

Summary

Project Homeless is a four-year national trial project carried out in seven municipalities and by four organisations. The project was completed at year-end 2004. The forerunner of the project can be read about in the White Paper, St. meld. nr. 50 (1998-99) the equalisation report in the chapter on homelessness (Utjammingsmeldinga i kapitlet om bosteds-løshet). The initial instigating documentation for a national project plan was prepared in 2000 by the Norwegian Department of Health and Social Security (SOS, from October 2004 Ministry of Work and Social Securities (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, ASD)). The project has been grounded in the Department of Health and Social Security, and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KRD). The Norwegian State Housing Bank, which comes under KRD, has led the project. The Directorate for Health and Social Affairs (SHdir) was established in 2002, and since then, SHdir has participated in the central management of the project. The Norwegian Building Research Institute has evaluated the project from the beginning. This is the fifth and final report in this evaluation² series.

The project has had the following goals (in brief):

- The Project – and the local projects – shall develop and establish housing solutions and models which will fight and prevent homelessness.
- To establish and try out various forms of assistance in the housing offered.
- To establish formalised mutual, cross-department services.
- That the Norwegian State Housing Bank allowance and loan schemes must be used.
- That the participants must collate experiences and disseminate these further during the entire project period.

The project has included the seven largest municipalities in the country: Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger, Kristiansand, Drammen and Tromsø. The seven municipalities have had one project manager and one project organisation. Three voluntary organisations, the Salvation Army,

² The Norwegian Building Research Institute: Evaluation of Project Homeless Start up Phase, Project Report 325-2002; Project Homeless Start up Phase Part 2, Project Report 343-2003; Project Homeless Interim Evaluation, Project Report 358-2003; Education in social housing – an evaluation, Project Report 366-2004

the Church City Mission and the Church Social Services, have participated with their own projects. The government, through the Norwegian State Housing Bank, have funded a project manager for each municipality (three for Oslo) and for the three organisations. In addition, the State has contributed operating funds for parts of the housing and services offered in the municipalities and organisations. The municipalities and organisations have used The Norwegian State Housing Bank's economic tools for purchase and/or building or renovating housing. Aktbo, a non-profit organisation, has received financial support directly.

The Project's primary target group has been the most disadvantaged homeless people, those with substance misuse or combined diagnosis substance misuse/psychiatric problems. The majority of the housing and services offered which are established in the projects, target the primary target group, but some target other groups. Oslo had four different projects. One of these, the Large Family Project, focused on large families from ethnic minority groups who were living in insecure and difficult conditions. Aktbo promotes a self-help philosophy and was thus markedly different from the other projects.

Five main conclusions and recommendations

Below, we present the five most important conclusions arising from the evaluation. The most important and overriding conclusion is that Project Homeless has been a success with regard to the central goals of the project.

1. The project has created acceptance for the right of homeless people with substance misuse or combined diagnosis substance misuse/psychiatric problems to have access to housing and services.

The project's starting point was that the municipalities and organisations should base the development work on the staircase of transition model. The basic concept in this model is that homeless people must *qualify* to receive housing; a viewpoint that is the opposite of the *right to housing*. The Project discarded this viewpoint at an early stage. But the goal that the municipalities should find models to counteract and prevent homelessness was maintained. This was an important aspect of the project. The focus on model development resulted in elevation of the work from simple measures to an all-embracing perspective on homelessness and the homeless people's need for housing and services. A development

project is not necessarily a guarantee that something new will emerge. A project such as Project Homeless could have ended with the municipalities doing much the same as before. Doing more of the same would not necessarily have improved the situation for the homeless. The project in itself was proof of the need for new practices.

In the first phase, in particular, of the project, the project managers and others connected to the project, discussed models and choice of model. Discussion centred on three known models; normalisation, tiered and staircase of transition. The last one, the staircase of transition, had been launched previously in the national Project Plan. The normalisation model has been the basis for de-institutionalisation over the last 25 years, both in Norway and in other countries. The tiered model is positioned halfway between these two.

We have previously systematised the three models using the criteria of goal, method and concept. Discussion at the beginning of the project was highly focussed on *housing* as the only criteria for choice of model. In this context this would mean looking solely at whether the client moves into housing immediately (normalisation), moves to a halfway house before ordinary housing (tiered) or progresses in steps from the one housing form to another (staircase of transition). But, of the three criteria for model categorization, *concept* has been the most important in Project Homeless.

The project's target group, the most disadvantaged homeless people, is normally considered the least deserving. It is precisely the discussions about, and the addressing of, what sort of *concept* housing and services for this group should be founded on, that have been critical in strengthening the group's right to housing and services. It can be discussed whether or not there is, in fact, a general "right to housing" today and if so, how strong it is. If looked at in relation to other groups who need help and support; homeless people are still less "deserving" than the elderly and handicapped, but they have undoubtedly strengthened their position. The data from the final evaluation reveals that a small group of the most disadvantaged still had not received a satisfactory offer.

Recommendation: The focus on the normalisation model must be continued and reinforced, both at a national and municipal level. Regardless of how the municipalities decide to organise the services and responsibilities for the target group, it is important to use the same approach in work with homeless people with substance misuse or with the combined diagnosis substance misuse/psychiatric problems, as in other welfare work. How this can be achieved is described in more detail below.

2. Project Homeless became a housing project.

This formulation could be considered as obvious. The central project plan does not, however, stipulate clearly that the municipalities and organisations have to find housing. The goal is formulated thus: “to develop and establish housing solutions”. Housing solutions are not necessarily houses. A housing solution can also be a place in an institution.

We find that there are two important reasons why the project became a housing project. The first is that the project was grounded in, and was led by, the Norwegian State Housing Bank. The umbrella project plan also stipulated that the Norwegian State Housing Bank’s schemes must be used. Use of the Norwegian State Housing Bank’s loan and allowances schemes are in themselves an important incentive to provide and establish housing. Grounding in the Norwegian State Housing Bank reinforces the focus on housing. We would also like to stress the importance of participation by the Ministry of Health and Care Services (later ASD) and the Directorate for Health and Social Affairs in the central project management, which ensured the necessary social political expertise.

The second important reason that the project became a housing project is that the normal life ideals, as we know them from other welfare sectors, gained ground. This is otherwise evidenced in point 1.

Nevertheless, we do find that several of the housing solutions in the project exhibit clear institutional characteristics, including high personnel ratio and use of conditional tenancy agreement housing which limit the rights of the occupant. It is important that people with a great need for help and services receive the necessary follow up. But, the housing must not be “institutionalised” more than absolutely necessary.

Recommendation: It is important that in the future too, the Norwegian State Housing Bank schemes shall facilitate that homeless people receive offers of housing and that the Norwegian State Housing Bank economic tools are adapted for this target group. It will be a challenge for both the State, represented by The Norwegian State Housing Bank, among others, and the municipalities to limit the “institutionalisation” of the housing offered. Evaluation should be carried out after two or three years and, in particular, should examine whether housing with conditional rental agreements has been more effective than housing with standard rental agreements.

3. Building competence has been important and necessary.

Part of the efforts to change attitudes and values in the work with homelessness has been to build up competence about the target group. The most important *single element* has been implementation of a one-year part-time study at Sør-Trøndelag University College (HiST). These studies, which included topics such as rejection and marginalisation processes, work methods, the politics of social and housing issues, and ethical problems, generated both new perspectives and new knowledge within social housing work.

The 50 students who started on these studies came from the project municipalities, the voluntary organisations and the Norwegian State Housing Bank. They acquired a common background giving an understanding of, and work with, homelessness. The studies were also an important step toward defining social housing work with the disadvantaged in the housing market as a separate *study and competence field*. The studies at HiST covered a far wider competence field than studies and courses in housing environment work which have been carried out, for example, at Oslo University College and internally in individual municipalities.

Expertise development and transfer to the project municipalities and between the State and the municipalities has taken place in various ways: seminars, coursing, study trips and committee/group work. The vertical and horizontal dissemination of this knowledge after completion of the project has not been secured through the implementation of any formal structures.

Continued competence building is crucial to maintain the positive results generated by the project and to disseminate these. The most important tool in spreading knowledge and results to other municipalities is by showing a “good example”. The “good example” can be understood variously, and also misunderstood. If the municipalities focus, for example, primarily on specialised technical solutions in housing or its location, then we have not made any progress.

Recommendation: The central elements must be to maintain a comprehensive education in social housing work which builds on and continues the studies at Sør-Trøndelag University College. The course must include new and more municipalities than the seven which participated in Project Homeless. It is important that central bodies at State and municipal level secure channels for competence transfer

between the various administration levels, internally in the municipalities and across municipalities.

4. The results from the Project appear to be implemented and grounded in management in the municipalities and professional departments.

The projects in the municipalities were grounded in departments or groups with an interest and desire to do something for the homeless. The projects in the municipalities also had a steering group with members from administration management and various groups or departments. The function of the steering group was to ground and implement the project in the municipal administration and professional departments. In the voluntary organisations, the project was either grounded in a professional department or directly in administration.

One of the difficult aspects of an evaluation of the trial is to decide whether, and to what extent, the results of the project are grounded at levels and in departments with the power and authority to continue operations. The conclusions in this report are based on data collation in the final evaluation. The data reveals that the results from the project are reasonably well grounded.

A questionnaire answered by the bodies connected to Project Homeless in the municipalities and the voluntary organisations, as well as to the social welfare departments in the project municipalities, reveals that these have differing perceptions of whether the results achieved will be permanent. We have divided the respondents according to two goals. The first is the degree of contact with the clients. The second is where in the municipal organisation the various bodies are positioned. The data reveals that bodies with little or no contact with clients have the greatest confidence that the results will be permanent. And conversely, bodies with some or a great deal of contact with the clients have less confidence that the results will be permanent.

Further, the data reveals that members of the steering groups have the greatest confidence that the results will be permanent. These bodies are positioned at the highest level in the municipal system and have the authority to ensure continuation of these results. Service providers working with the clients are more pessimistic with respect to continuation. One possible explanation is that they understand how much effort is needed and, at the same time, know that the client group is "low status" in the help apparatus, and cannot themselves comprise a pressure group.

The belief of the professional bodies and municipal administration that the results are permanent, is nevertheless an important conclusion. But there is still cause to note the pessimism in the first-line services, amongst those who work with the clients.

Recommendation: Even if central bodies in the municipalities believe that the results are permanent, follow up of and incentive drivers for the municipalities will be necessary. One example of the latter could be re-direction of funds dedicated to the efforts to fight poverty (allocated by the Directorate for Health and Social Affairs) to the work with homeless people in the municipalities. Another form of incentive could be funding for earmarked positions for specific tasks for a set period. Monitoring the field, for example by regular registration of the number of homeless people, could also be another follow up tool.

5. There has been too little room in the project overall for other groups than the primary one.

In point 1, we stressed that it was extremely positive that the most disadvantaged group has received an offer and, not least, that there is increased acceptance for the credence that this group has a right to housing and services. At the same time, there has been little room for client groups and other homeless people who do not fit the category of most disadvantaged: substance misuse or combined diagnosis. The clearest example of this is the self-help organisation Aktbo. Aktbo's goal is that members, through joint self-initiated activities, shall acquire housing across the market. At the same time, it is clear that Aktbo cannot achieve this without help and support from the authorities.

Aktbo has, rather than participating in the project, been a type of affiliated member. The organisation has received support for organisation development through the Norwegian State Housing Bank. But Aktbo has not participated in the common fora for the project managers in the municipalities and organisations or other bodies. As project participants they have been invisible.

Large families in Oslo have also been a clear part of the project. But as a target group, large families from ethnic minorities, which this project has targeted, had little room. The explanations are undoubtedly that the group does not belong to the primary target group and the project work has not been directed at establishing own housing with follow up, but was rather to help families find permanent solutions to their housing problem.

During the course of the project, we have pointed out the risks of restricting the definition of homeless and making it synonymous with homeless people with substance misuse and psychiatric problems. It is important that the Norwegian State Housing Banks schemes provide sufficiently for all groups of disadvantaged. In general, one can choose how to define “homeless”. It would be a paradox if Norway ends up with a narrower definition than the other Nordic countries.

Recommendation: those responsible for registering homeless people must ensure that the definition of homeless is not too restricted, but includes all who are in fact homeless. New efforts targeting homelessness must include a wider selection of homeless people. This is not an academic debate about definition. It is about ensuring that all people who are homeless are given adequate and appropriate help.