



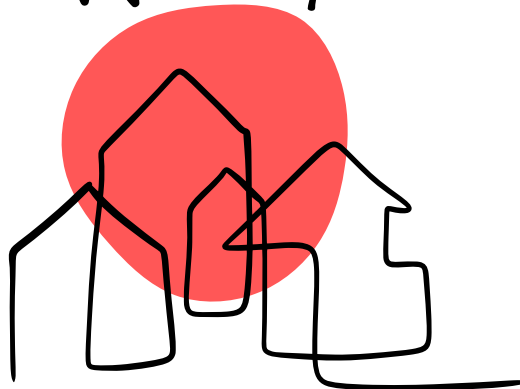
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INTEGRATED PATHWAYS

for continuous learning and support
in multiple exclusion homelessness

WooH



THE WAY OUT OF HOMELESSNESS



THE PROJECT

IN SHORT

ACRONYM	WOOH
TITLE	The way out of homelessness. Sharing strategies and practices between Bologna and Norrköping municipality
FUNDING PROGRAMME	ERASMUS+, Key Action 2, Small Scale
LENGTH	2024 - 2026
GENERAL OBJECTIVE	The general objective of the project is enhancing the skills and methodologies of social workers in supporting people experiencing multiple exclusion homelessness, through the housing first model.
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	The specific objectives are: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Sharing new strategies and methodologies among social workers related to health, mental and physical well-being of the HF service users, increasing social and community participation, reduce antisocial behaviour and substance misuse, working to identify and reduce intimate partner violence2. Establishing a network for knowledge exchange in the framework of the housing first model, among social workers.3. Developing an international community of practice among social workers for continuous learning and support.
LEAD PARTNER	Socialkontoret - Municipality of Norrköping (SE)
PARTNERS	ASP Città di Bologna - Municipality of Bologna (IT)
WEBSITE	www.sern.eu/projects/wooh



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INTEGRATED PATHWAYS FOR
CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND SUPPORT IN
MULTIPLE EXCLUSION HOMELESSNESS



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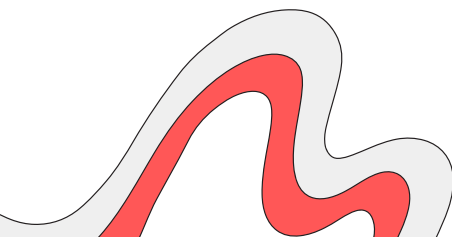
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INTEGRATED PATHWAYS FOR
CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND SUPPORT IN
MULTIPLE EXCLUSION HOMELESSNESS





INTRODUCTION

TO THE PROJECT ACTIVITIES

WOOH – The Way Out of Homelessness is a transnational cooperation project between the ASP City of Bologna - Municipality of Bologna (Italy) and the Municipality of Norrköping (Sweden), aimed at strengthening professional competences and shared methodologies in addressing multiple exclusion homelessness through the Housing First model.

Multiple exclusion homelessness affects people facing a combination of severe challenges beyond the lack of housing, such as mental and physical health issues, substance misuse, experiences of violence, and deep social exclusion. Responding effectively to these complex situations requires integrated, rights-based and person-centred approaches, as well as continuous professional learning and exchange.



Within this framework, WOOH promotes mutual learning and knowledge sharing among social workers and professionals involved in Housing First services. Through seminars, study visits, peer exchange and joint reflection, the project creates a structured space for comparing practices, identifying success factors and challenges, and strengthening the capacity of services to support people with complex needs.

Motivation

A central objective of the project is the development of a shared professional framework, developed through the exchange of experience and practices at European level, that enhances social workers' skills in supporting health and well-being, fostering social and community participation, reducing antisocial behaviour and substance misuse, and identifying and addressing intimate partner violence within Housing First pathways.





*Daily Center Hela människan
Norrköping, May 2025*

The transnational dimension of WOOH is a key added value, allowing partners to compare welfare systems, service organisation and operational tools in different national contexts, be inspired by other good practices while reinforcing a common vision of housing as a fundamental human right.

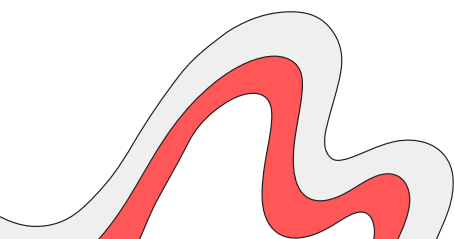
The transnational dimension of the project is grounded in two core seminars held in Bologna (November 2025) and Norrköping (May 2025), during which local services and their operational models were presented, analysed and discussed, highlighting strengths and good practices that can possibly be transferred and applied across similar housing and homelessness services throughout Europe.



*City tour... Bologna the Red, the Fat, the Learned
Bologna, November 2025*

These Guidelines are the core outcomes of the WOOH project. They are designed to support social workers and practitioners by sharing approaches, strategies and practical insights emerging from the collaboration between Bologna and Norrköping. The Guidelines aim to contribute to the development of an international community of practice and to support the continuous improvement of Housing First services for people experiencing multiple exclusion homelessness.

These guidelines are intended for social workers, educators and all professionals working within Housing First programmes and, more broadly, in housing and homelessness services.



PUBLIC HOUSING IN SWEDEN

AND DIFFERENT FORMS OF COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN NORRKÖPING MUNICIPALITY AND HYRESBOSTÄDER

Public housing (Allmännyttan) in Sweden refers to housing companies that are owned by municipalities and whose mission is to offer good and affordable housing for everyone, not just to maximize profits. The basic idea is that these companies should contribute to a socially sustainable society by:

1. Provide housing for all groups – regardless of income, background or life situation.
2. Operate without profit maximisation – surplus is reinvested in the business, for example for maintenance and new construction.
3. Promote mixed living environments – to counteract segregation and create safe areas.
4. Follow the municipality's housing policy goals – for example, to build more rental apartments or offer housing for the elderly and young people.

Public housing is regulated by, among other things, the Act on Public Utility Municipal Housing Companies, which sets requirements for commercial viability but also social responsibility.

As a municipal housing company within the public housing sector, Hyresbostäder has taken a social responsibility to work together with Norrköping Municipality to counteract homelessness and make it easier for people who, for various reasons, find it difficult to enter the regular housing market. This applies primarily to individuals who are unable to obtain housing on their own due to, for example, previous substance abuse, financial difficulties or other social vulnerability that form the basis for assistance decisions from the social services.

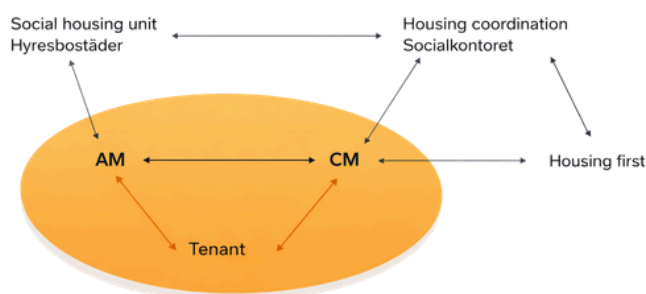
Hyresbostäder and Norrköping Municipality have collaborated in various forms of transitional housing since 1987. Originally, the collaboration focused on people who were at risk of causing disturbances to nearby tenants. Over time, the target group has broadened and today includes people with varying needs for social interventions. During the ongoing support effort, the municipality has acted as a creditor and provided a contact person as a link between tenant and landlord.

Rental housing and the Social Services Office collaborate in various forms, and these are described below:

The accommodation options offered to homeless adults in Norrköping are:


- * **Emergency housing** for acute homelessness that is applied for night by night, when applying, the client can choose whether the application should also include other types of housing such as Housing First. These rooms are located within low-threshold housing which is conducted in properties rented or owned by the municipality, these are not part of the collaboration with Hyresbostäder.
- * **Low-threshold housing** in collectives with a fixed staff group such as Gränden and Elsa. There is a permanent staff group in place in the property who provide support based on individual needs. In addition to this, the residents can receive, for example, home nursing at the home.
- * **Non-transferable social services apartments** in the form of apartments from the property owners' regular apartment stock that the social services office has access to according to a collaboration agreement between the property owners and the Housing Coordination. These apartments are rented by the social services office and cannot be transferred to a first-hand contract. Support is provided by a resource team that works on the basis of case management. This kind of apartment is also available for young adults with their own staff group.
- * **Transitional apartments** with tenancy take-over option are apartments from the property owners' regular apartment stock that the social services office has access to according to a collaboration agreement between the property owners and the Housing Coordination. The goal is for the person to gain the trust of the property owner and after a period of time, at least 18 months, be able to take over the first-hand contract in the existing apartment. Different types and intensities of support can be offered based on the resident's needs. Housing First takes place in the same way as Transitional apartments with tenancy take over option, the resident undertakes to comply with the rental legislation and receives support from the Case Manager based on their individual needs. Housing first is modelled through the collaboration form called The Triad Model illustrated below.

Hyresbostäder & Housing first



AM - Area Manager Hyresbostäder
CM - Case manager Housing first

DU ÄR HEMMA
HYRESBOSTÄDER

 INTEGRATED PATHWAYS FOR
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AGREEMENTS AND TENURE

For the forms of housing within the framework of the cooperation between Hyresbostäder and Norrköping Municipality, special agreements apply. The agreements are regulated by agreements between the property owner, Norrköping Municipality and the intended tenant, including an application to the rent tribunal for waiver of security of tenure. This means that if the accommodation does not work according to the agreement, the notice period is one week.

BEST LOCAL PRACTICE, COLLABORATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND CASE MANAGEMENT

One success factor is that the collaboration between Hyresbostäder and other property owners and Norrköping Municipality, to a large extent provides access to apartments from the property owners' usual stock, this means that people with social problems can be integrated into ordinary apartment buildings and not referred to special housing that can be perceived as stigmatizing. This also contributes to housing stability for the resident.

Another success factor for the Social Services Office has been the implementation project that was carried out during the introduction of Housing First. Prior to implementation, a survey was carried out when all initiatives for homeless persons were reviewed and conscious decisions were made in line with the basic principles of Housing First. One example is that all requirements for drug-free and sobriety were abolished. The introduction of Housing First has meant that other efforts, mainly in the form of collective housing with different regulations that go beyond the rental legislation, have been abolished, this based on the Dead Horse Theory. The theory of dead horses is a metaphorical way of describing how organizations continue to invest time, resources, and legitimacy in ways of working that have empirically proven to be ineffective or directly harmful. Instead of admitting that "the horse is dead", strategies are often developed to change riders, introduce new steering documents or reformulate the goals – without questioning the basic assumptions. [SEE APPENDIX]

Previously, housing interventions in Norrköping were organised in a staircase where emergency housing was the first step and then low-threshold housing. After that, people who managed to stay sober and drug-free had to move to another accommodation with continued requirements for drug-free before they were offered the opportunity for a supported apartment, which in turn could be converted into their own first-hand contract. Today, people who apply for emergency housing can apply for Housing First directly and there are no requirements for drug-free or sobriety. This has resulted in that the turnover at our low-threshold homes is significantly lower and the pressure on emergency housing has decreased significantly, which means greater stability and higher continuity in support for the residents.

None of the housing interventions have time limits but are based on individual needs and the support for the individual can increase and decrease based on the need for support changing.

Previously, the support offered in different types of housing was more static, and then the residents were often perceived as belonging to the wrong target group. Now, support can be offered in all areas of life, in all forms of housing.

Furthermore the support for people with comorbidities has been provided primarily on the basis of the Resource Group ACT (R-ACT). R-ACT is a manual-based, evidence-based working model for coordinating care and support efforts for people with mental health conditions, such as depression, schizophrenia, other psychoses, anxiety and addiction. It is about coordinating medical and psychosocial efforts in a systematic way.

The resource group is the "hub" in the R-ACT work. It consists of: the user, relatives of the user's choice, professional contacts that the patient considers important, the Case Manager (always present) and the responsible physician (always present). The resource group meets regularly to plan, implement and follow up on initiatives and goals. RACT is based on the user's goals, needs and priorities guiding the work, which is in line with national guidelines and person-centred working methods.

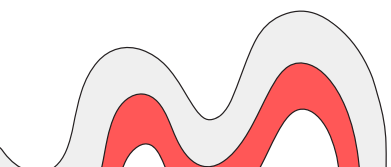
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WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT FROM THE PROJECT?

COOPERATION – THE KEY TO A COHESIVE WELFARE SYSTEM

Sweden, like the other Nordic countries, has a strong and well-developed welfare system. It is easy to focus on the existing institutions and public resources, but reaching people in particularly vulnerable situations requires collaboration that goes beyond the traditional systems. NGOs fulfil a unique function here. These actors can often build relationships and create trust in a way that authorities are not always able to – not least when it comes to people with substance abuse or other complex life situations, where contact with the public sector can be characterised by a risk of coercive measures or previous negative experiences.

In international contexts, there are important lessons to be learned. One example is Bologna, where limited public resources have created strong incentives to develop cooperation models between the municipality, civil society and other actors.



The result is a high degree of flexibility and shared responsibility. It shows that collaboration is not just an organisational issue, but a way of working that can strengthen the whole and give more people the support they need.

HOUSING FIRST – A NATIONAL STRATEGY THAT REQUIRES LOCAL SOLUTIONS

Housing first is firmly anchored in Sweden's national homelessness strategy, but the way of working is implemented in practice at the local level. This means that challenges, opportunities and solutions vary from municipality to municipality. It is the local landlords who decide what supply of housing is available, and it is local politicians who design the guidelines for financial assistance and acceptable rent levels.

A central problem arises here: since financial assistance only covers rents up to a certain level – often relatively low – people with such support are referred to residential areas with lower rent levels. The result is that the welfare system inadvertently contributes to creating or reinforcing an already existing segregation. When groups with limited economic opportunities are concentrated in vulnerable areas, social problems are exacerbated, which risks jeopardising both long-term stability and the chances of recovery.

At the same time, the experience of Housing First, both nationally and internationally, shows that the model works well when the local conditions are in place – when there is trust between the municipality and landlords, when the support is individualised and when collaboration between actors works. Therefore, it is crucial that municipalities receive support in developing local cooperation structures, working strategically with housing supply and at the same time promoting inclusion rather than segregation.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOCIAL HOUSING

HOUSING FIRST, RECEPTION SYSTEM AND SUPPORT TO HOMELESS PEOPLE IN BOLOGNA

The social reception system addressed in supporting Homeless people and provided by the City of Bologna through the coordination of ASP Città di Bologna comprises three main areas:

1 EMERGENCY RECEPTION FOR ADULTS AND FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

This area offers more than 350 beds, which are further integrated during Climate Alerts (heatwaves, cold spells, adverse weather events). The reception is organized within low-threshold collective facilities, designed to provide immediate relief from street conditions for single adults or temporary emergency housing for families with children following a housing crisis (e.g., eviction). These facilities prioritize rapid access and short-term support to ensure safety and stability in emergency situations.

2 SHARED HOUSING FOR SINGLE ADULTS

This area provides approximately 200 beds in collective housing facilities, offering longer-term reception pathways. These are often integrated socio-healthcare projects aimed at helping individuals regain autonomy and maintain personal care. Organizing services within collective structures also fosters highly relational contexts capable of building community, supporting both social integration and personal growth.

3 RECEPTION IN APARTMENTS FOR ADULTS AND FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

This area consists of widespread apartments throughout Bologna, including those under the Housing First Project, with a total of 248 individual apartments and 84 beds in shared apartments. Reception in these apartments is structured as a “housing transition” project, aimed at individuals and families who have already achieved higher levels of autonomy. Educational interventions here focus on the practical exit from the assistance pathway, supporting access to employment, stable housing, and necessary care.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES ACROSS ALL RECEPTION TYPES

Each type of reception defines specific duration and modalities of stay, supported by Reception Agreements drafted between the individual/family, the social service responsible for their care, and the hosting team.

HOUSING FIRST PROJECT IN BOLOGNA

The Housing First project, as adapted in Bologna, provides studio apartments or rooms in shared apartments to people who either come directly from the street - if they do not accept collective placements - or from other low-threshold facilities, where it is assessed that intensive and holistic educational support is needed. Participants must have a minimal level of economic autonomy to cover basic housing costs and a history of life on the street that has affected multiple areas of personal life (relational, family, economic, and occupational).

Unlike other programs, Housing First in Bologna does not set a fixed timeframe for participation, giving individuals the security of stable housing while working on small, achievable personal care goals, with the ultimate aim of supporting long-term autonomy and reintegration.

BEST LOCAL PRACTICES: NETWORKING, COMMUNITY WORK, OUTREACH WORK

* **Methodological and integrated educational work**

Our approach is strongly educational and integrative. The team focuses on building and maintaining a formal network that ensures comprehensive and coordinated care, prioritizing shared planning over reactive, emergency-driven interventions. In Bologna, this network typically includes local social services, mental health services, and specialized addiction support services. The aim is to create structured pathways that enable continuity of care, reduce fragmentation, and support long-term stability for individuals experiencing homelessness. By actively engaging multiple stakeholders, we foster a system where interventions are not isolated but interconnected, promoting holistic wellbeing and resilience.

* **Community work and Networking**

Individuals experiencing homelessness in Bologna often face extreme social isolation, with many of their personal and familiar relationships severely weakened or lost. Our work emphasizes the reconstruction of social ties and the reinforcement of a sense of community. This is achieved through targeted social programs and initiatives that encourage participation, socialization, and inclusion. Activities are closely coordinated with local territorial networks, including neighborhood network offices, municipal social services, and third-sector organizations. By strengthening these connections, we aim not only to support individual reintegration but also to foster community cohesion, making the urban environment more inclusive and responsive to vulnerable populations.

* Outreach work

Outreach efforts are essential to connect with people in the most isolated and marginalized situations. In Bologna, this involves proactive engagement in public spaces, collaboration with local authorities, and partnerships with NGOs and voluntary organizations to ensure that immediate needs are met while simultaneously linking individuals to longer-term services. Outreach is guided by a philosophy of trust, continuity, and presence: building relationships that are consistent and reliable, offering both practical support and pathways toward reintegration into the community.

By combining networking, community work, and outreach, our approach in Bologna seeks to transform fragmented support systems into cohesive, responsive, and human-centered networks that address both immediate survival needs and long-term social reintegration.

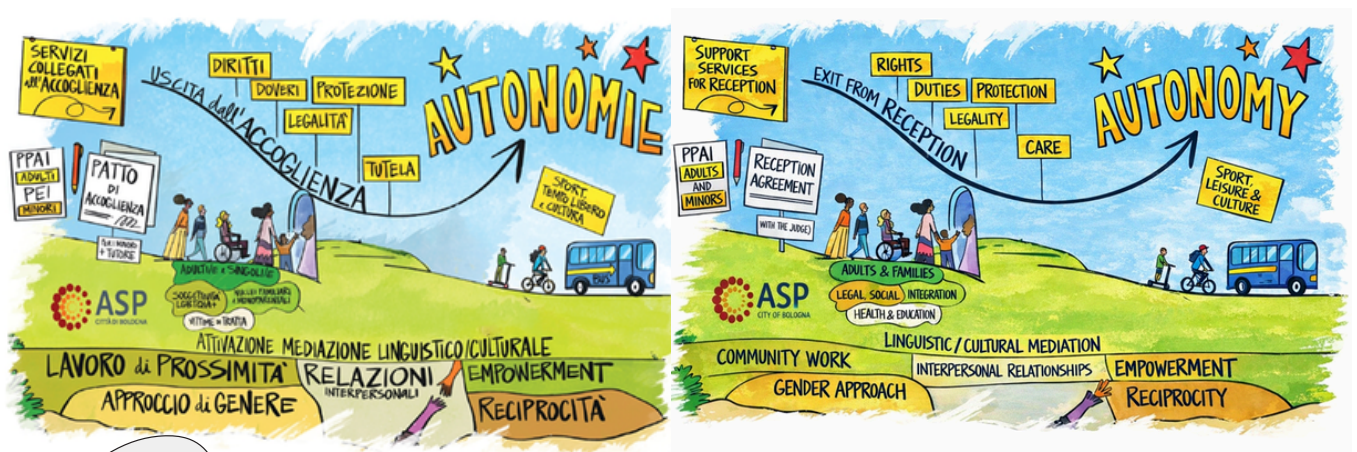
CONCLUSION

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT FROM THE PROJECT?

Echoes & Impressions - by ASP City of Bologna

HOME OR HOMES?

Within public welfare systems, programs are increasingly developing that broaden the concept of “home,” seeking to respond in different ways to different needs. The traditional idea of a single, standardized notion of “home” does not always represent the most appropriate response to a person’s situation. For this reason, diversification of housing solutions has become a cross-cutting principle in social policy. The focus is shifting from providing a house to creating flexible housing pathways that take into account vulnerability, autonomy, health conditions, and social support needs.



HOUSING FIRST – A NATIONAL PUBLIC COMMITMENT

In Sweden, the Housing First (HF) program is embedded within a welfare system that allows public authorities to cover the full cost of housing. Beneficiaries are not only supported in finding and matching with suitable accommodation, but are also sustained through a comprehensive public welfare structure that enables them to afford rent and domestic expenses. This represents a significant institutional commitment to individual care pathways, assumed at the national level through structured welfare plans and coordinated policies. Housing is recognized not as the final reward of a process, but as a starting point for social inclusion and recovery.

REACHING OUT

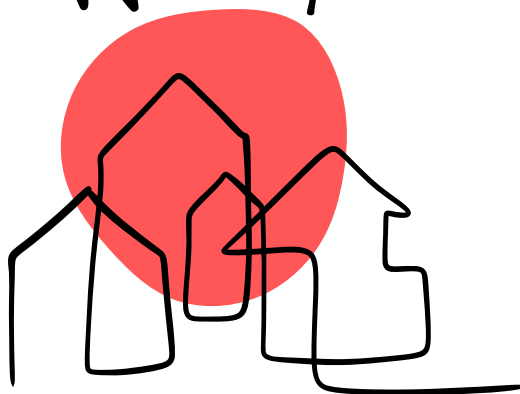
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HEALTH AND INTEGRATED CARE

Regarding shared case management between social and health services, there remains a strong need for coordination and dialogue. This exchange has highlighted that the so-called “silo logic” — where services operate separately with limited integration — is not unique to the Italian system but is widespread across welfare cultures. Overcoming this fragmentation requires continuous collaboration and the development of increasingly integrated and network-based approaches. Only through stronger interconnection between social and healthcare services can responses become truly person-centered and holistic.



WooH



THE WAY OUT OF HOMELESSNESS



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DEAD HORSES AND HOUSING FIRST

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF HOUSING FIRST BETWEEN ZOMBIE ORTHODOXIES AND THE NEED TO REMOVE

INTRODUCTION

The theory of dead horses is a metaphorical way of describing how organizations continue to invest time, resources, and legitimacy in ways of working that have empirically proven to be ineffective or directly harmful. Instead of admitting that "the horse is dead", strategies are often developed to change riders, introduce new steering documents or reformulate the goals – without questioning the basic assumptions.

The theory of dead horses can be used to analyze the implementation of Housing

First (Housing First) in Swedish municipalities. I also usually relate this to Geoff Mulgan's concept of Zombie Orthodoxies and Leidy Klotz's analysis in the book Subtract about the importance of removing rather than adding. This is something that we have worked on in the research project Take Away (<https://www.soch.lu.se/take-away>) and our research on Housing First with, among other things, the RECO project (<https://portal.research.lu.se/sv/projects/reco-resilienta-gemenskaper-genomh%C3%A5llbar-v%C3%A4lf%C3%A4rdstransformation/>).

DEAD HORSE THEORY

The theory of dead horses is not a formal scientific theory, but an organizational and governance metaphor used to describe how individuals, organizations, and institutions continue to invest in ways of working, policies, or ideas that clearly do not work. The core idea is simple: If you find yourself riding a dead horse, it's best to get off.^[1]

In practice, organizations often do the opposite.

What are the characteristics of a "dead horse"?

A "dead horse" can be:

- a way of working that repeatedly fails to achieve its goals
- a policy that lacks empirical support
- a method that is more costly than effective
- a practice that has survived despite its basic assumptions being disproved

The key is not that something has never worked, but that it continues to be used despite clear signs that it no longer does.

Typical organizational reactions instead of stepping down

The theory of dead horses is often used in conjunction with a list of common strategies that organizations resort to avoid admitting that the horse is dead:

1. You change riders (staff turnover, new manager)
2. You change saddle (new steering documents, new manuals)
3. You whip the horse harder (increased control, more demands)
4. An investigation is appointed into why the horse does not run
5. The horse is compared with other dead horses, and it is concluded that it is still not the worst
6. Redefining what "running" means

These strategies create activity and legitimacy but rarely lead to actual change.

Why do dead horses survive?

Dead horses do not survive because humans are ignorant, but because they fulfil functions:

Institutional inertia – systems are built around them

Professional identity – professional roles are linked to the way of working

Moral logic – the idea of "one must earn" efforts

Risk minimisation – it is safer to continue as before

Liability avoidance – no one wants to be the one who winds up

The relationship to research and evidence

The theory of dead horses points to a well-known paradox in evidence-based practice:

Knowledge of what works does not automatically lead to the cessation of what does not work.

What does it mean to "step off"?

Getting off a dead horse doesn't just mean that:

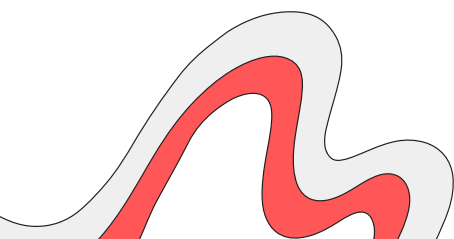
- End a project
- Introduce something new

without:

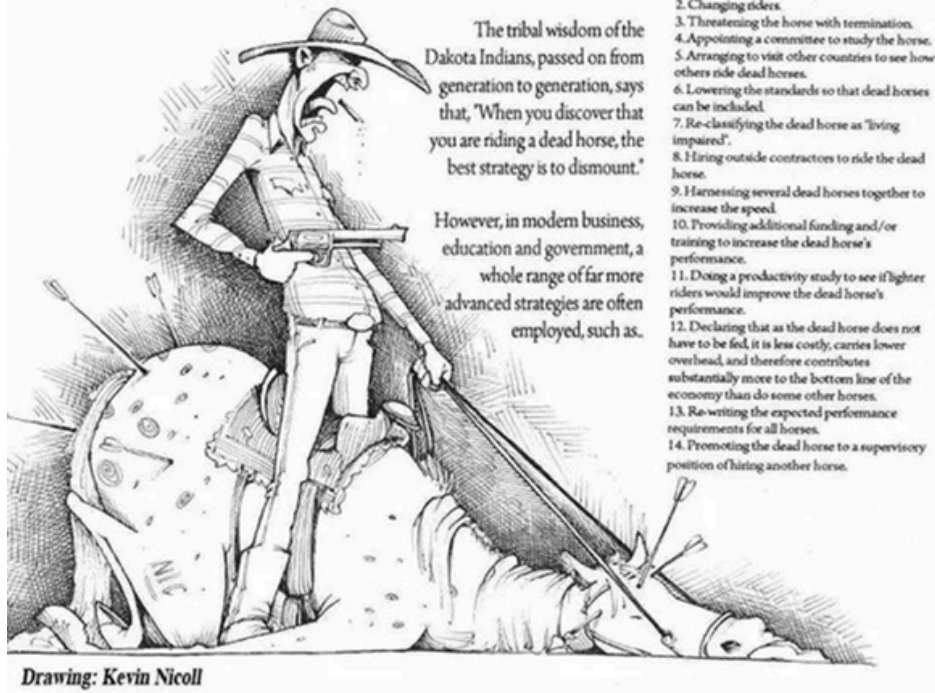
- decommissioning structures
- question basic assumptions
- remove unsupported requirements, steps, or controls

This is why the theory is often linked to ideas about:

- unlearning
- subtraction rather than addition
- system change rather than method change



THE DEAD HORSE THEORY



DEAD HORSES IN HOMELESSNESS WORK

In homelessness policy, step-by-step models, requirements for "housing capacity" and conditional housing solutions have for a long time shown limited results, especially for people with complex needs. Despite this, these ways of working still live on as organizational norms. In terms of dead horses, this means that professional systems continue to ride on interventions that do not lead to lasting housing solutions, despite extensive international evidence that Housing First provides better outcomes in terms of housing stability, health, and cost-effectiveness (Tsemberis, 2010).

Swedish research has shown how homelessness in Sweden is often understood as an individual problem rather than a structural one, which legitimizes control, training and conditions instead of rights-based solutions (Knutagård, 2009). When Housing is first implemented without these basic assumptions being questioned, the model risks becoming an addition rather than a paradigm shift.

Zombie orthodoxies and parallel systems

Geoff Mulgan describes Zombie Orthodoxies as ideas and practices that are intellectually disproved, but organizationally continue to guide action (Mulgan, 2022). In Swedish homelessness policy, the step-by-step logic can be understood as just such a zombie orthodoxy. It continues to structure assessments, resource allocation and professional identity, even when Housing First is formally introduced.

In practice, this leads to parallel systems: Housing first exists side by side with shelters, training apartments and fixed-term contracts. Instead of replacing the old, the new is placed on top. The result is an organizational overload where Housing First risks being adapted to existing logics rather than the other way around.

Subtraction as an implementation strategy

Leidy Klotz shows in *Subtract* that people and organizations systematically underestimate the value of removing things that don't work, and instead prefer to add new components (Klotz, 2021). The implementation of Housing First in Sweden clearly illustrates this. The focus is often on introducing new teams, manuals and project funds, rather than dismantling inefficient forms of housing, control mechanisms and assessment practices.

In our research project *Take Away*, we address this particular blind spot by analysing what needs to be removed in order for evidence-based working methods to have an impact. From this perspective, Housing First does not appear primarily as something to be implemented, but as something that requires active subtraction: the removal of requirements, the removal of steps, the removal of temporary solutions that have become permanent.

Getting off the horse

Fully implementing Housing First therefore means acknowledging which horses are dead – and daring to get off them. For civil servants in Swedish municipalities, this means a shift from project logic to system change, from additions to dismantling, and from moralising assessments to rights-based practice. This is ultimately about which welfare state logic should govern homelessness work: discipline or social inclusion.

Table 1: Degree of implementation of Housing First and the theory of dead horses

Degree of Implementation	Organizational characteristic	Dead horses	Consequence
Low	Housing first as a pilot project alongside steps	The stair-step model dominates	Limited impact, symbolic implementation
Medium	Housing first integrated but with Remaining Claims and Parallel Accommodations	Partly questioned	Results improve but are structurally inhibited
High	Housing first as the norm, other forms of housing are phased out	Dead horses identified and removed	Systemic change and lasting results
Full	Rights-based housing policy	Inga zombieortodoxier	Housing First as a natural internship



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