

How can a residential building facilitate the physical and social needs of home-seeking youth?

Abstract

This research addresses the rising amount of homelessness in Rotterdam. Homelessness should be prevented in an early stage to prevent health issues and long-term homelessness. Therefore the target group of this research are home-seeking youth between 18-23 years old. In this research will be spoken about home-seeking youth to reduce the stigma and to emphasize their quest for stable housing. This research seeks to explore the needs of home-seeking youth and how a residential building can address them. Research will be conducted through field research and involves interviews with professionals, workshops with long-term homeless individuals, and questionnaires for the target group to understand their needs and preferences regarding housing. The research aims to determine how a residential building can support the physical, mental, and social needs of youth seeking stable housing. The goal is finding a way to stably house home-seeking youth where they have a chance to work on their future and won't fall back into homelessness.

Research Plan

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1.0 Problem statement

1.1 Rising amount of homelessness

A protest was held in October 2023 in front of Rotterdam Central Station to raise awareness about the rapidly increasing number of homeless people in Rotterdam. With tents and camp beds they stayed the night to gain attention for the problem (Minnema, 2023). The manifest was called “Recht op rust” translated to the right to rest. Apart from the increasing homelessness in Rotterdam, there is a particular group where homelessness is increasing. According to the Salvation Army (Leger des Heils) there is a large increase in young people between the ages of 18 and 22 entering social shelters in 2022. This research was done in the four major cities of the Netherlands: Rotterdam, Amsterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht. Part of this group comes from youth care but remains a vulnerable group despite being 18 and “mature” (Leger des Heils, 2022).⁷In the transition from youth (18-), still partially dependent on for instance youth care, to adult (18-23) years, there is a lack of a transition after a person turns 18. This allows youth to fall out of the system (van Doorn et al., 2023). Without the prospect of permanent housing, it becomes difficult to get back into the system, especially if you don’t have a secure social network to fall back on. Home-seeking youth get off to a bad start as a result. This is why it is important that young people who want to make something of their lives get the opportunity they deserve. Housing is one of the main rights of being human, so this problem should be tackled as soon as possible. The house of representatives also sees this need. On the first of December 2022, the government wrote a letter to the house of representatives on the “National Homelessness Action Plan: A Home First” in which the approach is about the ‘prevention and housing first’ principle (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2022). There is also an action plan written specifically for young people ‘action plan homeless youth 2019-2021’ which deals more specifically with the young target group. (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2021)

1.2 Who is home-seeking youth?

Home-seeking youth in this study are homeless youth between the ages of 18 and 23 who are expected to stand on their own two feet but don’t have the means to do so. This group of youth often has a history with youth care but are let go at age 18 and have no place to go, but also no home base to fall back on. They often belong to ‘marginally housed’ and they also do not sleep on the street, but often with friends or family and are therefore difficult to grasp (Hammink & Rodenburg, 2014). To get a better grip on these different groups of homelessness, a new approach to counting different homeless groups is developed by FEANTSA (2015). It is called the ‘ETHOS’ approach, which is a new typology of homeless people which allows a broader understanding of the word homelessness. ETHOS stands for European typology of homelessness and housing exclusion. This approach looks at living conditions rather than the number of people sleeping on the streets or calling for social care. It should provide a better

representation of the number of people who are homeless (van Doorn et al., 2021). The different typologies of homelessness are divided among inadequate housing, insecure housing, houseless and roofless. Home seeking youth following this typology falls under the cap of insecure housing under operational category 8. This can be living with friends/ family, having no legal (sub)tenancy or illegal occupation of land (FEANTSA, 2015). Next to this: there is also a practical disadvantage of being marginally housed. No address means no unemployment benefit or difficulties for finding a job.

1.3 Stigmatisation

Another problem is that there is a huge stigma attached to the word “homelessness” even though it is not representative of a large portion of the group (Kansfonds.nl). This stigmatizing works in two ways. People often see homelessness as an individual problem, in which it is someone’s own fault for becoming homeless. Homeless people can take this stigma upon them and put the blame on themselves and become victims. Whereas in many cases the young people can do little to help that they ended up in this situation. The other image that one has with homelessness is a person sleeping outside on a bench, leading for homeless youth to not identify with this image and therefore not feel obliged to seek help (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2022). Therefore, in this study, we will not refer to homeless youth in the future but will instead refer to home-seeking youth from here on out. This term puts less emphasis on the fact that someone does not have a home, but more on the fact that they are looking for a home where they can work on their future.

1.4 Research question

This research will examine the needs of home-seeking youth and how a residential building will be able to answer to these needs. The research question that follows is:

How can a residential building facilitate the physical, social, and mental needs of home-seeking youth?

To arrive at this answer, both literature and field research will be conducted on the target group. Sub-questions that lead to this answer are:

- 1. What are the social, physical, and mental needs of home-seeking youth?*
- 2. How can housing prevent home-seeking youth to fall back into homelessness?*
- 3. What kind of housing typology would be most beneficial for home-seeking youth?*

2.0 Frame of reference

2.1 Relationship of homelessness and health

The susceptibility of home-seeking youth to drug and addiction use, medical problems, mental problems, violence and falling into victimization has been clearly demonstrated according to Garrett et al. (2008). Can housing reduce all these problems, as we hope? Several studies have been done on this and there are mixed results regarding the improvement in health when homeless individuals have found housing. Often the improvement in physical and mental health is associated with an improved social network that comes with it. At the point when there is no social integration after getting the house, the results seem to point in different directions. According to Van der Laan et al. (2017) surprisingly, acquiring independent housing was not directly related to change in perceived health in this study. This is not to say that getting a home is not important for improving health. It is important, but it needs to be reinforced with any treatment, employment support and making a good social network. (Zhaozhan et al., 2020). This is also evident in other research that focuses more on drug use after home seekers have found a home. The social network can make a difference in reduced drug use after housing or no difference when a proper social network is not established around the new place of residence (Rhoades et al., 2018). In the following research it is important to be conscious of the relationship between social, physical, and mental health which is shown in figure 1.

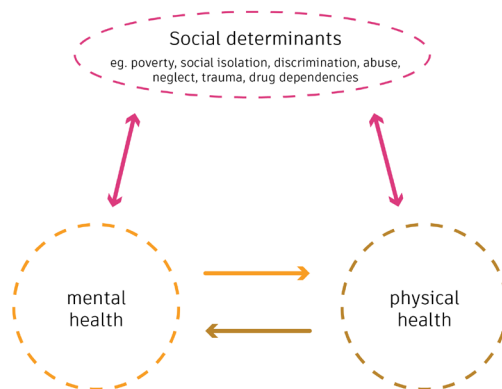


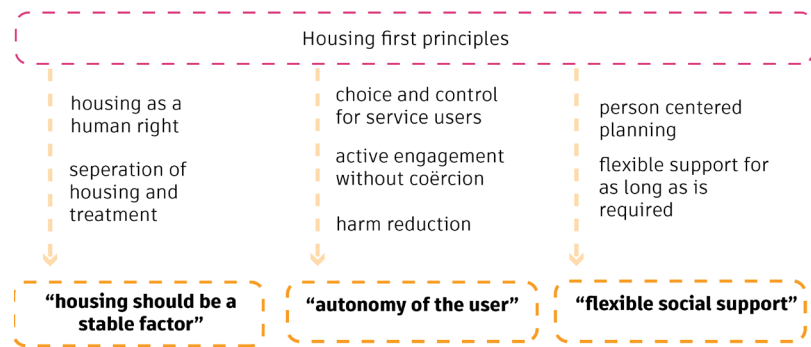
Figure 1. Mechanisms through which physical and mental health interact. Image based on Figure 1 in "Bringing together physical and mental health" (Naylon et al., 2016)

2.2 Housing first in the Netherlands.

Home-seeking youth need Housing First to get out of the system and be able to work on a healthy future and thereby avoid a structural health disadvantage. Housing first is a principle that has been widely researched (Schmit et al., 2023). Home-seeking youth struggle to get back into society because there is no appropriate housing. By having Housing First, they can have a fair chance to build a life for themselves and leave the past behind. It is important to have a solid foundation during the transition

to adulthood. There are eight principles for the ‘Housing First’ to work. These principles should be considered when designing a residential building in the Netherlands (Schmit et al., 2023). The eight principles of Housing First are envisioned in Figure 2 and they come together to three main terms. First, housing should be a stable factor. Second, an important factor to bring the Housing First to a success is bringing flexibility in the support that the target group receives. Next to that, it is important that home-seeking youth gets the autonomy they need to be able to live their life (Schmit et al., 2023).

Figure 2. Housing First principles. Image based on principles described in “Housing First as a System Approach: what Does This Require from the Netherlands?” (Schmit et al., 2023)



2.3 Needs of home-seeking youth

There are 5 needs of young people described in the study by Leerdam et al. (2021) and they are shown in Figure 3. The study is talking about young people who exited youth care, but these conditions apply well to the target group of home-seeking young people. The main need is a house tailored to their needs. A place to live that is appropriate, stable, and affordable. In addition, well-being and health is important and it is important that the young person is physically and mentally balanced but can also recognize when there is an imbalance and seek help in time. Third, it is important to have a foundation for future careers through activities, education, and work. The fourth need is that there is sufficient income and a plan for preventing and or resolving debt. And the fifth need is having sufficient relationships which consists of at least one adult who is permanently available and having a stable support network.

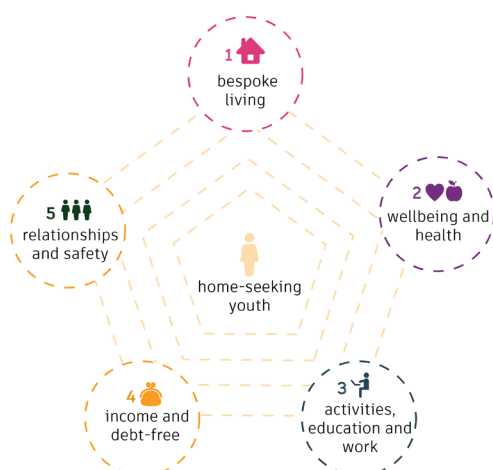


Figure 3. The needs ‘The Big 5’ of outflow youth from youth care(Jeugdzorg).

Image based on “Uitstroom uit instelling Jeugdzorg” (Impuls onderzoekscentrum maatschappelijke zorg, 2021)

2.3 housing typologies

There are different Housing First for youth typologies shown in Figure 4 that were suggested by the research of Gaetz (2017). The focus of this research will be developing design conditions for independent housing. Gaetz (2017) recommends a scattering approach to this independent form of housing as shown in figure 4. It will be researched how this scattered housing can be mixed with other target groups to create mutual benefits and a strengthening of social networks. On the other hand, combining this vulnerable group can bring problems as well, so research is needed to find important nuances and pitfalls when bringing together different groups.

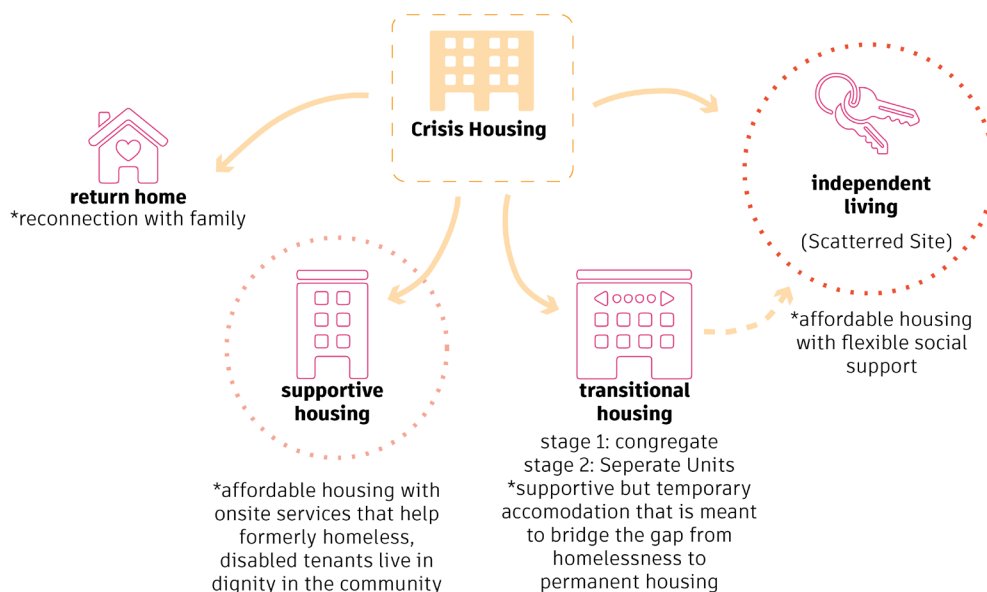


Figure 4. Models of accomodation within Housing First For Youth. Image based on Figure 2 in "This is housing first for youth" (Gaetz, 2017)

3.0 Methodology

To investigate the needs of home-seeking youth, several methods will be used as showed in figure 5. To answer the question “What are the physical, social and mental needs of home-seeking youth?” interviews, workshops and questionnaires will be held. The knowledge attained from field research will be strengthened by literature research.

3.1 Needs of home-seeking youth

Interviews will be held with professionals who encounter the target group at different stages of life. Interviews with institutions such as youth care (Jeugdzorg), mental health services (GGZ) and organisations that now house home-seeking youth. Youth Care has insight into the past of the home-seeking youth. Where does the target group come from and what kind of past does this target group have before they are homeless? So, this is about the life stage up to 18 years. Next, an interview is done with someone from the mental health services, who has insight into mental health through all ages. Furthermore, interviews will be done with organisations that house home-seeking youth to get specific information on housing needs of home-seeking youth.

3.2 triggers of home-seeking

To answer the question “How can housing prevent home-seeking youth to fall back into homelessness?” workshops will be held with long term homeless people to get a deep understanding on how these people came to be and see how this could have been prevented by identifying triggers to keep falling back into homelessness. Interviews will be down with the Salvation Army that has more insight into the target group 23+, but therefore no less useful information, because this group may also have been homeless before the age of 23 but did not manage to escape this throughout their life.

3.3 Desired housing typology

To answer the last question “What kind of housing typology would be most beneficial for home-seeking youth?” interviews and questionnaires will be done with the target group to find out what would be desired.

These sub questions should lead to answering the question: How can a residential building facilitate the physical, mental, and social needs of young people seeking a home? The target group can be a difficult group to research because of the traumas, psychological problems, and even possible drug dependencies. Care must be taken when dealing with the people in this study, and flexibility and caution are important to the success of the study.

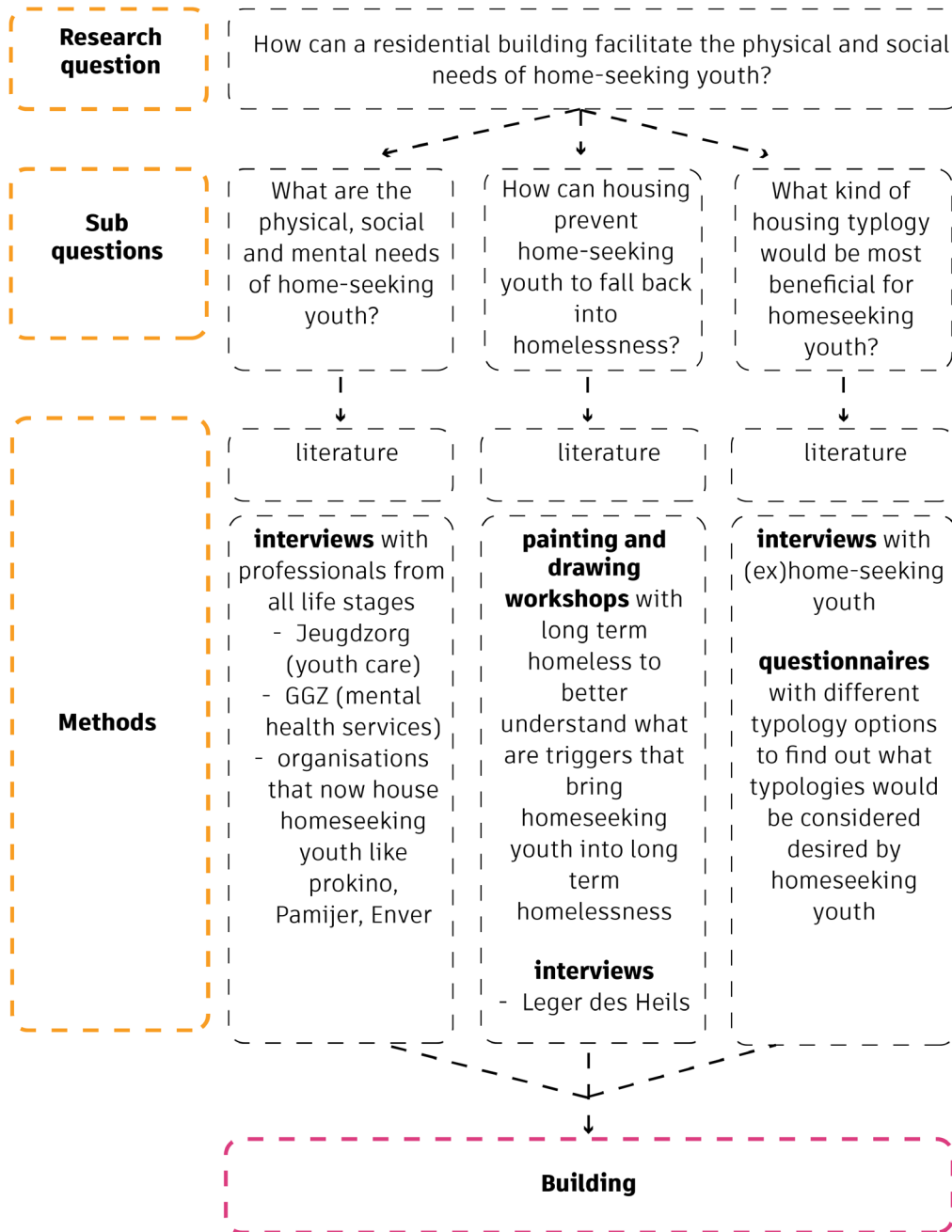


Figure 5: Methodology in scheme

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