

Rebuilding Lives: Low-Barrier Shelter and Rehabilitative Support for Lasting Stability

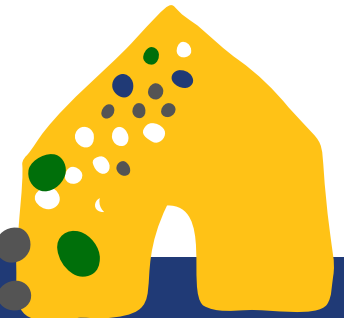


Calio
Education



Rebuilding Lives: Low-Barrier Shelter and Rehabilitative Support for Lasting Stability

- Kelly Gonzalez, South Park Inn
- Kristina Lewin, St. Vincent De Paul of Bristol
- Hannah Smith, Beth-El Center



Innovative, Low-Barrier Shelter Model



Low-Barrier Shelter

Being a low demand shelter means that South Park Inn does not require sobriety as a condition of shelter. We do not require background checks, income, participation in services, or identification to access shelter and services. We do not have a specific length of time people can stay and we do not ask people to leave for things that do not relate directly to safety. Being low-barrier is about looking at all the reasons people do not come into shelter and eliminating those the best we can.

What makes South Park Inn low-barrier?

Animals
Accepted

LGBTQ+
Inclusion

Specialized Case
Manager for
Aging Population

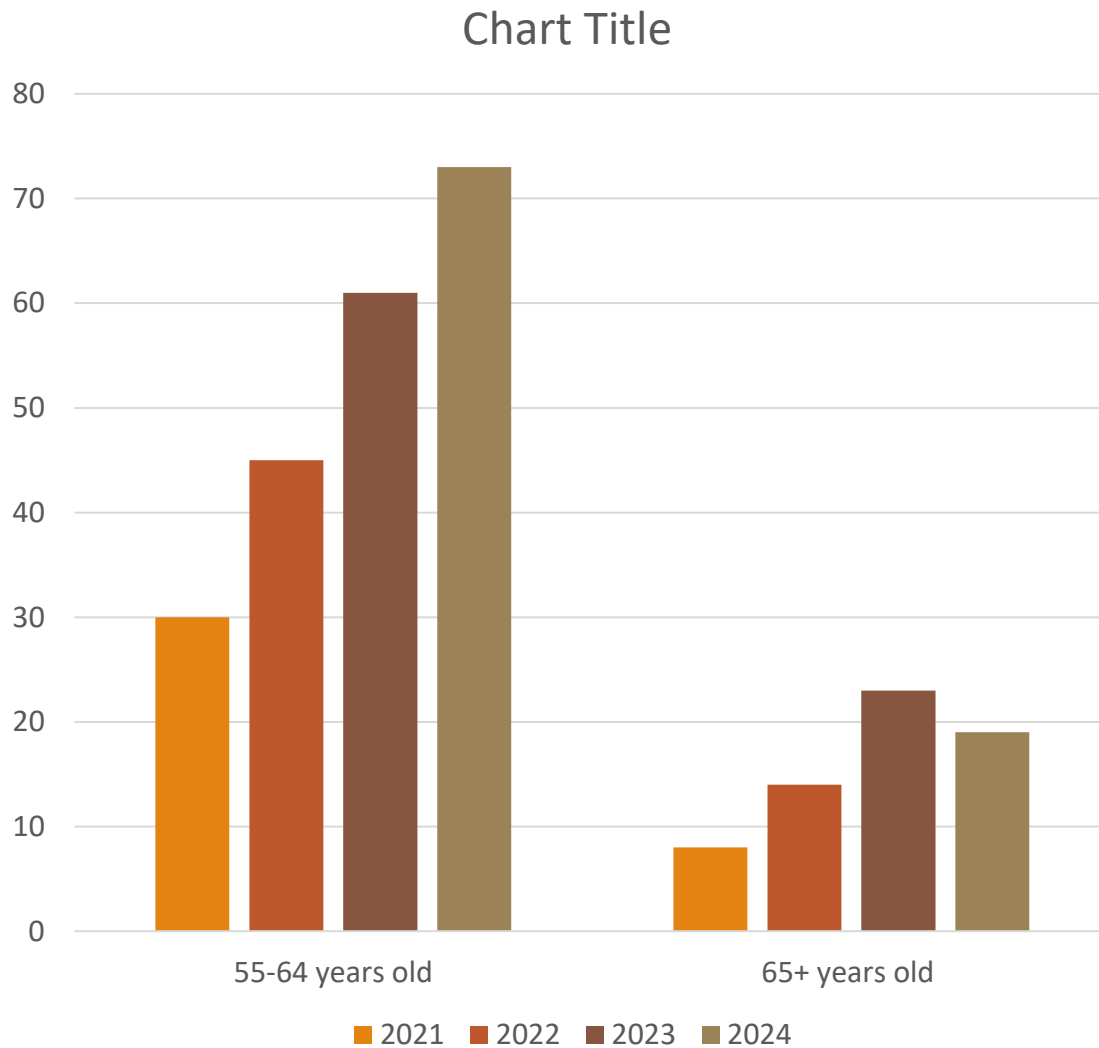
Comprehensive
Harm Reduction
Model

On-site Clinical
Services

Data on Homelessness of Older Adults

Homelessness amongst older adults is increasing rapidly. This can be attributed to the following:

- Overall inflation & lack of exceeding income
- Increase in chronic health conditions and physical disabilities
- Expiration of the moratorium = rise on evictions
- Lack of affordable housing and assisted living facilities



SPI's Response to This Emerging Crisis

After some advocacy and acquiring funding, SPI was able to hire an Older Adult Case Manager. The Older Adult Case Manager will work directly with our guests 55 and over who are also medically compromised in our emergency shelter to provide guidance and support for their aging journeys. She is responsible for the following:

- coordinating elder care between multiple service providers
- developing both short- and long-term care plans
- helping manage medical and behavioral concerns
- assisting with transitional care
- completing ongoing assessments of aging life care needs

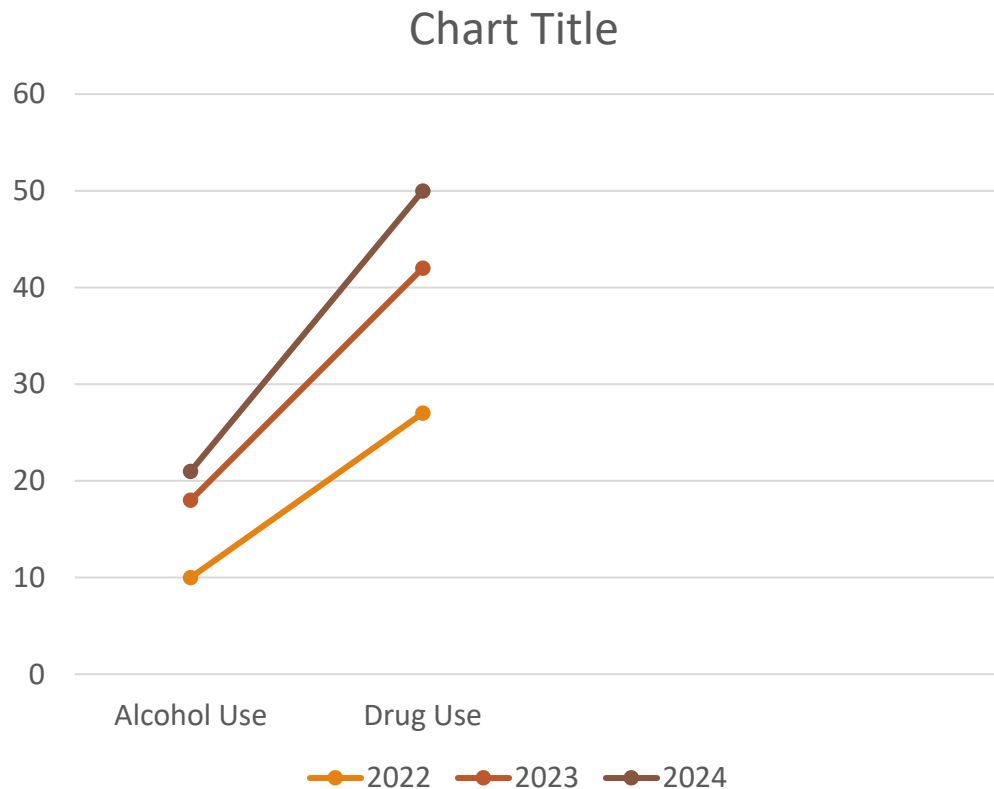


Older Adult Case Manager

The Older Adult Case Manager has been working with SPI since March 2025 and has been able to complete the following with the 15 older adults on her caseload:

- Connected 6 guests to medical and behavioral health providers for long term care
- Got 8 guests document ready for housing
- Has completed over 50 low-income housing applications
- Assisted 2 guests with obtaining health insurance
- Assisted 5 guests with obtaining/ reactivating SSI funding
- Assisted 2 guests with obtaining SNAP benefits
- Has connected with our local senior center

Harm Reduction at Another Level



With substance use issues at an all time high, South Park Inn established the following to meet guests where they are in a low demand model:

Full time Peer Support Specialist

Weekly All Recovery Groups

Amnesty Box

Peer Support Specialist



Serves as a role model by sharing personal recovery stories, showing that recovery is possible.



Empower others by helping them identify their strengths, supports, resources and skills.



Offer a sounding board and a shoulder to lean on.



Advocate by working to eliminate the stigma of behavioral health disorders.



Teach goal setting, problem solving and symptom management skills.



Peer Support Specialist

The Peer Support Specialist has been certified for 9 months and has done the following:

- Built relationships and trust with most of the guests at SPI
- Created an All-Recovery Group which is held every Tuesday on site
- Has conducted a total of 8 groups thus far with 15-25 guests in attendance
- Has assisted 3 guests in getting into detox and/or recovery programs



Amnesty Box

The Amnesty Box is a steel constructed and locked container located in the lobby. Illicit drugs, drug paraphernalia and/ or alcohol that is confiscated from guests should be disposed in the Amnesty Box.

Guests who are caught with illicit drugs, drug paraphernalia and/ or alcohol on property should be advised to dispose of items in the Amnesty Box. Failure to dispose of items will result in discharge from the program.

Guests who comply with disposing items will be given three instances to do so prior to discharge from program. Each incident is used as an opportunity for a therapeutic intervention regarding substance use issues. Guests are referred to the Peer Support Specialist immediately after confiscation and disposal.



Disabling Conditions Verification

- A disabling condition verification form for housing is used to prove an individual meets the requirements for subsidized housing or housing with set-asides for people with disabilities.
- SPI was the first shelter to acquire short-term funding to contract a counseling practice (CTACC) to complete disabling conditions verifications for homeless individuals in our community.
- Through this contract we were able to obtain 187 verifications.
- Though the contract has ended, our partnership with CTACC continues. Currently, CTACC is providing therapy to insured guests of SPI in our new counseling room.

Attainable Low-Barrier Services



Working with the person
and where they are.
Not a one size fits all.



Building Relationships



Building Trust



Showing Empathy



Wraparound
Rehabilitative Services



Knowledge of Local
Resources

“Disruptive” Behavior	How it Could Actually be a Trauma Response
Aggression and violence	Individuals who have experienced violence or abuse in the past may resort to aggression <u>as a way to protect themselves</u> or cope with feelings of powerlessness and fear.
Substance abuse	Substance use can be a way to self-medicate and numb the emotional pain resulting from past traumas or the stress of homelessness
Social isolation and withdrawal	Past traumatic experiences can lead to a deep distrust of others and social withdrawal as a defense mechanism to avoid potential harm.
Noncompliance with rules	Some individuals may struggle with authority figures and rules due to past experiences of control, coercion, or abuse, leading to a resistance to being controlled again.
Self harm and suicidal behaviors	Extreme emotional distress and feelings of hopelessness can lead to self-harming behaviors or suicidal ideation to cope with overwhelming pain.
Panic attacks and flashbacks	Traumatic memories may resurface in the form of panic attacks or flashbacks, making it challenging for individuals to control their emotional and behavioral responses.
Hoarding and clutter	Hoarding possessions, even in limited spaces like a shelter, can be a way to regain a sense of control and security over one's environment, especially if they have experienced loss or displacement.
Avoidance of services and support	Fear of judgment, mistrust, or a desire to avoid reliving traumatic experiences may lead to individuals avoiding or resisting the support and services offered in shelters.
Sleeping during the day and awake at night	Sleep disturbances can be related to hypervigilance, where individuals feel safer staying awake at night to guard against potential threats or disruptions.
Disruptive outburst and yelling	High levels of stress and emotional dysregulation resulting from past traumas can manifest as disruptive outbursts and yelling when triggered.



A COMPREHENSIVE AND
COMPASSIONATE APPROACH TO:

LOW BARRIER SHELTERS



HANNAH SMITH - DIRECTOR OF SHELTER SERVICES



BUILDING
CONSTELLATIONS
NOT STARS

TRAUMA

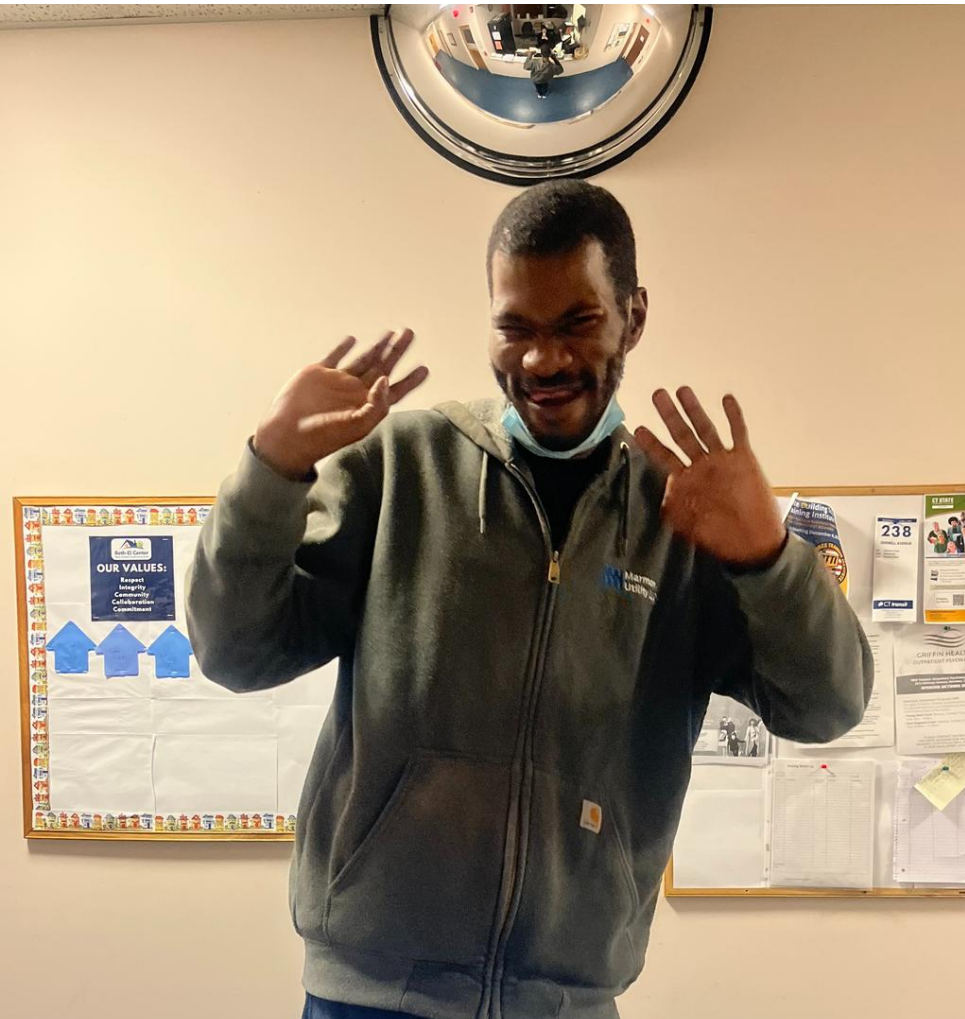
TRAUMA INFORMED
- RESPONSES AT EVERY
LEVEL OF THE SYSTEM



WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER
IT'S UP TO US, WE ARE BUILDING THIS TOGETHER

ALIGNED
INDEPENDENT
ACTION!

UNDERSTANDING LOW BARRIER SHELTER MODEL



AT THE HEART OF LOW BARRIER SHELTER:

- We recognize that behaviors are often rooted in lived trauma—not bad intentions.
- Everyone deserves a safe place to sleep, regardless of what they're carrying—emotionally or physically.
- Our goal is to remove barriers, not people. We lean into support, flexibility, and second chances.
- Shelter is not a reward. It's a fundamental human need—and a step toward long-term stability.

Why It Matters: low barrier shelter is the foundation of equity, healing, and housing justice.

"We regard our unhoused neighbors as problems to be solved, rather than as people to be loved."

Structure of Intake:

Basic Needs



Holistic approach – addressing the complex and interconnected challenges individuals may face.

Document Ready



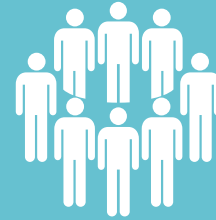
Vital Docs are important for securing housing – applying for these documents requires time and money

Housing First



Housing plan is created when folks enter into shelter and reviewed weekly. Stable housing is a fundamental need.

Community



Importance of community connections in supporting individuals on their journey out of homelessness.

Dignity



Acknowledges the inherent worth and value of each person, provide a safe and supportive environment that fosters healing.

Substance Use: Harm Reduction, Not Exclusion



Sobriety or abstaining from drugs and alcohol can be challenging for individuals, and the fear of withdrawal may create barriers to entry for those who use substances.

Guests are permitted to stay even if intoxicated, as long as they are respectful, non-disruptive, and following shelter guidelines.

While we do not permit the use or possession of drugs or alcohol inside the program, we offer a compassionate structure:

- Lock boxes are provided at entry for guests to safely store items.

Bottom line: Shelter is a human right, not a reward for sobriety.

Why the Shift?

- Guests deserve consistent, well-trained, and trauma-informed support.
- Stability in staff increases trust, follow-through, and safety for everyone.

What's Changing:

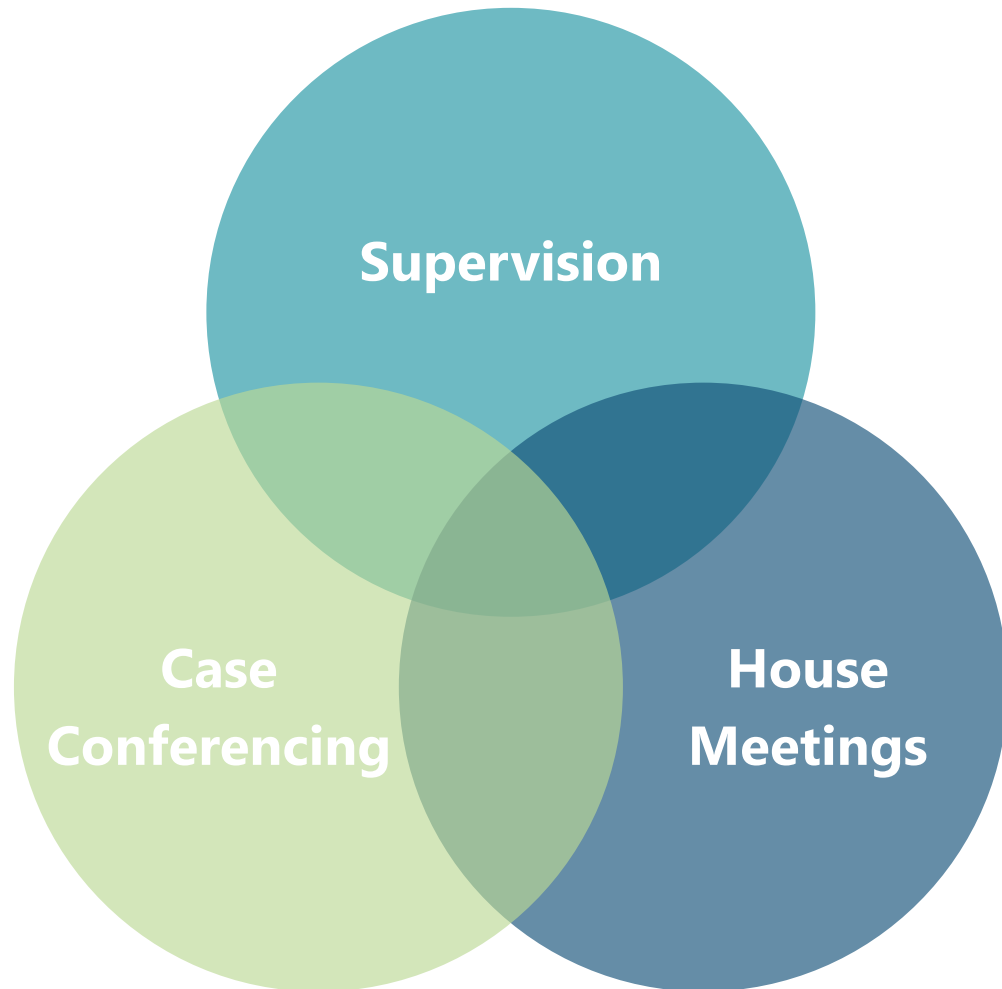
- Hiring three full time Residential Counselors
- Increased access to trainings on harm reduction, de-escalation, MHFA and trauma-informed care.
- Regular supervision and team meetings to review practice, discuss incidents, and promote reflective work.
- Creating a culture of shared accountability, where we hold each other and ourselves to the mission of dignity-first care.

Big Picture: This shift deepens our commitment to professional excellence and aligns with our low-barrier, high-compassion model.

Shifting to Full-Time “Front Desk” Staff



The Intersection of Supervision, Case Conferencing and House Meetings



These initiatives complement each other by providing different avenues for communication, collaboration, and support.

They form a cohesive framework for promoting a culture of collaboration, communication, and support within our shelter community.

- Do welcome a guest when they come to the shelter. Make eye contact and greet them with a smile. Introduce yourself when meeting a guest for the first time.
- Do maintain a clean and orderly environment. Remember, the shelter is not only a workplace, it is someone's home.
- Do follow policies and procedures consistently. Reinforce to guests that staff can be relied upon to carry out their duties and enforce the rules and regulations of the facility in a consistent, competent, and fair manner.
- Do be aware of your professional limitations. Do not attempt guest interventions you are not trained or authorized to provide.
- Do pay attention to how you present yourself in your demeanor, dress, and body language. It is important that our own standards of behavior, dress, and cleanliness be a model for guests.

WITH GUESTS

DO'S FOR INTERACTING

- Do enforce policies and procedures equally with all guests. You are more likely to gain the respect of guests who see your actions as fair and balanced than if you treat one guest differently from another.
- Do your job even though no one is watching or reminding you. For example, staff may not be supervised during the late hours and this may provide temptation to skip rounds or bed-checks. A guest's sense of safety may depend on the idea that someone is checking the area where they sleep. Guests need to trust that staff are looking out for them and showing concern for their well-being – even while they sleep.
- Do know emergency procedures and respond to a crisis situation immediately to ensure a guest's safety. It is the responsibility of every staff member to know their facility's emergency protocols. Know when to call a supervisor or outside help.

- Don't use your power as a shelter employee to demean, humiliate, or judge a guest. Be aware of your status as a staff person.
- Don't discuss a guest's business in public areas where other guests may overhear. Provide privacy for a guest to discuss sensitive information.
- Don't blame or reprimand a guest in front of other guests. By refraining from loud or obvious criticism of a guest in front of others, you maintain the dignity and cooperation of the guest.
- Don't lose control of your emotions in front of guests. Seek help from peers or your supervisor when you feel overwhelmed.

WITH GUESTS

DONT'S FOR INTERACTING

- Don't take it personally. Even when a guest is in a blaming or angry mode, remind yourself that by not reacting emotionally you are able to better assess and respond.
- Don't promise a guest something you cannot deliver. Most guests have a difficult time trusting "the system." When they are promised something that is not fulfilled, it reinforces the idea that the system cannot be trusted. Take responsibility and apologize to the guest.
- Don't let dangerous situations or interactions go unattended. A guest's feeling of safety is important. Consistent professional behavior shows guests that the facility can be trusted to provide a safe haven.

No One Thrives in Isolation

“There are people who mentally cannot be alone... They survive in our homeless communities because we make room for them.”
– KC, According to Need (99% Invisible)

Housing is more than a solution; it is the foundation of belonging. The strength of our community is measured by how well we care for ALL. Let's continue to make room.





"If you have a set of priceless dishes, and one plate has a fine hairline crack in it. You know that you don't just give that to anybody sitting at the table. You don't just send it anywhere, or to the kids' table, you know. You always end up with that plate because you're the one who knows not to hit it too hard with your knife or not to drop the fork in it. Because... that plate is part of the set."

This speaks to the responsibility we carry in this work. Just as we care for the most fragile pieces in a cherished collection, we create environments where people—despite their vulnerabilities—are valued, protected, and supported. Housing is more than a solution; it is a foundation for belonging.



206

INDIVIDUALS
SERVED

18

ANIMALS
ACCOMMODATED



Pet Policy

FOR MANY, PETS ARE A SOURCE OF EMOTIONAL REGULATION, TRAUMA RECOVERY, AND UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.

ALLOWING GUESTS TO STAY WITH THEIR SERVICE OR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMAL HELPS REDUCE ISOLATION, INCREASE STABILITY, AND FOSTER TRUST.

GUESTS ARE SUPPORTED IN MAINTAINING RESPECTFUL SPACE BETWEEN THEIR ANIMAL AND OTHERS. ANIMALS MUST BE LEASHED, CRATED AT NIGHT, AND NEVER LEFT ALONE OR WITH OTHER GUESTS.

INCLUSION LOOKS LIKE THIS: IF SOMEONE FEELS SAFE ONLY WHEN THEY'RE WITH THEIR ANIMAL, THEN THAT'S WHO WE'RE WELCOMING. THIS IS NOT JUST A POLICY—IT'S AN EXTENSION OF OUR TRAUMA-INFORMED VALUES.

Is homelessness a justifiable consequence for violating a shelter's rules?

Can I defend my decision to the community?

Is it reasonable to expect people with alcohol or drug dependence to abstain simply because they have walked through our doors?

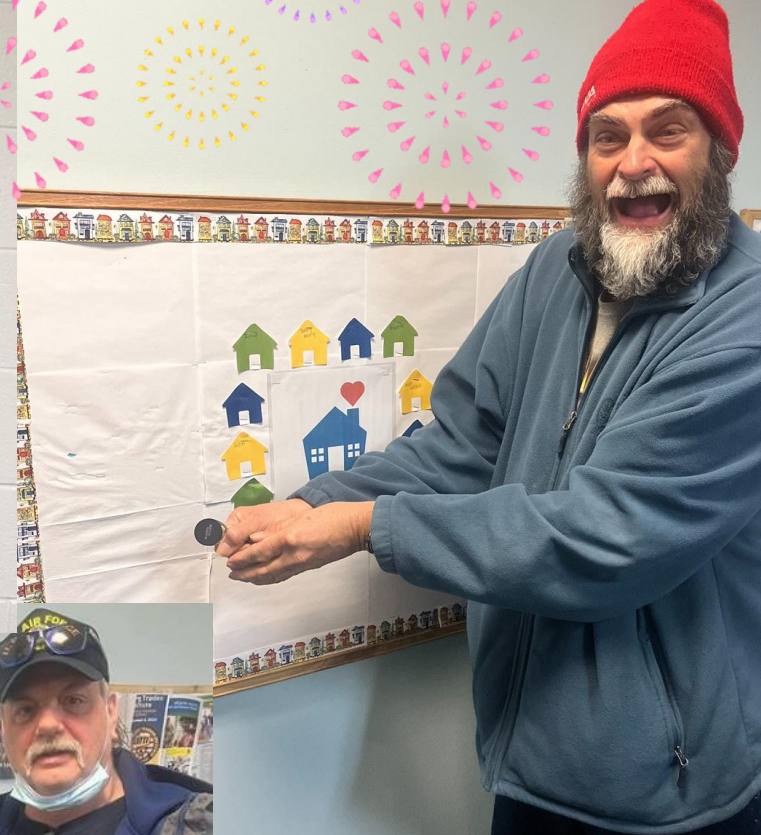
Is it reasonable to expect that a group of strangers living together with diverse backgrounds and values will always get along?

Is it reasonable to expect someone to keep track of all the rules in shelter when the staff sometimes can't even keep track?

Would I want to stay in this shelter?

Would I want myself as an advocate?





Leading with **Compassion**

Our Commitment as a Low-Barrier Shelter

Kristina Lewin
Shelter manager

What is a **Low-Barrier Shelter?**

- ✓ No sobriety or income requirements upon entry
- ✓ Immediate access to shelter with minimal barriers
- ✓ Focus on housing-first principles
- ✓ Emphasis on harm reduction and dignity
- ✓ Working on housing and providing resources to other programs and services to provide a holistic approach.



Our Low-Barrier **Philosophy**

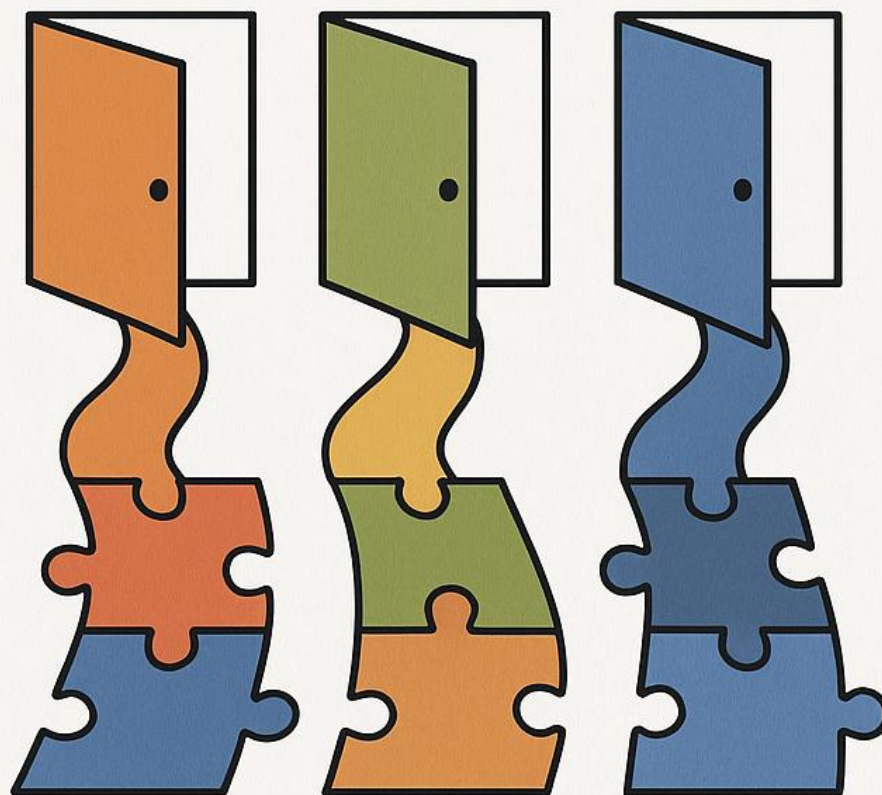
- ✓ **Every** individual deserves access to shelter without unnecessary obstacles.
- ✓ **Trust** and dignity
- ✓ Safety and **accessibility**
- ✓ **Compassionate** care for complex needs.



Meeting People Where They Are

We cannot assume that every individual who walks through our doors will immediately adapt to structure, feel comfortable in shared spaces, or be ready to consider sobriety—especially if that's not a path they've chosen for themselves.

As a low-barrier shelter, we must set aside our personal beliefs about what progress or stability "should" look like. Housing solutions are not one-size-fits-all. True support begins by recognizing each person's unique journey and respecting their readiness, choices, and autonomy.



Outreach Team

Extending Access Beyond 9–5



Connects with the unsheltered during nights and weekends

Builds trust through consistent community practice

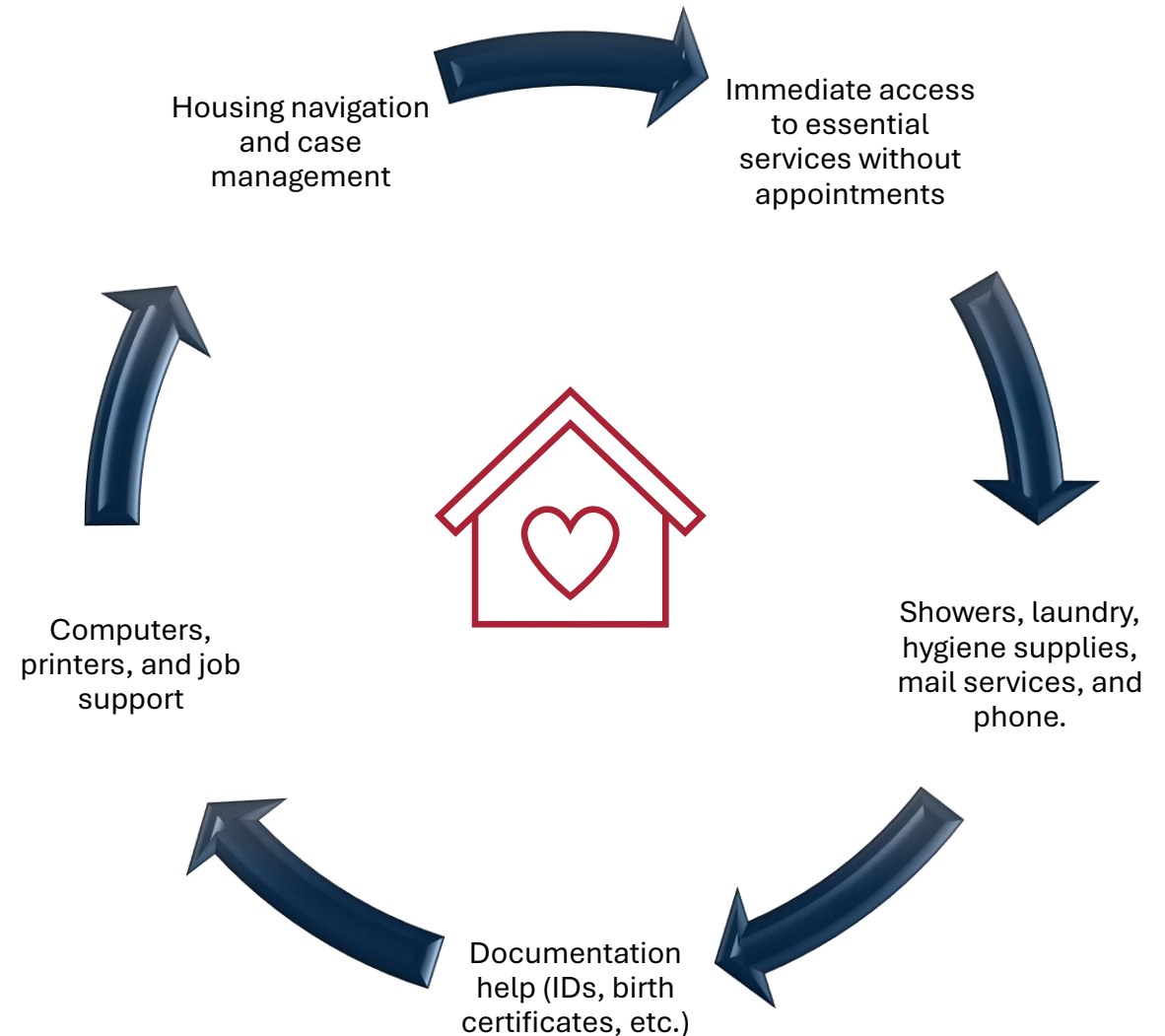
Provides critical supplies, resource referrals, and services for housing

Links individuals to shelter and case management

Encampment to Housing

Resource Center – Walk-In Support Hub

- The Resource Center is a walk-in support hub.
- Staff includes:
 - Diversion Specialist
 - Document Ready Specialist
 - Case Manager
 - Housing Specialist
- Offers a holistic approach through multiple services.
- Collaborates with community partner agencies such as CW Resources, CT Works, CMHA, and Harm Reduction.



Shelter Team – Upholding Low-Barrier Standards



18 individual rooms. It could be accessed by families, couples, and individuals.



Residents may stay indoors during the day, even when dorms are closed



Flexible policies to meet people where they are



Resource Room with computers, printers, and office supplies.

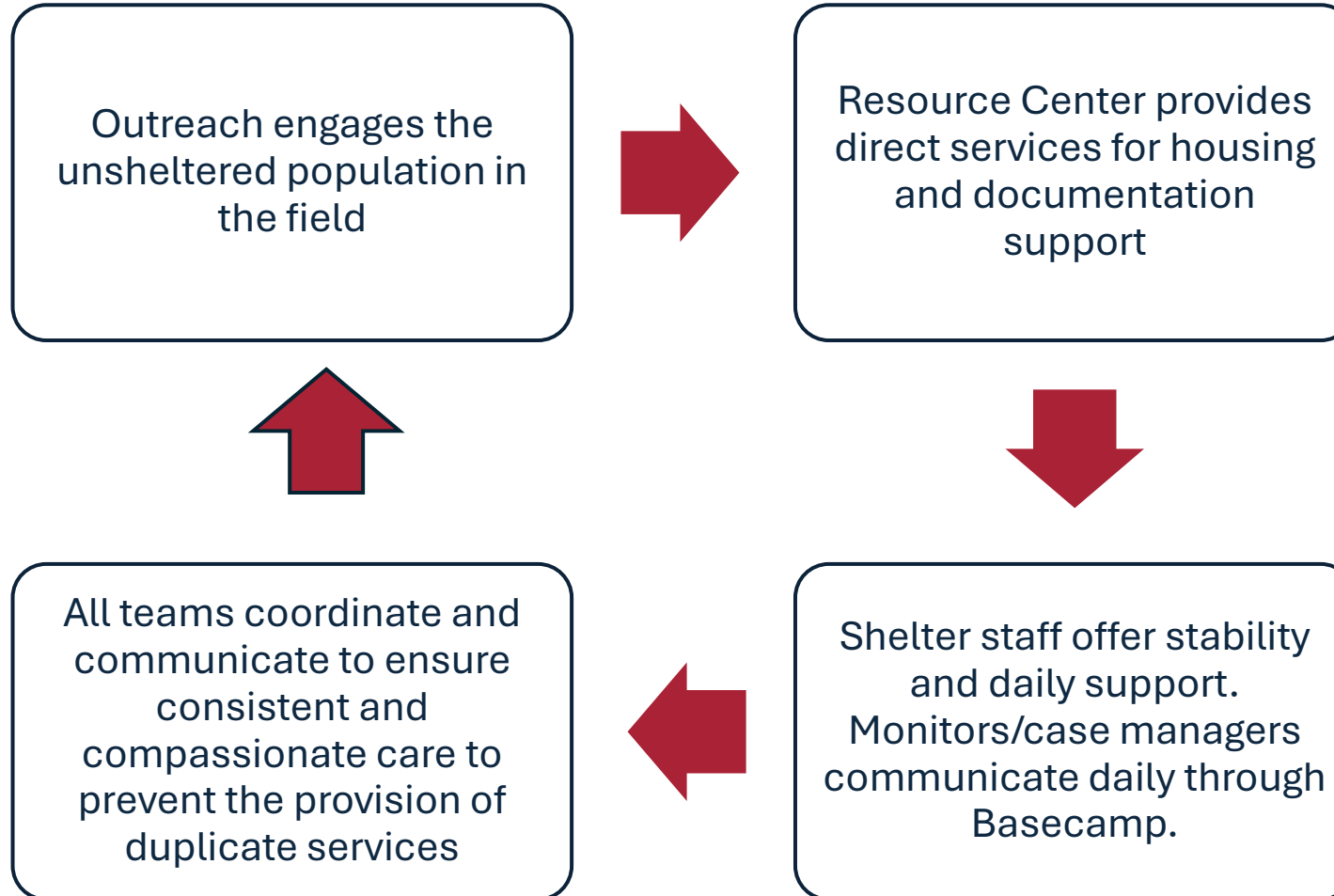


Weekly case manager meetings with residents. The case manager will accommodate a Saturday meeting, if needed.



Pets are allowed; no documentation needed

Interdepartmental Collaboration



Real Impact of a Low-Barrier Approach



Reaches people with complex medical, limited mobility, mental health, or substance use needs



Improves engagement and reduces program exits



Facilitates **faster** transitions to permanent housing



Strengthens trust and promotes long-term stability

Addressing Challenges Together

- ✓ Balancing safety and accessibility for all
- ✓ Ongoing training in trauma-informed care and de-escalation
- ✓ Using resident feedback during monthly meetings to adapt policies and improve services.
- ✓ Conducting monthly monitoring meetings
- ✓ Fostering staff resilience and peer support



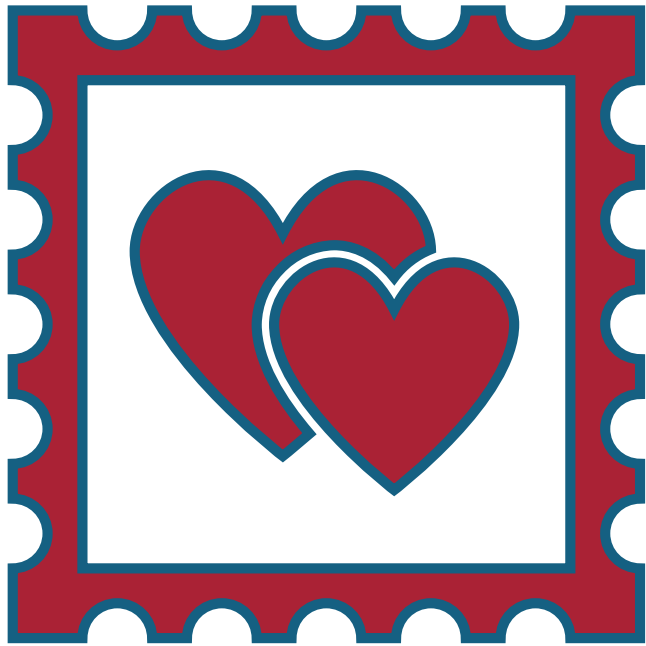
Conclusion



- ✓ Being a low-barrier shelter means putting people first.
- ✓ Through teamwork, flexibility, and compassion, we help individuals find hope, safety, and a path forward.
- ✓ Thank you for your support and commitment to this mission.

Our team:

The heart of SVDP



At St. Vincent De Paul, our staff is the foundation of everything we do. Their commitment, compassion, and resilience are what bring our mission to life every day. No policy, program, or initiative would succeed without the genuine care and presence of the individuals who make up our team.

- They are the first point of contact for our guests, creating a safe, welcoming, and judgment-free space.
- They build trusting relationships that foster long-term engagement and healing.
- They meet people where they are, emotionally and physically, walking alongside them through their journeys.

Every breakthrough we celebrate begins with a staff member who chose to show up with kindness, patience, and integrity.

Our success is not in the systems we build, but in the people who carry them out with heart.

Thank You!

For any questions email
info@cceh.org

Visit our website cceh.org

