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Housing First  
Pilot Project Vienna





neunerhaus  
Housing First Pilot Project  
Report

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Imprint

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## A RECORD OF OUR SUCCESS: THE NEUNERHAUS HOUSING FIRST

PILOT PROJECT (STARTED 09/2012)


**HOUSING FIRST:** Support to allow formerly homeless people to live independently in their own home.

**ERST WOHNEN:** neunerhaus-led platform of 17 real estate agencies providing affordable housing in Vienna.

### DURATION OF THE PILOT PROJECT

 **3**  
years

### FUNDEED BY THE VIENNA SOCIAL FUND (FSW):



 **490.000**  
annually

### CAPACITY TO SUPPORT

 **50**  
households

### ACHIEVEMENTS (at 20 March 2015)

#### RESIDENTS RECEIVING SUPPORT:

 **84** adults  
 **47** children

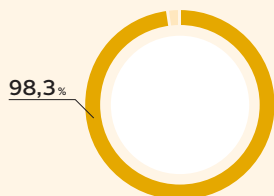
#### HOURS OF SOCIAL WORK PER WEEK:

 **156**  
hours



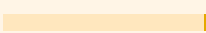
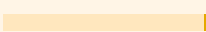

#### NUMBER OF HOUSING UNITS WITH TENANTS

 **58**  
flats rented

#### VALID TENANCIES DURING AND AFTER SOCIAL SUPPORT, AS A PROPORTION OF ALL TENANT AGREEMENTS (IN PERCENT):



#### NUMBER OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AGREEMENTS COMPLETED FOLLOWING TENANT ENTRY INTO THE FLAT:

Current tenancy agreements:	15	
Where support was ended following a joint agreement	12	
Evictions	1	
Deceased	1	
Total	17	

#### MEDIAN DURATION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT UNTIL MOVING INTO THE FLAT:

 **2,10**  
months

#### AVERAGE LENGTH OF SOCIAL SUPPORT:

 **15**  
months

#### FLATS ACQUIRED BY ERST WOHNEN:


 **74**  
apartments

#### NUMBER OF HOUSING INDUSTRY COOPERATING PARTNERS:

 **17**  
Partners

#### AVERAGE MONTHLY RENTAL COSTS (including service charges and VAT):

 **289,75**  
39 m<sup>2</sup> flat

 **425,14**  
66 m<sup>2</sup> flat

×  
Years of the  
Housing First  
Pilot Project



## DEAR READERS

The Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe (Viennese Assistance Programme for Homeless People) provides a range of services for the psychosocial stabilisation of homeless citizens. Professional advice and social care are on hand to facilitate their (re)integration into the housing market.

Until very recently, it was a common assumption that homeless people could only be granted their own secure and permanent place to live once they had completed a given period of stabilisation in a transitional housing facility. At that time, they received support from professional social workers and supervisors, and were given the time and opportunity to work on their problems and to prepare for independent living.

Paradigm Shift. Housing First completely turns this concept around: permanent accommodation is available right at the beginning of social care, rather than at the end. There is no temporary sheltered accommodation phase. Instead, individuals receive “training” to live independently when they are already inside the comfort of their own four walls.

Inspired by the convincing results of evaluations of Housing First projects in other cities, the debate about providing Housing First for homeless people in Vienna began in 2011. Accordingly, a line-up of stakeholders from the health and social sectors discussed issues such as “what structural framework is needed for Housing First?” and “what care standards are necessary for its implementation?”. The outcome of the expert discussions was the “Housing First - The Viennese Model” report, that was compiled and published in October 2012.

Successful Implementation. The neunerhaus Housing First project is based on the results of this report and it has been professionally implementing the standards developed in it on a daily basis for over two years. In doing so, neunerhaus applies the principles of Housing First in practice with outstanding commitment and determination. The results clearly speak in favour of the project and the approach followed: 98 percent of the Housing First project clients are still in their home after completion of their social support. The fact that for the duration of the project, the Vienna Social Fund did not receive a single official complaint about the Housing First service users from local residents is an endorsement of the success of their integration into the local environment.

I would like to thank neunerhaus for putting this highly innovative project to support homeless people into practice. I wish the Housing First project and all its service users all the very best for the future and I wish readers an exciting and informative reading experience as they get an insight into this project in the pages that follow.



**Kurt Gutleiderer**

Head of the Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe  
(Viennese Assistance Programme for Homeless People)



## INNOVATION FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE

DIRECT TENANCY AGREEMENTS, SOCIAL CARE SUPPORT THROUGH EVERYDAY LIFE: LET US END HOMELESSNESS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE WITH HOUSING FIRST.

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Many people feel uneasy talking about homelessness. We are, understandably, afraid of ending up in the same situation and we do not wish to confront our anxiety directly. Just the way we talk about the facts says more about ourselves than it does about them. So it is often with the subject of homelessness.

**Qualitative assistance.** Many people have a distorted image when they think of homelessness; it is all about it being “their own fault” and is often associated with laziness. The reality, however, is different. More and more working people earn salaries below the poverty threshold, despite being in full-time employment. At the same time, rent prices are on the increase. Homelessness now affects an ever broader segment of society, and in neunerhaus we see that increasing numbers of single parents, working people and families are applying for our support. The stigmatising image of homelessness also leads people to think that they don’t want “those people” living in their neighbourhood. One forgets that “those people” are like you and me: they have social relationships, they have desires for their own lives and they have their own opinions about life. It is therefore essential to be transparent about the reality behind the word “homelessness”; because it is so difficult to stand up for the qualitative needs of homeless people in public.

That is what we are doing with this report about the Housing First pilot project that has been running in Vienna for about three years. We are extremely committed to providing quality and professional help to build a tighter social network that does not just provide emergency help for one night, but helps long-term to get homeless people back on their feet - to offer more than just a roof over their heads.

**Housing First works.** We are proud that the Vienna Social Fund (FWS) has agreed to fund the implementation of this innovative approach, in accordance with the recommendations of the current coalition city government. Homeless people are provided with the right flat to suit their income, and social workers are on hand to support them throughout everyday life; at any time and for as long as necessary, but for as short a time as possible. The fact that this innovative idea works, was shown after the first three years; we have supported 131 formerly homeless people into independent living. The success speaks for itself: 98 percent of the individuals receiving social support live in their own homes. The success of Housing First, however, depends on the availability of affordable housing. That is why we are equally proud that the neunerhaus platform, ERST WOHNEN, works so well with our partners in the housing sector. At the time of going to press, we have acquired 74 affordable apartments through our project partners. This shows great confidence, not only in us but also in “our” former homeless service users, who are now tenants.

We are very proud of all that has already been achieved. A huge THANKS goes to all of our employees and project partners, the City of Vienna and the Vienna Social Fund.

Best wishes from the neunerhaus management team,



Markus Reiter



Christa Weißmayer



✕  
Percent  
Success Rate

## GAINING INDEPENDENCE STEP BY STEP

EVA MAAS\*, A 28-YEAR-OLD SINGLE MOTHER, HAS BEEN LIVING IN AN AFFORDABLE APARTMENT AS AN OFFICIAL TENANT WITH HER TWO CHILDREN SINCE THE BEGINNING OF 2014 AND HAS BEEN RECEIVING SOCIAL SUPPORT FROM THE HOUSING FIRST TEAM.

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Eva Maas\*, a 28-year-old single mother, has been living in an affordable apartment as an official tenant with her two children since the beginning of 2014 and has been receiving social support from the Housing First team.

Eva Maas has a smile on her face. She talks about her favourite place in her flat; she feels most at home on her comfortable sofa in the living room, surrounded by pictures and carefully chosen ornaments. These home furnishings now provide her with emotional security and individuality, but it was not always like that.

When Maas was still living with the father of her children, he was responsible for the family and the home income. That he had not paid the rent, contrary to his assertions, was a fact that Maas only discovered when they were evicted. The relationship ended. From one day to the next, she found herself alone with her children. Eva Maas moved into sheltered accommodation for mothers and children. Then, with her new partner, whom she met shortly thereafter, she moved into a form of assisted living. Everything went well for a year. But then came another blow: her partner died unexpectedly in his sleep in the shared apartment. A sudden shock.

Maas left the flat that was full of memories. “I couldn’t stay there”, she says. Her mother offered her a place to stay with her, but that did not work out. “Once again, I was completely alone and homeless with my children. Where could I go?” recalls Maas. With an emergency bed at a parent-child home and on the couch at the home of a good friend, she was able to keep her head above water. At the same time, her social worker at the youth welfare office helped her to register for Housing First. The first phase of social support began. The flat that became available was negotiated through ERST WOHNEN., It did not entirely cater for all of the needs of the small family, “But”, says Maas, “I was so happy to finally get the chance to have a flat. You cannot imagine how much!”

What are the advantages of having your own home over the mother-child facility? Maas has to ask again to make sure she has understood the question properly. The answer seemed quite obvious to her, “the most important factors for me are my peace and privacy, and the chance to make my flat as beautiful and clean as I want it to be. And, we finally have a home.”

\* Name changed.



## GETTING THROUGH EVERYDAY LIFE TOGETHER

SOCIAL WORKER CHRISTINA LINCK HAS BEEN SUPPORTING EVA MAAS SINCE EARLY 2014.

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“When I first met Eva Maas, I saw a young, confident, energetic woman with high expectations; she only wanted the best for her children”, says social worker Christina Linck, who has been supporting Eva Maas since the beginning of 2014. The range of tasks is broad, ranging from correspondence with authorities through official channels to the practical and financial organisation of childcare for her children. “It’s mostly about everyday tasks. As Eva Maas moved to Austria when she was younger, I supported her in overcoming language barriers and helped her navigate her way through the Austrian social system” she explains. “And since she has never been in the position of being completely responsible for a home, we are building up the necessary knowledge about the system together.”

A recurring challenge for Maas is the fact that questions sometimes have more than one correct answer. “Multiple options are not easy to spot, and often bring the agony of choice with them”, explains Linck. “My goal is to assist Ms Maas in the understanding of these issues and to ensure that she is able to decide for herself. After all, Housing First is all about becoming self-reliant. I therefore intervene as little as possible on her behalf.”

And it works. Maas can now solve more and more everyday problems by herself, and requires less help. Meanwhile, she now believes herself capable of living independently in her flat, and can close the Housing First social support arrangement.“ Her case history illustrates that it is even possible for a single mother with a huge amount of stress and strain to learn to become self-reliant within a short time, and that Housing First does not become a first step into a long history of social support”, explains Linck. In her role as a social worker, she initially ensures that she is well received and her services are well used, but as time passes, however, the objectives change. For the Maas family, this means that “When I am no longer needed, we have achieved our goal”.

✕  
Service  
Users





## **“A GREAT FEELING”**

**HERBERT BREUER\*, 59 YEARS OLD, HAS BEEN IN THE HOUSING FIRST PILOT PROJECT SINCE 2014.**

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“Basically, neunerhaus saved my life” says Herbert Breuer, who moved into the neunerhaus in Hagenmüllergasse in 2011, before the start of the Housing First project. At last, things were starting to get better in his life. A few years earlier, he divorced from his wife and not only lost his house, but also his job. “I ended up on the street with two suitcases”, he says. “Then I started drinking” says Breuer, “because nothing mattered anymore”. He slept on friends’ couches and every so often in emergency shelters or on the streets. He became more and more dependent on alcohol. He received treatment, which helped him bring the addiction under control. In the meantime, Breuer heard about neunerhaus and got lucky; he was able to move straight into an apartment that had recently become vacant.

With the group of residents on his floor, he soon shared much more than just the hallway. The roommates got on well together, and had a real laugh. Yet, they knew inside that they would not live together like this for much longer, because not only did they share the view from the row of windows on the fourth floor of the block, they also had the shared goal of living independently again. Today, each member of the group has their own home. “We still keep in touch”, says Breuer, who was transferred to the Housing First project and has lived in a small flat in the 10th municipal district of Vienna since September 2014. They regularly meet up at the hot-dog stand around the corner from their former residence.

Although Herbert Breuer does still reminisce about his time in neunerhaus Hagenmüllergasse, he is glad to finally have his own “normal” flat after so many years. “It’s an absolutely fantastic feeling. You come home, shut the door, and that’s it. Nobody knocks on the door and I’ve finally got peace and quiet.” His main contact person is his social worker Helga Gaber, whom he speaks to mostly by telephone, with personal meetings being held either in her office or with him in his flat. “But I do most things myself. That is also the main goal, that I will soon be able to do everything independently” says Breuer. When asked whether he would have thought himself capable of doing all this when he was lost and living on the street, Breuer answers “Straight away would really have been best. Housing First is a truly tremendous idea”.

\* Name changed.



## WELL INTEGRATED IN THE NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD

HELGA GABER, SOCIAL WORKER, NEUNERHAUS HOUSING FIRST

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“Mr Breuer is a natural communicator”, says Helga Gaber. Since August 2014, she has been supporting him in his everyday endeavours, and she is his contact for everything to do with his housing needs. “I like how thoughtful he is. He finds it easy to approach people, finds common ground with them and gets on well with everybody. This is a resource that can work in his favour while he is settling into the new living environment”, says Gaber.

Even if Breuer says how he appreciates having found peace and quiet again in his own home, he fits in well in his neighbourhood. “He brings a good social network with him. His income situation was reviewed by my colleagues at the neunerhaus Hagenmüllergasse. My role is to assist him in dealing with official agencies and authorities, in addition to the intensive period with many meetings and appointments required before the tenancy contract on the flat”, explains the social worker. Due to his chronic poor health, Breuer receives income support from the MA40 department of social services, and he is obliged to have his health condition and capacity to work reviewed annually. “This brings uncertainty, and if his income is reduced, then this could, in the worst case scenario, put his flat at risk. This is a great responsibility for him, and I offer my support, among other things”, she says.

From a social worker’s point of view, Gaber finds Breuer’s transition from the homeless shelter into the deinstitutionalised Housing First setting amazing. “Who can tell us better than Mr Breuer whether the pilot project is working, what the advantages of having your own home with social support are and whether our innovation is successful? He knows both.”

## HOUSING FIRST – THE VIENNESE MODEL

THE IDEA BEHIND HOUSING FIRST ORIGINATES IN THE USA. THE CITY OF VIENNA BROUGHT HOUSING FIRST TO AUSTRIA IN 2010. READ HOW THE PROJECT BEGAN HERE, INCLUDING THE FIVE BASIC PRINCIPLES, AND FIND OUT WHY YOU CAN “ONLY LEARN TO SWIM ONCE YOU GET IN THE WATER”.

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Since Mr K. has had his new apartment, he has been happy again. He no longer wants to be reminded of the nights that he spent on a park bench on the Danube Island; of the times he had to repeatedly beg friends for a place to sleep, and of the small locker in the homeless night shelter in Vienna that housed his few personal items. K. worked his way out of this dilemma, step by step, above all because he wanted to be able to have more contact with his son again at last. Today he lives with his son, who moved in with him, in a small Housing First flat in the 11th municipal district of Vienna. When his little boy is doing his homework and watching TV in the afternoon, K. goes about his favourite pastime, which is baking. “I really missed that while I was homeless”, he says.

**Housing First is the new system for combating homelessness in Vienna that has made this possible.** A homeless person is able to move into affordable housing, is supported by social workers and learns how to live independently again. Housing First has already been very successful. Studies have shown that the housing retention rate (those who are still living in their homes) after six years, is around 90 percent. This convinced the Vienna Social Fund (FSW) and the Vienna city government; in 2010, the Social Democrats and Green Party coalition governing the city signed a decree agreeing to implement this approach for homeless people in Vienna. In 2011, neunerhaus published the “Housing First in Vienna” study. FSW and social welfare experts published the feasibility study, “Housing First - The Viennese Model” together in 2012. neunerhaus was commissioned to implement the project and so the pilot project began. At the same time, neunerhaus founded the ERST WOHNEN platform, the project that would find affordable housing for the future service users. In October 2012, K. was the first person to move into his own Housing First home.

**What is new about Housing First?** In many countries, the “staircase approach” is used for homeless people: service users are first provided with a place to sleep in an emergency shelter. Here, they receive help for their urgent needs and are then, in the majority of cases, moved into transitional housing. During this period, they are offered help to address and manage any problems they may have had which originally led them into homelessness. Only then, once they have proven that they are “housing ready” (capable of living by themselves), are they given their own flat. Their own home therefore comes at the end of the social support process.

**Housing as the first step** – this is the Housing First principle. After all, if you want to learn to swim, you have to get in the water first. Housing First is based on the premise that every human being is able to live in housing, and has this right to do this as well. It has several advantages which can be seen right away: not having to move between different services avoids repeated upheaval. Even when the social support ends, the tenancy agreement remains in force and the residents stay in their homes. In this respect, Housing First offers a long-term, sustainable perspective for the future, right from the start.



Housing First also separates the tenancy arrangement and the provision of social support. In sheltered housing, the organisation providing support or supervision is usually also the landlord. In Housing First, these elements are strictly separated. The landlords are housing management companies, as is usual with most flats in Vienna. This arrangement means the conditions governing the social support are fundamentally different: enforcing sanctions, such as a ban from entering the house, are simply not in the social worker's repertoire. The focus is on self-reliance and self-determination, as neunerhaus project manager Claudia Halbartschlager explains in her interview (pp. 20 - 21).

**Overview of the pilot project.** Since the launch of the Housing First pilot project, 84 adults have been provided with housing to allow them to live independently again: 46 women and 38 men, with 47 children living with them. The figures confirm the success of the project here in Vienna over the course of the first two and a half years. At the time of going to press, a total of 15 social support cases had been successfully closed, representing a success rate of 98 percent of the individuals housed, who continue to live stably and independently in their homes. Positive interim results were also provided by the accompanying social scientific evaluation by the L & R Social Research Institute (see pp. 26 and 27). This confirms the view that Housing First is the right path for homelessness services to take in the future.

**In Vienna, there are over 10,000 people who need support from the Viennese Assistance Programme for Homeless People.** The number is growing: this is due to increased rents, falling incomes and ever more unstable employment contracts. The Assistance Programme for Homeless People cannot cope with this challenge by itself. New approaches, such as Housing First, help those needing services as quickly as possible, and enable them to live independently again. The success of this social work innovation, however, stands and falls – as with all housing programmes – by the availability of affordable housing.



## HOUSING FIRST IN NEUNERHAUS

PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING, SELF-DETERMINATION AND INCLUSION: HOUSING FIRST UPHOLDS KEY SOCIAL WORK OBJECTIVES.

### SELF-DETERMINATION

BEING FREE TO MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS ABOUT YOUR LIFE.

Housing First changes homelessness services: it means a move away from shelters and working towards getting people into their own homes with more flexible and adequate support. This also means a paradigm shift for social work. The array of problems and issues that arise through placement in institutions, and their socially stigmatising effects, are therefore avoided. The Housing First approach thus helps to better achieve goals that are inherent to the profession of social work.

**Social work promotes participation.** Participation means a person being able to become actively involved in making decisions that affect their lives and social circumstances. Participation presupposes self-determination. It is widely assumed in our society that the ideal of “responsible citizenship” is easy to achieve. If we look more closely, however, we see that there are often structural factors that impede and prevent self-determination.

Self-determination in the Housing First approach means that tenants enter into their own entirely separate rental agreement that is independent from neunerhaus. This separate tenancy agreement has a direct effect on the relationship between the tenant and social worker, allowing them to engage in negotiation processes on an equal footing. On this basis, participation and shared responsibility in social work are more easily achieved.

### PARTICIPATION

BEING ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES THAT AFFECT ONESELF AND ONE'S SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

Participation is a key component of Housing First support. With the support of the social worker carrying out tasks, from organising meetings to deciding on social care objectives, shows service users how negotiations can be achieved and that participation in decision-making is possible. It cannot be assumed, that everyone has the required skills (making decisions, expressing oneself clearly) and therefore cooperation with the social worker ensures that these skills are continuously developed and improved in the service user. Participation and the proficiency for participation rely upon each other.

### DEINSTITUTIONALISATION

ABOLITION OF SEGREGATED LIVING ARRANGEMENTS FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS.

Group settings are also useful because they help people experience participation and develop skills. There are opportunities for participation in communal life within the institutions; for example, regular meetings of people living on the same floor or in the same house. However, the structures of Housing First make these settings obsolete. The focus moves to the co-creation of the service provision itself: participants can provide helpful input that specifically works towards the further improvement of the service provided.

These participative settings have the objective of enabling people to defend their own interests in society (again), actively, responsibly and autonomously. In this sense, participation is not limited to deciding on the services provided by neunerhaus, but is intended to apply to decisions having an effect further afield. The tenants should be empowered

to participate in decision-making in society. In this sense, participation is conceived as being closely linked to democracy and inclusion.

Social work promotes social inclusion. Social inclusion means being accepted for who we are in society, and being able to participate actively in it. An inclusive society is achieved through a continuous dismantling of social barriers, symbolised for example by special schools for children with disabilities or placing people with mental health issues permanently in isolated institutions. Homeless people also find it difficult to participate in society if they are accommodated in institutions.

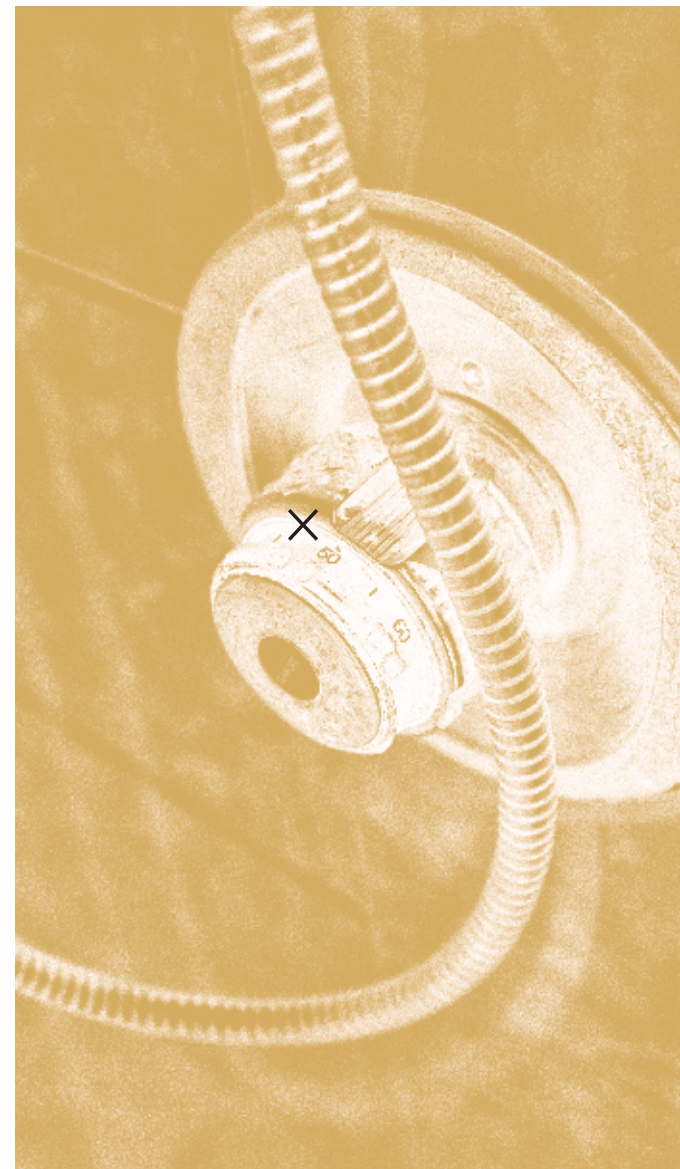
**INCLUSION**  
**HAVING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**  
**TO PARTICIPATE IN SOCIETY**

In contrast, the Housing First approach promotes de-institutionalisation and emphasises the fact that, if they receive sufficient support, every human being is capable of living independently. Accordingly, the flats come with “ordinary”, legally-bound tenancy contracts. Housing First therefore pursues the goal of an inclusive society. For social workers, Housing First means that they can concentrate on other important issues, such as helping service users feel included in the neighbourhood and find employment.

**Social work is taking sides.** In addition, this separation of living and social support allows social workers to literally take sides. This means that they accept the lives of the service users, are “on the service users’ side” and provide them with support options that help them extend their agency. In this spirit, the things life can throw at us are not just accepted uncritically, rather they are questioned and often addressed directly. For example, if a tenant falls behind with their rent, the social worker supports them in their correspondence with the landlord to arrange a reasonable repayment plan. The need for confidentiality about the underlying problems is complied with, but the problems are actively discussed and dealt with together as part of the support provision. It is the same when the social support comes to an end: the tenancy agreement is upheld, and vice-versa: lease expiration or eviction does not mean the end of support through social work.

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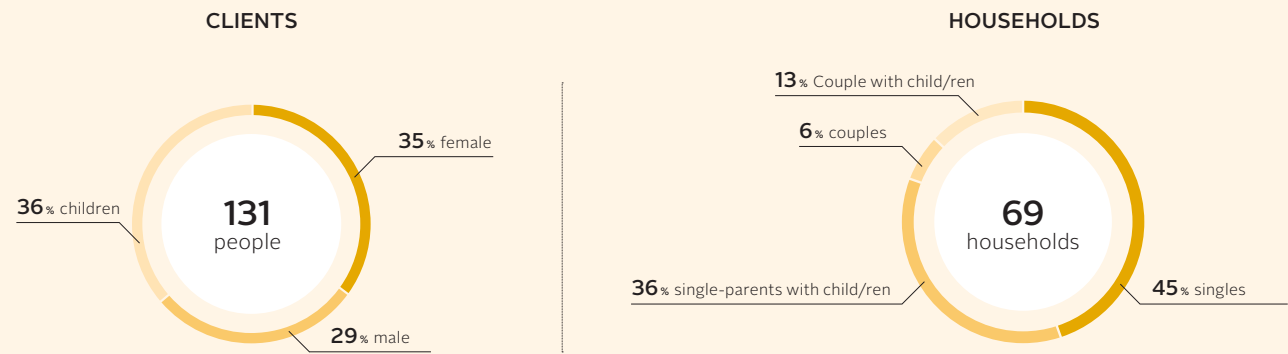
Capacity to support  
households



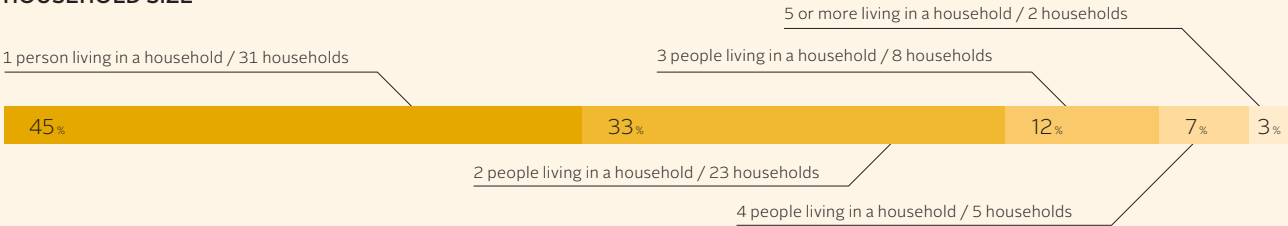


HOUSING FIRST IN FIGURES

REPORTING PERIOD: 1.9.2012–20.3.2015



HOUSEHOLD SIZE



HOUSEHOLD INCOME

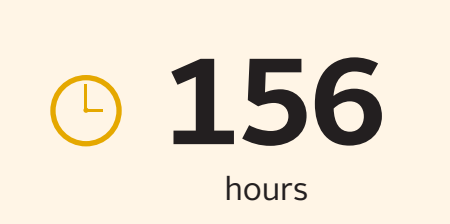
Income from employment or transfer payments such as unemployment benefits, means-tested basic benefit income, including child benefit, housing benefit and basic subsidy for housing costs (12 times per year, average value):



LIVING SITUATION PRIOR TO HOUSING FIRST SOCIAL SUPPORT



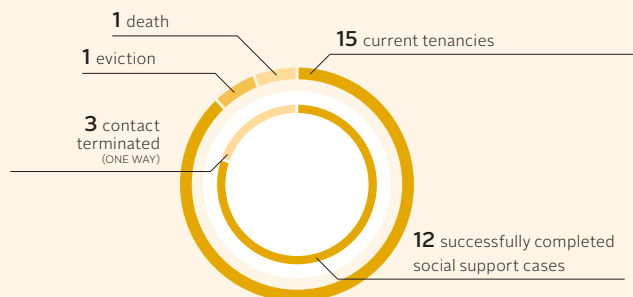
WEEKLY HOURS OF SOCIAL WORK



NATIONALITY  
Total: 84 adults



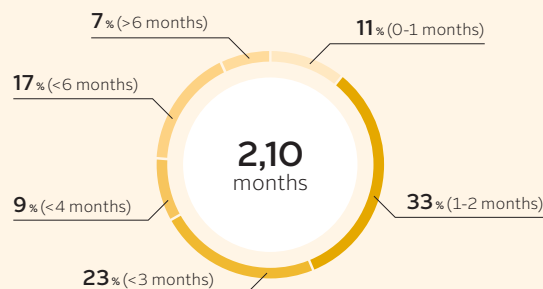
## COMPLETED SOCIAL SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS:



Number of tenancy agreements during and following social support, of all Housing First flats negotiated:

**98,3%**

## DURATION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT FROM FIRST CONTACT UNTIL MOVING INTO NEW HOUSING MEDIAN: 2.10 MONTHS



Length of time to move into the new flat:

Shortest: 21 days

Longest: 10 months

## CONTACT PER MONTH AND HOUSEHOLD

☎ 5 telephone or personal counselling sessions

💬 3 social work interventions, for example, contact with property managers, authorities.

In months with a higher number of new rental agreements or service terminations, the average number of contacts was higher.

## TOTAL LENGTH OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

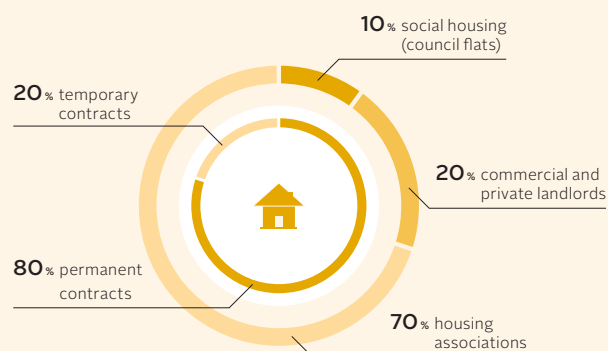
**4 TO 27 MONTHS**

(flexible care duration)

**AVERAGE: 14.9 MONTHS**

## HOUSING

Overview of the landlord arrangements



## ERST WOHNEN ACQUIRED FLATS:

**74**

## AVERAGE FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION:

**€ 3.170,-**

## AVERAGE DEPOSIT:

**€ 824,-**

### 1-BEDROOM FLATS

Number: 40

✂ Size: 38.6 m²

✂ Gross monthly rent (incl. VAT + SC): € 287.17

✂ Deposit: € 721.73 (18 flats)

✂ Financial contribution: € 2,928.10 (21 flats)

### 2-BEDROOM FLATS

Number: 20

✂ Size: 50.09 m²

✂ Gross monthly rent (incl. VAT + SC): € 357.89

✂ Deposit: € 943 (8 flats)

✂ Financial contribution: € 3,027.97 (12 flats)

### 3-BEDROOM FLATS

Number: 12

✂ Size: 65,75 m²

✂ Gross monthly rent (incl. VAT + SC): € 425.14

✂ Deposit: € 790.69 (7 flats)

✂ Financial contribution: € 4111.74 (5 flats)

### 4-BEDROOM FLATS

Number: 2

✂ Size: 85 m²

✂ Gross monthly rent (incl. VAT + SC): € 548.50

✂ Deposit: € 1394 (2 flats)

## “HOMELESS PEOPLE DO NOT NEED TO BE FORCED TO ACCEPT SOCIAL WORK”

HOUSING FIRST PROJECT MANAGER CLAUDIA HALBARTSCHLAGER LOOKS BACK AT TWO AND A HALF YEARS OF THE PILOT PROJECT, SUMS UP INITIAL FEARS THAT HAVE BEEN DISPROVED, TALKS ABOUT SOCIAL WORK STANDARDS, AND EXPLAINS HOW IT IS EASY TO REACH 50-PERCENT WOMEN, EVEN WITHOUT QUOTAS.

### PARTICIPATION

PARTICIPATION: A PILLAR OF HOUSING FIRST.

**You have helped to integrate Housing First into neunerhaus. How do you currently rate its progress?**

Very positively. We have successfully introduced Housing First in Vienna and can confirm that this approach is ideal for a large number of homeless people and a variety of social support issues. This proves that providing social work for homeless people

is a natural and logical step. That is to say, our social support is not directly connected with housing accommodation. Our clients have an independent tenancy agreement that is separate from the support that they receive from neunerhaus; thus the threat of the housing being taken away cannot be used as a

bargaining chip by support services. This is a huge step towards self-determination for homeless people! We can provide reassurance that the chances of a client immediately breaking off contact with social support right after receiving the flat keys are minimal.

**When your tenants contact you and your team, what are the issues they ask about?**

Mostly questions about financial matters, about living and rent, as well as health, social relationships, looking for a job or legal issues.

**Housing First prompts social workers to completely rethink help for homeless people. What is new about it?**

Empowerment, participation and genuine respect for privacy. This is only possible when someone has their own home, and can decide when to go in and out of it, how to decorate it and can furnish it the way they want to. Service users also have a say in whether, and to what extent they require support, and whether this contact is conducted in the form of home visits, accompanying them to appointments or at meetings in our office. We also have to accept when service users wish to terminate their contact with the social support. Participation means that we work together – on an equal footing – when we plan the support agreement. Participation affects the objectives, focus and intensity of our social support.

**Is Housing First suitable for all homeless people?**

Yes. In the pilot project, we made it available to people from the widest possible range of circumstances - whether they were in emergency shelter accommodation and had lived on the streets, had just been evicted or had been discharged from halfway houses, had lived in an institution for a long time or had been sleeping on a best friend's couch. These are different forms of homelessness. Housing First is a great housing offer for all these target groups, that can be tailored to all needs, from individuals to families with children. It is not the case that we were only able to support people in straight-forward situations successfully and we found this out after often long and intensive social support provision. If necessary, our network is able to liaise with other services and organise help to address the specific needs of the person and support them through a difficult phase in their lives.

### BROAD TARGET GROUP

HOUSING FIRST IS THE SOLUTION FOR A BROAD RANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES; FOR ALL THOSE WHO: ARE IN UNSTABLE, PROVISIONAL HOUSING SOLUTIONS OR EMERGENCY SHELTERS; HAVE BEEN EVICTED OR ARE LIVING HALFWAY HOUSES OR HOSTELS .

**Two thirds of homeless service users are male. Is this proportion reflected in the Housing First project?**

It is interesting to note that we support 50% women. This is without quotas and in



cooperation with colleagues from the Advice Centre for Homeless People, a FSW facility, which organises access to the pilot project with us. For me, this is a sign that we offer adequate services for both sexes and for people in different circumstances. In addition, our focus is on gender-sensitive work, and we respect pluralism in terms of living concepts and gender and support individual autonomy and empowerment in this area, such as in terms of avoiding precarious situations with tenancy agreements.

**What can people expect from the social support provided by your team?**

We start with an intensive evaluation phase before the tenant moves into the flat, which lasts an average of two to three months and is when the criteria for a suitable apartment are worked out together: what is “affordable” and what is the objective of the social support. Finding the right accommodation is paramount; for example, if children come to visit at the weekend, there are specific requirements for the layout of the rooms. In the second phase, once the contract is signed and the flat is occupied, support becomes based more on each individual day of the person's life and their housing. We adjust the intensity of the social work based on the circumstances, which can vary from case to case.

**50% WOMEN**

**GENDER SENSITIVE SOCIAL WORK  
SUPPORTS EMPOWERMENT AND  
AUTONOMY**

**What happens if the rent is not paid?**

We have entered into cooperation agreements with our partners from the housing industry. This states that the tenant gives consent for the landlord to inform us if the rent is unpaid within the first month of the arrears. We then act as promptly as possible, making contact with the service user and working out a repayment plan. This might, for example, include payments in instalments, yet these need to be realistic. We offer them our support and encouragement, so that they can contact the property management company and remain able to act. Therefore, we are able to avoid an eviction notice. For all our 58 leases, we have only ever had one eviction notice; we do not want to conceal this fact, as transparency towards landlords is important.

**What does Housing First have to do with the issue of affordable housing?**

It begins with the placement in a flat, where we and the ERST WOHNEN platform help service users overcome these first hurdles. Just think, some people have to go to flat viewings with dozens of tenants, cannot provide the usual payslip, but can only show notification of unemployment benefit or income support, with their current address being a homeless shelter; it is more difficult for them right from the beginning. It is therefore important for us to have the backing of the MA40 – the municipal department for social welfare, social and public health law – to provide financial contributions or assistance with the flat deposit. We then have to react quickly once the right flat has been located. Affordable housing is related to having a permanent tenancy agreement, because a temporary rental contract may result in many areas of uncertainty and tension.

**ERST WOHNEN**

**PLATFORM FOR THE ACQUISITION OF  
AFFORDABLE HOMES FOR HOUSING  
FIRST, CURRENTLY WORKING WITH 17  
PARTNERS IN THE HOUSING INDUSTRY.**

**Finally, is it possible to forget how to live in a home?**

No. What do you need to live in a home? That's easy to answer – a home. Housing is a fundamental right.

## AFFORDABLE HOMES FOR HOUSING FIRST

ERST WOHNEN IS THE NEUNERHAUS PLATFORM OF 17 PARTNER COMPANIES IN THE HOUSING INDUSTRY WHO ACQUIRE THE FLATS FOR THE HOUSING FIRST PROJECT: A STRUCTURED FORM OF COOPERATION, PROVIDING STABLE TENANCIES FOR BOTH LANDLORDS AND TENANTS.

### ERST WOHNEN

NEUNERHAUS HOUSING ACQUISITION PLATFORM, WITH 17 PARTNER COMPANIES IN THE HOUSING INDUSTRY

Creating affordable housing is the long-term solution to combating homelessness. As obvious as this seems, its implementation is only viable if enough affordable housing is accessible to those people who need support. This illustrates how closely housing and social policies are related. There is currently a deficit of at least 500 housing

units per year for the needs of the Wiener Wohnungssloshilfe (Viennese Assistance Programme for Homeless People). This challenge needs to be addressed by all housing bodies: council housing construction, housing associations and the private real estate industry if there is to be a reduction in homelessness. Hence the foundation

of the ERST WOHNEN project in 2012 by neunerhaus, in cooperation with the sBausparkasse savings bank, the ÖVW Austrian Housing Construction Enterprise and the WBV-GPA Housing Union for Employees, a platform that acquires and provides suitable housing via partnerships with developers. This provided the funding for the pilot phase of Housing First, which the FSW (Vienna Social Fund) used to pay for social work for 50 households, in order to make suitable and affordable housing available to service users. At the time of going to press (April 2015), a total of 74 flats had been acquired through ERST WOHNEN.

**Not an easy task:** Housing First supports tenants to regain their ability to pay for their own housing costs, and complete other tasks, autonomously. Yet, while rents continue to rise, more and more people are being confronted with insecure employment contracts, declining incomes and low rates of social transfer benefits. House-

holds at risk of poverty must therefore pay unacceptably high housing costs, equalling an average of 43% of their income. Those receiving the means-tested basic benefit in Vienna are eligible for the basic subsidy for housing costs: a total of € 309 for a household of one to two inhabitants and € 324 for households with three

or four people, to help cover housing costs. The current market prices for private lettings are no longer feasible, and at the same time, homelessness is unnecessarily prolonged by a lack of access to affordable housing. neunerhaus is campaigning for affordable housing for these people, and advocates permanent rental contracts whenever possible, that are drawn up directly between landlord and tenant. The priority is to have permanent housing and self-determined living.

€ 6,88

AVERAGE COSTS PER SQUARE METRE, PER MONTH (INCL. SERVICE CHARGES AND VAT)



X

HOUSING UNITS  
ACQUIRED BY  
ERST WOHNEN

**Strong partners.** It takes much more than just an estate agent to achieve all of this, considering the limited availability of housing. As a social organisation with strong links to partners in the housing industry, the ERST WOHNEN platform can successfully address the interests of service users and work together with them to help them overcome obstacles to the housing market. It does this through targeted acquisitions and long-term cooperation, along with raising awareness about common interests and concerns. To strengthen links within the housing industry, a company, mmb wohnen GmbH, was commissioned to implement ERST WOHNEN in 2014.

**THERE IS A HUGE POTENTIAL FOR  
THE PROFESSIONAL IMPLEMENTATION  
OF COOPERATION WITH THE HOUSING  
INDUSTRY**

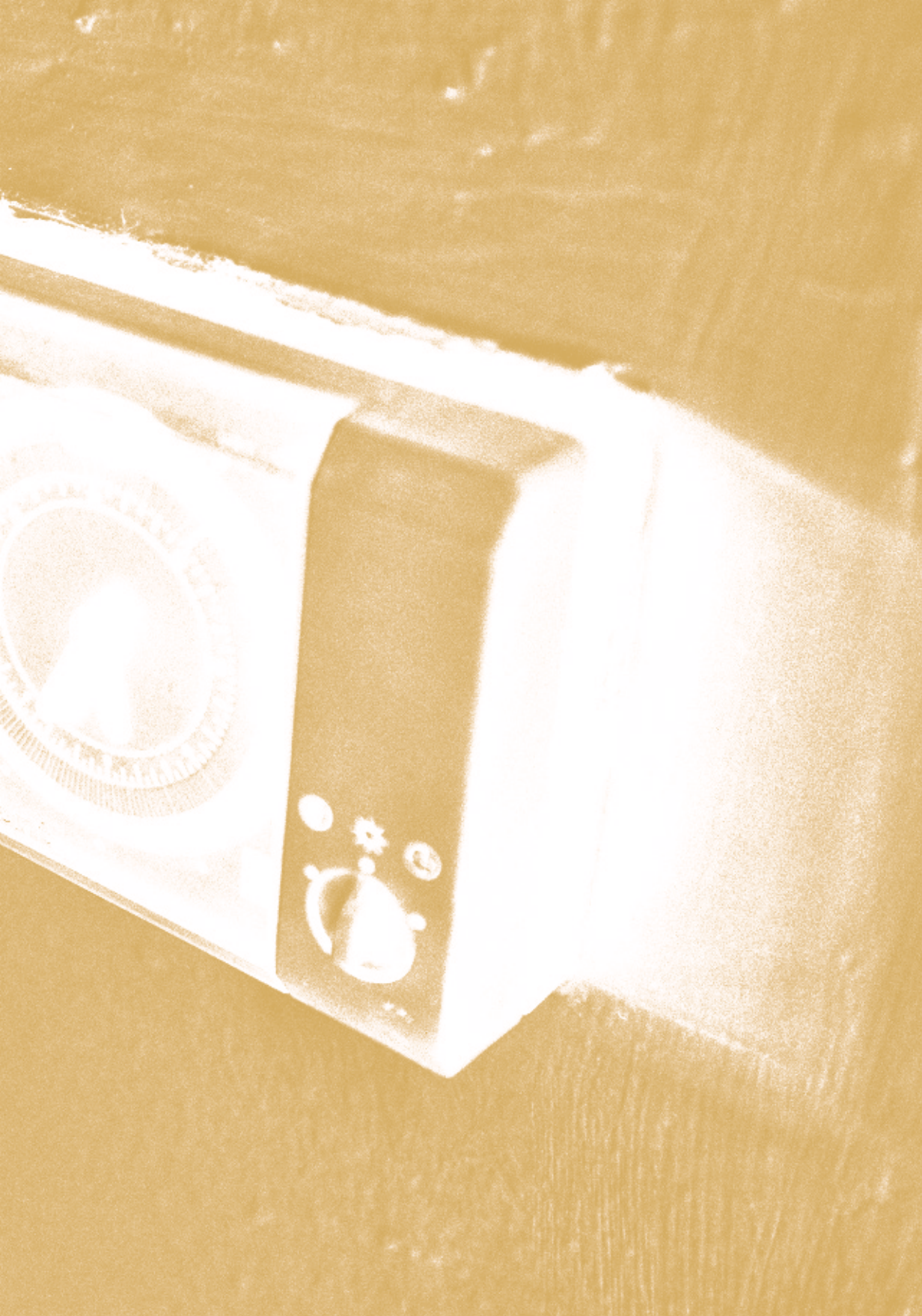
New structures and processes were jointly developed for issues where it could link up with social work, as unpaid rent and problems with neighbours do occur, and this is not only common among tenants who were once homeless. Housing First tenants must sort out these problems themselves, although they receive support in solving the issues. The rental management company benefits from a direct link to a contact person. This approach is also new for the housing sector, yet the benefits are already apparent: the landlords are provided with more security and, at the same time, our service users have better access to ordinary flats, with neighbours who are not aware of their past and their receipt of social support. Should the service user not have sufficient savings to cover rental costs, financial contributions or household improvement costs, then there are grants available for “aid under exceptional circumstances” that are funded by the needs-tested minimum benefit system (MA40), private donations or funds from foundations to clear this last hurdle out of the way.

**Potential.** The past few years have been challenging. They are proof of how much potential lies in professionally-implemented cooperation. A total of 74 flats have been provided at an average price of € 6.88 per square metre by the founding member company and 14 other partners. In the meantime, ongoing social support agreements have been completed. Now, in 2015, ERST WOHNEN continues to acquire flats, that are in good, decent conditions for living, with modern and affordable heating systems, ranging from 30m<sup>2</sup> to 80m<sup>2</sup> with a gross monthly rent (including service charges) of € 250 to € 600, with (preferably permanent) tenancy agreements according to MRG (Austrian Act on Tenancy Law) or WGG (Limited Profit Housing Act) standards. These flats are situated throughout the capital city, and are as varied as the Housing First target groups themselves, providing housing for single people, couples, small and large families, in older flats or in newly constructed housing. Our specific contribution is to provide homeless people with access to affordable housing, and to promote the need to implement Housing First as a long-term social policy programme.









x  
months  
Average  
support duration

## EXTERNAL EVALUATION CONDUCTED BY L&R SOCIAL RESEARCH: LET THE SERVICE USERS HAVE THEIR SAY!

L&R SOCIAL RESEARCH, A RENOWNED INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH IN VIENNA, WAS COMMISSIONED TO CONDUCT AN ACCOMPANYING EVALUATION OF THE HOUSING FIRST PROJECT AND SUPPORT ITS CURRENT DEVELOPMENT. INITIAL FINDINGS REVEAL THAT THE PROGRAMME IS A PERFECT FIT.

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The core element of the evaluation is a series of case studies with selected service users who were interviewed on a total of three separate occasions: at the project start, shortly before the end of their social support and after the programme had ended. The viewpoints of the social workers were also obtained at the same time. A total of 30 service-user interviews will be carried out for the evaluation over the entire project term. To date, the following interviews have been conducted: 30 of the first series of interviews and 14 interviews for the second set of interviews. These form the basis of the following interpretations.

**The Housing Unit:** a focus on affordability and durability in time, with independence as the goal

The expectations and demands of the service users for their future home are pragmatic and realistic. Specific requirements can arise out of special situations, such as reduced mobility or the desire to live close to family members, etc. In many cases, there is high time pressure, which takes precedence, and therefore the prompt availability of new housing is a top priority.

The service users' answers, show that affordability and long-term tenancy agreements are essential. In nearly all the interviews, the service users made clear that the rental contract should be permanent.

The separation of the tenancy agreement and social care was well explained and understood. The fact that rental contracts and social services exist independently was both acknowledged and appreciated by the service users.

### 30 SERVICE USERS INTERVIEWED FOR THE ACCOMPANYING STUDY.

The service users primarily wished to have direct contact with the landlord/property management companies and take matters into their own hands; this form of contact was preferred by respondents when it came to basic and necessary tasks (e.g. repairs). In cases of conflict, the clients trusted themselves to find a solution-oriented approach (communicative and co-operative strategies). In cases of rent arrears, the social worker would also be called on to provide (negotiating) support. This was also the case when the rental contract was set up.

**The Support:** flexible, needs-oriented, with the possibility of participation and decision-making

### SEPARATION OF TENANCY AND CARE ACKNOWLEDGED AND APPRECIATED BY SERVICE USERS.

The respondents view the primary role of the Housing First support as dealing with all matters pertaining to residential issues; other areas of life (particularly financial issues, assistance with correspondence) have varying importance. Housing matters are mostly about finding a flat, making contact with the landlord/property management company, reading through the rental agreement together, support for the organisation of furniture and transport, assistance in gaining access to other (financial) support options, help with contacting energy suppliers, and so on. It was also mentioned by several service users that the



support worker was the primary contact person for the property management company in the event of difficulties.

The support workers say that there is certainly a need for discussions giving psychosocial relief and expert advice about money and finance. The situation of homelessness and earlier experiences (often marked by conflicts, isolation and violence, health and addiction-related crises or even already longer residence periods in hostels) often cause psychological strain and impairments for service users, and social workers in the context of Housing First wish to support them through it.

Every part of the drawing-up of the support agreement is done together with the service user. A section of the document is standardised, and thereby sets out the framework for and the process of receipt of social care. The definition of the care objectives is designed as a communicative process, where the goal of independent, long-term living in one's own housing forms an integral part. The degree to which the clients get involved in drawing up the objectives of the support agreement, compared to how the support is implemented in practice, varies in cases, yet ultimately all of those interviewed expressed satisfaction with the agreement.

**THE CARE AGREEMENT**  
FORMULATES THE SUPPORT  
OBJECTIVES AND DESCRIBES HOW  
NEUNERHAUS AND THE SERVICE  
USERS WILL WORK TOGETHER

There is the possibility of making amendments and additions to the support agreement at a later date. This procedure obviously provides a good opportunity for co-decision and develops the final decision-making power service users have over the issues in their own lives.

The flexibility and need-centredness of the care arrangement has so far been viewed with satisfaction by the Housing First service users. Respondents appreciated the social worker's readiness to focus on their needs.

The Housing First pilot project wants to introduce new and innovative approaches that differentiate from those currently used by homelessness services. The concepts of "free will" and "service-user autonomy" and the issue of (building) trust that goes with them came through strongly throughout the initial phase of the Housing First project.

The service users expressed the view that, as early as at the start of the project, the care relationship is characterised by a mutual relationship of trust and the exercise of decision-making rights. The social workers were seen very positively and were praised for their role as contact person. Nevertheless, the key factor was the constant awareness that the service user always has the last word on his or her decisions about what to do.

*Author: Susi Schmatz, M.A., L&R Social Research - Institute for Social Research in Vienna*



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Cooperating Partners  
in the Housing Industry

## PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

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### NEUNERHAUS PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Claudia Halbartschlager	Project Leader, Support and Project Management
Elisabeth Hammer	Strategic Planning, Responsible for Content
Markus Reiter	Managing Director, Apartment Acquisition

### HOUSING FIRST PILOT PROJECT STEERING GROUP

Jörg Atteneder	bzWO - Beratungszentrum Wohnungslosenhilfe (FSW) (Advice Centre for Homeless People)
Kurt Gutlederer	Head of the Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe (Viennese Assistance Programme for Homeless People) (FSW)
Gertraud Katzlberger	bzWO - Beratungszentrum Wohnungslosenhilfe (FSW)
Michael Langwiesner	Department of Supported Housing (FSW)
Martina Minichmayr	Head of bzWO - Beratungszentrum Wohnungslosenhilfe (FSW)
Susanne Schmatz	L&R Social Research

### NEUNERHAUS HOUSING FIRST SOCIAL WORKERS

Sebastian Erlach	
Helga Gaber	
Ines Ganahl	
Christina Linck	
Sabrina Quitt	(until July 2013)
Martin Roßbacher	
Manuela Wasner	

### ERST WOHNEN RESIDENTIAL HOUSING ACQUISITION

Clarissa Böck	Consultant Housing (from January 2015)
Birgit Brodner	(from July 2014, mmb wohnen GmbH)
Michaela Mischek-Lainer	(from July 2014, mmb wohnen GmbH)
Helmut Redl	(from July 2014, mmb wohnen GmbH)
Peter Schäfer	(March 2013 – March 2014)

### NEUNERHAUS PROJECT STAFF

Claudia Ackerl	Marketing
Julia Emprechtinger	2010/2011 Project Development
Roswitha Harner	Idea Development
Jonathan Kufner	2011 Survey
Barbara Kumer	Volunteer Project
Monika Pfeffer	Communication
Petra Stummer	Infrastructure
Conny Vrbicky	Project Assistance to 12/2014

### A SPECIAL THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE, WHO HELPED ESTABLISH ERST WOHNEN

Günter Bischof	
Thomas Buchinger	Buchinger Consulting
Michael Gehbauer	Managing Director, WBV-GPA
Charlotte Harrer	sBausparkasse, Public Relations
Lukas Lochmann	ÖVW
Detlev Neudeck	Trustee
Martin Orner	Vice-Chairman, EBG
Florian Pollack	Goodville Consulting, neunerhaus Supervisory Board
Andreas Reitinger	Managing Director, ÖVW
Josef Schmidinger	General Director of sBausparkasse
Michael Seiller-Tarbuk	Real Estate Entrepreneur
Ute Toifl	Fruhstorfer & Toifl solicitors, neunerhaus Supervisory Board



#### **SBAUSPARKASSE STAFF**

(Volunteers that support ERST WOHNEN)

Susanne Bock  
Monika Gröger  
Susanne Hummer  
Konrad Klinkenberg  
Astrid Kratschmann  
Edith Rosar  
Michael Swoboda  
Stefanie Szekendi  
Andreas Watzek  
Johann Weinreich

#### **COOPERATION PARTNER:**

##### **HOUSING FIRST:**

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Magistratsabteilung 40 der Stadt Wien – Soziales, Sozial- und Gesundheitsrecht, Geschäftsstelle der Stiftungsverwaltung sowie Fachbereich Mindestsicherung

##### **ERST WOHNEN:**

ARWAG Holding AG und MIGRA Gemeinnützige Wohnungsges.m.b.H.  
BWSG – Gemeinnützige allgemeine Bau, Wohn- und Siedlungsgenossenschaft reg. Gen.m.b.H.  
EBG – Gemeinnützige Ein- und Mehrfamilienhäuser Baugenossenschaft reg. Gen.m.b.H.  
EGW – Erste gemeinnützige Wohnungsgesellschaft Heimstätte Gesellschaft m.b.H.  
ERSTE Immobilien KG  
Familienwohnbau – Gemeinnützige Bau- und Siedlungsgenossenschaft reg. Gen.m.b.H.  
Heimbau – Gemeinnützige Wohnungs- und Siedlungsgenossenschaft reg. Gen.m.b.H.  
Neue Heimat – Gemeinnützige Wohnungs- und Siedlungsgenossenschaft m.b.H.  
Neues Leben – Gemeinnützige Bau-, Wohn- und Siedlungsgenossenschaft reg. Gen.m.b.H.  
Österreichisches Volkswohnungswerk – Gemeinnützige Ges.m.b.H.  
RS Holding GmbH  
s Bausparkasse – Bausparkasse der österreichischen Sparkassen Aktiengesellschaft  
WBV-GPA Wohnbauvereinigung für Privatangestellte – Gemeinnützige Ges.m.b.H.  
Wiener gemeinnützige Wohn- und Siedlungsgenossenschaft  
Wiener Tierschutzverein  
Wiener Wohnen – Stadt Wien  
Win4Wien Bauträger GmbH

#### **PRINCIPAL SUPPORTER AND FUNDING BODY**

Fonds Soziales Wien (FSW) - Vienna Social Fund



×  
children  
received support

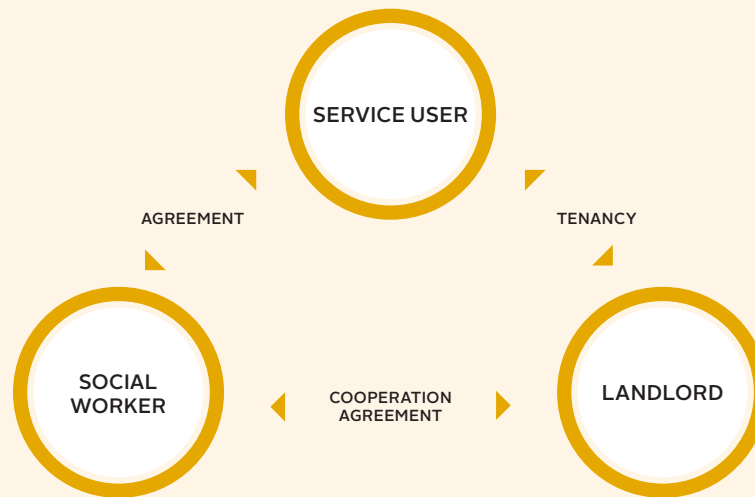
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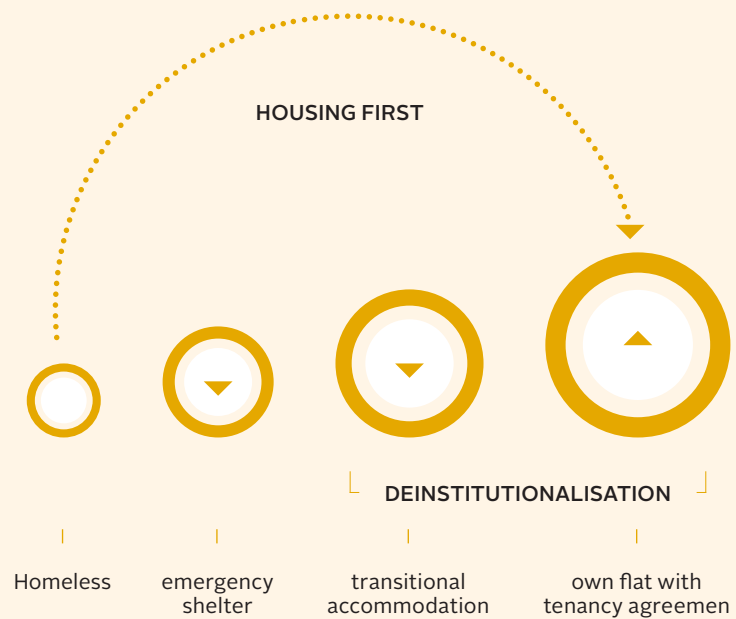
## HOUSING FIRST MEANS DIRECT TENANCY AGREEMENTS

HOUSING AND SOCIAL SUPPORT ARE VIEWED INDEPENDENTLY IN HOUSING FIRST.

### HOUSING FIRST CONTRACTUAL RELATIONSHIP

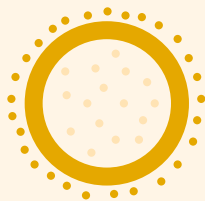


### DEINSTITUTIONALISATION PROCESS

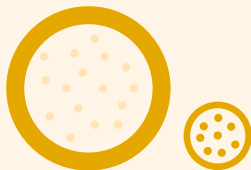




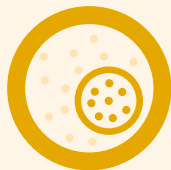
EXCLUSION



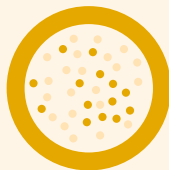
|  
Exclusion



|  
Separation



|  
Integration



|  
Inclusion

## RECOMMENDATIONS

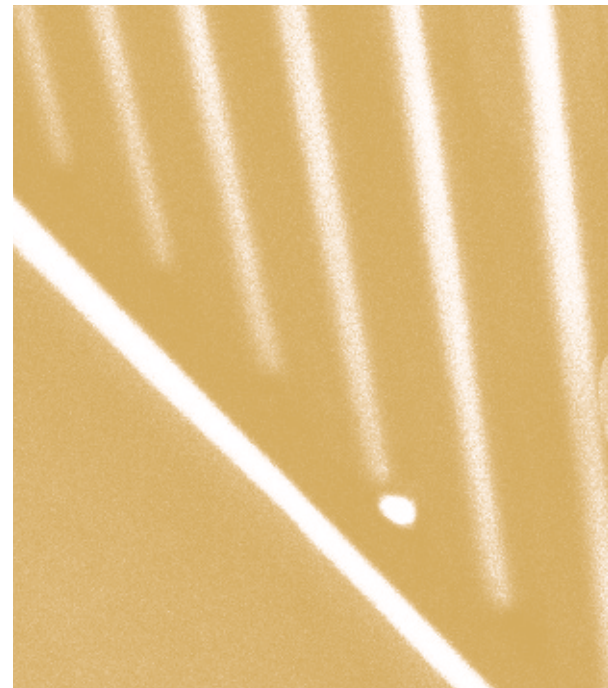
### HOUSING FIRST – HOW TO ACHIEVE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

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1. neunerhaus believes that if this service is extended within the Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe (Viennese Assistance Programme for Homeless People), a process of de-institutionalization will result in the long-term. Therefore we recommend:
  - Step by step expansion of the Housing First support quotas to include several hundred people over the next few years in Vienna.
  - Quality of support with a focus on self-determination, participation and empowerment.
  - Tenancy agreements to be drawn up directly with the clients – not the social organisation.
  - Short-term housing throughout all districts of the city, so that social support can begin from the very first day of homelessness, for a duration of one to four months, or until, for example, a Housing First flat becomes available.
2. In social and housing-policy terms, we recommend that housing subsidies (property promotion and housing benefit) as well as access systems to subsidised housing (e.g. the residential service “Wohnservice Wien”), be amended so that they reach the target group of people most at risk of homelessness and homeless people. At least 500 additional homes per year are required.
3. In political terms, Housing First confirms that city policy still needs to be open to innovation and encourage the creation of conditions in the social fabric of society that focus on self-determination, participation and empowerment. We therefore consider the City of Vienna and the Vienna Social Fund (FSW) to be role models for other cities wishing to implement Housing First professionally; not only in Austria but also throughout Europe.

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Complaints by local  
residents to the FSW



## SUMMARY OF OUR SUCCESSES

### HOUSING FIRST - THE VIENNESE MODEL WORKS!

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- 98 percent of the supported clients have valid tenancies; although (initial) setbacks are not left undisclosed.
- 131 individuals were professionally supported in their integration back into a normal living environment.
- 50 percent of the adults are women – the service on offer suits people regardless of gender and supports empowerment.
- 17 completed social support programmes, with durations ranging from 4 to 27 months, show strongly that a focus on individual needs in terms of care duration and intensity is possible.
- The service on offer appeals to a wide range of people from different circumstances, from those living on the streets to those living in institutions.
- The average time of waiting until moving into a Housing First flat was 2.1 months.
- At the time of going to press, there were only three cases where the social support was terminated by the service user, and there was only one eviction.
- No complaints were made by neighbours to the FSW.

#### NEUNERHAUS WAS SUCCESSFULLY ABLE TO PROVE THAT:

- Not only does service users' housing situation remain stable, the social services are freely taken up and without coercion.
- Clients take responsibility for their own accommodation.
- With the ERST WOHNEN platform, neunerhaus succeeded in gaining the support of 17 developers and landlords who got involved in this innovative concept and rented their flats directly to former homeless tenants.
- 74 flats have been acquired to date.

