

The implementation of Housing First in Spain. Innovating social work practice and training

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Ethical issues: teaching ethics and being ethical teachers

Abstract

This paper presents some problems and dilemmas raised by the development of Housing First oriented programs in Spain focusing mainly on the professional practice and training of social workers. We draw our data from an evaluative research project we are developing in Barcelona, interviews with practitioners in Montréal (Quebec, Canada) and a review of literature

Housing First projects are targeted at homeless people with severe mental health and/or addiction problems. This approach was first developed in New York in the 1990s as an alternative to the “staircase of care” model. Its main feature is offering access to a private home from the very beginning which isn't subject to the usual conditions of accepting or following treatment or other behavior requirements. It considers the access to housing as an entitlement and a key element for the recovery of service users. Thus, access to services has to be adapted to the needs, preferences and rhythms of people.

Our paper shows that developing this kind of practice in a context where service users' entitlements have been usually weak and subject to a high degree of institutional discretion is a challenge for social workers. This kind of practice requires a strong engagement of social workers that have to cope with a greater proximity to service users and need to develop a more creative and reflexive approach to practice.