



Transforming Our Systems of Care Track:

***Making the Shift to a Housing Focused, Low
Barrier Shelter***

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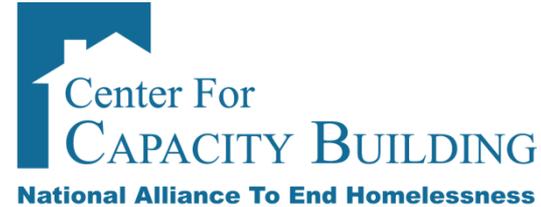


Making the Shift to a Housing Focused, Low Barrier Shelter

Kay Moshier McDivitt

Senior Technical Assistant
Specialist





The National Alliance to End Homelessness is the leading national voice on the issue of homelessness. The Alliance analyzes policy and develops pragmatic, effective policy solutions. The Alliance works collaboratively with the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to build state and local capacity, leading to stronger programs and policies that help communities achieve their goal of ending homelessness. The Alliance provides data and research to policymakers and elected officials in order to inform policy debates and educate the public and opinion leaders nationwide.

Working with a strong network of innovators, the National Alliance to End Homelessness identifies and evaluates hundreds of policy and program strategies and their impact on homelessness. The Alliance's Center for Capacity Building helps communities replicate and customize the best of those strategies. The Center focuses on strategies that are cost effective, data driven, and can be implemented at a scale that can significantly reduce homelessness.

Who is here?



- Executive Directors/Program Directors
- Case Managers
- Rapid Re-housing Providers
- Transitional Housing, Permanent Supportive Housing, Services Providers
- Funders
- Continuum of Care Leadership
- City/County Government
- Other stakeholders

How are you feeling?



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Anxious

Excited

Confused

Exhausted/Overwhelmed
Annoyed

Purpose

- **What** is the role of emergency shelter and how do we connect shelters to the system in a meaningful way?
- **What** are the keys to effective low-barrier, housing focused shelter ?
- **How** should shelters implement the keys to effective shelter?
- **How** should communities use shelter data to assess the performance of emergency shelters?

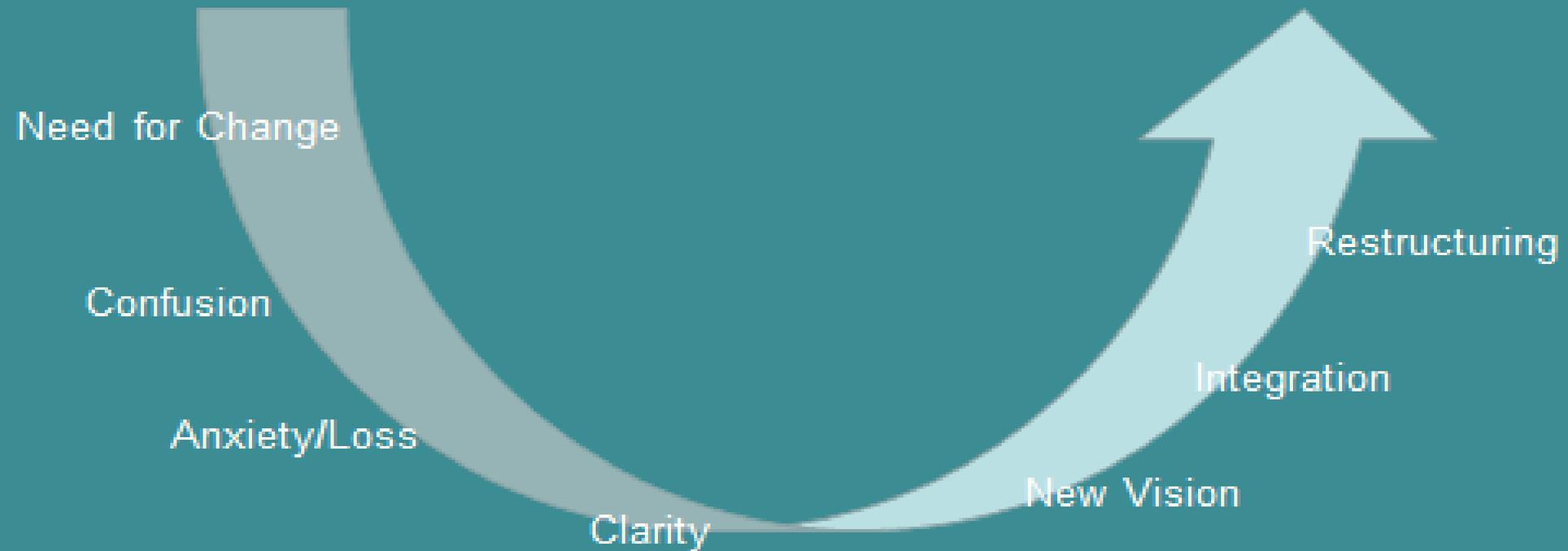




Where are you in your Transformational Change?

Old Shelter Model

New Shelter Model



MAKING THE SHIFT

Philosophical Shift



Practice Shift



Operations Shift

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT EMERGENCY SHELTER STAYS

Emergency Shelter



What Do We Know About Shelter Stays?

- The majority of people who become homeless have relatively short stays in the homeless system and rarely come back to it (“transitionally homeless”)
- Families with long stays are no more likely than families with short stays to have intensive behavioral health treatment histories, to be disabled, or to be unemployed

The results suggest **that policy and program factors**, rather than household characteristics, **are responsible for long shelter stays**

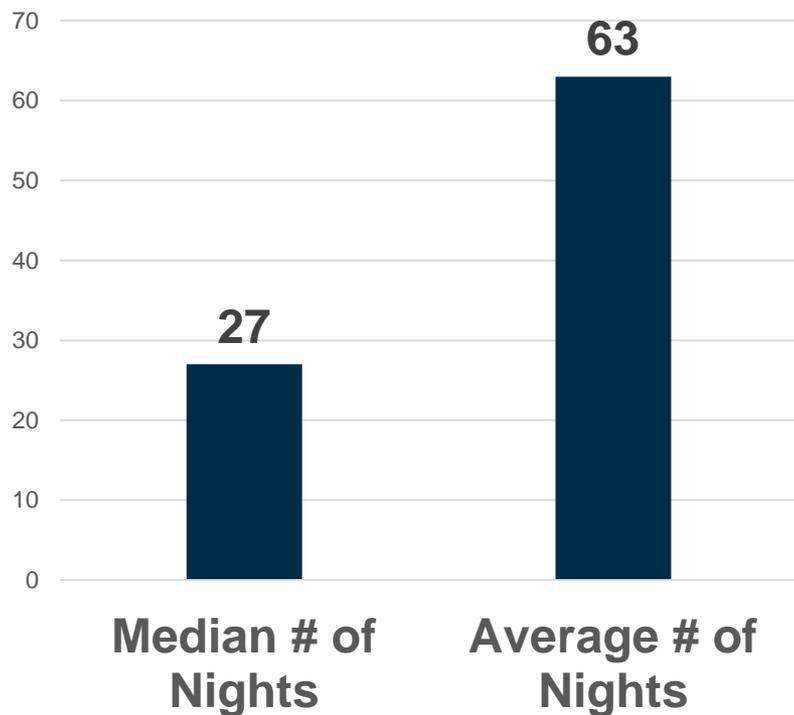
Dennis Culhane, *Testing a Typology of Family Homelessness Based on Patterns of Public Shelter Utilization in Four U.S. Jurisdictions: Implications for Policy and Program Planning*, 2007

What Do We Know About Shelter Stays?

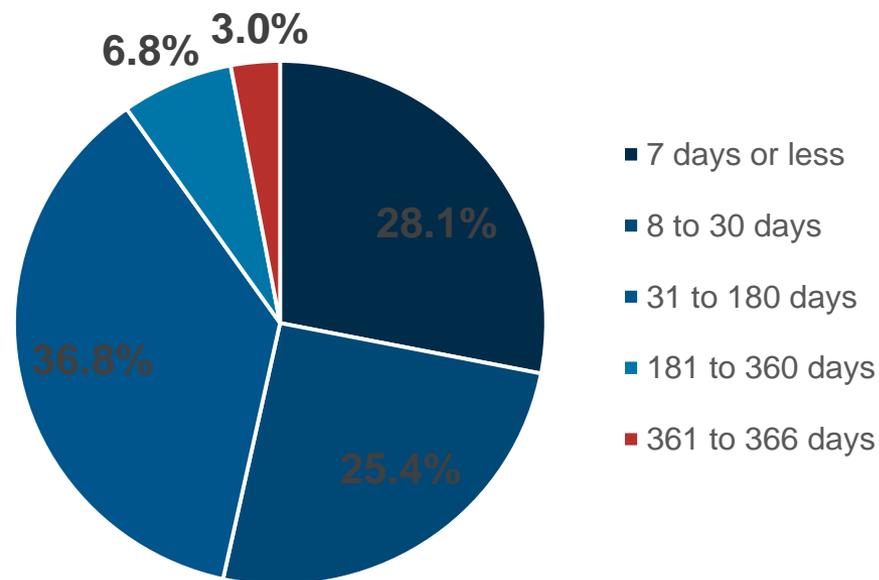
- Significant portion of people self-resolve or seek help from another system
- Most people can exit homelessness with a light touch of services and assistance to exit homelessness for good (RRH)
- People who have highest needs often lose shelter beds due to non-compliance issues
- Minority of people need more intensive services and long-term housing supports (PSH)

Length of Stay in Emergency Shelter

National Length of Stay in
Emergency Shelter- 2016 AHAR



National Length of Stay in
Emergency Shelter- AHAR 2016



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

Why do you think some people experiencing homelessness avoid shelter?



Why Do People Avoid Shelters?

They are too crowded	37%
Bugs	30%
There are too many rules	28%
They are full	27%
I can't stay with my partner/family	23%
Germs	22%
They don't accept my pet	22%
There is nowhere to store my stuff	19%
They are too far away	18%
I can't stay with my friends	13%

ROLE OF SHELTER IN THE CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

Emergency Shelter



Why are shelters so important?

- **Shelter** plays an **important role** in your system's response to homelessness
- People will always need a safe and decent place to go when having a housing crisis
- The effectiveness of emergency shelter greatly impacts your system's performance
 - Average length of homelessness
 - Exits to permanent housing
 - Returns to homelessness



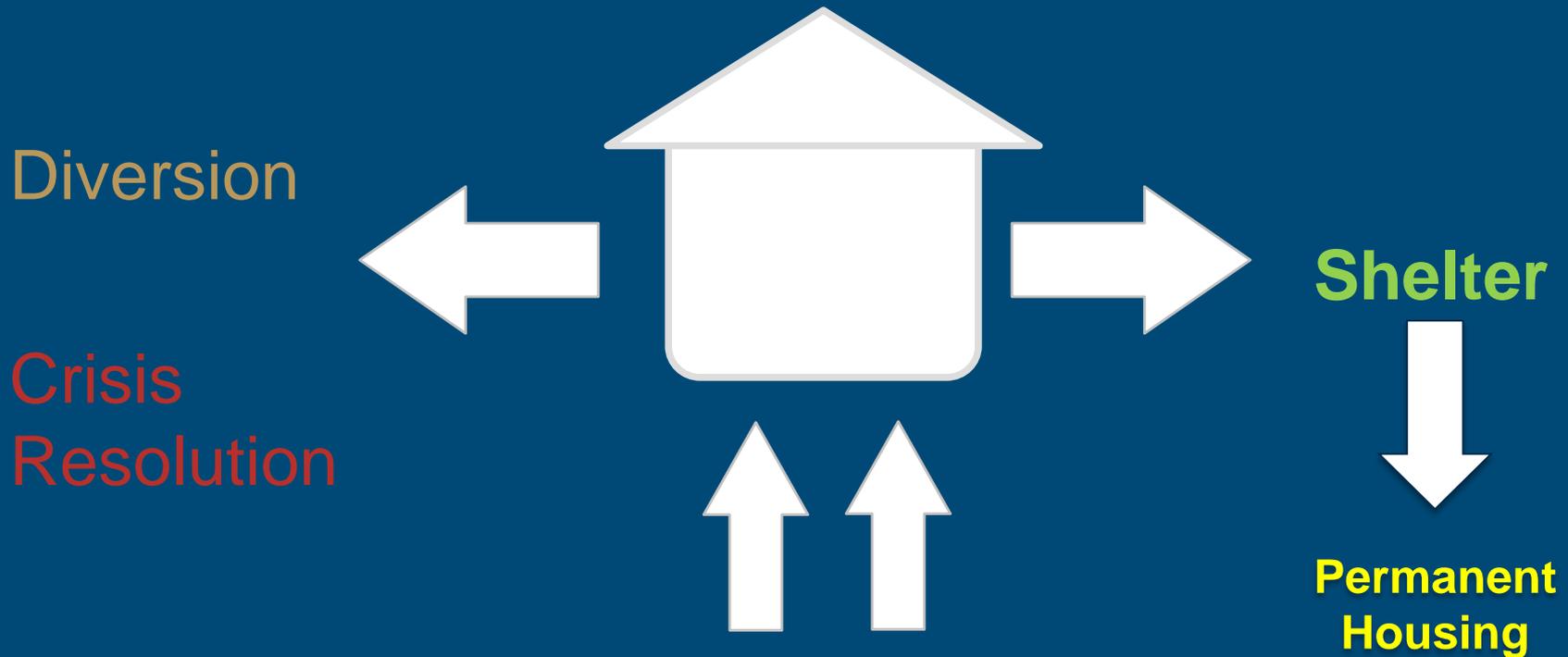
An Effective Crisis Response System That Ends Homelessness...

Provides immediate and low-barrier access to safe and decent shelter to anyone that needs it and aims to **re-house** people as quickly as possible

AND....

The community ensures **shelter is not contingent** on sobriety, minimum income requirements, criminal records, or other unnecessary conditions

Creating Flow Through The System to Housing



Prioritize Unsheltered People With
Housing Crisis Seeking Shelter



Housing crisis resolution
Rapid re-housing
Permanent Supportive
housing
Other subsidized housing
Voucher



CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

FIVE KEY ELEMENTS

Of Emergency Shelter





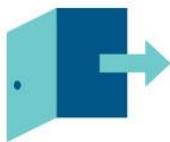
HOUSING FIRST APPROACH



SAFE & APPROPRIATE DIVERSION



IMMEDIATE & LOW-BARRIER ACCESS



HOUSING-FOCUSED, RAPID EXIT SERVICES



DATA TO MEASURE PERFORMANCE

THE FIVE KEYS TO EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY SHELTER



HOUSING FIRST APPROACH

Align shelter eligibility criteria, policies, and practices with a Housing First approach so that anyone experiencing homelessness can access shelter without prerequisite, make services voluntary, and assist people to access permanent housing options as quickly as possible.



SAFE & APPROPRIATE DIVERSION

Provide diversion services to find safe and appropriate housing alternatives to entering shelter through problem-solving conversations, identifying community supports, and offering lighter touch solutions.



IMMEDIATE & LOW-BARRIER ACCESS

Ensure immediate and easy access to shelter by lowering barriers to entry and staying open 24/7. Eliminate sobriety and income requirements and other policies that make it difficult to enter shelter, stay in shelter, or access housing and income opportunities.



HOUSING-FOCUSED, RAPID EXIT SERVICES

Focus services in shelter on assisting people to access permanent housing options as quickly as possible.



DATA TO MEASURE PERFORMANCE

Measure data on percentage of exits to housing, average length of stay in shelter, and returns to homelessness to evaluate the effectiveness of shelter and improve outcomes.

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1. 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 permanent housing
- Rapid entry into permanent housing
- Services are voluntary



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

2. Safe and Appropriate Diversion

Philosophy

- Belief that clients are the captains their own solutions
- Belief that a call to shelter does not mean there is no other option



Practice

- Instead of immediate intake at shelter, engages clients in a conversation and identifies safe alternatives to shelter
- Uses a strength based assessment vs. a needs assessment
- Assists in connecting to community resources to avoid a shelter stay

Sample Job Description for Housing Support Specialist (Intake and program monitor)

Housing Support Worker provides daily supervision, reporting and support services to clients in a low barrier residential facility that promotes a Housing First philosophy; primary responsibility is to facilitate an emotional and physical environment conducive to enhancing positive client morale and stabilization by ensuring the security and safety of the facility; maintaining appropriate records in addition to ongoing written and verbal communication with the supervisor in relationship to daily client activities; support and encourage clients in achieving goals outlined in their housing plans.

Essential Duties & Responsibilities:

- Serve as first point of contact to triage requests for emergency shelter. ***Use shelter diversion techniques to assist households in self-resolving their housing crisis.***
- Prepare and complete intake packages for households unable to be diverted at entrance. Continue to use shelter diversion techniques to assist households in self-resolving their housing crisis throughout their stay.

Hartford, CT

3. Immediate and Low Barrier Access

Philosophy

- Shelter is life saving
- It should be easy to access for those that need it
- It should be easiest for the most vulnerable



Practice

- Few to no prerequisites to shelter – no drug and alcohol testing
- Referrals through coordinated entry -no waiting list
- Prioritize households with the most needs
- 24/7 access
- Equal Access Rule compliance
- Rules should only pertain to safety

Immediate Access Does Mean:

Screening people in, not out

- Shelter is open 24/7 – no requirements for people to leave during the day
- Connected to street outreach
- 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 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

Example of Low-Barrier Guidelines



4. Housing-Focused Rapid Exit Services

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
- Moving people out of shelter quickly reduces the trauma of homelessness

Practice Shift

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



Housing-Focused, Rapid Exit Services

Practice Shift

- Focus on a “housing plan” vs “family plan” or “case plan”
- Identify barriers to housing and identify resources to address barriers
- Focus every in-person meeting on a quick move to permanent housing
- Create a clear “housing message” throughout the shelter
- Review and discuss the housing plan weekly at minimum



Job Description for Shelter “Case Manager” Role – 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

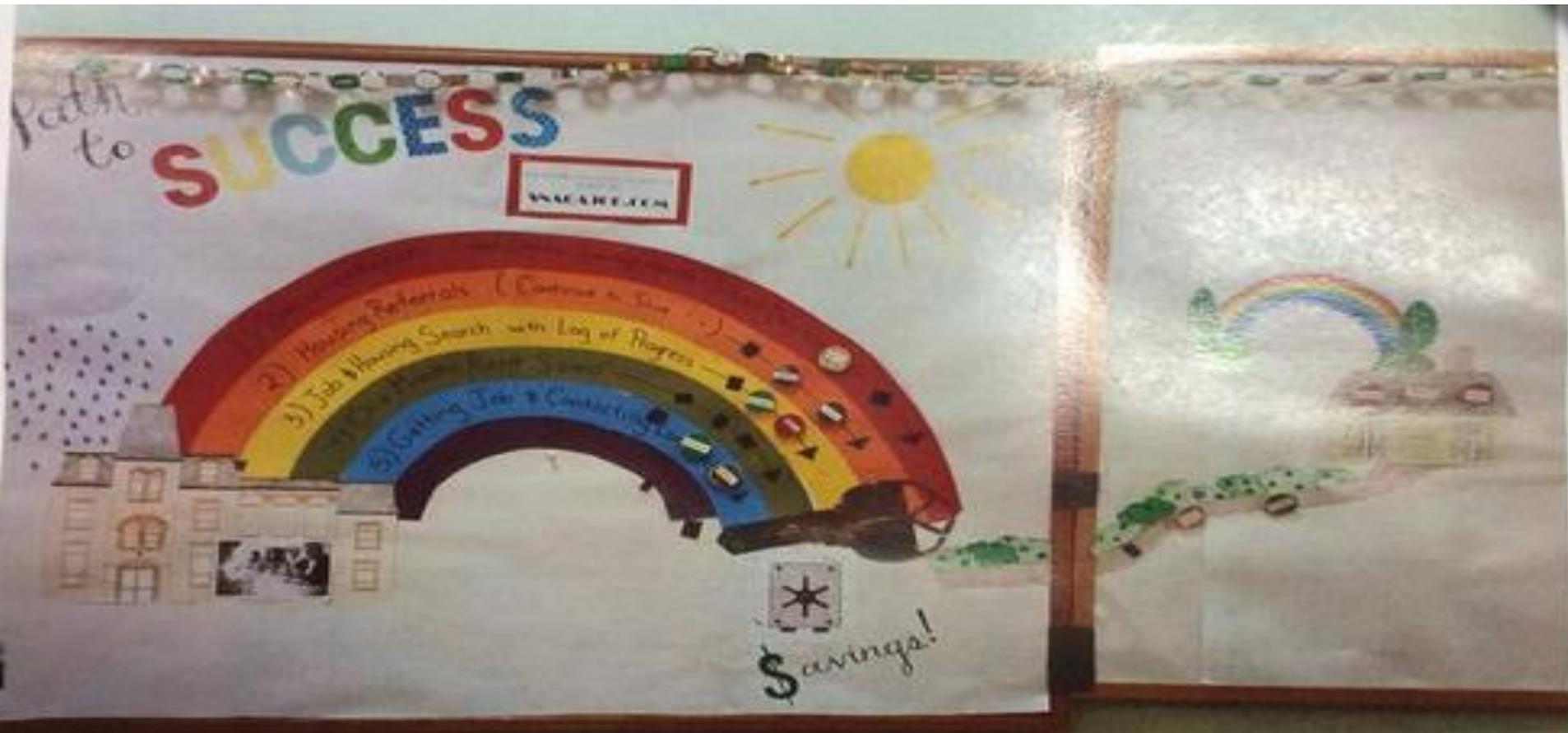
Salvation Army Marshall House Family Shelter
Hartford, CT

Example of a Housing Focused Message



Developed by
CRT in Hartford
for McKinney
Shelter and East
Hartford Family
Shelter

Example of Housing-Focused Shelter Messaging



5. Using Data to Improve Performance

Philosophy

- There is always room to improve

Practice

- Measure outcomes, not outputs
 - Decrease length of stay in homelessness
 - Increase exits to permanent housing
 - Decrease returns to shelter

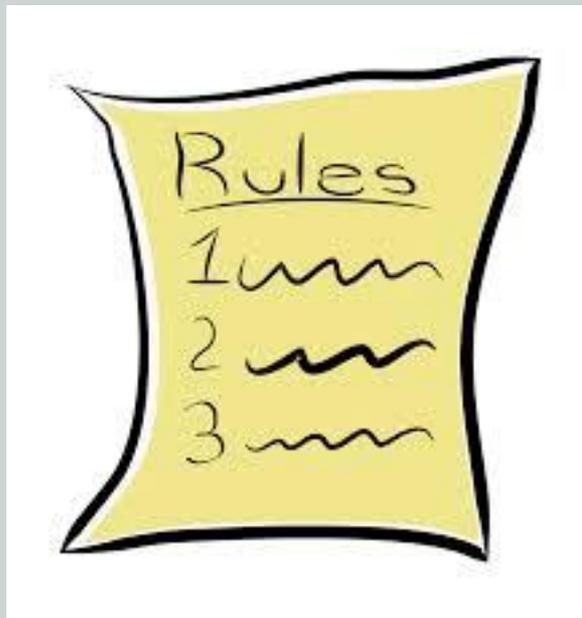


Use Your Data to Shift

- Which populations are using shelter?
- Average length of stay?
- Exit destinations after shelter?
- Frequent users?
- Long stayers?

WHAT ABOUT RULES?

The “Right Rules” in Emergency Shelter



The Role of Rules



Promote safety

Don't try to change or control
people or their behaviors



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.

Reviewing the Rules

- How does this activity/service get people into or hinder people from getting housing?
- How does this keep people safe?
- Is this rule about making things easier for staff and not about being client-centered?
- Is this rule about controlling or changing behavior?
- Does this rule hinder people from getting housed quickly?

Re-tooling the Rules

Which rules cause people to be discharged most often?

- Decide which behaviors are a safety issue and which behaviors are a behavior management issue that was handled by asking the client to leave

Message as “Expectations” or “Guidelines” vs. “Rules”

Restrict “barring” or service restriction rules to:

- Matters of violence (including sexual violence)
- Excessive damage to property
- Theft

Reviewing the Rules



NEXT STEPS TO RETOOLING YOUR SHELTER

Making Shift Happen



Next Steps to Re-Tooling Shelter

- Identify a vision and core values that will drive the re-tooling – Revise mission statement to reflect “low-barrier housing focused shelter”
- Identify what in the current culture needs to shift
- Identify staffing needs, including revised job descriptions and training
- Focus on the outcomes that matter – rapid exits to PH
- Rethink current budget – what can shift to assist with housing?
- Identify community partnerships and outside resources that will be needed to assist in housing and supporting households
- Communicate, Communicate



Anything I Missed?



Contact

Kay Moshier McDivitt

kmoshiermcdivitt@naeh.org

202-942-8242

Twitter @60_kay

www.endhomelessness.org – Emergency Shelter Learning Series



Questions?

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training@cceh.org**

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