

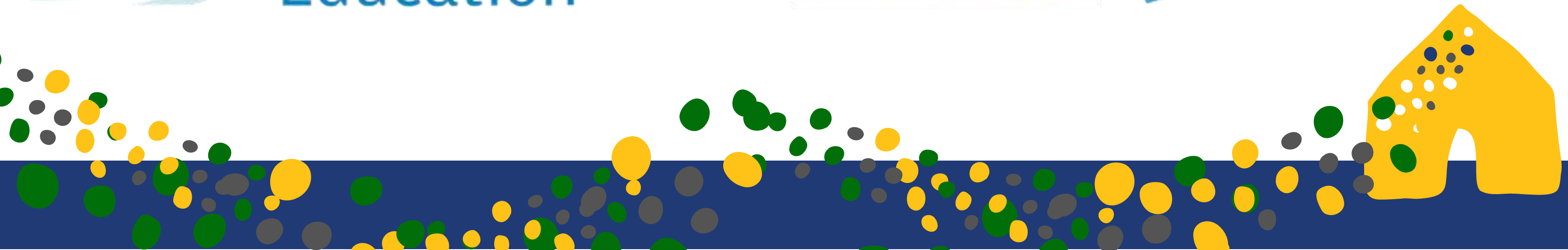
Redefining Success: Recognizing Small Wins in Homeless Services



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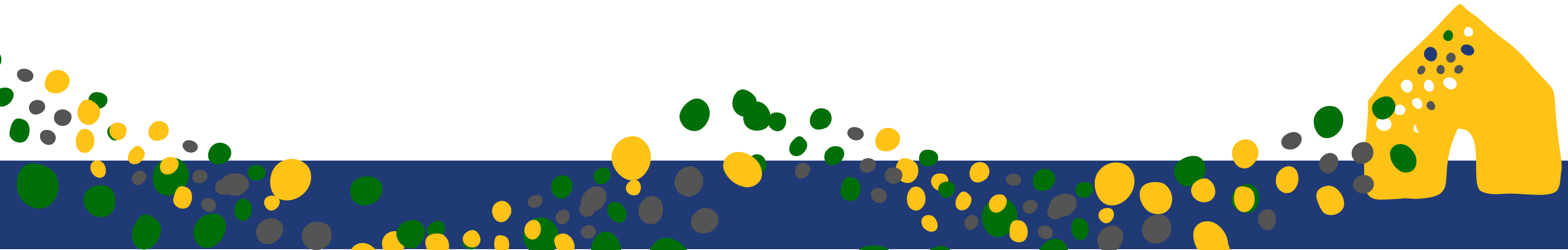


Connecticut
Department of
HOUSING



Redefining Success: Recognizing Small Wins in Homeless Services

Sheryl Lambert, Community Health Resources



GROUND RULES FOR GROWTH



STEP IN WITH OPENNESS

Bring your full self, curiosity, and compassion.



HONOR ALL VOICES

Everyone's experience matters – let's make space for each other.



CELEBRATE PROGRESS

Big or small, every insight and share is a win.



KEEP IT KIND & CONFIDENTIAL

Respect each other's stories and privacy.



STAY PRESENT

Be here, participate, and engage (phones on silent or off, if possible).



LAUGH, LEARN, AND LIFT EACH OTHER UP

We grow stronger together.



Icebreaker: A Piece
of the Puzzle or It's
in the Card

Let's Get to Work!

Together we shall...
Redefine Success by
Recognizing Small Wins
in Homeless Services



Sheryl G.
Lambert, MS

Traditional Metrics

Metric	Purpose	Limitations
Housing placements	Measures how many people move into permanent housing	Doesn't track long-term stability or housing quality
Length of stay in shelter	Used to monitor shelter flow	Penalizes those with complex barriers to housing (e.g., no ID, criminal history)
Bed utilization rates	Indicates system capacity and use	Doesn't reflect the quality or appropriateness of services
Returns to homelessness	Tracks system "failures"	Doesn't account for economic shifts, re-entry from institutions, or domestic violence
HMIS data points (income at exit, disability status, etc.)	Standardized data collection	Misses nuanced progress (e.g., improved trust in providers, health stabilization)

Complex Realities

Reality	Explanation	Why It Matters
Trauma and distrust of systems	Many clients avoid or disengage from services	Success may be slow or look different—relationship-building itself is progress
Systemic inequities	Disparities in housing access and outcomes by race, gender, and disability	Metrics should be disaggregated to highlight and address inequities
Invisible progress	Small wins like obtaining ID, attending medical appointments, or reducing substance use	These steps are vital but not always captured by traditional metrics
Client-centered goals	Definitions of “success” vary (e.g., some prioritize sobriety, others just safety)	System success should align with client-defined goals, not just outcomes
Resource gaps	Lack of affordable housing, mental health services, or transportation	The system’s limitations can delay success regardless of staff effort or client will

James' Journey

James had been unhoused for over a decade. He lived with untreated bipolar disorder, struggled with substance use, and had a long history of trauma; both personal and institutional. He'd been in and out of shelters, jails, and hospitals for years. On paper, he was labeled "hard to house," "non-compliant," and "high-utilizer."

James Enters Shelter

James lost everything when his encampment was cleared. He entered shelter again and traditional metrics started tracked him this away:

- Length of stay began on Day 1.
- Length of verified homelessness categorized him as “chronically homeless.”
- No income. No ID. No health insurance.

James meets Mia



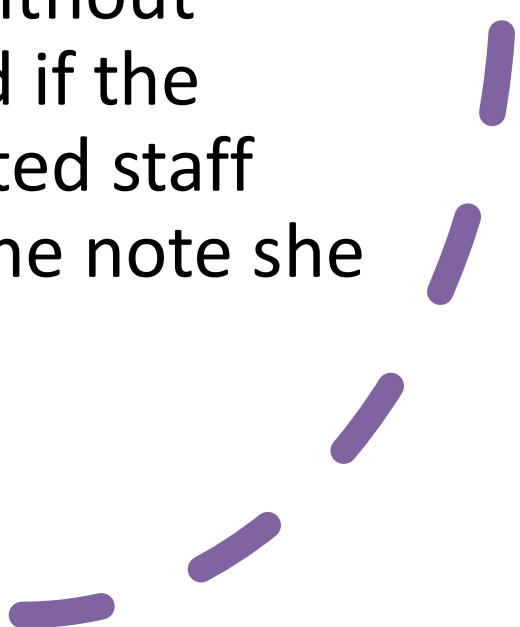


Mia's Journey with James

Mia listened to James she didn't just look at the forms she was given. Even though she used a trauma informed approach with James, their first few interactions were rough. James missed appointments, yelled at times, and often left during case meetings.

Mia's notes for the first few meetings indicated he was challenging to engage and noted he showed up on time.

The 5th time they met she noted he showed up just to say he wasn't ready. That was a first. Additionally, he took a hygiene kit without throwing it away this time and asked if the shelter had coffee. Mia added "Trusted staff enough to stay fifteen minutes" to the note she wrote that day.






The Small Wins

Mia complimented and celebrated every small step with James.

- The day he agreed to get a TB test.
- The afternoon he let her call a doctor he hadn't seen in 12 years.
- The morning he showed up clean, saying, "I think I'm ready to try again."

Each step wasn't tracked in traditional dashboards, but they mattered. They were signs of re-engagement, rebuilding trust, and personal motivation - the kind of progress that leads to housing success later.



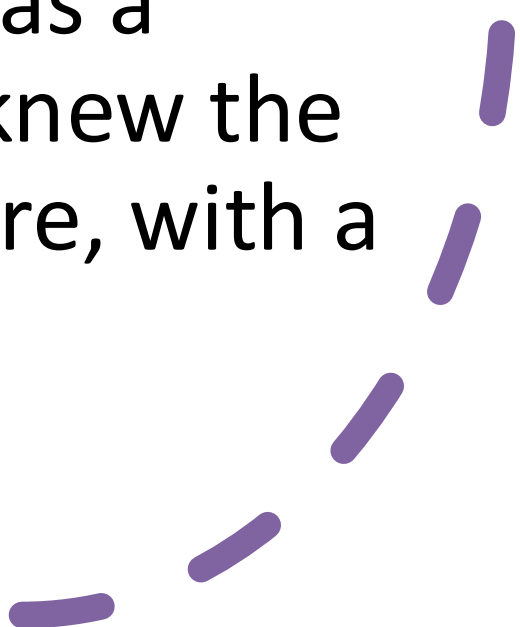


James Moves On

It took four months before James agreed to apply for housing. By then, he'd:

- Replaced his documents
- Started medication
- Completed a mental health evaluation
- Reconnected with his sister

When he finally moved into supportive housing, the system noted it as a success. But Mia and James knew the real win started months before, with a cup of coffee.





Sound Rounds or The 3 H's



Focusing on Small Wins Builds Positivity



Here's why: The Science Behind Micro Milestones



Our brains are built to respond positively to small successes. When we set and reach tiny, doable goals called micro milestones our brain releases a chemical called dopamine.



Dopamine makes us feel good, motivated, and more likely to keep going. Even a small win, like showing up to an appointment or asking for help, can give the brain a boost.



These little victories help build momentum and keep us moving toward bigger goals, especially during hard times. In homeless services, recognizing these moments can make a big difference for both clients and staff.

Flying Above The Storm



Remaining Centered

Breathe - Literally

Take slow, deep breaths.

Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4, exhale for 6.

This signals your nervous system to stay out of “fight or flight.”

Don't Take It Personally

Remind yourself: This is about what they're going through, not who I am.

People in crisis often project their pain onto others—it's not about you.



Remaining Centered

3. Use a Grounding Technique

- Feel your feet on the floor.
- Notice something in the room: colors, sounds, textures.
- This helps you stay present instead of reacting emotionally.

4. Keep Your Tone Low and Steady

- Speak slowly and calmly—even if your heart is racing.
- A steady tone can de-escalate the situation and help the other person regulate.



Speak Up or Step Away

Set Boundaries with Respect

Say something like:


“I want to help, but I have a hard time listening you when you speak loudly.”

“Let’s take a moment and try again in a minute.”

Take a Break (if it’s safe)

Step away if you need to and if the situation allows.

A short reset can help both you and the client regain control.



Self-Care
You are needed
Please take good
care of yourself

Have a Reset Plan

Know what helps you cool down after difficult interactions:

Talking to a teammate

Stepping outside for fresh air

Journaling or quick movement/stretch

Debrief with Someone You Trust

Share what happened with a colleague or supervisor.

Processing out loud helps prevent burnout and emotional buildup.





Fuel for your Journey

- “Sometimes the smallest step in the right direction ends up being the biggest step of your life.”
— *Naeem Callaway*
- “I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”
— *Maya Angelou*
- “You may not see the change right away, but your presence is the start of it.”
— *Anonymous*



Thank You!

For any questions email info@cceh.org

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