Sibongile Mashereni
Diaconia University of Applied Sciences
Bachelor of Social Services
Degree in Social Science
Thesis, 2021

ACTIVITIES IN A SUPPORTED HOUSING UNIT
Professionals´ perspective on residents' experiences

ABSTRACT

Sibongile Mashereni
Activities in a supported housing unit. Professionals' perspective on residents' experiences
 34p, 2 appendices
December 2021
Diaconia University of Applied Sciences
Bachelor`s Degree of Applied Sciences
Bachelor of Social Services

The Housing First program was a Finnish concept geared towards providing housing for all and mitigating against homelessness. Notable organizations in the third sector have partnered with municipal governments to facilitate accessibility to living spaces. The perspectives of experts in charge of residents' welfare were sought to understand the effects of organized recreational activities in reducing social isolation and enhancing their well-being. Participating in recreational activities proves that it can provide the ability to manage someone's mental balance, which could reduce stress, depression, and anxiety, thereby improving self-esteem.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, which was then analysed using thematic analysis. The criteria considered in the choice of study participants were five or more working years of experience in the social and welfare sectors. This helps in validating the study outcome.

The study was plagued with a few challenges, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic, language barriers faced by service users of immigrant background, and the municipality's rules discouraging longer stays above two years. Recommendations such as an increase in funding from the municipality to the housing organization to enable living beyond two years, the use of virtual platforms to host recreational activities, and the provision of interpreters to enable equal participation of residents were made.

Keywords: social isolation, social support, recreational activities, wellbeing

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

The Housing First model approach helps provide homes to people without homes with no barriers and conditions. The concept has been widely diffused in a relatively short period of time. (Tsemberis 2010, 235). In Finland, many people have benefited from the Housing First Model through the supported housing units. The findings of the study suggest that traumatizing events, as well as experiences of stigmatization and exclusion from resources, are common in the lives of residents in assisted housing (e.g., Granfelt 2016; Juhila et al. 2016; Nousiainen 2016 cited in Raitakari & Juhila 2015). Therefore, the supported housing unit provides activities based on the Housing First model in partnership with the municipalities and Y-Foundation to improve the residents' well-being. Besides, international research suggests people who sleep in temporary shelters have a higher risk of mental health problems than those who live in permanent housing. (Horghagen, Fostvedt, & Alsaker 2014). However, are residents participating in these activities benefiting in terms of developing their well-being? Therefore, this research explores the housing unit residents' experiences and identifies how participating in activities with other residents has impacted their social lives and improved their well-being.

According to the Y-Foundation (2018) report, the housing unit project seeks to eliminate homelessness. Thus, this research is relevant to community development because it aims to reduce homelessness and assist people in dealing with the negative effects of homelessness, such as drug and/or alcohol addiction, mental and/or physical illness, and involvement with the criminal justice system (Housing First England 2019, 5).

This research was especially inspired by an ethnographic approach. It was the product of an in-depth analysis of experiences and observations made at the facility during my practical placement at my study research working life partner (a non-governmental organization) which works in collaboration with the Y-Foundation. During my professional skills development practice, I had profound interactions with both residents and professionals. I experienced first-hand the

need for more emphasis to be placed on enhancing social inclusion. This is in line with Pleace, Nicholas, and Culhane, Dennis, and Granfelt, Riitta, and Knutagrd, Marcus (2015, 43), that in Finland, keeping people out of institutions from becoming homeless is an important aspect of the battle against social exclusion.

2 THE AIM AND PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

The purpose of the study is to explore the views of the staff or social work professionals in the supported housing unit on residents' experiences and identify how participation in activities with others has impacted their social lives and improved their well-being. This is because residents' experiences with the Housing First programs might vary, and the impact can be negative or good (Blomberg 2020, 5).

Consequently, the aims of the research include: (1) investigating the importance of low-threshold activities for the residents of supportive accommodation among homeless people in Finland. And (2) learn about the benefits of recreational activities in reducing social isolation.

This study addresses the following research questions to achieve the aim of the research: (1) How have the recreational or low-threshold activities in the supported housing unit improved the well-being of the residents? (2) What are the outcomes of social events organized by the housing unit that are aimed towards reducing social isolation among residents?

The research's working life partner is a nongovernmental organization working in collaboration with the Y-Foundation in Finland. It is important to mention that due to the vulnerability of the group and some ethical issues, it was agreed by both parties (I and the working life partner) that the name of the working life partner be withheld. Notwithstanding, they (the working life partner) helped immensely in the completion of this study and provided interviewees for the data collection.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW AND KEY CONCEPTS

Investigating the experiences and observations of social workers and other allied professionals on the well-being of residents of supported housing units. To find out the effects or benefits of the facility's activities and events geared towards reducing isolation. A review of related literature or research on exploring different aspects of the housing unit program and the effects of various activities on the lives of the residents was done in this chapter. I came across some excellent research in this field; unfortunately, many of them are in Finnish. It was a little challenging to access sufficient studies in this critical sector of community work. I cannot delve deeply into this study without understanding some parameters such as homelessness, supported housing, and so on.

Homelessness is a situation where an individual or family does not have a permanent dwelling place to live in. A person will be considered homeless when he or she lives in a place not habitable for human living, sleeps rough, lives in tents in the streets, rail stations, subways, and so on. Homelessness has impacted humanity at the individual, community, and society level. It has increased the frequency of seeking social and health care services. In Finland, it was the responsibility of the Housing Finance and Development Centre of ARA to compile annual reports on the status of homelessness in Finland. 2017 put the overall number of homeless people at 7112. Of these amounts, the largest demography among them is 5528, which was observed to be those in a make-shift temporal living with relatives and well-wishers. (Helskyaho, Ohisalo & Turunen 2018; Y-Foundation 2017.)

The growth in the number of people experiencing homelessness, especially since the early to mid-1980s, saw an increase in the number of shelter beds in Europe, North America, and the Antipodes, with progressive housing added later, leading to an unplanned, reactionary, and chaotic system of various forms of emergency and make-shift accommodation and, in some cases, the provision of psychosocial support (Mikel et al., 2020, 1). It was discovered that existing intervention responses to mitigate homelessness were not reaching some individuals who might be in dire need of shelter and warmth. Various governmental policies

and innovations were enacted to enable housing provision for various individuals that were in need.

Innovations such as Critical Time Intervention, particularly Housing First in the United States of America, demonstrated that the high-risk homeless population can be reached and their homelessness can be resolved (Mikel et al., 2020). Ending homelessness in every society may be nearly impossible. Some countries, such as Finland, are now openly discussing the idea of achieving absolute zero homelessness.

According to the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (2021), Finland's capital region has recorded the highest number of homeless people, which was put at 1856 in 2020. When an individual becomes homeless for at least one year or at least four separate periods in the last three years, it is called "long-term homelessness." The most defining factors are health-related and social factors; these factors present a challenge in providing optimal and timely housing solutions to the needy (Helskyaho, Ohisalo, & Turunen 2018).

Key concepts include recreational activities, social isolations, social support, well-being, and housing unit.

3.1 Social isolation

Social isolation is defined as a situation where an individual with an inadequate sense of belonging, especially socially, has limited contact with other people, has insufficient social contacts, and exhibits an inability to build and maintain a relationship (Nicholson, 2009, 1346). Social isolation can result from many factors that include stigma, involuntary isolation, and can be explained by the number of social, psychological, and physical contacts maintained. These contacts can be measured by their duration, the quality of the relationship, the relationship's outcome, and so on. The study was geared to understanding this phenomenon as it affects the study participants.

3.2 Social support

Social support is said to be a network of people or individuals from whom a person can get support in material, social, moral, etc., to cope with a person's daily struggle. This support can be obtained through social integration, support groups, religious organizations, family members, neighbourhood organizations, etc. I am poised to understand in this course of study the type of social support provided by the housing unit, the frequency and quality of available support, and whether the said support is delivered. Again, it will be of interest to understand the satisfaction of residents of the housing unit.

Social scientists have conceptualised social support in a variety of ways. Some scholars examine social support from a quantitative and tangible perspective, such as the number of friends or associates an individual has, while other scholars view it from qualitative aspects, such as emotions or feelings of connectedness. Strong evidence has shown the direct effects of social support on individuals' or groups' well-being and health outcomes (Kroenke et al., 2006).

3.3 Housing First program

According to the Y Foundation (2018), Housing first program in Finland concept initially originated in the United States in the 1980s to support the homeless. Finland's approach is based on the Act on the Residential Leases (481/1995), providing a place to live first and then the support or rehabilitation needed afterwards. Thus, the study research Non-Governmental Organization got involved in the program in providing a supported housing unit.

3.4 Supported housing unit

A supported housing unit is a form of housing where all the residents have their own permanent apartment and pay rent at a subsidized price. A supported housing unit also provides the residents with shared living areas where they gather

for community meetings, which plays a role in building trust amongst the residents (Y Foundation 2017, 25).

The housing unit provides accommodation for homeless people chosen by the city's social services and housing support under the Housing First Model, regardless of their background. All the residents live in their private apartments. They are all allowed to have one-on-one meetings with the social workers about their personal lives regularly. They are also involved in community meetings where they are given the platform to share their ideas and decide with the instructors. During the day, they participate in craft activities, designing different products and accessories.

The residents get support from the social workers, and they can book appointments with the nurse within the premises. Y Foundation (2017, 28) states that when the study non-governmental organization started their first supported housing unit under the Housing First principle, the staff underwent training on the fundamentals of community work and applied community work methods in their practices. With no one being obliged to participate in community work development activities, the housing unit organized some programs (low-threshold activities) for the residents as part of the support.

3.5 Recreation activities and well-being

According to Horghagen et al. (2014, 148) findings during their group craft activities for supporting mental health users, they discovered that participating in crafts with a low-risk threshold appeared to be a motivation for the participants as they attended the meetings every morning and took part in the crafts group. Afterwards, the recreational activities participants went home, made food, rested, and did other casual activities. They could thus structure their lives around group activities like how other people structure their everyday lives. Taking part in the craft groups could tell others about their daily occupations and what they had accomplished, which marked a significant step away from feeling disabled due to mental health illness. Crafting in a group also helped

them justify their current lives and increased their recovery potential; however, these last two effects may be long-term processes.

Y-Foundation (2017, 40) states that physically fit housing unit residents are encouraged to participate in different low-threshold work activities. The service users are provided with a different range of activities, namely leisure activities, including games, task-oriented groups, party organizers, trips to the summer cabins, day trips, picnics, grill parties, birthday celebrations, and general and traditional parties. They also provide work-related activities, including cutting logs, cooking for celebrations, working in the greenhouse, packing reflectors, cleaning the compound, and security night shift. Some residents are known for taking care of the environment around their neighbourhoods, like clearing snow from the terraces during winter. Most of the residents expressed their gratitude and the significance of owning a home post-homelessness. One resident was quoted as saying, "The most important thing about a home is that it feels like home."

4 METHODS

I carried out the research using a qualitative research approach. In a humanistic, interpretive perspective, qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding human beings' experiences (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara 2007, 21). I considered the qualitative research method to be more suitable for this type of study. It offers me a valid platform to obtain detailed results for this study. (Eyisi (2016, 92) suggests that qualitative research has all the tools needed to elicit recall, which aids in problem-solving. The qualitative research method helped me answer the research questions. Qualitative analysis is based on the observation of individuals or groups of people as they interact with their physical and social surroundings. Silver & Patterson (2015, 25) claim that data is gathered through participant observation, one-on-one interviews, and the recognition and response in qualitative research. The qualitative research approach's focus group nature and the participants' observations offer a broader understanding of behaviour. As a result, qualitative research yields a wealth of information about real people and circumstances. (De Vaus 2014, 6; Leedy & Ormrod 2014 cited in Eyisi 2016, 93).

4.1 Data collection process

Participants for the data collection were the professionals from the working life partner supported housing unit in Finland. The said location was selected for the study due to its proximity to accessing information. Though the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult to get participants for this research. Notwithstanding, three social services professionals with varying degrees of work experience in the sector were chosen for the data collection. The number of participants for the study was influenced by the sampling method applied for the selection. In other words, a purposeful sampling method was adopted in selecting study participants because of the limited resources available at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Purposeful sampling is a qualitative research technique for identifying and selecting information-rich situations to make the most efficient use of limited resources. (Patton, 2002 cited in Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom,

Duan & Hoagwood 2015, 2). Moreover, purposeful sampling is defined as the deliberate selection of an informant based on the attributes they possess (Tongco 2007, 147). I wanted to obtain quality information from the participants, hence my choice of participants willing to provide the required data.

A semi-structured interview was used to collect study data. Doyle (2020) defines a semi-structured interview as a meeting in which the interviewer does not adhere to a pre-determined set of questions. Instead of a straight question and response approach, they will offer more open-ended questions, allowing for a debate with the interviewee. In simple terms, during a semi-structured interview, you'll be asked a mix of closed and open-ended questions, as well as why and how inquiries. (Adams 2015, 493). Two-way dialogue is encouraged by the semi-structured interview method. Both the interviewer and the candidate can ask questions, allowing for a thorough discussion of all relevant topics. (Doyle 2020.) A semi-structured interview was adopted for this study to get in-depth information from the participants (see Appendix 1). Adams (2015, 494) asserts that a semi-structured interview can be used to augment and add depth to other methods of data collection. Stuckey (2013, 057) explains that observation is frequently used before semi-structured interviews. As a result, the semi-structured interviews used for this study were formulated based on my observations and experience gained as an intern at the housing unit. According to Stuckey (2013, 057), this will enable the researcher to have a thorough understanding of the subject of interest, which is required for the development of relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions.

The interview has initially been a one-on-one contact process. Given the ongoing global coronavirus pandemic and subsequent restrictions placed by the Finnish authorities on reducing human-to-human contacts, we agreed to move to a virtual platform via Microsoft Team.

A cover letter seeking the consent of participants was sent and approved prior to the interview (see appendix 2). I assured participants of the confidentiality of the data collected. I also took the necessary steps to ensure that their identities and the retrieved information were kept anonymous. And the data will be destroyed afterwards. Each participant was allotted 45 minutes for the interview.

We had a team meeting video call with the participants that lasted at least 45 minutes per participant. The interview proceedings were recorded, and some key points were jotted down. Participants spoke freely in answering research questions; there was no limitation to the answers provided. The recorded data was transcribed into eleven pages of A4 paper. On average, each study participant had a minimum of three pages.

4.2 Thematic analysis

The study was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a technique for detecting, assessing, and understanding meaningful patterns in qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017, 297). Thematic analysis requires detailed involvement and interpretation of data from the researcher. Thematic analysis involves not only counting explicit words or phrases, but also identifying and explaining explicit and implicit data in a study, putting them into themes (Guest et al. 2012, 12). Thematic analysis brings order to data, categorizes them, and explains the real themes that emerge from the study (Hubner, 2007, 79). According to Weiss (1994), there are four steps of thematic analysis: coding, sorting, local and inclusive integration.

I arrived at using thematic analysis in my data analysis because of its numerous advantages in arriving at a valid result. It is relatively quick to understand. As a researcher not yet versed in qualitative research methods, this type of data analysis was easy for me to grasp. It provided me with an in-depth understanding of the different perspectives of my study participants. Going by its theoretical framework, thematic analysis imbues flexibility, which can be modified to support many studies, making provision for a comprehensive and detailed, yet complicated account of data (Braun & Clarke 2006; King 2004). Thematic analysis was chosen for data analysis; this was to enable accurate and thorough data analysis. The author first became acquainted with the concept, and then investigated its benefits and applications to the research.

Thematic analysis has been the subject of debates among scholars. Its merits and demerits have been extensively discussed. Braun and Clarke (2006, 78–79)

said that thematic analysis should be considered an analytical system on its own terms because it delivers important skills that researchers should acquire to develop a more thorough understanding of other forms of qualitative analysis. The condition for a theme to be considered is not due to its frequency in the data nor its dependency on quantifiable measures; it is on whether it contains important information that can address the research question. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 82.) Themes within the data of thematic analysis can either be identified as inductive or deductive. The inductive approach is purely data driven. It is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into any pre-existing coding frame or preconceived frameworks. On the contrary, deductive analysis is driven by chosen theories and prior research. (Braun & Clarke 2006, 83-84.)

For a thorough understanding, I read all the notes and transcriptions several times and compared them. I summarized the interviews. Initial codes were then produced from the data gathered. Similar results were sorted and grouped into common themes. Next, I examined the initially generated codes and some of them clearly fitted together into a theme. I collected and sorted the various codes into common themes such as self-confidence, social inclusion, independence, motivation, and community exclusion (see Table 1). Then I reviewed, modified, and developed the first themes that were identified earlier. And I gathered all the data that applied to each theme. I established each theme and determined what may be included in the data of each theme by creating clear names and definitions for each theme. Finally, I analysed the data and made a report based on the themes identified in relation to the research questions and literature. Table one below further explains how the data collected was analysed using the thematic approach.

Table 1. Data Results Themes

Summary from the interviews	Code	Themes
1. Impact of recreational activities to improve the wellbeing of residents. 2. Benefits of low threshold activities 3. Skills development (personal discovery) 4. Implementation of the residents' ideas. 5. Positive feedback	Community Inclusion Choosing activities over alcohol Participating in the activities	Self-confidence Social inclusion Independence Motivation
Challenges of organizing activities 1. Covid-19 pandemic 2. Limitations due to language problem 3. Limited time allotment per resident		Community exclusion

5 RESEARCH ETHICS

The research was targeted at a vulnerable group of service users. However, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, I ended up interviewing the housing unit professionals instead. I ensured that I got the necessary approval from the appropriate authorities and maintained high professional and ethical boundaries. A researcher is expected to act ethically and morally toward the community, institution, or bodies funding the research, his or her professional organization, the objects to be studied, and society (Arene, 2019). All necessary precautions, morally and ethically, were considered in carrying out the studies by respecting the participants and other stakeholders. It is common knowledge among academics, social care professionals, and other affiliated disciplines in the social sciences that borders' ethics, morals, and values are fundamental in social work practice (Banks, 2006, 11).

I was given permission to carry out the interviews with the professionals by the manager of the housing unit. A detailed approval of the study by the working life partners was sent via the researcher's official email contact. Before the interviews were conducted, the participants were informed, and an explanation of the study's needs and essence was given. The outcome of the interviews was documented professionally, with honesty, with no additional information. The identities of participants were anonymously recorded, ensuring no data breach. Data protection was of the utmost priority during the study. It is worthwhile to state here that data collection runs concurrently with data analysis. Data transcription and analysis were done independently to ensure confidentiality.

All the study participants work in the same organization, but I ensured that each interview was conducted individually in a serene environment. Following ethical guidelines according to Arene (2019), I stored the data on encrypted devices with a protected password that can be accessed only by me. The interview recordings will be deleted when the thesis is graded and accepted. I can state without doubt that there was no conflict of interest before, during, or after the research process. The final work was sent to my working life partners for

review, comments, and approval before publication. This is to enhance study validation and reliability.

6 RESULTS

The results gathered from the interview indicate that the residents of the Housing First Program benefit enormously from their social events, despite the few challenges. The results from the interview sought to answer the research question: (1) How have the recreational or low-threshold activities in the supported housing unit improved the well-being of the residents? (2) What are the outcomes of social events organized by the housing unit that are aimed towards reducing social isolation among residents?

The participants identified some benefits of the activities in the supported housing unit that are geared towards improving the wellbeing of residents. They include self-confidence, social inclusion, independence, and motivation. Notwithstanding the benefits of organizing the social events, the respondents also acknowledged some challenges facing residents in the supported housing unit, which include community exclusion and loneliness. This chapter therefore discusses the outcomes of the study's data collection.

6.1 Self-confidence

Individuals can achieve greater interpersonal achievement and influence in peer groups and life when they possess self-confidence. Belief in one's own ability to perform and achieve one's goals is a sign of a progressive life. Self-confidence is a belief in one's ability to undertake a specific action to produce an outcome (Bandura, 1977; Chemers, et al., 2000).

From the data gathered, it was discovered that self-confidence was a major attribute of residents' participation in organized activities in the supported housing unit. A participant mentioned that one highlight of their job in the past years was seeing the service users participating in activities, gaining confidence, and moving on with their lives.
"That is the part of my job I love the most, by boosting their confidence level and encouraging them to move on with their lives" (Participants A).

Through the organized activities, residents that were reclusive and shy suddenly became outgoing and receptive. For example, one participant mentioned observing social changes among some residents, such as introverts becoming extroverts.

"They were those who started preparing food during the activities, and since then they never wanted to stop due to positive feedback from their colleagues and the social work professionals. They also started creating relationships" (participant B).

The result also indicated that the residents take responsibility when participating in the organized activities, which boosts their confidence level.

"It was encouraging to them as service providers, seeing some of their clients inspired and invigorated to seek employment and fend for themselves," said participant C.

6.2 Social inclusion

The study's participants highlighted that some residents showed signs of depression and low self-esteem on their arrival at the unit. However, they observed gradual changes after providing regular check-ups on them whenever they did not show up for day activities. Because of the professional checks, the residents began to willingly join others in participating in the daily activities. However, those who refused to participate were left undisturbed in their homes. For instance, A participant said:

"If it wasn't for the activities, it could have been very difficult to include the residents in the community" (Participant A).

One of the important activities mentioned by the participants was residents' involvement in the housing unit's community work. Participant B said that residents' participating in community work establishes good social relationships.

"Residents moving around the community cleaning have created good relationships with the residents who live in the neighbourhood. The participant also said whenever the neighbours did not see the residents in a long time moving around

and cleaning, they would ask about them from the housing unit employees" (Participant B).

Another participant said that the activities in the supported housing unit compel some of the residents to stop drinking or drink less. "It is always fulfilling to see some of the service users, especially those who preferred to go out and drink, drinking less so that they would be sober to participate in the activities because they may not participate when drunk, even if the activities are voluntary," said participant C).

According to Cuthill (2018), people who have issues living in a home develop some problems on their health and wellbeing and for them to find a home it brings a sense of belonging and safety. Cuthill (2018) further stated the importance of other means and approaches that could be added to a resident post homelessness that could impact their wellbeing positively, threshold activities carried out in the supported housing unit come in handy as one tool that could include the residents in the community.

6.3 Independence

The study's participants indicated that the idea of independency was maximized and maintained throughout the organized recreational activities, residences` ability to manage independent tasks without supervision was commendable. According to Rafaeli, (2017, 2) independence can boost one's conviction in one's own strength and ability to cope.

One of the participants stated that with time residents carried out activities with little or no supervision.
"If they need guidance, we guide them but usually they are motivated to work on their own" (Participant B).

Another participant mentioned giving room to the residents to sit down and decide on rules for the housing unit together and later observe them abiding to

them was a sign of maturity and non-dependency on the social work profession-
als to be guiding them all the time. The participant further explained:
"Resident's independence in daily living were improved. They manage to set
alarms, cook meals, do laundry, manage hygiene, self-advocate, resolute con-
flict and so on by themselves" (Participant A).

6.4 Motivation

A contemporary study shows the impact of motivation on an individual's per-
sonal development. The concept of motivation is used in a diverse field of hu-
man endeavor to analyze the "what and why" of human action (Deci & Ryan,
2000). Motivation can improve other areas of life outside of work and the aca-
demic environment. Motivation is conventionally acknowledged to improve
performance and staff efficiency (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Among the study's results was motivation. The participants claim their clients
are both internally and externally motivated to partake in social activities orga-
nized by the housing unit. According to the participants, residents are motivated
to participate in the organized activities through the inspiration and experiences
of others.
"The ability of the residents to participate in activities, socialize, and share suc-
cess stories of some having gotten the chance to work on summer jobs and others
planning to complete their studies was a contributing factor in motivating other
residents to discover their skills through studying, searching for employment,
and working" (Participant C).

Similarly, "Every time they attend social gatherings, exchanging ideas, listening
to people's ideas, and seeing others going to work, they start reflecting about
their lives and want to change their lives, looking at other people's success sto-
ries and wanting success stories for themselves" (Participant B).

Participant A added that those who had stayed unemployed for a long time
seemed happy to be doing something, working together with others, and later
getting paid for their work.

6.5 Challenges of organizing the activities

The main challenges for organizing housing activities, according to the participants, were COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns introduced by the Finnish government and social distancing, limitations due to the language, and limited time allotment per resident.

First and foremost, global activities were brought to a standstill in the first quarter of 2020 because of a deadly virus. According to the World Health Organizations (2020), COVID-19 was caused by SARS-CoV-2. The progression of the virus from an epidemic stage to a pandemic stage led to the paralysis of educational, social, economic, and political activities.

In sum, the participants highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the activities at the housing unit. They all agreed that the lockdowns, restrictions, local and international border closures, social distancing, and so on have affected social activities such as recreational events and gatherings organized by the housing units. Even though those measures were to stem the spread of the virus.

One other challenge hindering the supported housing unit activities is the language barrier. The participants indicate that a lack of common language hinders the involvement of clients in the unit's activities. For example, it was discovered that:
"People with foreign backgrounds might shy away from expressing themselves decide not to take part in activities. However, the use of seniors has been helpful" (Participant C).

Another confronting issue with the activities in the supported housing unit is the short stays or contracts with clients. "Short stays or contracts for the service users to stay in the housing unit were also one challenge because the organization works in collaboration with the city municipality; due to a lack of funds, the city encourages short stays, whereas the housing first says the residents can live there if they want," participant A said.

7 DISCUSSION

The study was aimed at investigating the importance of low-threshold activities for the residents of supportive accommodation among homeless people in a city in Finland. The research was also intended to discover the advantages of recreational activities in the mitigation of social isolation. The following research questions were asked to attain the aims of the study: (1) How have the recreational or low-threshold activities in the supported housing unit improved the well-being of the residents? And (2) what are the outcomes of the housing unit's social events aimed at reducing social isolation among residents?

The results showed that everyone is valuable and respected, and they are encouraged to be proud of their work by positive feedback from the professionals. According to Y Foundation (2018, 41), peer support was reported as one of the essential tools in making the service user in a housing unit to realise their potentials.

Based on the study's findings, the positive effects of social inclusion and the reduction in loneliness among residents because of recreational activities cannot be overstated. Social exclusion is often a mixture of chronic mental illness, and its deterioration can add to the worsening of psychiatric symptoms (Russell & Goldfinger 2011).

It is noted that supported housing is appropriate for people who are quite independent in their everyday events (Turku Municipality 2021). The results from this study indicated that housing activities promote residents' self-reliance. The housing staff inspire clients in the housing unit to be independent and guide them where necessary.

The research findings also demonstrated the significance of housing activities. In accordance with the study's aim, helping people integrate into their communities is an important aspect of the Housing First plan, and this needs socially supportive involvement and the opportunity to participate in meaningful activities. Housing stability may be jeopardized if people are housed and become or

remain socially isolated (Homeless Hub 2021). Therefore, the housing staff or the social professionals regularly support and motivate residents in the Housing First unit to take part in their organized activities.

The study's findings indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has mired the progress of the organized activities by the housing unit. The participant for the study were of the view that the measures taking to curb this deadly global pandemic has only hampered the organization of the activities, but it has also prevented residents from participating. In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the well-being of residents in the housing unit. Pawar (2020, 112) explains that the COVID-19 has brought shock, trauma, fear, existential dread, and sadness have all been experienced by countless individuals, families, and communities.

Language barrier was also noted as a of the challenges facing the organization of the supported housing unit. O'Reilly, Ryan, and Hickey (2010) confirm the pattern of the replies revealed a consistency with the theory, indicating that language barrier is one of the most critical challenges that people confront that causes difficulty in adaption. Participant of the study mentioned not every resident in the housing unit could understand and speak Finnish language. In short, the respondents stated that housing unit also accommodate immigrants and so using a language that they do not understand deter them from participating in the organized activities. It is worth noting that residents' well-being could be hampered because of the use of uncommon language. This is consistent with (Heng 2018) that the one of the most serious issues is the language barrier, which has detrimental implications.

One challenge confronting the activities is the short stay of residents at the supported housing unit. The study's participants argued that some of the residents require to participate in the activities longer to overcome their challenges and improve their well-being. As a result, staying in the housing unit for a short time could affect their well-being and development.

8 CONCLUSION

The study was centred on investigating the benefits of social activities organized by housing management for the residents. Following the social, economic, and educational background where the residents come from, the professionals managing the facilities deem it important to create a platform where residents can get together, socialize, learn new skills, meet other residents, and share their experiences. The study's idea was based on my professional practice placement in one facility and my participation in some of the events. I then developed an interest in finding out if threshold activities were impactful in the lives of residents.

It was revealed that the activities in the housing unit have positive impact and improves the well-being of the residents. The study's key findings regarding the benefit of the organized events in the housing unit included self-confidence, social inclusion, independency, and motivation.

Though the supported housing unit activities provided many positive impacts, the findings also disclosed some challenges confronting the organizers and the residents. The COVID-19 pandemic, language barrier and short stay of residents in the supported housing unit were the major challenges identified in this study.

The study outcome answered all the research questions and provided further insight in the field of social and welfare services. The analysed data and results therein, shows the relevancy of the study in the field of social work.

8.1 Professional development

The study outcome pointed out the need to integrate social activities during planning and implementation of social care. In social work continuing education, organizing activities for clients, especially vulnerable groups, should be an integral part of the curriculum. Threshold activities from the research result showed that service users' self-worth, motivation, and general positive life

outlook improved. It is expected of every social worker or social service worker to network professionally, advocate for clients, and maintain a practice devoid of malpractices. Results derived from the studies will help workers in the fields of social services and welfare better serve individuals, families, and their communities. The need to use social activities as a framework to engage clients, thereby enhancing their networking ability and improving their general well-being, cannot be overstated. Professional learning that focuses on contextually based, personalized, data-driven instruction is one of the three central components of breakthrough thinking that will be critical to successful educational reform and that will noticeably improve and sustain learning for learners and instructors alike (Fullan, Hill & Crevola 2006).

The study gave me insight and thoughtful understanding on research process in social sciences. I was inspired and have seen the need to acquire further education, gain more professional experience, learn relevant skills, and to educate others about social work and services. The get-together recreational activities were result-oriented. I saw first-hand during my 13 weeks of professional development placement in the housing facility, on how social activities enhance social inclusion, interpersonal relationships, and social networking among residents. These observations were validated by study participants during data collection.

8.2 Recommendations

The study was conducted during the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. These brought about restrictions imposed by the government to stem the tide of the pandemic. These include social distancing, lockdowns of businesses, education, religious events, and social activities.

In view of this, it will be difficult to organize contact social activities for clients. The author recommends using virtual platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom Meetings, and so on to organize recreational activities for residents. Moreover, professionals working in the housing unit can update themselves on modern

means of reaching the clients and educate them on how to use sophisticated tools in their activities.

Limitations caused by language insufficiency among immigrant residents posed a challenge to social care workers. This factor hampers organizing activities for residents. Some residents were not fully participating because they cannot understand very well the language of instructions. It is recommended that sufficient fund should be available to hire an interpreter as at when needed.

The housing organization works in collaboration with the municipality in proving services for the residents. Municipalities rule states that each resident have maximum of two years to live in the apartments. The housing organization, in other words, would want to accommodate clients longer. The Municipality working in collaboration with my work life partner Supported Housing unit emphasizes on lack of resources to fund living beyond two years per service user. The author recommends adequate budgetary allocation to enable service users to live over two years when necessary.

REFERENCES

Adams, W. C. (2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews. *Handbook of practical program evaluation*, *4*, 492-505.

Allen, M., & Benjaminsen, L. (2020). *Ending homelessness? : The contrasting experiences of ireland, denmark and finland*. Bristol: Policy Press. Retrieved from http://ebookcen-tral.proquest.com/lib/diak/detail.action?docID=6110739

Arene. (2019). *Ethical recommendations for thesis writing at Universities of Applied Sciences. Arene Ry*. https://www.oecd-ili-brary.org/docserver/aa39e88f-en.pdf?ex-pires=1615410212&id=id&accname=guest&check-sum=6117889463FB99CD06B3E1307DAB3EB8. Accessed 20.02.2021.

Bandura, A. 1977. Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioural change. Psychological Review 84(2): 191- 215.

Banks, S. (2006). *Ethics and values in social work*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Blomberg, S. (2020). *Housing First-A Multifaceted Experience-The Journey of Recovery Through the Support of Housing First*. Malmö Univer-sity: Faculty of Health and Society

Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualita-tive Research in Psychology*, 3, 77–101.

Chemers, M.M., Watson, C.B., May, S.T. 2000. Dispositional Affect and Leadership Effectiveness: A Comparison of Self-Esteem, Opti-mism, and Efficacy. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 26(3): 267-277.

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017) Thematic analysis, The Journal of Positive Psychology, 12:3, 297-298, DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613

Cuthill, F. (2018). *Homelessness, social exclusion and health: Global perspec-tives, local solutions*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press. Re-trieved

from https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=2286577&site=ehost-live&scope=site&authtype=sso&custid=s4777465

Deci, E. L. & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "What" and "Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behaviour. Psychological Inquiry 11 (4), 227-268.

Does housing first work? what research says about the effects of stable Housing. (2020, 05). *Congressional Digest*, 99, 10. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/2392486085?accountid=27468

Doyle, A. (2020). *What Is a Semi-Structured Interview? Definition & Examples of a Semi-Structured Interview.* Retrieved 16.11.2021 from Semi-Structured Interviews: What Are They? (the-balancecareers.com)

European Center for Diseases Prevention and Control. Retrieved 20.11.21 from https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19/latest-evidence/coronaviruses

Eyisi, D. (2016). The usefulness of qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in researching problem-solving ability in science education curriculum. *Journal of Education and Practice*, *7*(15), 91-100.

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. (2021). Coronavirus COVID-19 – Latest Updates. Retrieved 25.10.21 from https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases-and-vaccinations/what-s-new/corona

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. (2021). Travel and the coronavirus pandemic. Retrieved 25.10.2021 from https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases-and-vaccinations/what-s-new/coronavirus-covid-19-latest-updates/travel-and-the-coronavirus-pandemic

Fullan, M., Hill, P., & Crevola, C. (2006). Breakthrough. Corwin Press

Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2012). Applied thematic analysis. Los Angeles: Sage Publications. Retrieved from https://diak.finna.fi/Record/diana.115461

Heng, T. T. (2018). Different is Not Deficient: Contradicting Stereotypes of Chinese International Students in U.S. Higher Education. *Studies in Higher Education* 43 (1): 22-36.

Homeless Hub. (2021). Housing First. Retrieved 25.10.2021 from
https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/housing-first

Horghagen, S., Fostvedt, B., & Alsaker, S. (2014). Craft activities in groups at meeting places: Supporting mental health users' everyday occupations. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 21(2), 145-152. DOI: 10.3109/11038128.2013.866691Retrieved 15.9.2020 https://www.pelastusarmeija.fi/uutisia/uutiset/housing-first

Housing First England. (2019). Exploring patterns of Housing First support: Resident Journeys. Homeless link UK. Retrieved 11.11.2021 from https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2020/20200790

Hübner, H. (2007). The communicating company: Towards an alternative theory of corporate communication. New York: Springer. Retrieved from https://finna.fi/Record/aalto.995692004406526

Jackson, R. L., Drummond, D. K., & Camara, S. (2007). What is qualitative research?. *Qualitative research reports in communication*, *8*(1), 21-28.

King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. In Cassell, C., Symon, G. (Eds.), Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research (pp. 257–270). London, UK: Sage

Kroenke, C. H., and others. "Social Networks, Social Support, and Survival After Breast Cancer Diagnosis." Journal of Clinical Oncology, 2006, 24, 1150-1111.

Nicholson, N. (2009). Social isolation in older adults: An evolutionary concept analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 65*, 1342–1352. doi:10.1111/j.1365–2648.2008.04959. Retrieved 14.03.2021 from https://asuntoensin.fi/assets/files/2018/10/Measuring-homelessness-in-Finland-thoughts-for-development.pdf.

O'Reilly, A., Ryan, D., & Hickey, T. (2010). The Psychological Well-Being and Sociocultural Adaptation of Short-Term International Students in Ireland. *Journal of College Student Development* 51(5), 584-598.doi:10.1353/csd.2010.0011.

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation

research. *Administration and policy in mental health and mental health services research*, *42*(5), 533-544.

Pawar, M. (2020). The global impact of and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. *The International Journal of Community and Social Development* 2(2) 111–120.

Pleace, Nicholas & Culhane, Dennis & Granfelt, Riitta & Knutagård, Marcus (2015) *The Finnish Homelessness Strategy: An Internationa Review*. Helsinki: Reports of the Ministry of the Environment

Raitakari, S., & Juhila, K. (2015). Housing First literature: different orientations and political-practical arguments. *European Journal of Homelessness _ Volume*, *9*(1).

Refaeli, T. (2017). Narratives of care leavers: What promotes resilience in transitions to independent lives? *Children and Youth Services Review, 79,* 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.05.023

Russell, K. S., & Stephen, M. G. (2011). *Homelessness, housing, and mental illness*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. Retrieved from https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=668837&site=ehost-live&scope=site&authtype=sso&custid=s4777465

Silverman, R. M & Patterson, K. L. (2015). *Qualitative Research Methods for Community Development*. Newyork: Routledge

Stuckey, H. L. (2013). Three types of interviews: Qualitative research methods in social health. *Journal of Social Health and Diabetes*, *1*(02), 056-059.

Tongco, M. D. C. (2007). Purposive sampling as a tool for informant selection. *Ethnobotany Research and applications*, *5*, 147-158.

Tsemberis, S. (2010). Housing first: The pathways model to end homelessness for people with mental illness and addiction manual. *European Journal of Homelessness*, *5*(2).

Turku Municipality. (202). Housing services for persons with intellectual disabilities. Retrieved 25.10.2021 from https://www.turku.fi/en/health-and-social-services/special-services-disabled/housing-services-persons-intellectual

Weiss, R. S. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*

World Health Organization. (2020). *Origin of SARS-CoV-2*. Retrieved 10.11.2021 from https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332197/WHO-2019-nCoV-FAQ-Virus_origin-2020.1-eng.pdf

Y-Foundation. (2017). *Annual report 2017: CEO's review*. Retrieved 15.9.2020 from https://ysaatio.fi/en/annual-report-2017/financial-statements-and-board-of-directors-report-2017

Y-Foundation. (2018). A home of your own: Housing First and ending homelessness in Finland. Retrieved 15.9.2020 from https://ysaatio.fi/assets/files/2018/01/A_Home_of_Your_Own_lowres_spreads.pdf.

APPENDIX 1. Interview questions for professionals working in a housing unit

I will derive the benefits offered by semi-structured interview in obtaining a valid and reproducible data for the thesis. Due to the increasing number of Corona virus (Covid-19) infection in Finland, it will be difficult to conduct a one-on-one physical interview. I have agreed with the study participants on a recorded team meeting interview, they warmly obliged to my request. My interview questions were structured to be more open ended and will offer my interviewee an opportunity for broader discussion. The data collection duration is planned to span between 40mins to 1hour per participant. I have put all machinery in place pending the thesis plan approval. I strongly believe that my studies will contribute to community work in social service sector.

1. Can you tell me about yourself and how long have you been working in the organization?
2. What kind of activities do you provide for the residents of this housing unit? Please give me some examples of the activities and who co-ordinate them?
3. Have you observed any improvement in the well-being of the residents because of recreational activities?

4. What are the feelings like among residents after each low threshold activities?
5. Did you observe any improvement in the self-esteem of participants because of the organized events?
6. In some residential housing, it seems that some residents feel socially isolated and excluded. What would you say about that?

APPENDIX 2. Cover letter for Data collection

COVER LETTER FOR DATA COLLECTION

I am writing to seek your consent as a study participant in conducting my thesis research. My name is Sibongile Mashereni, a final year student in Social Services Diaconia University of Applied Science (DIAK) Helsinki, Finland. The study is titled " ACTIVITIES IN A SUPPORTED HOUSING UNIT: Professionals` perspectives on residents experiences ".

In view of this, I want to assure you that your participation in this study is voluntary. I have taken the necessary step to ensure that your identity and the retrieved information is kept confidential. Data will be collected through semi-structured recorded interview via teams and will be destroyed afterwards.

Thank you in anticipation, looking forward to your kind reply.

Best regards
Sibongile Mashereni