

Introducing HOOD

The HOOD project started in 2020. Involving six partners from five different countries and three associated partners, it aims at promoting the importance of early intervention and at developing a new methodology based on Dialogical Practices and on the Enabling Coplanning Approach in the work developed with homeless people. Insights, reflections, and tools from these approaches will be adopted by professionals in their daily work, exploring how can social work make homeless people regain power over their lives and their futures.

The Importance of Early Intervention



The importance of early intervention to tackle homelessness is an assumption that is receiving increasing attention. According to the *Homeless Hub* «early intervention is a means of “preventing escalation”. It aims to stop someone from becoming so entrenched in homelessness that it becomes almost impossible for them to leave this condition». Indeed, the time spent in streets and shelters contributes to people’s worsening of mental and health conditions, network deterioration, and loss of capabilities and self-esteem. Developing systems able to detect people at the very moment they experience homelessness and offering them valuable timely solutions should be a fundamental goal for tackling homelessness.

An effective approach to early intervention needs several elements besides the time of the action. It calls for solutions promoting rapid rehousing and shelter diversion and person-centred tools (e.g. the *Personalised Budget* adopted in London). It also needs an effective relational approach for social workers, so that they can sustain homeless people in gaining power over their own life and future. Valuable experiences in this field have adopted the “Case Management” and the “Strength-Based Approach”.

These kinds of experiences and the spread of the Housing First programmes developed in the professionals community the awareness that the same services’ functioning could paradoxically be a source of disempowerment of homeless people. For instance, the traditional approach based on people’s problems produced labelling, limiting people’s options, and avoiding the recognition of their capabilities and opinions. “When people act as experts on resolving the problems of others, we deny those facing the problem the opportunity to participate, take control, and learn” (*McCashen, 2008*).

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Developing Enabling and Dialogic Approach



Aware of these critical points, the HOOD project focuses exactly on the approach social workers adopt in dealing with homeless people. The HOOD project aspires to develop person-centered interventions, capable of strengthening one's ability to gain power over him/her life and self-determination. To this aim, throughout the project's life, we will adjust two working methodologies developed in other social fields for early intervention with homeless people: i) the Enabling Coplanning, firstly developed in Italy for addressing disabled people and ii) Dialogical Practices coming from the mental health sector in Finland.

Enabling Coplanning is a methodology born by the need of professionals to find tools for promoting disabled people's right to develop full citizenship. It is based on the personalised project, but the relationship, the power redistribution, and the network are its key devices. Enabling Coplanning aims at guaranteeing that marginalised people can live their life and their citizenship in a fully unrestricted way. Power redistribution is core to this process: "enabled" people do not necessarily have more abilities than when we met them, but he/she necessarily has more power over their life. Dialogic Practices, developed by J. Seikkula, B. Alakare, and J. Aaltonen (Seikkula, Arnkil, 2006) have been key instruments for Enabling Coplanning. Dialogical Practices, first adopted in social psychological settings, offer insights and tools for social intervention where both parts involved are in an equal relationship. None of them can give the real, ultimate, and true account of the event or situation. Moving from these assumptions, Dialogic Practices enable the development of relationships among professionals and welfare users that do not disempower them but take into consideration their own life's vision, desires, needs, strengths, and projects.

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HOOD partners



The HOOD project aims at adapting these methodologies to the work developed with homeless people, by using an approach of early intervention. Throughout the three-year-long project life, the methodology will be adopted and fine-tuned by practitioners from four different countries.

The organisations involved differ from each other as regards their mission, dimension, intervention, and specific target.

Klimaka is a Greek Athen-based NGO proactive in the provision of mental health services and the promotion of social inclusion for marginalised groups. It works with people from socially excluded groups, such as those

suffering from mental illness, refugees, asylum seekers, Roma, and since 2000 with homeless people, implementing an integrated programme to provide specialised services to them. **Sant Joan de Déu Serveis Socials (SJD)** has been working with homeless people in Barcelona since 1979. It aims at sustaining homeless people in maximizing their potential, working on their freedom and community resources. To do that, SJD expanded its housing programmes, according to the housing first and housing-led model. In Danish “Udenfor” means “outside”. **Projekt UDENFOR**, an NGO based in Copenhagen, chose this name to underline that its professionals literally work outside: outside in the street, outside the official public system, with people who are “outsiders”, marginalised by society. Their work is based on two pillars: the outreach work and the knowledge-gathering, dissemination, and debate-creating activities on the homelessness issue. Finally, **Ufficio Pio della Compagnia di San Paolo**, leader of the HOOD project, is an independent operating body of the Foundation Compagnia di San Paolo, specialising in the issues of poverty, social exclusion, and inequality. It works mainly in the metropolitan area of Turin, developing projects dealing with various kinds of economic and social inequalities in innovative ways. Since the 2000s, it supports homeless people through an approach of rapid rehousing and capabilities promotion.



The professionals engaged in HOOD will adopt the Enabling and Dialogic methodology in their daily work, exchanging doubts, reflections, and insights among themselves on an online Intervision platform. Differences among the various organisations involved represent both a challenge and a resource for the HOOD partnership: indeed, they allow to collection of heterogeneous data on the feasibility and potential transferability of the methodology.

The whole process of target profiling, methodology adaptation, and fine-tuning will benefit from the supervision of the two HOOD scientific partners. **CESIS, Centro de Estudos para a Intervenção Social (Centre for Studies for Social Intervention)** is a Lisbon-based independent organisation of researchers from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, concerned to promote evidence-based, policy-relevant research at both national and European levels. Among other areas, CESIS has remarkable expertise in poverty and social inclusion, mobility and migration, and homelessness. The **DiVI- Centers for Studies on Rights and Independent Living of the University of Turin** is an Italian research center that has been developing and implementing the Enabling Coplanning approach with organisations targeting disabled people for several years.

Besides them, associated partners with a core role and expertise on the homelessness issue cooperate with the HOOD project, engaged in a reciprocal sharing of knowledge. **FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless**, is an umbrella network with over 110 members from 28 different countries. FEANTSA promotes the work of its members and advocates for the fight against homelessness among EU institutions. Moreover, it undertakes and disseminates contemporary research and knowledge on the topic, to raise awareness and expertise among professionals, policymakers, media, and citizens. **Fio.PSD, Federazione Italiana Organismi per Persone Senza Dimora**, is an analogous entity in the Italian national context. With 125 members from different areas of Italy, it played a central role in the promotion of Housing First in Italy and in the development of the first national policy for tackling homelessness. Finally, the HOOD project sees the participation of **HOGAR SÍ**, a Spanish NGO born in 1998 that works at the national level to promote, through advocacy and interventions, the struggle for ending homelessness. The associated partners will sustain the HOOD project

through feedback and debates concerning outcomes and findings and promoting their dissemination among other realities engaged in the homelessness issue.

Further and updated information on HOOD's development will be available on the website: www.hoodproject.org, where the possibility to subscribe to the project mailing list is provided. The website also includes a section called "bites". As the name suggests, bites are more informal and briefer considerations coming from HOOD's development that may help other practitioners, policymakers, researchers and citizens to understand our work. Finally, as the dialogic approach will lead our project, we will always be happy to share our next steps with whoever is interested: do contact us!

McCashen W. (2008), *The Strength Approach*, Victoria, St. Luke Innovative Resources.

Seikkula J., Arnkil T. (2006), *Dialogical Meetings in Social Networks*, London, Routledge.

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