

BEST PRACTICES LOW BARRIER, HOUSING FOCUSED SHELTER

SESSION TWO: HOUSING FIRST AND PROBLEM SOLVING IN EFFECTIVE SHELTER PRACTICE

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Training Series Overview

Week One

- Effective Homeless Response Systems
- Role of Emergency Shelter

Week Two

- Housing First Approach in Shelter
- Role of Shelter in Diversion and Problem Solving
- Intro to Transitioning Shelter to a Low Barrier Model

9/10/2024

Week Three

- Implementing Low Barrier Practice and the Role of “Rules”
- Housing Focused Shelter and Rapid Exits
- Creating a Housing Focused Environment

Week Four

- Continued Creating a Housing Focused Environment
- Using Data and Outcomes to Measure Success
- Taking Action and Wrap Up



Virtual Session Logistics



Breakout Rooms Who's Here?

- Your name
- Pronouns
- Role
- Identities
- Organization
- What was an aha moment you had from last Tuesday's training...

Aha!

REVIEW

Remember Session One?



Why Are Shelters So Important?

- People in a housing crisis will always need a safe and decent place to go that is immediately available
- Shelters will most likely be the only place people receive help to resolve their housing crisis and get connected to permanent housing
- Shelter eligibility, policies, and stays impacts performance outcomes and **system flow**



Why Are Shelters So Important?

- The effectiveness of emergency shelter greatly impacts the performance of your crisis response system
 - Average length of homelessness
 - Exits to permanent housing
 - Returns to homelessness

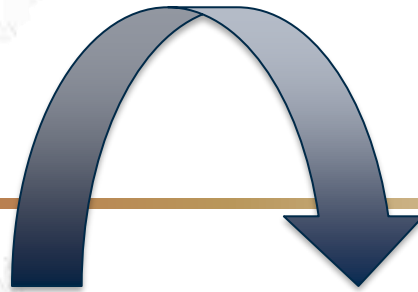


Effective Homeless Response System: Increase System Flow

System Flow:

An efficient and coordinated process that moves people from homelessness to housing as quickly as possible





Emergency Shelters in the CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

- Housing crisis resolution
- Shared Housing
- Family and Friends
- Rapid re-housing
- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Market rate housing
- Voucher

FIVE KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE SHELTER

THAT CREATE SYSTEM FLOW IN THE HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM



Key Elements of Emergency Shelters in an Effective Crisis Response System

- **Housing First Approach**
- Safe & Appropriate Diversion
- Immediate and Low-barrier Access
- Housing-focused, Rapid Exit Services
- Data to Measure Performance



Breakout Rooms

As a group, create a brief one sentence definition of Housing First....



Please turn on your cameras, unmute yourselves, and have a note taker who will report out!

Housing First Approach

Housing First is a homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people who are homeless as quickly as possible and connects them to supports necessary to sustain that housing



AFFORDABLE HOUSING

At the system level, key Housing First principles include...

- Policies and regulations do not create barriers to accessing services and housing
- People with the greatest needs are screened **INTO** programs and services, not **OUT OF**
- Communities provide a continuum of supports that meet the breadth of needs of all people experiencing homelessness, not just particular subpopulations
- Providers coordinate with each other to ensure that access to services is unified, streamlined, user-friendly, equitable, and available across the entire community
- All levels of service have a housing focus and are dedicated to quickly resolving the experience of homelessness

Housing First

HOUSING FIRST IS NOT	HOUSING FIRST IS
Just one type of program (not just PSH)	A system-wide philosophical approach to many types of homeless assistance interventions
One-size fits all	A philosophy that values flexibility, individualized supports, client choice, and autonomy
Housing only	Supportive services that people choose for themselves are a critical part of a Housing First approach
Setting people up for failure	The provision of a foundation of stability and health through permanent housing
A way to prioritize one population over another	A way to provide a housing intervention for everyone regardless of the severity of their needs

Poll: Which statement(s) most accurately reflect how Housing First is put into practice

Multiple Choice

1. The first step in working with a household is to start retrieving vital documents and increasing their income prior to beginning the housing process.
2. Housing conversations should happen with the first household contact to discuss past housing history, housing goals, and strengths to develop a housing plan together. All meetings focus on following the housing plan and assistance to identify available housing options.
3. Each HH is expected to engage in supportive services such as substance use treatment, mental health treatment, or employment services. Enrollment and compliance with services prompts the housing process.
4. Each HH must be connected to critical services (e.g., A MH clinician, childcare, etc.) to sustain in permanent housing long term after moving in.

Homelessness is Misunderstood & It Impacts Shelter Practice

- Almost everyone with poor credit history is housed, not homeless.
- Almost everyone with a history of evictions is housed, not homeless.
- Almost everyone with a felony conviction is housed, not homeless.
- Almost everyone who is a registered sex offender or sexual predator is housed, not homeless.

-Orgcode

Things to Keep in Mind

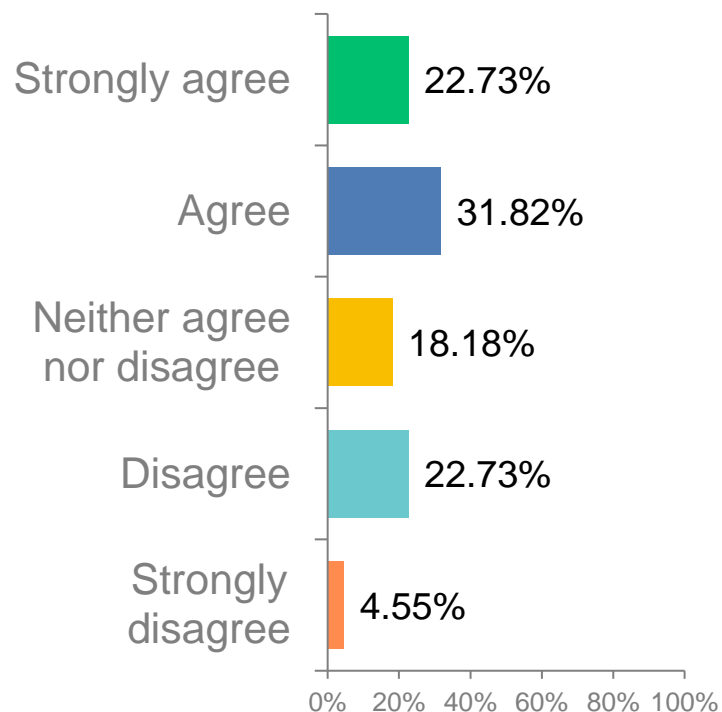
- Households experiencing homelessness are not significantly different than other low-income households
- Majority experience homelessness due to a financial or other crisis
- Prolonged exposure to homelessness has a significant negative impact on adults and children

“Blaming Housing First for the ongoing homelessness crisis is like blaming cancer treatments for cancer” –Jeff Olivet USICH Executive Director

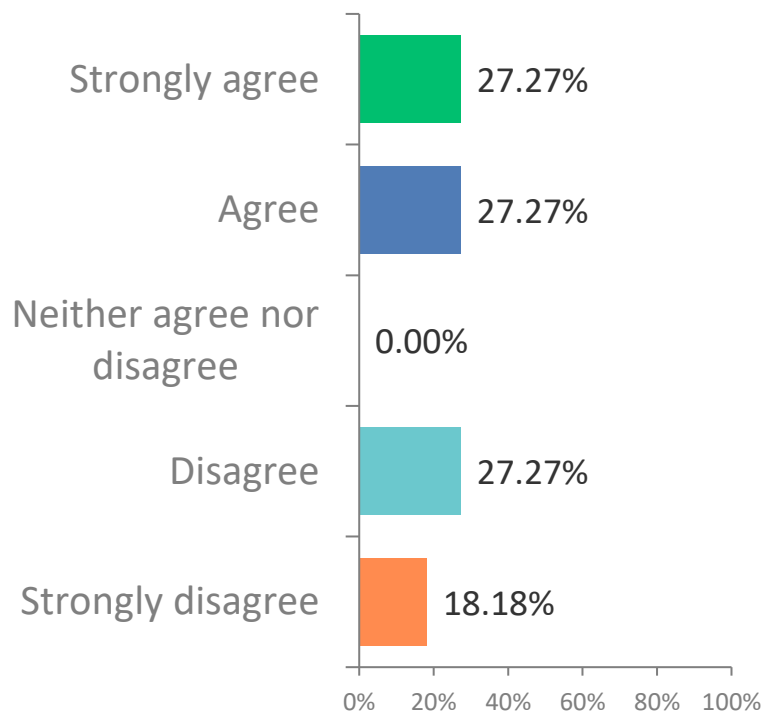


Our community has adopted a Housing First approach to ending homelessness.

Providers

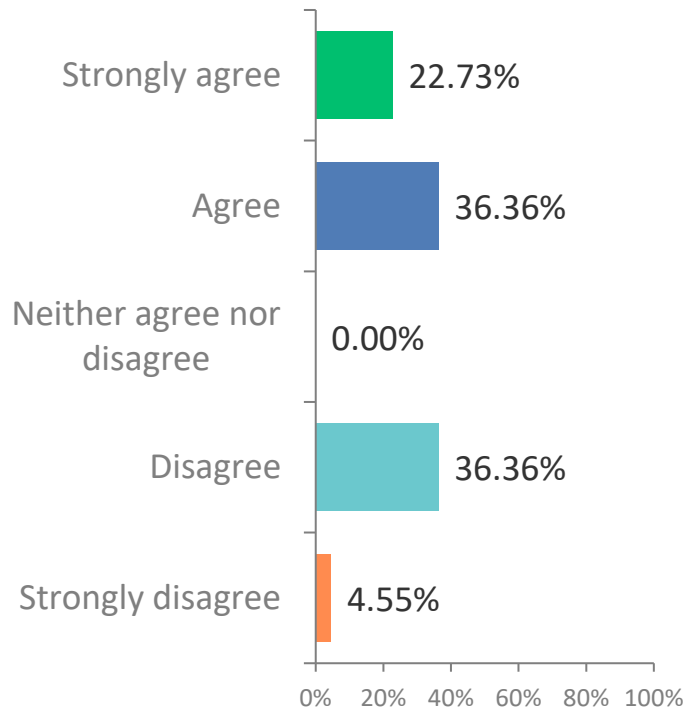


Leadership

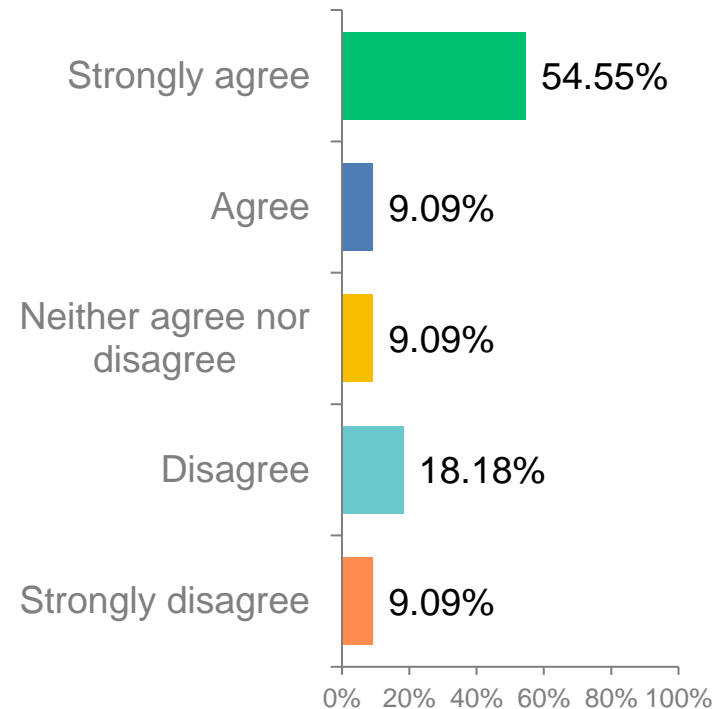


All persons experiencing homelessness are ready for housing and should be connected to housing quickly .

Providers



Leadership



INTEGRATING HOUSING FIRST

The Philosophical Shift



Advancing the Role of Shelter in
Reducing Homelessness

Philosophical Shift

Operational Shift

Practice Shift

Shelter Adopts Housing First Principles

Philosophy Shift

- Homelessness is foremost a housing problem
- Everyone is ready for housing **now** if they choose
- Permanent housing is a right to which all are entitled
- People should be returned to or stabilized in permanent housing as quickly as possible and voluntarily connected to resources necessary to sustain that housing

Shelter Adopts Housing First Principles Philosophy Shift

- Issues that may have contributed to a household's homelessness can best be addressed ***once they are permanently housed***
- For most people experiencing homelessness, intensive services are not necessary
- Vast majority of homeless individuals and families fall into homelessness ***one time*** after a housing or other crisis

Housing First

Operational Shift

- Mission Statement reflects the Housing First Philosophy
- Shelter adopts a “Housing First” orientation across all practice by using policies and procedures that:
 - Clearly define the housing first philosophy
 - Reflect low-barrier admission and retention policies
 - Emulate the Housing First Approach in shelter operations
- Shelter Job Descriptions require that employees embrace the Housing First philosophy, and job duties reflect a Housing First approach

Housing First Shelter

Operational Shift

Sample Mission Statement for a “Housing First” Shelter

OUR MISSION: To offer safe, temporary, emergency shelter to individuals experiencing homelessness, while offering individualized housing solutions. Our goal is to empower our guests to quickly obtain stable, permanent housing. We are committed to advancing a collaborative, locally driven solution to ending homelessness in our community.

McKinney Shelter

Hartford, CT

Housing First Cornerstone=Believe in HF Practice Requires a Shift in Conversations...

Shift from...

- Many of our clients/consumers have too many barriers to be successful in housing
- Housing is too expensive for the Housing First approach to work
- Some of my clients just aren't ready for housing
- The most successful Housing First approaches use the same approach and model when working with everyone

To...

- Creativity in housing options is critical!!
- **People Can Be Successful** regardless of barriers
- Housing First Philosophy offers a great opportunity to empower people without housing to believe in themselves and their success
- Many people that have the same housing history as our clients never become homeless and find ways to make housing work
- Creativity and flexibility are the key factors in successful housing first.

Housing First

Practice Shift

Shelters adopt a “Housing First” orientation across all practice by:

- Using strength-based case management
 - Strength's assessment vs. needs assessment
- Supporting guests by communicating the belief that they are ready for housing
 - Eliminate all “housing readiness conversations”
- Focusing all interactions on supporting guests to access and sustain permanent housing situations quickly
- Building partnerships to connect guests with services **after** they are housed
- Offering housing-focused services that are voluntary.

Housing First Philosophy in Practice

- Housing First is NOT a “program”, but the adoption of the Housing First Principles across the shelter
 - Belief by all staff that guests are housing ready
- Housing First is NOT a one size fits all approach
 - Everyone’s housing plan is unique to them
- Housing First is NOT housing ONLY
 - Services are more effective when someone is in a permanent setting
- Shelter is NOT a destination
 - Shelter is life-saving, but ONLY housing ends homelessness

A Note: Don't be the “Dumping” Grounds for Other Systems

- Your shelters should be the crisis response of first choice for **people with a housing instability issue**; not the exit plan for other systems
- A shelter should not adapt to become a parallel substance use recovery system, mental health care provider, halfway house, hospice, center for chronic disease management, refugee or immigrant settlement home, prison reentry, etc.
 - Shelters simply are not equipped nor designed to be good at these types of services, nor should they be!

Housing First Advances Race Equity

Black/African Americans disproportionately face...

- Eviction
- Criminalization
- Un/underemployment
- Health disparities contributing to underdiagnosis with MH and other health conditions

So, if you are screening out for these things, who's disproportionately affected?

Activity: POLL

Housing First Statements

1. Housing First is a one-size fits all
2. Support Services come after housing
3. Many clients/consumers have too many barriers to be successful in housing
4. For most people experiencing homelessness, intensive services are not necessary
5. Housing First can set people up for failure
6. Housing First in practice means few to no pre-requisites to shelter entry
7. Housing First doesn't work in communities with high housing costs
8. Everyone is ready for housing
9. Housing First means housing fast

Summary: Housing First Approach

Philosophy

- Not a “program,” it is a system-wide orientation and response
- Everyone is ready for housing
- Homelessness is a housing problem
- Housing First means housing fast

Practice

- Few to no pre-requisites to shelter entry
- Not screening for “housing readiness”
- Staff embrace “housing first” approach
- Services are voluntary and all are housing-focused
- Services come after housing



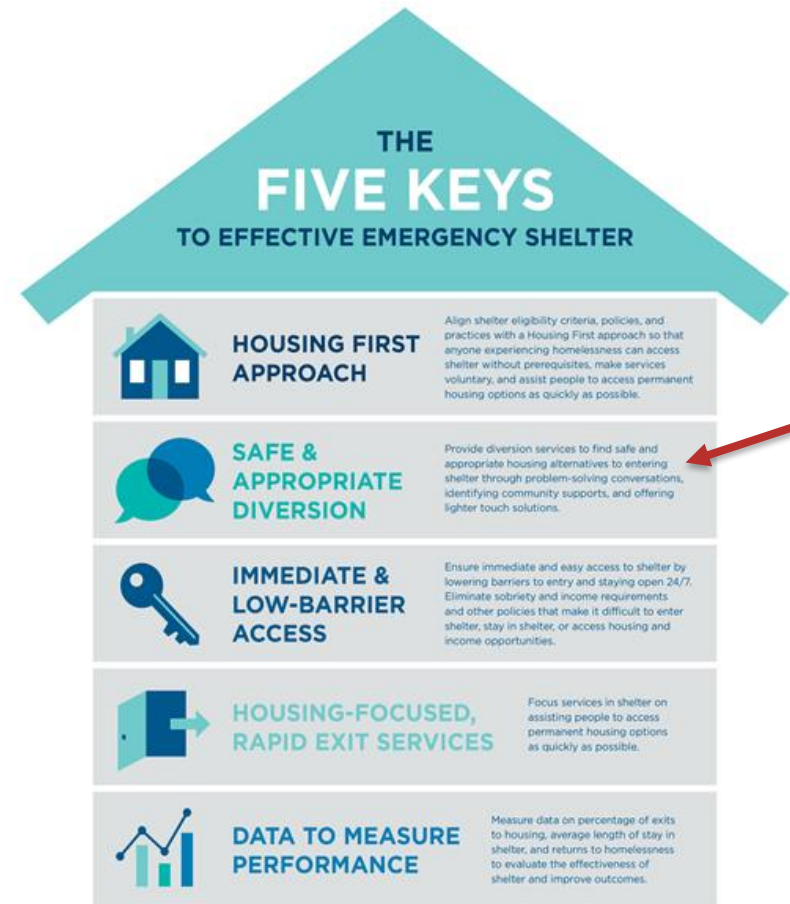
Break time!

See you back in 3 min



Key Elements of Emergency Shelters in an Effective Crisis Response System

- Housing First Approach
- **Safe & Appropriate Diversion/Problem Solving**
- Immediate and Low-barrier Access
- Housing-focused, Rapid Exit Services
- Data to Measure Performance



PROBLEM SOLVING/DIVERSION

Avoiding the Trauma of a Shelter Stay



What is Shelter Diversion?

- Diversion strategies and practices assist people to resolve their housing crisis by accessing alternatives to entering emergency shelter or unsheltered homelessness.
- The intent is to promote positive alternatives to entering shelter or unsheltered homelessness, **not to erect barriers to homeless assistance programs**



Distinguishing Diversion

Consumer's Housing Situation	Intervention Used	Services Provided (In All Interventions)
AT IMMINENT RISK OF LOSING HOUSING (precariously housed and not yet homeless)	PREVENTION	Housing Search Rental Subsidy Utility Assistance Case Management Mediation Connection to Mainstream Resources Legal Services
REQUESTING SHELTER (at the "front door" or another program/system entry point seeking a place to stay)	DIVERSION	
IN SHELTER (homeless/in the homeless assistance system)	RAPID EXIT	

Shelter Diversion is Solutions-Focused



Collaboratively working with household to develop creative solutions to their housing crisis



Facilitating connections to community resources and natural supports



Solutions can be immediate, short-term, and long-term

The Role of Diversion in the Crisis Response System

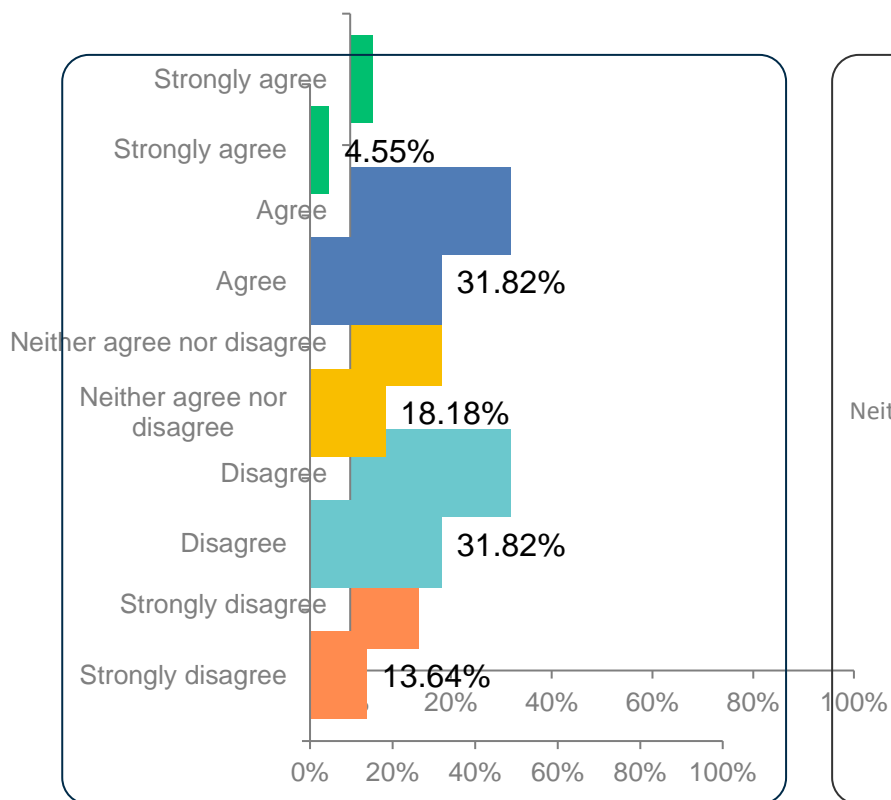
- Divert people from entering shelter if they have **safe and appropriate** housing alternatives
- Provide access to crisis beds, if needed
- Enable “flow” through your system to housing
- “Front door” must be connected to permanent housing solutions



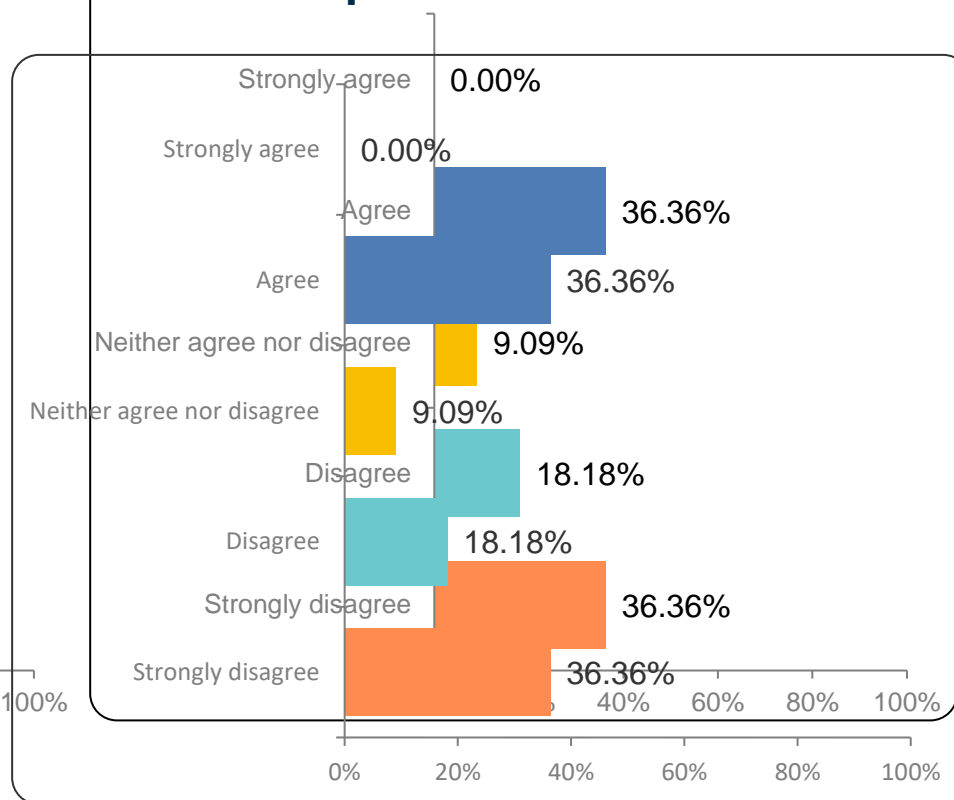
In chat – yes or no! Is your shelter currently doing diversion/problem solving at the front door before intake?

Whenever possible, our community employs strategies that prevent people from losing their housing and diverts them away from needing shelter or other housing assistance.

Providers



Leadership



Role of Diversion and Problem Solving in Shelter

- Reduces new entries into homelessness
- Cuts down on **shelter** wait lists
- Stems inflow into the **shelter** system
- Reduces demand for limited **shelter** beds
- Improves system performance outcomes by reducing new entries and re-entries into homelessness
- Targets more intensive homelessness interventions and resources to be provided to those with higher needs who have no alternatives to a shelter stay
- Increases Rapid Exits.

Role of Shelter in Diversion

When we don't utilize diversion...

- People enter shelter when they could have been successfully diverted
 - Trauma is associated with shelter stays
 - Experiences of homelessness predict future episodes of homelessness
- Shelters become overloaded and cannot adequately respond to those who have no other safe alternative housing options
- Increase of unsheltered homelessness due to not enough shelter beds available

Things to Keep in Mind...

- Households experiencing a housing crisis are not significantly different than other poor households
- Majority experience homelessness due to a financial or other crisis
- Prolonged exposure to homelessness has a significant negative impact on adults and children
- Shelter is an emergency resource



What Do We Know About Shelter Stays?

Significant portion of people self-resolve or seek help from another system

Most people can exit homelessness with a light touch of services and assistance, and exit homelessness for good

People who have highest needs often lose shelter beds due to inability to follow/comply with shelter “rules”

Minority of people need more intensive services and long-term housing supports

Problem-Solving Conversation

Possible Solutions to Avoid Shelter

 *Moving in with friends or family for longer-term period*

 *Return to their own residence*

 *Temporarily stay with friends or family as they seek new housing*

 *Relocating permanently to a safe place out of town*

 *Move to their Own Residence*

MAKING THE SHIFT

Embracing Diversion



Safe and Appropriate Diversion Philosophy Shift

- Housing First orientation that promotes that..
 - Everyone is ready for housing now
 - People experiencing homelessness don't experience it in a vacuum: they have connections, skills, and resources
- Try problem-solving with every household before conducting an intake
 - You can't predict who you will be able to problem-solve with and who you won't
- You aren't helping someone by admitting them into shelter before trying to problem-solve

Safe and Appropriate Diversion Philosophy Shift

Diversion before Intake!

Shift From	Shift Towards
Are you willing to enter shelter and follow our rules?	Is the place you were staying safe? What can we do to help you remain there? What can we do to help you find a safe place other than shelter?
What programs are you eligible for? Who has a bed?	What would resolve your current housing crisis?
Beginning with eligibility determinations and intake questions	Begin with brainstorming and structured problem-solving conversations about household's situation and resources
Beginning with screening and assessment tools and shelter waitlists	Support crisis resolution to avoid shelter entry through problem solving conversation

Safe and Appropriate Diversion

Operational Shift

- Re-envision Intake Process
 - Again, problem solving conversations before intake
 - What does intake process consist of?
 - How much time is given to the conversation?
 - Keep in mind **housing first**
- Space
 - Private space conducive to a conversation
- Staffing
 - Incorporate diversion culture, “right fit”
 - Training in mediation skills
 - Job descriptions and structure



Role of Shelter in Safe and Appropriate Diversion

Practice Shift

- Instead of immediate intake at shelter, engages clients in a conversation to identify safe alternatives to shelter
- Uses a strength-based assessment vs. a needs assessment
- Assists in connecting to community resources to avoid a shelter stay
- Stay away from housing readiness conversations

Have all direct service staff been training in diversion/problem solving practices?

When Diversion Is Not Successful

Use Problems Solving, Housing-focused Services in Shelter

When a household is not diverted from shelter, the same diversion strategies - **effective problem-solving conversations, that are client-centered, and focus on creative solutions – should continue in the shelter** in order to quickly resolve a household's homelessness.

These continued strategies provide much needed **housing focused, rapid exit services** for all households assessed for housing and support services and **are critical for those who will not receive** interventions such as rapid re-housing or permanent support housing.



Safe and Appropriate Diversion

Philosophy Shift

- A call for shelter does not mean there is no other option
- Belief in a strength-based approach – clients are the best resource for problem solving
- Shelter is not a housing solution



Practice Shift

- Uses a strength-based assessment vs. a needs assessment
- Instead of immediate intake, engages clients in a **solutions-based problem-solving conversation** and identifies safe alternatives to shelter
- Assists in connecting to supports and community resources to avoid a shelter stay whenever possible

Breakout

As a group, identify 2-3 ways that Shelters can integrate diversion/problem solving into practice.

Please turn on your cameras, unmute yourselves, and have a note taker who will report out!



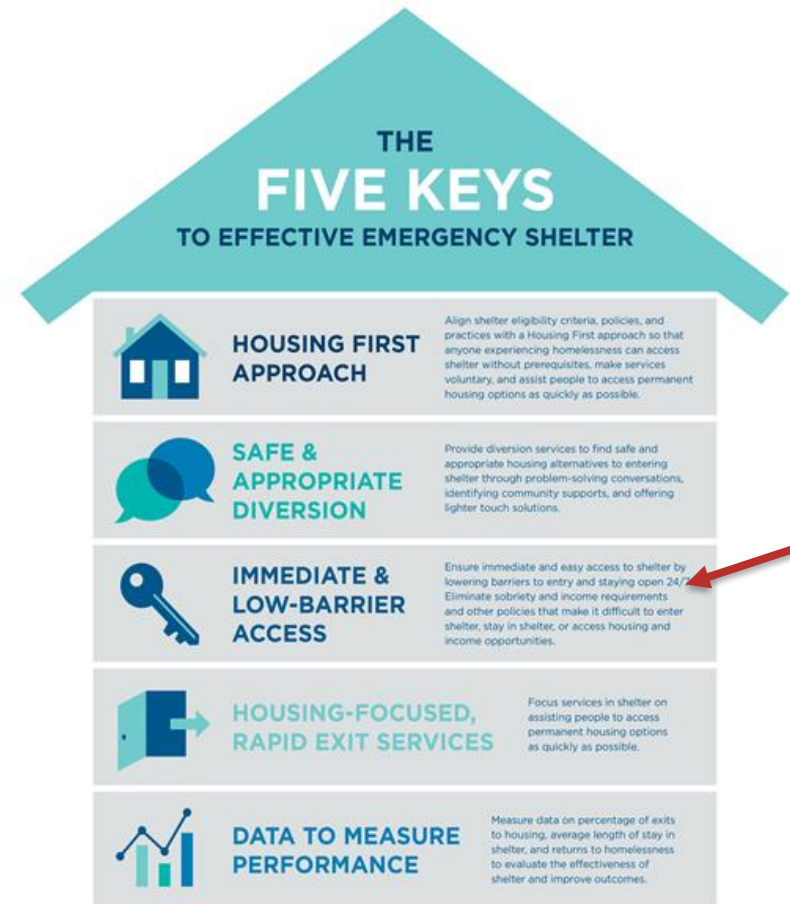
Debrief

- Articulate with staff what the goals are and what we're trying to accomplish
- Shelter tour before intake
- Integrating staff along the way to get their feedback and brainstorm as a staff together
- Practicing taking more time with folks who call in from our waitlist to see if there are ways to resolve their housing crisis
- Add diversion to our strategy before shelter intake
- Holding monthly team meetings to all get on the same page about our approach
- Change the direction of the conversation when “housing readiness” comes up and reframing those conversations
- Strength's based conversations focusing on building peoples' confidence and empowerment toward housing solutions
- Providing active listening, problem solving, and finding active resources

Debrief

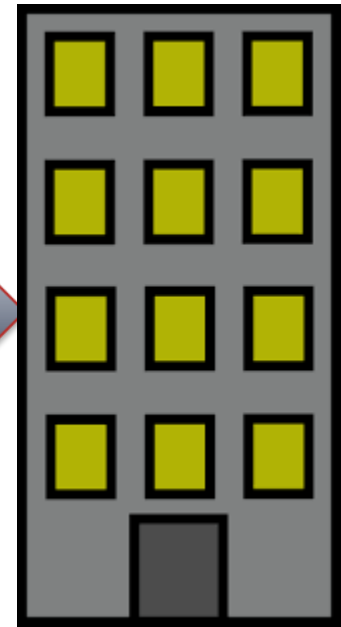
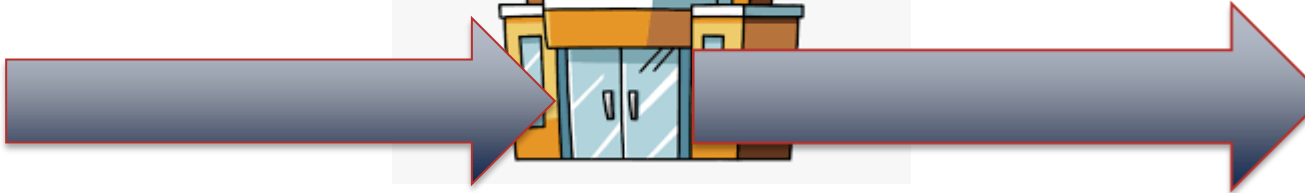
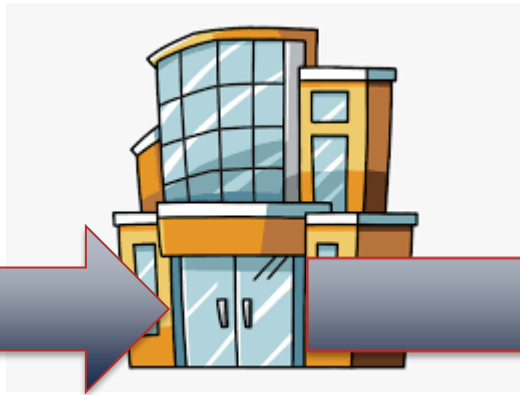
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People have to be able to get *in*...
...and be able to get *out* (to housing).



DOES OUR SHELTER PROVIDE IMMEDIATE AND LOW- BARRIER ACCESS?



From the Field!

“ “ Before we tried to change people, now we support change in people.

Staff Member, The Road Home
Salt Lake City, UT

Breakout Discussion (5 minutes)

What does it mean to be a “low barrier”
shelter?



Debrief



Debrief

Case Study

"I was so against the idea of going low barrier that I even wrote my resignation letter to quit. Then a lightbulb went off in me.

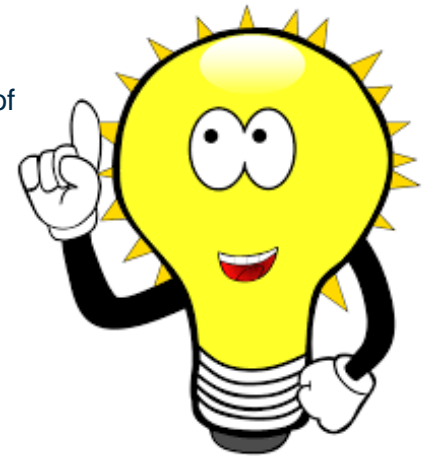
I got to speak with other shelters that have done this or are about to do this. I did so much research and found out everything I could about it. I got to see it through a different lens than clean and sober and I got on board. As soon as I bought in, the other staff did as well. Before, I was spreading so much negativity about it that there was so much fear from the staff. I turned that around after I starting believing in it.

To help staff buy in, I actually stopped drug testing without the staff knowing about it. I did this for an entire month and we had no issues in the shelter. Once staff learned this and knew that their fears did not happen, they were more willing to embrace going low barrier."

We have been keeping a log of people who would get kicked out. After going low barrier, I kept a list of people who relapsed and people really trying to work on sobriety. Our assumptions were that the people on this list would be the ones who would get kicked out first for things like behavior issues. When I stopped drug testing secretly, most of the people I assumed would have been kicked out did NOT cause behavior issues and did NOT get kicked out. Testing dirty did not indicate that they would cause behavior issues and get kicked out. This was a big surprise.

Since going low barrier I have seen some people I used to know living outside come into the shelter for the first time and get housed."

-Shelter Provider in Napa, CA



Immediate and Low-barrier Access

In Simple Terms...

Remove unnecessary barriers and improve access to shelter for those who need it most



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9/17/2024



Q&A



Your Trainers

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Immediate and Low-Barrier Access

MEANS...

- The most acute, highest-need people are prioritized for shelter **such as unsheltered individuals and families who are at greatest risk for severe health and safety consequences if not sheltered**
- You fill your shelter with those who **need it the most**, not those who got there first or can “comply” with the rules
- **You do not require** service participation to stay in shelter

Immediate and Low-Barrier Access

Requires **checking our own biases** about who we think “should” be in shelter and why we might feel anxious about serving different populations

- People shouldn't have to “earn” being in shelter
- We shouldn't be trying to heal or fix people's behaviors – it doesn't work
- We should be supporting change in people that **they** desire, rather than trying to change their behaviors

Immediate and Low-barrier Access

What Does Low Barrier Shelter Look

- Shelter is open 24/7
- People do not have to line up for a bed each night or leave early in the morning
- No drug and alcohol testing to get in **or to stay in**
- No criminal background checks to get in
- Not requiring income to get in
- Not requiring “housing-readiness” to get in
- Allowing people, pets, and possessions

We want to create shelters that are accommodating to the people who need them, not make people accommodate the shelter program and its rules.

We want to screen people in, not out.

Why People Avoid Shelters

"If there are too many rules, people won't go," warned Kendell Jackson, 29, who is living at the camp. "A lot of people out here have problems with authority, and they'll risk frostbite or worse to preserve their freedom."

Minneapolis Star Tribune, November 24, 2018

Immediate and Low-barrier Access Does NOT Mean Low Expectations

LOW-BARRIER DOES NOT MEAN

- Not having rules or expectations of shelter participants
- Allowing people to act in ways that are unsafe to themselves or others
- Letting anything happen or letting everyone in
- First-come, first-serve
- Forgetting about safety of clients and staff

Immediate and Low-Barrier Access Philosophy Shift

- The most acute, highest need people are prioritized for shelter **such as unsheltered individuals and families who are at greatest risk for severe health and safety consequences if not sheltered**
- Fill your shelter with those that **need it the most**, not those that got there first or can “comply” with the rules
- **Do not require** service participation to stay in shelter

Immediate and Low-Barrier Access Operational Shift

Emergency Shelter = Immediate Response to a Housing Emergency



- Shelter is available 24/7/365
- Required staff training in conflict resolution, crisis de-escalation, trauma-informed care, harm reduction
- Policies and procedures are reviewed and updated regularly to ensure low-barrier access
- Connected to outreach and referrals from coordinated entry, if applicable

Immediate and Low-Barrier Access Practice Shift



- Change staff roles from being “program monitors” or “house parents” to being housing navigators and partners with clients
- Re-frame statements like, “they are not working the program, so they have to leave” to “the housing plan doesn’t seem to be working, so the case manager should work with the client to revise it so it is more achievable”
- Use motivational interviewing and strengths-based approaches

Case Study

"I was so against the idea of going low barrier that I even wrote my resignation letter to quit. Then a lightbulb went off in me.

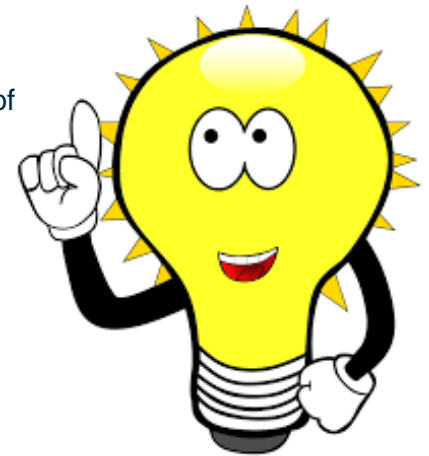
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To Be Continued....

People



Possessions



Pets

Brainstorm:

How can your shelters/TH providers shift practices and operations in order to accommodate these common reasons why people do not access shelter?

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