Housing First: From Policy to Practice

A special thanks to our Presenting Sponsor:
Kay Moshier McDivitt, National Alliance to End Homelessness
Diiv Sternman, National Alliance to End Homelessness

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Housing First: from Policy to Practice

Kay Moshier McDivitt
diiv sternman
Senior Technical Assistance Specialists

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WHO WE ARE

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a nonprofit, non-partisan, organization committed to preventing and ending homelessness in the United States.
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
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.
Session Objectives:
Housing First: from Policy to Practice

- Understand what Housing First is and isn't
- Get clear on the role that Housing First plays in effective systemwide response to homelessness
- 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
Effective, Efficient, and Equitable Homeless Response System: PRACTICE

Practice Standards Across all Programs

• **Housing First** approach across all interventions within the system
• **Diversion** from imminent homelessness 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 people (sheltered and unsheltered), *whether or not* they are matched to a housing resource through coordinated entry
Why Housing First?

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

Crisis/Stress Biology: The neurohormones released 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.
Why Housing? Why First?

Because people

- Have a right to self-determination, dignity & respect
- Have unique needs and preferences
- Experience improved quality of life, health, MH/BH, employment IN HOUSING
Grounded in the Truth that

• 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 registered as a sex offender is housed, not homeless.

-Orgcode
People Make Housing Work

• Fewer than 4% of renters below 30% AMI become homeless in CT annually.¹

• When almost a third of renters statewide in CT are making less than 30% of AMI

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1. Data estimated from 2022 LSA NLIHC Out Of Reach
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 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 services 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
• Permanent housing is a right to which all are entitled
• Returns to permanent housing should be facilitated ASAP
• People should be connected to whatever services and resources they need to sustain their housing ASAP
Housing First Does Not

- Provide only housing
- Ignore immediate safety risk to housing providers and other residents
- Promote illegal activities in supportive housing programs
- Function as a “program”
- Encourage people to avoid engaging in basic case management
- Have to be perfect
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 & responsive services**
  - participation is not required; responsibility lies with the program not the client
  - make continuous attempts to engage client in ways that accommodate their needs
  - make services effective & irresistible, match services offered to their stated needs

- **Strengths-based and client driven housing plans**
  - communicate the client’s primary responsibility to keep their housing
  - communicate a strong belief in their ability to maintain their housing
  - support household’s identification of what will help them keep housing & match services to that

- **Community Integration**
  - connection to formal resources in the new community
  - connection to informal support network, community, and natural supports
  - foster whatever connections they identify will help them sustain housing
So...are we REALLY practicing Housing First? At your table, discuss…

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
HOUSING FIRST CORNERSTONE #1

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 we see clients who….

- Were not successful maintaining housing before
- Have too many barriers like addiction or mental illness
- Have not enough or zero income
- Are not "employable"
- Lack a "desire" to change
- Lack a "good" attitude
- Are "uncooperative"

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
  • Encouraging – engage their motivations!
HOUSING FIRST CORNERSTONE #3
Empowerment

• Empowerment is ACTION – shift power to the client!
• Focus on the spirit of housing first
• Self-determination and housing regardless of a client's barriers
• Knowledge is power! Educate & share tools for self-advocacy and tenant's rights
• “You can do it!”

It is the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one’s life and claiming one’s rights
# Housing First

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>HOUSING FIRST IS NOT</strong></th>
<th><strong>HOUSING FIRST IS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Just one type of program (like PSH)</td>
<td>A system-wide philosophical approach to many types of homeless assistance interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-size fits all</td>
<td>A philosophy that values flexibility, individualized supports, client choice, and autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing only</td>
<td>Supportive services that people choose for themselves are a critical part of a Housing First approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting people up for failure</td>
<td>The provision of a foundation for increased stability and health through permanent housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>A way to prioritize one population over another</td>
<td>A way to provide a housing intervention for everyone regardless of the severity of their needs</td>
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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 their own goals and strengths, and support their plan to keep their housing?

• Do I use reality checking techniques to help my clients identify natural consequences of their decisions and encourage continued learning and personal growth in the face of challenges?
Breakouts
At your table…

Share how you currently incorporate or plan to incorporate Housing First values into your daily work. Be ready to share your best 1-2 new ideas.
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
In Conclusion

Housing First is

the **RIGHT** thing to do: everyone deserves the safety and dignity of a home

the **SMART** thing to do: it is both effective in ending homelessness and cost-efficient when compared to other interventions
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)
Contact Us

Kay Moshier McDivitt  
Senior Technical Assistance Specialist  
Center for Capacity Building  
kmoshiermcdivitt@naeh.org  
@Alliance_Kay

diiv sternman  
Senior Technical Assistance Specialist  
Center for Capacity Building  
dsternman@naeh.org
Thank you for attending this workshop!

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