But Are We REALLY a Housing First Community?

Presenters:

Josh Johnson
Senior Technical Assistance Specialist
National Alliance to End Homelessness

Kay Moshier McDivitt
Senior Technical Assistance Specialist
National Alliance to End Homelessness

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National Alliance to End Homelessness

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.

Session Objectives:
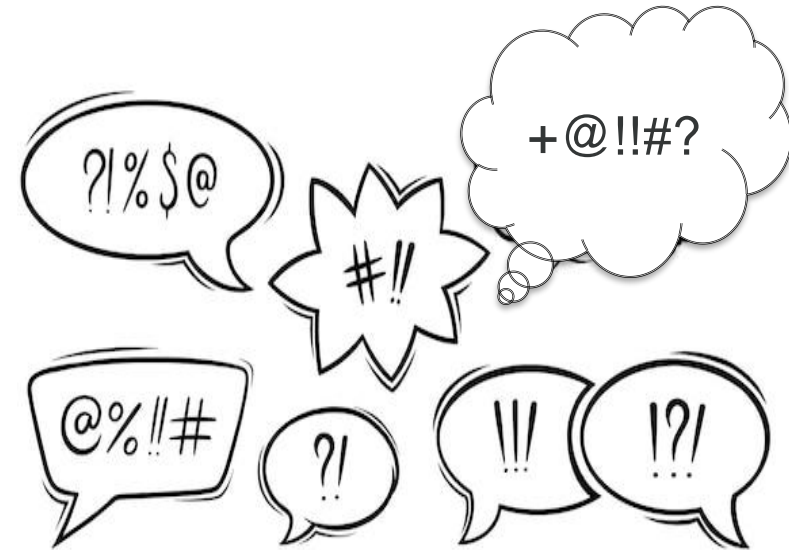# But Are We REALLY a Housing First Community?

Gain an understanding of an effective homeless response system

Understand the role of Housing First in the homeless response system

Identify ways to incorporate Housing First values into your daily work

One word:

In one word, describe the first feeling/thought that comes to mind when you think of housing first?

HOUSING FIRST IN A HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM?

That is effective, efficient and equitable

Effective, Efficient and Equitable Homeless Response System: **GOAL**

House people as quickly as possible and
divert people from imminent homelessness whenever possible

End Homelessness = Make homelessness rare, brief and one-time

Effective, Efficient, and Equitable Homeless Response System: **PERFORMANCE**

Establish systemic performance measures

- Reduce in-flow into homelessness
- Increase exits to permanent housing
- Decrease average length of homelessness
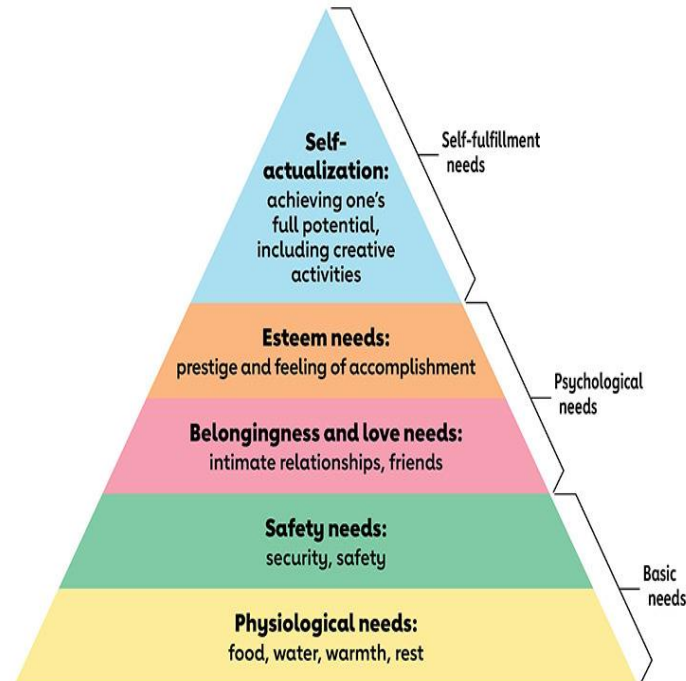- Decrease returns to homelessness

Impact of embracing a Housing First Approach

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Practice Standards Across all Programs

- **Housing First** approach across all interventions within the system

- **Diversion** from imminent homeless system when safe and appropriate

- **Rapid identification and engagement of people** experiencing unsheltered homelessness to connect them to crisis services and housing assistance

- **Quick, accessible, low-barrier pathways to shelter** and other crisis services with **short stays** in shelter

- **Rapid connection to permanent housing** for all sheltered and unsheltered people, *whether or not* they are matched to a housing resource through coordinated entry

Why Housing First?

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs pyramid:

- **Self-actualization:** achieving one's full potential, including creative activities — *Self-fulfillment needs*
- **Esteem needs:** prestige and feeling of accomplishment — *Psychological needs*
- **Belongingness and love needs:** intimate relationships, friends
- **Safety needs:** security, safety — *Basic needs*
- **Physiological needs:** food, water, warmth, rest

Housing First: People experiencing homelessness deserve housing first without preconditions.

Crisis/Stress Biology: The neurohormones related during stress drive people to unconsciously prioritize short term rewards.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Survival and safety needs will drive behavior until these needs are met. Only then can a person focus on other, "higher," needs.

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Why Housing

- Many people experience improvements in quality of life, in the areas of health, mental health, substance use, and employment, as a result of achieving housing.

- People experiencing homelessness have the right to self-determination and should be treated with dignity and respect.

- The exact configuration of housing and services depends upon the needs and preferences of the population.

WHAT IS HOUSING FIRST AND WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

Agree or Disagree…..

- Homelessness is first and foremost a housing crisis and can be addressed through the provision of safe and affordable housing.

- All people experiencing homelessness, regardless of their housing history and duration of homelessness, can achieve housing stability in permanent housing. Some may need very little support for a brief period of time, while others may need more intensive and long-term supports.

- Everyone is "housing ready." Sobriety, compliance in treatment, or even criminal histories are not necessary to succeed in housing. Rather, homelessness programs and housing providers must be "consumer ready."

Housing First Defined

Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, **without preconditions,** as quickly as possible and connects them to voluntary services and **supports necessary to sustain that housing**.

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
- Staff are trained in AND embrace the housing first philosophy

BUILDING ON THE HOUSING FIRST VALUES

Getting started

Your Thoughts!

In a small group discuss:

– **Concerns/questions I/we have about housing first is…**

– **The biggest challenge for our community in implementing housing first is…**
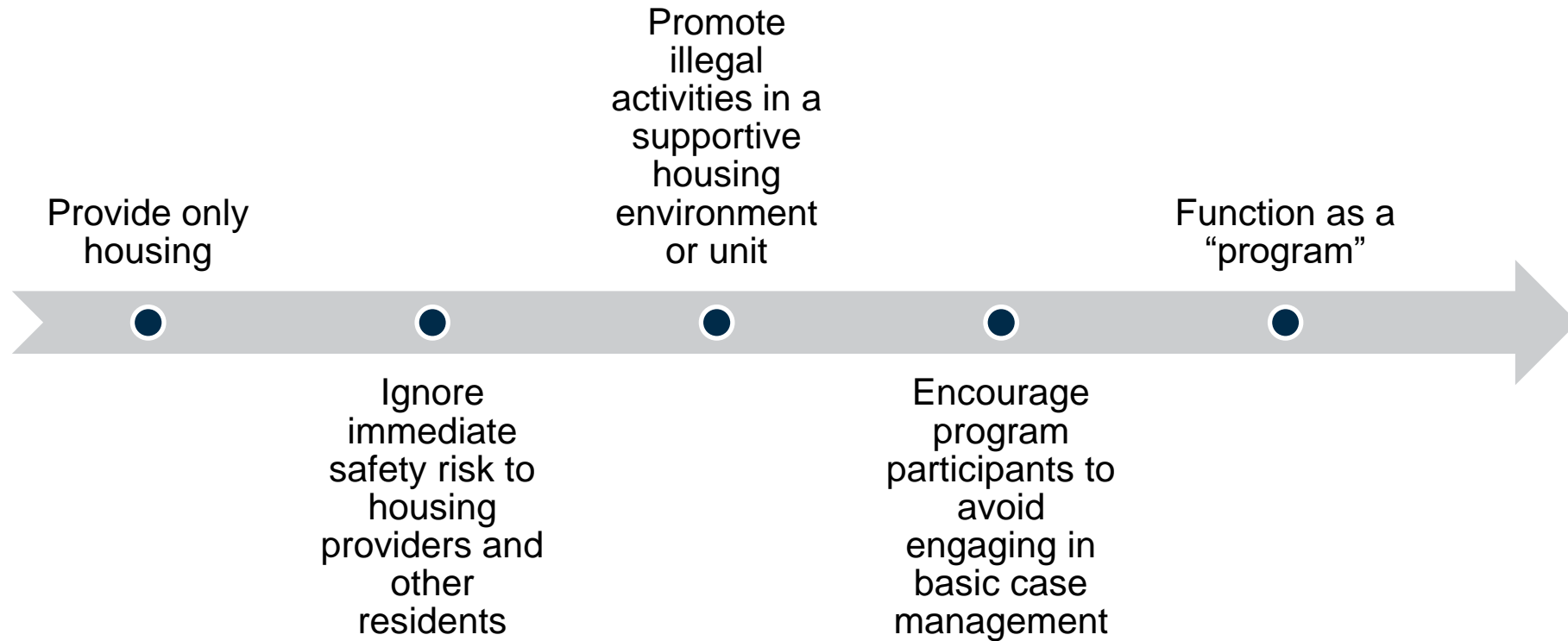
Housing First Values

Values

- 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 connected to resources necessary to sustain that housing

Shift in Thinking…

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Housing First Does Not

Provide only housing

Ignore immediate safety risk to housing providers and other residents

Promote illegal activities in a supportive housing environment or unit

Encourage program participants to avoid engaging in basic case management

Function as a "program"

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Principles in Action

Permanent Housing

- No time limits
- Household is a leaseholder with conditions and rights similar to other tenants
- Service participation is separate from housing and is not a condition of tenancy

Without Preconditions

- Low Barriers to Entry: Acceptance into programs and housing regardless of sobriety, mental health history, criminal history, low or no income, etc.
- No "housing readiness"- programs must be client-ready, NOT clients "program-ready"
- Housing is the foundation for positive change, **not the reward**

As Quickly As Possible

- Rapid, crisis-focused response

And….

- Voluntary services - participation is not required, although continuous attempts are made to engage and to make services effective and irresistible
- Strengths-based and client driven housing plans
- Community Integration - connection to formal and informal support network within the new community to help sustain housing

But are we REALLY a Housing First Community

What are we doing well?
What are we NOT doing?
Where can we start improving?

HOUSING FIRST IN ACTION

Putting Housing First into Practice

The Foundation for Implementing a Housing First Approach

1. **Belief** in housing first - that clients can be successfully housed regardless of housing barriers

2. Positive **engagement** starts at first contact

3. **Empowerment** leads to client/consumer belief themselves

Belief: Shift in Mindset

Shift from…

- Many of our clients/consumers have too many barriers to be successful in housing
- Housing is too expensive in Connecticut 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
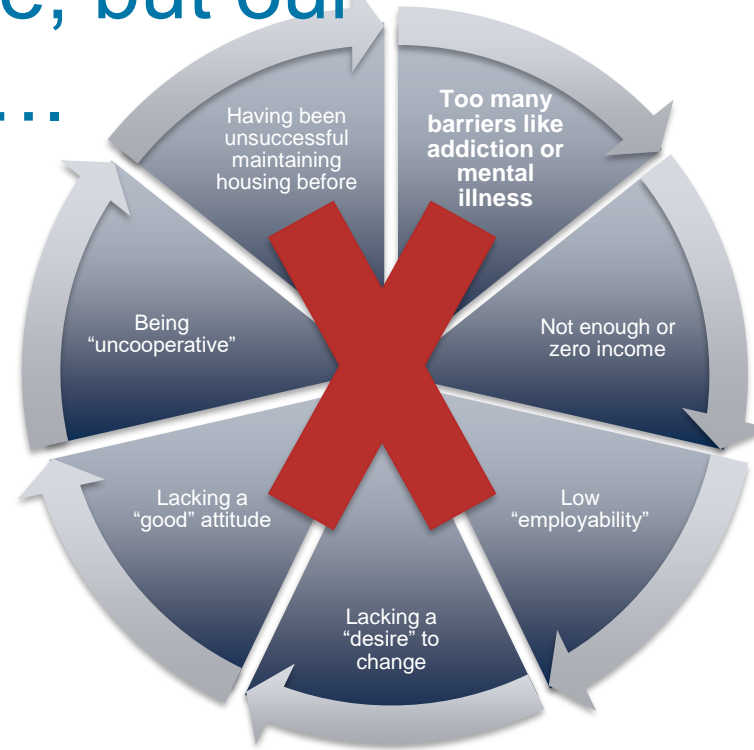
To…

- 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.

Implementing the Housing First Philosophy
Belief

We "believe, but our truths are….

Too many barriers like addiction or mental illness

Not enough or zero income

Low "employability"

Lacking a "desire" to change

Lacking a "good" attitude

Being "uncooperative"

Having been unsuccessful maintaining housing before

Check our own biases

HOUSING FIRST CORNERSTONE #2
Engagement

- First contact sets the stage for success:
  - Active Listening and Strength Based vs. Needs Based
  - Problem Solving
  - Trauma Informed
  - Communicating

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Remember

- 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

Housing First

HOUSING FIRST IS NOT	HOUSING FIRST IS
Just one type of program (like PSH)	A system-wide philosophical approach to many types of homeless assistance interventions
One-size fits only	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

How are you doing?

- Am I ok with allowing clients to be entered into a housing program (like RRH/PSH) or be housed in other options without income?
- Am I ok with allowing clients to be referred to or enter housing/housing program if they aren't "clean and sober" or "treatment compliant"?
- Am I ok with clients being referred to or entering housing if they have criminal legal system involvement?
- Do I give clients the decision to participate in services/case plans voluntarily, without imposing consequences?
- Do I use motivational interviewing to help my clients identify natural consequences of their decisions to help them identify their own strengths and support their plan to keep their housing.

Who does Housing First not work for?

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Breakouts

Break into groups of 3-4 persons. Share ways you currently do or can do to incorporate the housing first values into your daily work. Be ready to share your best 1-2 new ideas.

Things to Keep in Mind

NOT EASY.
BUT SIMPLE.

- 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

In Conclusion

- Housing First is the **RIGHT** thing to do: everyone deserves the safety and dignity of a home.
- Housing First is the **SMART** thing to do: it is both effective in ending homelessness and cost-efficient when compared to other interventions.

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Resources

- [Housing First Checklist](#) (USICH)
- [Why Housing First? Why Not Housing Second? Or Third?](#) (National Alliance to End Homelessness)
- [What Housing First Really Means](#) (National Alliance to End Homelessness)
- [Housing First: Fact Sheet](#) (National Alliance to End Homelessness)
- [The Case For Housing First](#) (NLIHC)

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Contact Us

Kay Moshier McDivitt

Senior Technical Assistance Specialist, Center for Capacity Building

kmoshiermcdivitt@naeh.org

@Alliance_Kay

Josh Johnson

Senior Technical Assistance Specialist, Center for Capacity Building

jjohnson@naeh.org

Questions?

www.cceh.org
info@cceh.org

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