

BEST PRACTICES LOW BARRIER, HOUSING FOCUSED SHELTER

SESSION THREE: LOW BARRIER AND HOUSING FOCUSED EFFECTIVE SHELTER PRACTICE

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JOY (UNSPEAKABLE)
VOICES OF FIRE
FEAT. PHARRELL WILLIAMS

What We Do

Policy and Programs

- Carries out the vital work of educating policymakers and the field about key strategies and policies for ending and preventing homelessness.
- Keeps federal policymakers and legislators informed of the needs of people experiencing homelessness and the programs serving them.
- Leads advocacy efforts on a grassroots level.

Capacity Building

- Supports efforts to end homelessness by offering training and technical assistance tailored to communities' unique needs.
- Helps design and implement crisis systems, improve systems' performance, and utilize data to end homelessness, particularly with an equity lens.
- Provides online courses, trainings, and webinars to inform the field of best practices to end homelessness.

Homelessness Research Institute

- Analyzes data to identify homelessness trends on national, local, and Continuum of Care levels.
- Publishes research that ensures policymakers, practitioners, the media, and the public have the best information about trends and emerging solutions to the problem.
- Uses an equity lens to identify disparities in homelessness data.

Lived Experience Innovation + Strategic Communications

National Alliance to End Homelessness Statements for Participation

The Alliance works to ensure that diverse voices are included as facilitators, attendees, and guests in our training forums. All voices are welcome.

The organization has a zero-tolerance policy for any form of discrimination or abusive behavior. The Alliance is committed to ensuring that all its events are safe and respectful for all participants.

Participants acknowledge that any form of discrimination, violence, or abusive behavior may result in removal from an office hour or forum depending on the situation.

If any discrimination is witnessed or experienced during the training, or if you feel unsafe, please notify any member of the Alliance staff.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness strives to create a diverse, inclusive, accepting, and safe space for everyone.

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

Week Three

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

9/17/2024

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?

- Name
- Pronouns
- Role
- Other identities
- Organization
- What was an aha moment you had from last Tuesday's training...

Aha!

REVIEW

Remember Session Two?



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

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



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

Safe and Appropriate Diversion Philosophy Shift

**Diversion before, during
and HPS after 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

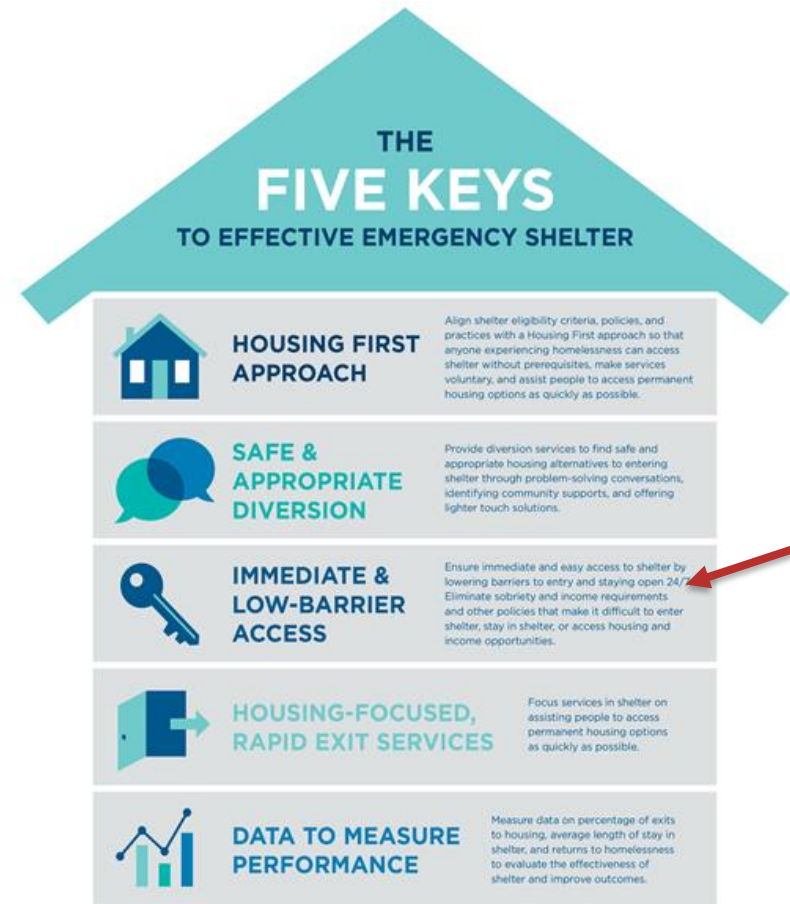
Operational Shift

- 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 & Time
 - Private space conducive to a conversation
 - Enough time to have a meaningful conversation
- Staffing
 - Incorporate diversion culture, “right fit”
 - Training in mediation skills
 - Job descriptions and structure



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



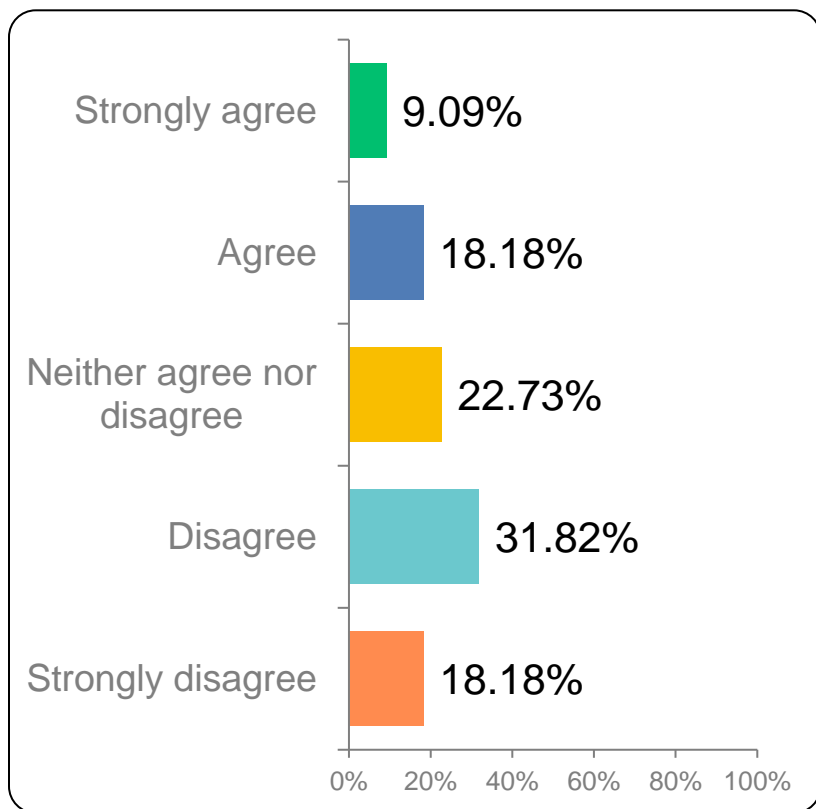
Breakout Discussion (5 minutes)

What does it mean to be a “low barrier” shelter? Make a list of all the ideas that come to mind!

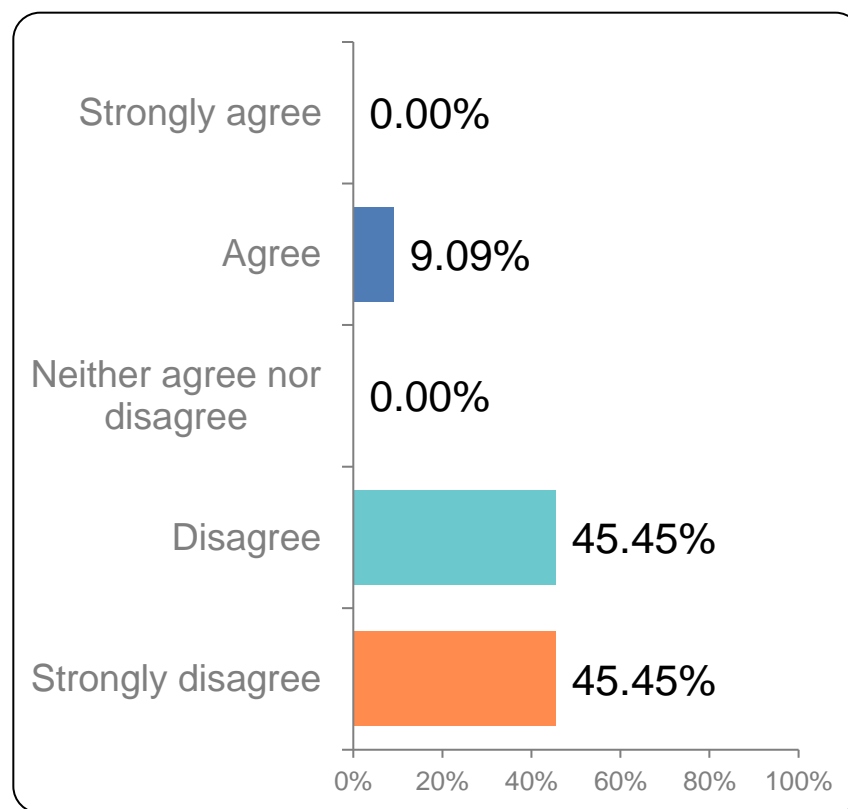


Emergency shelters have few barriers/preconditions for entry and are accessible to the people who need it.

Providers



Leadership



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

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 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

Breakouts

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?

REFLECTING ON “RULING”





Sometimes I feel like a child, with everyone watching my every move. It's not a good feeling and it makes me feel like I did something wrong by being homeless.

Consumer, Family Study

How Adults Respond

Does not work

- Coercion
- Pressure to change
- Moralizing
- Telling clients what they should do
- Disagreeing, judging, criticizing, or blaming
- Bargaining
- Penalizing, warning, threatening

Retooling the Rules

DO promote safety.

DO NOT try to change or control people or their behaviors.

-Iain De Jong, OrgCode Consulting



RULES



EXPECTATIONS

Simple, Safe, Behavior-Based Expectations



Treat everyone with dignity and respect.



Use the shelter space in a respectful manner.



Be a good neighbor.



No weapons are allowed in the shelter, and nothing may be used as a weapon inside the shelter.



Substance use is not allowed on the premises.

The “Marvin” Rule

Is this rule addressing something likely to be an actual ongoing concern, or was it developed in response to an incident that happened one time and is unlikely to happen again?



Reviewing the Rules

- How does this rule keep people safe?
- Is this rule about controlling or changing behavior?
- Is this rule about making things easier for staff rather than about being client-centered?
- How does this rule help or hurt someone's ability to pursue housing quickly?
- Which rules cause people to be kicked out the most?
 - Decide which behaviors are a safety issue and which behaviors are a behavior management issue that was handled by asking the client to leave
- Restrict “barring” or service restriction rules to:
 - Matters of violence (including sexual violence)
 - Excessive damage to property
 - Theft

BEFORE

AFTER

NO outside food is allowed onto the property. (Except for babies) Food is only allowed in the dining room and must not leave the area.

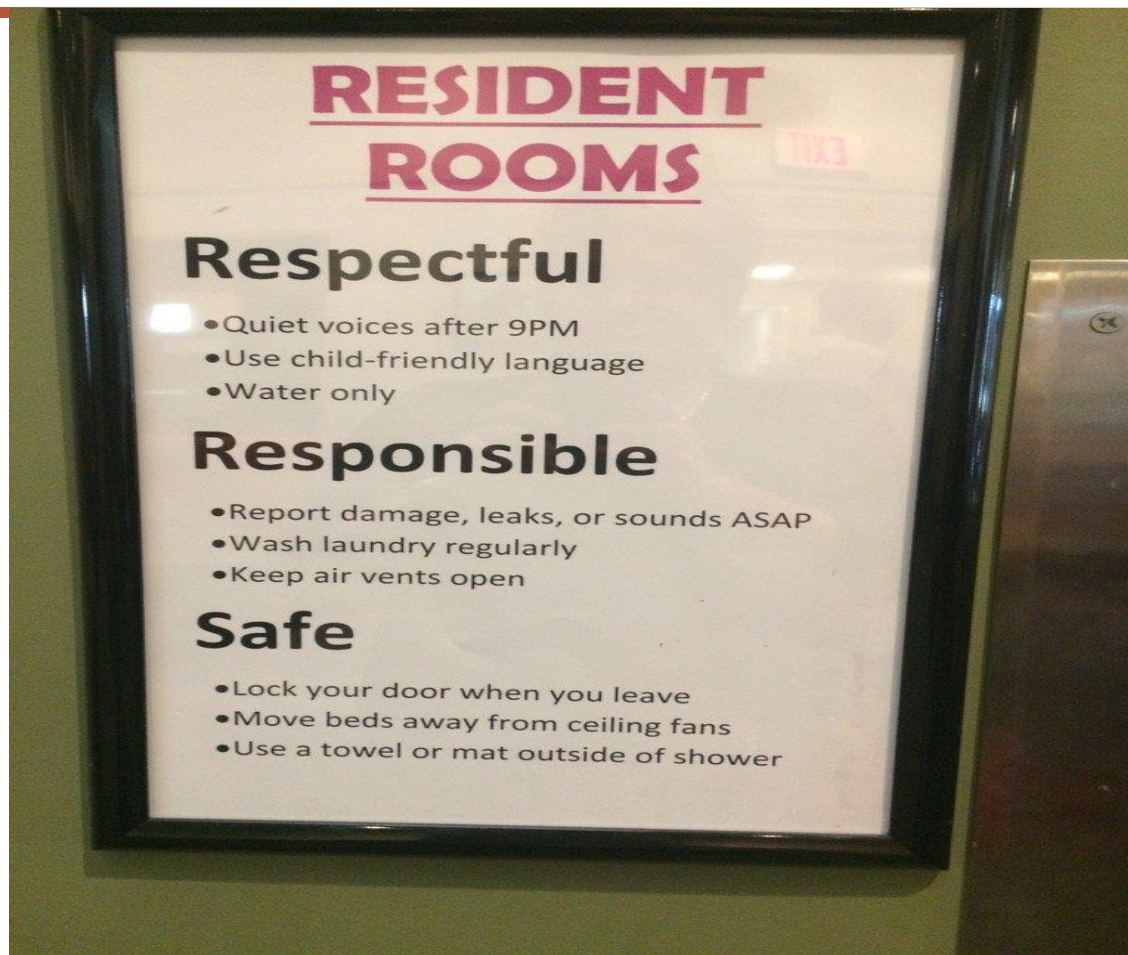
Every family is required to be here at 6pm to eat dinner. Working evenings or midnights are the only exception to this requirement. Appointments that result in you or a family member missing dinner need approval from the Shelter Director ahead of time.

All doors are locked at 8pm. We cannot approve late nights while you are in shelter unless it is related to work, housing or a school activity. Must be approved at least 48 hours in advance.

Shelter Director will schedule room inspections to make sure your room is in good condition. Staff reserve the right to perform unannounced inspections when necessary.

You must, when asked, meet with the Shelter Director to go over shelter issues.

Example of Low-Barrier Expectations



Discussion – chat or raise your hand

- What rule(s) lead to people being exited from shelter the most?
- How can we change those rules and what is the biggest challenge with making the shift to being more low barrier?



Five Minute Stretch Break!



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



Why Housing-Focused Shelter?

**HOUSED PEOPLE
ARE NOT HOMELESS**

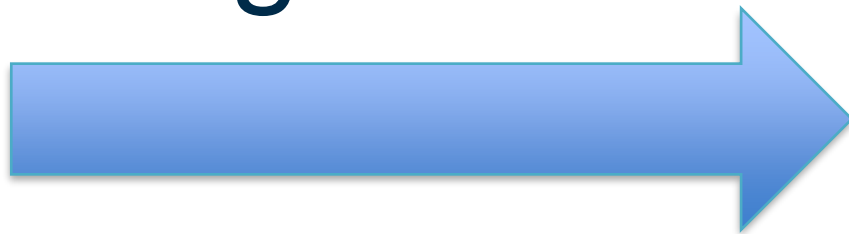


HOLD ON!

Isn't housing
people someone
else's job?
Coordinated Entry?
Rapid Re-Housing?
Permanent
Supportive
Housing?

Why Housing-Focused Shelter?

People have to be able to
get *in*...



...and be able to get *out*
(to housing).



Why Housing-Focused Shelter?

REALITY CHECK:

Few households will receive RRH or PSH.

Shelter is **not a waiting place** for interventions.

SHIFT FROM:

“Our guests cannot exit shelter without interventions.”



TO:

“Most households can find permanent living situations quickly without intensive interventions.”

- Shelter IS NOT an access point to something special...
- Shelter IS NOT a destination...
- Shelter **IS** a jumping-off point to your own solutions for housing!

Housing-Focused, Rapid Exit

Philosophy Shift

- Everyone is ready to be housed immediately
- Clients are the captains of their housing plans
- Shelters are not employment, recovery, or mental health programs
- Shelter stays are very short



Practice Shift

- Plan for rapid exit **to housing** at entry
- “If you’re not talking about housing, you’re having the wrong conversation” – problem-solving “housing” conversations continue
- Environment reflects a housing focus
- All meetings, policies, procedures, job descriptions, signage, client handbooks, etc. reflect focus on quick exits to housing

Why Housing-Focused Shelter?

Paradigm Shift

Shelter CAN facilitate **self resolution** through **problem-solving conversations**

1. Identify connections and supports
2. Identify strengths
3. Talk about past relationships and community supports
4. Leverage community partnerships
5. Believe in each guest's resilience and problem-solving ability
6. Believe in each guest's housing success



**Housing focused
messaging matters!**

**Belief that our guests
are better off without us
– believe in their ability
to be successful with
limited resources – and
to find permanent
housing situations**

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Housing-Focused Rapid Exit Supports

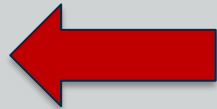
Practice and Operational Shifts

- All meetings, policies, procedures, job descriptions, signage, client handbooks, etc., focus on **housing**
- Plan for rapid exit **to housing** at entry – assign a “housing date,” not an exit date
- Guests are the captains of their housing plans
- Every conversation is about **housing**
- Environment and messaging reflects a housing focus



IMPLEMENTING HOUSING-FOCUSED SUPPORTS FOR RAPID EXITS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

STAFFING



HOUSING PLAN DEVELOPMENT

MESSAGING



Housing-Focused Rapid Exit Supports Staffing

Roles and Responsibilities

Historically:

- ***Housing workers were a specialized function*** either amongst employees of the agency or an external entity brought in or referred out to
- Functions of shelter staff were separated from functions of housing staff

Shift To:

- All shelter staff are ***housing*** staff
- All staff embrace Housing First
- All shelter staff are held accountable to being conversant in ***housing solutions***

Housing Focused Rapid Exit Supports

Staffing: Housing Focused Conversations

- Motivational Interviewing and Trauma-Informed Care
 - Be present in each meeting (turn off phones, etc.)
 - Be clear and transparent about the purpose of each meeting
 - You are there to help navigate and explore what's happening with their housing, not to assess how they are doing in shelter
 - Offer to stop and clarify questions as they arise using open-ended questions
 - Use client answers to get more information that helps you understand the situation
 - Rely on your own personal conversational style to best facilitate the assessment as a conversation, not an interrogation



Caitlin Rose
New Reach
New Haven, CT

Housing-Focused Rapid Exit Supports Staffing Example

Job Description: Case Manager to Housing Specialist

Housing Specialist assists clients in moving from homelessness to permanent housing through providing direct case management services following a Housing First philosophy. The Housing Specialist is responsible for working one-on-one with each household to identify their obstacles to permanent housing and to develop action plans to address and overcome those barriers to achieving housing stability. The Housing Specialist serves as a link to community resources and service providers.

Salvation Army Marshall House Family Shelter
Hartford, CT

Housing-Focused Rapid Exit Supports Staffing Example of Responsibilities

Job Description: Case Manager to Housing Specialist

1. Develop and implement an individual housing plan with each client.
2. Facilitate access to services required to support housing search (credit repair, legal aid, housekeeping, tenant rights and responsibilities, etc.) as needed.
3. Develop a projected budget plan that enables families and individuals to see what type of housing is affordable and manageable after assistance ends (for those in RRH) and how to live within their means.
4. Provide advocacy on behalf of program participants for housing and/or services related issues.

Housing-Focused Rapid Exit Support Staffing Example of Responsibilities

Job Description: Case Manager to Housing Specialist

5. Provide information and instruction to clients regarding how to complete a housing application, housing search, tenant rights and responsibilities, including observation of rental agreement rules and being a good neighbor.
6. Document all client encounters and maintain thorough and accurate records for reporting purposes.
7. Assist clients in obtaining rental assistance including, but not limited to, Section 8 certification, RRH, PSH, and other housing programs.
8. Provide referrals to employment, mental health, substance use, and other community services.

Housing-Focused Supports Staffing

Staff	Responsibilities
Overnight Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scour online listings and print new listings• Create list of new stayers that require housing-focused conversation by morning staff• Update bulletin boards with housing resources• Documentation of housing activities
Morning Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Housing-focused conversation with first-timer stayers• Daytime housing search conversation: “What are you doing on your housing plan today?”• Brief housing workshops• Matching with trained peers• Documentation of housing activities
Evening Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follow-up on housing search conversation• Brief housing workshops• Documentation of housing activities

Chat Discussion

Discuss the following:

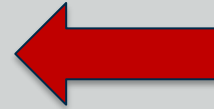
- Are your shelter job descriptions housing focused? Do they include activities that help clients obtain housing?
- What are some ideas of how to transition staff to a housing focus model?

IMPLEMENTING HOUSING-FOCUSED SUPPORTS FOR RAPID EXITS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

STAFFING

HOUSING PLAN DEVELOPMENT

MESSAGING



Housing-Focused Supports

Housing Plan

- Start developing the plan at entry with an exit date for a housing solution
- Shifting from “What can I do to help you?” to “How can I support you to obtain housing quickly?”
- Identify barriers to tenancy that will be worked through in the housing plan
- Have “problem-solving” conversations to connect to natural supports and housing options
- Focus every in-person meeting on a quick move to permanent housing
- Review and discuss the housing plan weekly at a minimum

Housing-Focused Supports

Housing Plan

SMART Goals

Specific - Action-oriented: e.g., Call Acme Property Management Company, Get birth certificate, Save \$250 for deposit, etc.

Measurable - Call XX # of landlords, apply for XX apartments, etc.

Assignable - WHO is responsible for each action item?

Relevant - HOUSING HOUSING HOUSING!

Timely - Set bold timelines - Start ASAP! - Don't wait weeks to begin housing search.

Housing-Focused Supports

Housing Plan (from City Rescue Mission in Lansing, MI)

My Housing Plan: Name: _____ Date: _____

My goal: I will end my homelessness by this date: _____.

Items often necessary to overcome homelessness:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Birth Certificate | <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Card |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Security Card | <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare |
| <input type="checkbox"/> State ID/Driver's License | <input type="checkbox"/> Phone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resume | |

I will end my homelessness by...

Plan A: _____

Steps necessary to complete this plan:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |

Plan B: _____

Steps necessary to complete this plan:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |

Housing-Focused Supports

Housing Plan (from City Rescue Mission in Lansing, MI)

Plan C: _____

Steps necessary to complete this plan:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Housing requires income.
A living wage in Lansing begins at \$1,500 per month.

My income plan is to...

Plan A:

Steps necessary to complete this plan: _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Plan B:

Steps necessary to complete this plan: _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The biggest obstacles to ending homelessness:

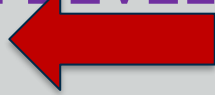
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

But I WILL overcome them by:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

IMPLEMENTING HOUSING-FOCUSED SUPPORTS FOR RAPID EXITS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

STAFFING
HOUSING PLAN DEVELOPMENT
MESSAGING



Housing-Focused Supports

Messaging

- **Shelter is not a destination; it is a step to get you housed**
 - Waiting in shelter for something better is NOT an option
 - We can't wait for a train that isn't coming
- **We are going to re-house you RAPIDLY**
 - Every day is a day to find a housing solution
 - Don't get too comfortable - save that for when you move home
- **You CAN be housed!**
 - You're better off without us
 - You will have supports in the community





Create a sense of urgency to find a housing solution and exit shelter quickly

Waiting in shelter for something better is NOT an option

Every day is a day to find a housing solution

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Incentivize Quick Housing Exits

When you leave, you can access...



Facilitate Self Resolution

From “What can we do to help you?” to “What is YOUR plan to quickly exit shelter?”

Breakout Activity

Shifting Our Message Brainstorm Activity

- **Breakouts 1&2:** Messaging to create a sense of urgency to find housing
- **Breakouts 3,&4:** Strategies to incentivize leaving shelter to move to permanent housing solutions
- **Breakouts 5:** Strategies to facilitate self-resolution

- Debrief
- Now, in chat identify one thing you heard that you can implement in your shelter within the next week!

Housing-Focused Supports

Messaging

All written materials reflect housing-focused practice:

- Mission statement: Is it about permanent housing?
- Re-writing policy and procedures
- Client handbook
- Clear messaging to community and clients

Housing-Focused Supports

Messaging

Shelter environment is housing-focused

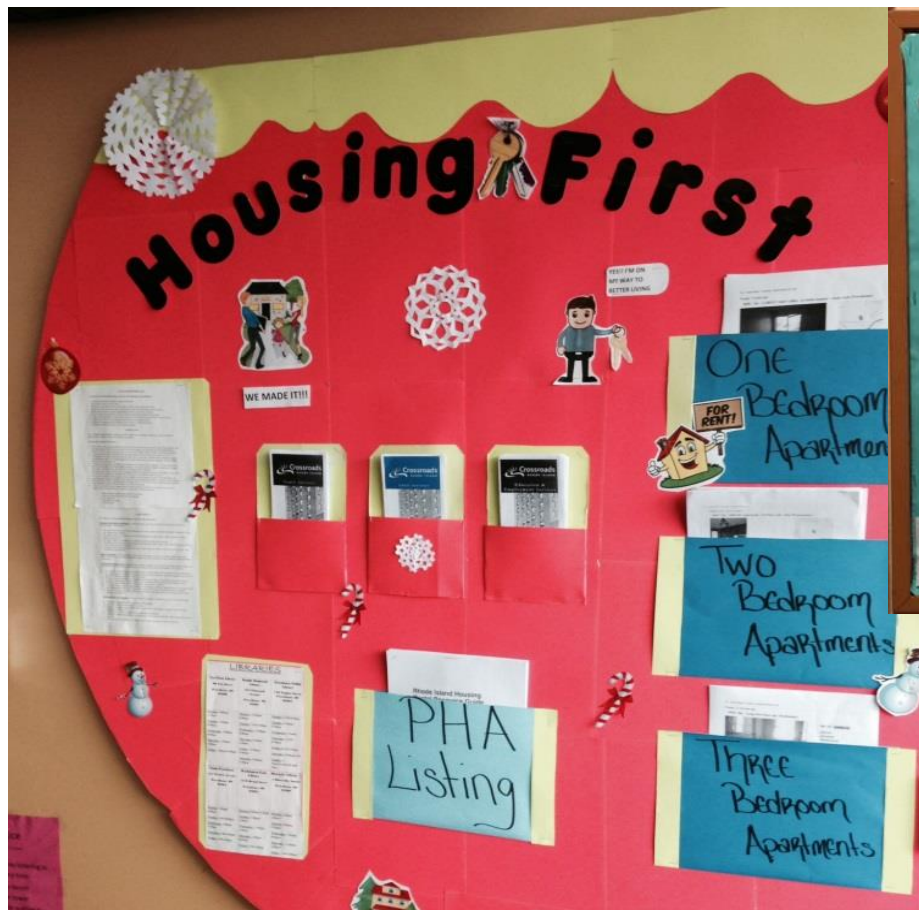
- Reframe messaging throughout the shelter
- All signage reflects a housing message
- Shelter environment incentivizes engagement in self-resolution and quick moves to permanent living situations
- Create a sense of urgency
 - “You are the best captain of your housing plan.”
 - “You CAN Find Housing!”
 - “You can choose to say no to a housing option, but not continue to stay in shelter forever.”

Housing-Focused Supports Messaging Before



Housing-Focused Supports

Shifting the Messaging





Assignment

In the next week, come in the front door of the shelter and then take time to walk around your entire facility and make detailed observations.

1. What does the signage look like?
2. Is there easy access to materials on finding housing?
3. Is language person-centered, empowering, and does it create a sense of urgency?
4. What are some simple changes you can make to ramp up your housing focused messaging
5. Be ready to report out next week.

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Week Four

- More on Housing
- Using Data and Outcomes to Measure Success
- Taking Action and Wrap Up

9/24/2024

Q&A



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