workers, service providers and their subsidizing governments on local, regional, national and European level

- Believe that young people in care can recover, reclaim and transform their lives:



- Invest in the relationship with youngsters; become ‘professionally close’ to them. Create stability in guidance (pursuit a low turnover of care workers involved in the transition of leaving care).
 - Support the youngster’s ability to take their life in their own hands.
 - Show them a belief in their capacities (without ignoring pitfalls and limitations).
 - Focus on strengths to help young people cope with pitfalls on their path (use the ideas of positive psychology).
- **Ensure that the focus is on individual strengths rather than on deficits**
 - To prepare people for life after care, they have to recognise their capacities.
 - Focus on strengths, do not ignore needs and difficulties.
 - Preparation for life after care, starts in care and preferably as soon as possible. Work on discovering strengths during the stay, use them to plan ahead.
- **Use the community as an oasis of resources**
 - Do not lose sight of the possibilities of the surrounding of the youngster, even if they are small
 - Connect the youngster to their network or help them build up one.
 - Invest in their social relations, both formal and informal.
 - Connect to adult care and social services, together with the youngster.
 - Combine methods that train skills and methods for reinforcing and enlarging the social network
- **Ensure that the youngsters voice is at the centre of the care process**
 - Listen to what they need, what they believe should be their future
 - Plan their future together with the young person, so they have something to look forward to.
 - Look for the condition to realise their dreams together.
 - Choose the method to prepare for care together with the care leaver, put them at the steering wheel of their path.
 - Be a traveling companion and point out their rights.
- **Realise that success depends highly on the case worker – client relationship**
 - Invest in the relationship with youngsters; become ‘professionally close’ to them. Create stability in guidance (low turnover).
 - Try to create a warm, relying network and be part of that network.
 - Be clear towards the young people about their upcoming in(ter)dependence
 - Build trust, so they can reach out if things turn out differently after leaving care.
- **Raise awareness and policy support**
 - Raise awareness for the voice of youngsters (e.g. look for funding for a special interest group on youth care experiences)
 - Call for policy to rethink laws and regulations on out-of-home care and make them (more) client friendly
 - Look for funding to have ‘after care time’, housing units, ...



- Improve the knowledge base by doing research and gathering data: collect data on the youngsters so there can be a better understanding on small interventions and on larger programs

Reimagining solutions to end youth homelessness

Recommendations to starting coalitions

- Install a human rights approach to youth homelessness prevention: Duty to assist
 - “When you see injustice, DO something about it” and “Duty to assist” are very strong baselines and motivators for a broad field of stakeholders to join forces in a coalition of the willing to end and prevent youth homelessness.
 - This coalition should work towards a statutory obligation, or a legal duty, requiring local authorities make reasonable efforts to end the person’s homelessness or stabilize their housing

- Build coalitions - based on equal relations – achieving collective impact
 - Youth homelessness is a fusion policy issue, meaning that the many systems that drive young people into homelessness must also be part of the solutions: the effort needs to come from various stakeholders, including public institutions and non profit service providers (youth, child protection, social services, education, justice, health, employment), private sector (landlords, private foundations, ...), research, ...
 - These coalitions are characterized by equal relations between youngsters, organisations, governments, civil society, researchers, .. in order to install a broad support base for a system and cultural change. The coalitions connect with local energy and good working networks.
 - The coalitions install 5 important basic conditions to reach collective impact: common agenda, mutually reinforcing activities, shared measurement, continuous communication and back bone support.

- Coalitions should define, implement and evaluate a plan to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness, in order to achieve collective impact
 - This plan should have effect on different levels of prevention: structural prevention, system prevention, early detection and intervention, eviction prevention and housing stabilization by enhancing prevention, after care, housing, support and system planning programs.
 - Integrate systems to measure what the effect is on the youngsters on the short, medium and long run

- Coalitions should install powerful youth participation / action by collaborating with young people with lived experience in planning, delivery and evaluation

- Coalitions should offer solutions tailored to the specific needs of at risk populations as LGBTIQ, migrants, youth leaving care, youth facing mental health and addictions, ethnic minorities/indigenous...



Six programs on different prevention levels to end and prevent youth homelessness from our international colleagues presented during the Conference

1. PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION IN POLICY AND PRACTICE: ESTABLISHING UPSTREAM CYMRU & CANADA – Hugh Russell, A Way Home Cymru

Hugh Russell explained that, thanks to the Upstream model, it is possible to identify and track down homeless young people, through monitoring within schools. Similar projects and initiatives have been implemented also in Canada, Wales and Australia. In order to achieve full monitoring, educational institutions submit questionnaires to students, with questions about their school situation, family environment, social inclusion, acceptance within the community and class, etc. The setting up of the survey is articulated in the following steps: schools submit the questionnaire to the students, they collect the results and then meetings with a staff of experts are scheduled.



2. THE RAPP & GOSCHA MODEL AS BASIS FOR STRENGTHS-BASED AFTER CARE POLICIES -Sharon Van Audenhove, Opgroeien / Sarah Debaets, Cachet / Wim Van Tongel & Gwendy Moentjens, AP University College

The Rapp & Goscha model is a holistic method for the care of children and young adults. The model is based on identifying the individual's strengths and on building self-esteem, in order to facilitate reintegration into society and the construction of supportive social networks. It is essential to remember that “people have the capacity to recover, reclaim and transform their lives” and that “the



community is viewed as an oasis of resources”, to focus on the individual’s resources rather than on deficits. In doing so, the development of a personal (and not only professional) relationship between the social worker and the caregiver should be carefully considered, in order to rebuild self-esteem and the skills needed to live and work independently. In this session, young care leavers, trainers of social professionals and policy makers presented the



most important outcomes of the use of the model in the A Way Home Project. They interacted with the public on different practices of effective strength-based after care policies.

3. SECURING PERMANENT HOUSING FOR YOUTH WITH HOUSING COUNSELLING – *Tiina Irjala, Finnish Youth Housing Association, Development Manager*

The Finnish Association for Youth Housing (NAL, a non-governmental, non-profit organization established in 1971) showcased youth housing policies adopted in Finland, where this leader association deals with:

- building houses for young adults between 18 and 29 years old;
- providing psychological and financial advice to residents;
- contributing to the development of internal housing policies;
- domestic training.

NAL's apartments have affordable prices and 15% of the places in each apartment are reserved for residents who need special support, in order to promote social inclusion. It also prevents evictions with early interventions on rent debts and problems with the landlord. Youth housing includes also a responsible resident selection process, orientation for a new resident, possibility of support, guidance and counseling and participation into decision-making in the housing community. The aim is to reach young people that are outside services and help them getting on the right track for the future.



4. ADDRESSING INEQUITY AND DISCRIMINATION: FOCUS ON LGBTIQ YOUTH – *Gregory Lewis, True Colors United USA, Executive Director and CEO*

Young people in the LGBTIQ community are 120% more likely to be homeless. Even so, care centers often do not implement specific programs to target their needs. This is one of the reasons why these young people do not feel safe to ask the centers for support and fear discrimination and violence. Lewis has therefore set the example of True Colors United, a U.S. nonprofit organization that addresses the problem of homeless youth and focuses on the specific needs of the LGBTIQ community. According to their studies, most cases of LGBTIQ youth homelessness are the consequence of family rejection and violence.

Some possible solutions to the above challenges could be:

- education on issues related to the concept of sexual orientation and gender identity, the use of the right pronouns...;
- a guide to data collection;
- the creation of inclusive spaces (e.g. gender neutral bathrooms);



- training for care centres and communities.

In conclusion, the US experience reported by Gregory Lewis provided an overview of the US approach to improve services for homeless people and to support the LGBTIQ youth community.



5. HOUSING FIRST FOR YOUTH - *Robbie Stakelum, FEANTSA*

The recognition of the right to housing is central to end and prevent the phenomenon of homeless youth, a condition that leads to difficulties in finding a job and in achieving social integration. The solution can only be found through collaboration between the public system and the various organizations working in the field, both on a theoretical and practical level. Some examples to guarantee the right to housing are:

- private individuals that volunteer to host the assisted young people;
- youth residences that offer a part of the beds to homeless young people, keeping them within a social community;
- municipalities that act as guarantors for the payment of rent.

Since 2015 FEANTSA has worked, using this model, with 42 young people: 32 people got tenancies and 13 accessed education and employment, maintaining a gender balance in the treatment of youngsters. The motto when undertaking this type of activity should be “give opportunity for a second chance without any precondition”.



6. OUTCOME-DRIVEN TACTICAL AND STRATEGIC LEARNING IN SOCIAL PRACTICES - *Ann Decorte, lecturer, social worker, and researcher Vital Cities at the University College of West-Vlaanderen (Howest)*

Ann Decorte explained how an outcome-driven tactical and strategic learning method can be employed in social practices. The workshop explored how to set up an appreciative learning process with all stakeholders, in order to co-create and to improve social practices, with the goal of enhancing their impact and understanding what works and why it works.



The basic concept that she highlighted was the one of assumptions. These can be distinguished between descriptive and prescriptive: the former derives from experience and leads us to investigate the causes of the problem; the latter, on the other hand, concerns the risks that we can predict and makes us focus on the actions that we must take to produce changes. In order to find a solution, it is important to understand what kind of presumption we have formulated. This is the starting point to understand why we do the things we do, in order to gain insights and learn how to evaluate our own social practices.



Inspiration day Mind the Gap (A Way Home Antwerp) – Some pictures



