

# Eastern PA Training Series

## Session Three: Transitioning to a Housing Focused Shelter

November 14, 2023

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# Your Trainers

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# Training Series Overview

## Week One

- Effective Homeless Response Systems
- Role of Emergency Shelter
- Housing First Approach in Shelter

## Week Two

- Role of Shelter in Diversion and Problem Solving
- Transitioning Shelter to a Low Barrier Model
- The role of rules and guidelines for effective shelter

11/14/2023

## Week Three

- Housing Focused Shelter
- Rapid Exits
- Creating a Housing Focused Environment

## Week Four

- Using Data and Outcomes to Measure Success
- Taking Action
- Wrap-up

# Virtual Session Logistics

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# Who's Here?

- In chat:
- Your name
- Shelter
- Region
- What's your favorite ice cream flavor?



# Review

## The Role of Diversion in Shelter and Effective Low Barrier Shelter



# What is Shelter Diversion?

- Diversion strategies and practices assist people to resolve their housing crisis by accessing alternatives to entering emergency shelter or unsheltered homelessness.
- The intent is to promote positive alternatives to entering shelter or unsheltered homelessness, **not to erect barriers to homeless assistance programs**



# Role of Diversion and Problem Solving in Shelter

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- Reduces new entries into homelessness
- Cuts down on **shelter** wait lists
- Stems inflow into the **shelter** system
- Reduces demand for limited **shelter** beds
- Improves system performance outcomes by reducing new entries and re-entries into homelessness
- Targets more intensive homelessness interventions and resources to be provided to those with higher needs who have no alternatives to a shelter stay
- Increases Rapid Exits.



# Safe and Appropriate Diversion

## Operational Shift

- Re-envision Intake Process
  - Again, problem solving conversations before intake
  - What does intake process consist of?
  - How much time is given to the conversation?
  - Keep in mind **housing first**
- Space
  - Private space conducive to a conversation
- Staffing
  - Incorporate diversion culture, “right fit”
  - Training in mediation skills
  - Job descriptions and structure



# Immediate and Low-barrier Access

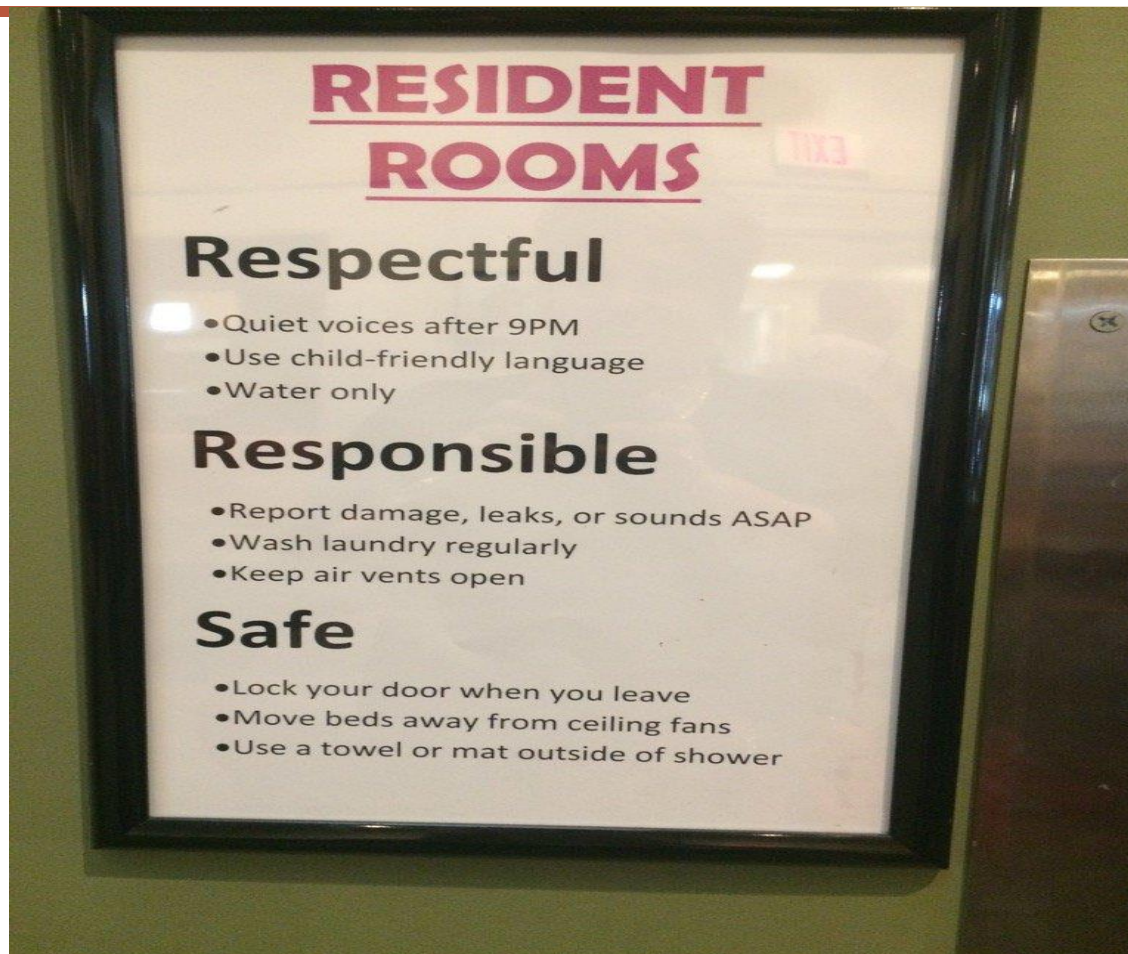
## What Does Low Barrier Shelter Look

- Shelter is open 24/7
- 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 to 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

We want to create shelters that are accommodating to the people who need them, not make people accommodate the shelter program and its rules.

We want to screen people in, not out.

# Example of Low-Barrier Expectations



# People



# Possessions



# Pets

## Brainstorm:

How can your shelters/TH providers shift practices and operations in order to accommodate these common reasons why people do not access shelter?

# Assignment:

## Review of client handbook, program policies, and rules

1. Highlight in green those “rules that meet the guidelines”
2. Highlight in yellow those to tweak
3. Highlight in orange those to remove



# Assignment: Review of Current Practice

1. What policies can we change to move to a lower barrier model?
2. Does our environment reflect a low-barrier policy? What might we change?
3. Space utilization – can we serve more populations? What can we do to accommodate pets?
4. How do we re-think job roles and activities?
5. What language do we use? Rules vs. Expectations? What should we change?
6. What changes do we need to make to client handbooks, etc.?
7. What training needs will this create?
8. Who will be responsible?



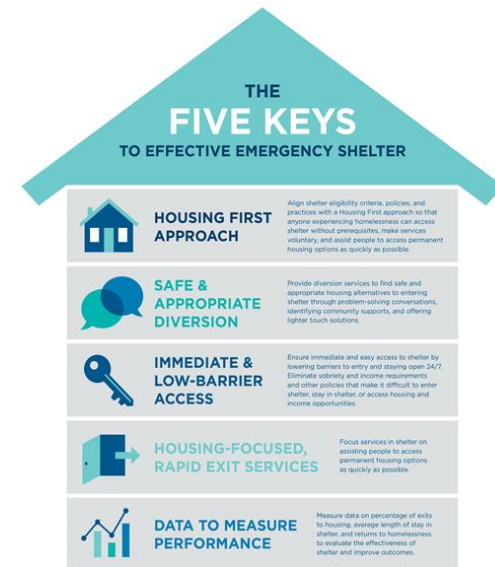
# Re-cap: Your Thoughts About Last Weeks Session

- What was a major take-away from last week?
- What is going to be the biggest challenge for your shelter in making a shift to lowering barriers?
- What is one change/practice that you are excited about doing?



# Key Elements of Emergency Shelters in an Effective Crisis Response System

- Housing First Approach
- Safe & Appropriate Diversion
- Immediate and Low-barrier Access
- **Housing-Focused, Rapid Exit Services**
- Data to Measure Performance





# Breakouts

## Housing Focused Shelter

Identify two things that a housing focused shelter “should” do...



# What is the Goal of Shelter?

## Philosophical Shift

- To provide temporary shelter
  - Hostel-like environment (check-in and check out every day)
  - Meets basic needs
    - Shower/bathroom
    - Laundry
    - Mail
  - Self-directed resource/information and referral
  - Light services



- To end homelessness
  - Resolve housing crises permanently
  - Facilitate self-resolution
  - Re-house people quickly
  - Reduce unsheltered homelessness
  - Create better system flow
  - Connect people to coordinated entry
  - Connect people to housing search and other resources to help stabilize them once housed

# Housing-Focused, Rapid Exit

## 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



## Practice Shift

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

# Why Housing-Focused Shelter?

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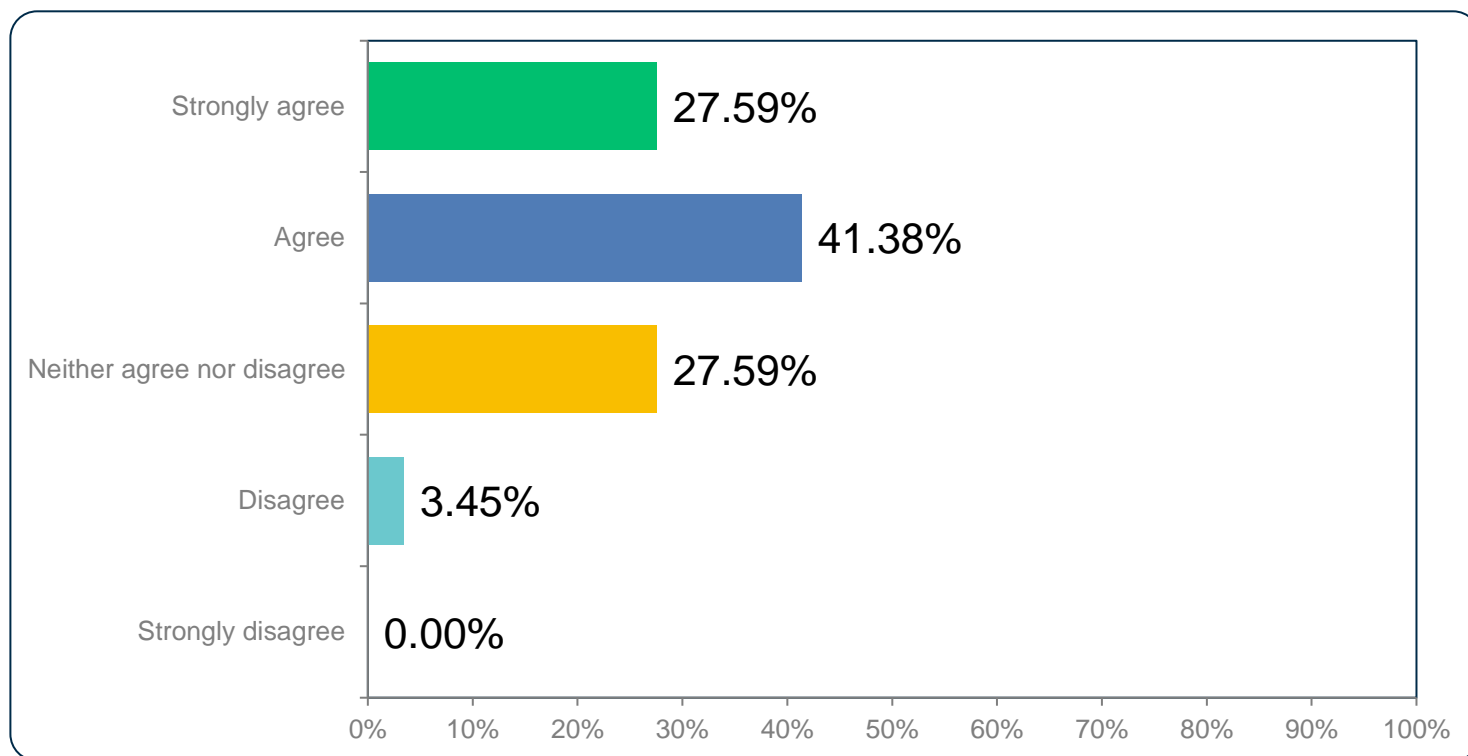
**HOUSED PEOPLE  
ARE NOT HOMELESS**



## HOLD ON!

Isn't housing  
people someone  
else's job?  
Coordinated Entry?  
Rapid Re-Housing?  
Permanent  
Supportive  
Housing?

Our community's shelters are focused on assisting shelter guests into permanent housing as quickly as possible.



# Why Housing-Focused Shelter?

## REALITY CHECK:

Few households will receive RRH or PSH.

Shelter is **not a waiting place** for interventions.

### SHIFT FROM:

“Our guests cannot exit shelter without interventions.”



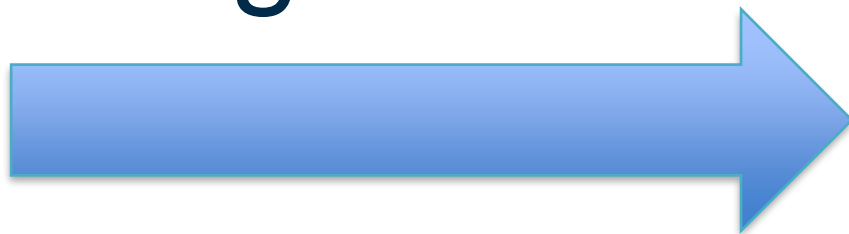
### TO:

“Most households can find permanent living situations quickly without intensive interventions.”

- Shelter IS NOT an access point to something special...
- Shelter IS NOT a destination...
- Shelter **IS** a jumping-off point to your own solutions for housing!

# Why Housing-Focused Shelter?

People have to be able to  
get *in*...



...and be able to get *out*  
(to housing).





# Why Housing-Focused Shelter?

## Paradigm Shift

Shelter CAN facilitate **self resolution** through **problem-solving conversations**

1. Identify connections and supports
2. Identify strengths
3. Talk about past relationships and community supports
4. Leverage community partnerships
5. Believe in each guest's resilience and problem-solving ability
6. Believe in each guest's housing success

# Housing-Focused, Rapid Exit Services

## Practice Shift

Focus on permanent housing starts at the front door on the first day of shelter entry

- Shifting from “What can I do to help you?” to “How can I support you to obtain housing quickly?”
- Requires a paradigm shift to believe that everyone is “housing ready,” meaning they are ready to be housed *immediately*
- It’s all about housing, not about healing or fixing

# Housing-Focused, Rapid Exit Services

## Operational Shift

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All written materials reflect housing-focused practice:

- Mission statement: is it about permanent housing?
- Re-writing policy and procedures
- Client handbook
- Voluntary service participation
- Job descriptions reflect the housing focused approach
- Clear messaging to community and clients

# Housing-Focused Supports

## Housing Plan

- Start developing the plan at entry with an exit date for a housing solution
- Shifting from “What can I do to help you?” to “How can I support you to obtain housing quickly?”
- Identify barriers to tenancy that will be worked through in the housing plan
- Have “problem-solving” conversations to connect to natural supports and housing options
- Focus every in-person meeting on a quick move to permanent housing
- Review and discuss the housing plan weekly at a minimum

# Housing-Focused Rapid Exit Supports

## Practice and Operational Shifts

- All meetings, policies, procedures, job descriptions, signage, client handbooks, etc., focus on **housing**
- Plan for rapid exit **to housing** at entry – assign a “housing date,” not an exit date
- Guests are the captains of their housing plans
- Every conversation is about **housing**
- Environment and messaging reflects a housing focus





**Housing focused  
messaging matters!**

**Belief that our guests  
are better off with out  
us – believe in their  
ability to be successful  
with limited resources –  
and to find permanent  
housing situations**

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# Discussion

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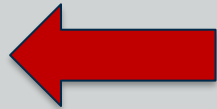
## Becoming a Housing Focused Shelter

- What are some “operational shifts” that will create a housing focused shelter?
- What are some “practice shifts” than will create a housing focused shelter?
- What are some key “housing focused messages” that the community and shelters can adopt?



# IMPLEMENTING HOUSING-FOCUSED SUPPORTS FOR RAPID EXITS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

STAFFING



HOUSING PLAN DEVELOPMENT

MESSAGING



# Housing-Focused Rapid Exit Supports Staffing

## Roles and Responsibilities

### Historically:

- ***Housing workers were a specialized function*** either amongst employees of the agency or an external entity brought in or referred out to
- Functions of shelter staff were separated from functions of housing staff

### Shift To:

- All shelter staff are ***housing*** staff
- All staff embrace Housing First
- All shelter staff are held accountable to being conversant in ***housing solutions***

# Housing Focused Rapid Exit Supports

## Staffing: Housing Focused Conversations

- Motivational Interviewing and Trauma-Informed Care
  - Be present in each meeting (turn off phones, etc.)
  - Be clear and transparent about the purpose of each meeting
    - You are there to help navigate and explore what's happening with their housing, not to assess how they are doing in shelter
  - Offer to stop and clarify questions as they arise using open-ended questions
    - Use client answers to get more information that helps you understand the situation
    - Rely on your own personal conversational style to best facilitate the assessment as a conversation, not an interrogation



Caitlin Rose  
New Reach  
New Haven, CT

# Housing-Focused Rapid Exit Supports Staffing Example

## **Job Description: Case Manager to 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

# Housing-Focused Rapid Exit Supports Staffing Example of Responsibilities

## **Job Description: Case Manager to Housing Specialist**

1. Develop and implement an individual housing plan with each client.
2. Facilitate access to services required to support housing search (credit repair, legal aid, housekeeping, tenant rights and responsibilities, etc.) as needed.
3. Develop a projected budget plan that enables families and individuals to see what type of housing is affordable and manageable after assistance ends (for those in RRH) and how to live within their means.
4. Provide advocacy on behalf of program participants for housing and/or services related issues.

# Housing-Focused Rapid Exit Support Staffing Example of Responsibilities

## Job Description: Case Manager to Housing Specialist

5. Provide information and instruction to clients regarding how to complete a housing application, housing search, tenant rights and responsibilities, including observation of rental agreement rules and being a good neighbor.
6. Document all client encounters and maintain thorough and accurate records for reporting purposes.
7. Assist clients in obtaining rental assistance including, but not limited to, Section 8 certification, RRH, PSH, and other housing programs.
8. Provide referrals to employment, mental health, substance use, and other community services.

# Housing-Focused Supports Staffing

Staff	Responsibilities
Overnight Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scour online listings and print new listings</li><li>• Create list of new stayers that require housing-focused conversation by morning staff</li><li>• Update bulletin boards with housing resources</li><li>• Documentation of housing activities</li></ul>
Morning Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Housing-focused conversation with first-timer stayers</li><li>• Daytime housing search conversation: “What are you doing on your housing plan today?”</li><li>• Brief housing workshops</li><li>• Matching with trained peers</li><li>• Documentation of housing activities</li></ul>
Evening Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Follow-up on housing search conversation</li><li>• Brief housing workshops</li><li>• Documentation of housing activities</li></ul>

## Discuss the following

- 1. Are your shelter job descriptions housing focused?** Do they include activities that help clients obtain housing?
- 2. Do you have the right staff to provide meaningful housing-focused services?** If no, how might you re-allocate or leverage resources to make this a priority
- 3. What training do you (or could you) provide to staff to effectively be housing focused?** How do you provide that training?



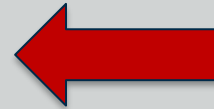


# IMPLEMENTING HOUSING-FOCUSED SUPPORTS FOR RAPID EXITS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

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HOUSING PLAN DEVELOPMENT

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# Housing-Focused Supports

## Housing Plan

- Start developing the plan at entry with an exit date for a housing solution
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- Identify barriers to tenancy that will be worked through in the housing plan
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- Review and discuss the housing plan weekly at a minimum

# Housing-Focused Supports

## Housing Plan

### SMART Goals

**Specific** - Action-oriented: e.g., Call Acme Property Management Company, Get birth certificate, Save \$250 for deposit, etc.

**Measurable** - Call XX # of landlords, apply for XX apartments, etc.

**Assignable** - WHO is responsible for each action item?

**Relevant** - HOUSING HOUSING HOUSING!

**Timely** - Set bold timelines - Start ASAP! - Don't wait weeks to begin housing search.

# Housing-Focused Supports

## Housing Plan (from City Rescue Mission in Lansing, MI)

**My Housing Plan:** Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**My goal: I will end my homelessness by this date:** \_\_\_\_\_.

Items often necessary to overcome homelessness:

\_\_\_ Birth Certificate

\_\_\_ Social Security Card

\_\_\_ State ID/Driver's License

\_\_\_ Resume

\_\_\_ Bridge Card

\_\_\_ Healthcare

\_\_\_ Phone

**I will end my homelessness by...**

**Plan A:** \_\_\_\_\_

Steps necessary to complete this plan:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

**Plan B:** \_\_\_\_\_

Steps necessary to complete this plan:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

# Housing-Focused Supports

## Housing Plan (from City Rescue Mission in Lansing, MI)

**Plan C:** \_\_\_\_\_

Steps necessary to complete this plan:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

Housing requires income.  
A living wage in Lansing begins at \$1,500 per month.

**My income plan is to...**

**Plan A:**

Steps necessary to complete this plan: \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Plan B:**

Steps necessary to complete this plan: \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**The biggest obstacles to ending homelessness:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**But I WILL overcome them by:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

# Next Steps:

## Look at your current plan:

1. Does it reflect the housing focus?
2. Does it easily facilitate housing-focused conversations?
3. Does it require you to set SMART goals?
4. How will you change plan template be SMART-er and more housing-focused?

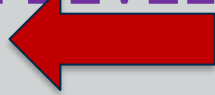
How often do staff check-in on and update housing plans with clients?



National Alliance to  
END HOMELESSNESS

# IMPLEMENTING HOUSING-FOCUSED SUPPORTS FOR RAPID EXITS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

STAFFING  
HOUSING PLAN DEVELOPMENT  
MESSAGING



# Housing-Focused Supports

## Messaging

- **Shelter is not a destination; it is a step to get you housed**
  - Waiting in shelter for something better is NOT an option
  - We can't wait for a train that isn't coming
- **We are going to re-house you RAPIDLY**
  - Every day is a day to find a housing solution
  - Don't get too comfortable - save that for when you move home
- **You CAN be housed!**
  - You're better off without us
  - You will have supports in the community







## Create a sense of urgency to find a housing solution and exit shelter quickly

Waiting in shelter for something better is NOT an option

Every day is a day to find a housing solution

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## Incentivize Quick Housing Exits

When you leave, you can access...



## Facilitate Self Resolution

From “What can we do to help you?” to “What is YOUR plan to quickly exit shelter?”

# Breakout Activity

## Shifting Our Message Brainstorm Activity

- **Breakouts 1&2:** Messaging to create a sense of urgency to find housing
- **Breakouts 3,&4:** Strategies to incentivize leaving shelter to move to permanent housing solutions
- **Breakouts 5:** Strategies to facilitate self-resolution
  
- Debrief
- Now, in chat identify one thing you heard that you can implement in your shelter within the next week!

# Housing-Focused Supports

## Messaging

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**All written materials reflect housing-focused practice:**

- Mission statement: Is it about permanent housing?
- Re-writing policy and procedures
- Client handbook
- Clear messaging to community and clients

# Housing-Focused Supports

## Messaging

### Shelter environment is housing-focused

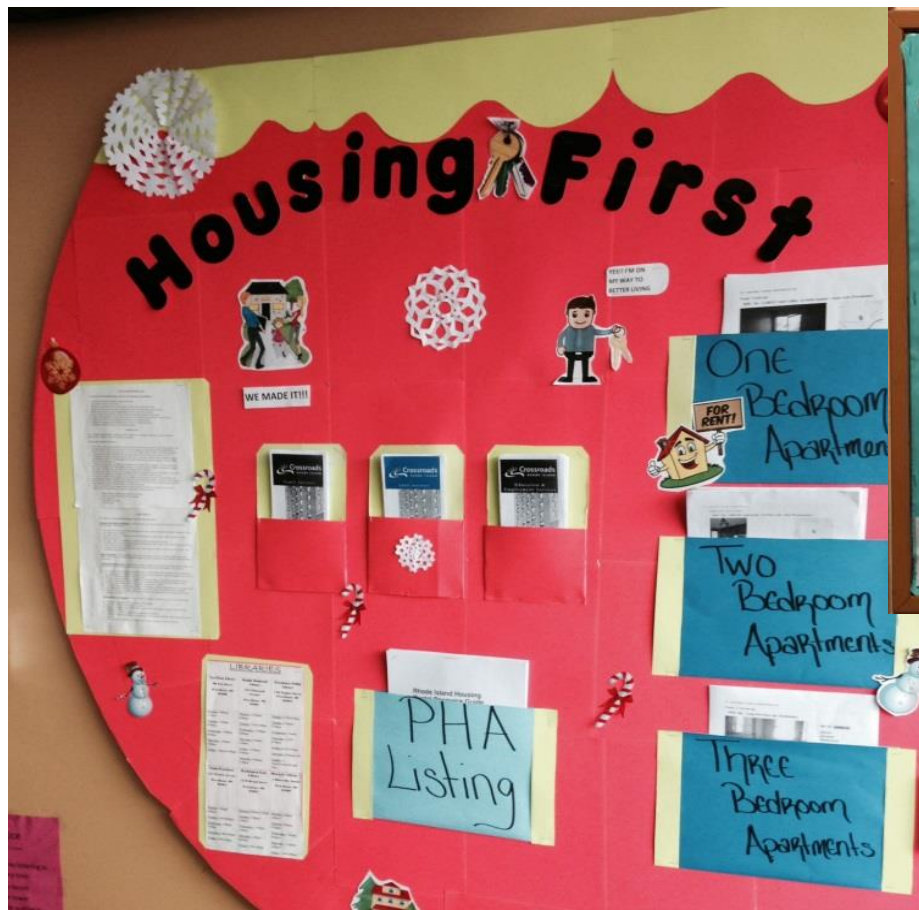
- Reframe messaging throughout the shelter
- All signage reflects a housing message
- Shelter environment incentivizes engagement in self-resolution and quick moves to permanent living situations
- Create a sense of urgency
  - “You are the best captain of your housing plan.”
  - “You CAN Find Housing!”
  - “You can choose to say no to a housing option, but not continue to stay in shelter forever.”

# Housing-Focused Supports Messaging Before



# Housing-Focused Supports

## Shifting the Messaging





**SHARED HOUSING – IT'S A GREAT  
HOUSING TOOL!**



# Shared Housing

## Wisdom from Meghann Cotter - Micah Ministries - Fredericksburg, VA

- Roommate situations are not uncommon
- Realized that most people on the street were already “living with” someone in their current circumstances
- Who do they live with in the woods? Associate with in shelters? Are there at-risk or imminently at-risk people in the community they could be paired with?
- Honor client choice
- Invest time in understanding deal breakers
- Don’t knee-jerk a relocation after the first roommate conflict
- Private landlords are the most flexible with shared housing

# Shared Housing

Home providers can be home owner, private landlord, or agency landlord

Apartment, entire building, private homes, with or without homeowner in residence rented to home seeker

Matching process and housing supports vary across organizations

Home Providers & Home Seekers

Apartment or House w/ multiple (1-4) bedrooms

Homeowner Rents Room

Home Seekers matched by organization

Home Seekers choose match themselves

Home Seeker matched to Home Owner

# Shared Housing

What to Look for or Avoid	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Someone I like				
Someone who will not have many visitors				
Someone who smokes				
Someone who is clean and sober				
Someone with pets				
A “night” person				

# LET'S TALK ABOUT: LANDLORD RECRUITMENT AND ENGAGEMENT



# Finding Housing



“It takes a lot of advocacy for someone to get into the housing. Without a case manager, without an advocate, these people would still be out in the streets. And that’s just the reality of it.”

Case Manager- Denton, TX

Source: <http://www.dentonrc.com/newsrss/newsrss/2018/04/21/annual-point-time-count-shows-new-increase-homelessness-denton-county>

# Finding Housing

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In order to locate housing you need three things:

- Find as many units as possible
  - Good landlord outreach strategy
- Get the landlords of those units to say “Yes!”
  - Offer attractive incentives for landlord partners
- Retain those landlords for future availability
  - Know landlord concerns and needs and respond accordingly

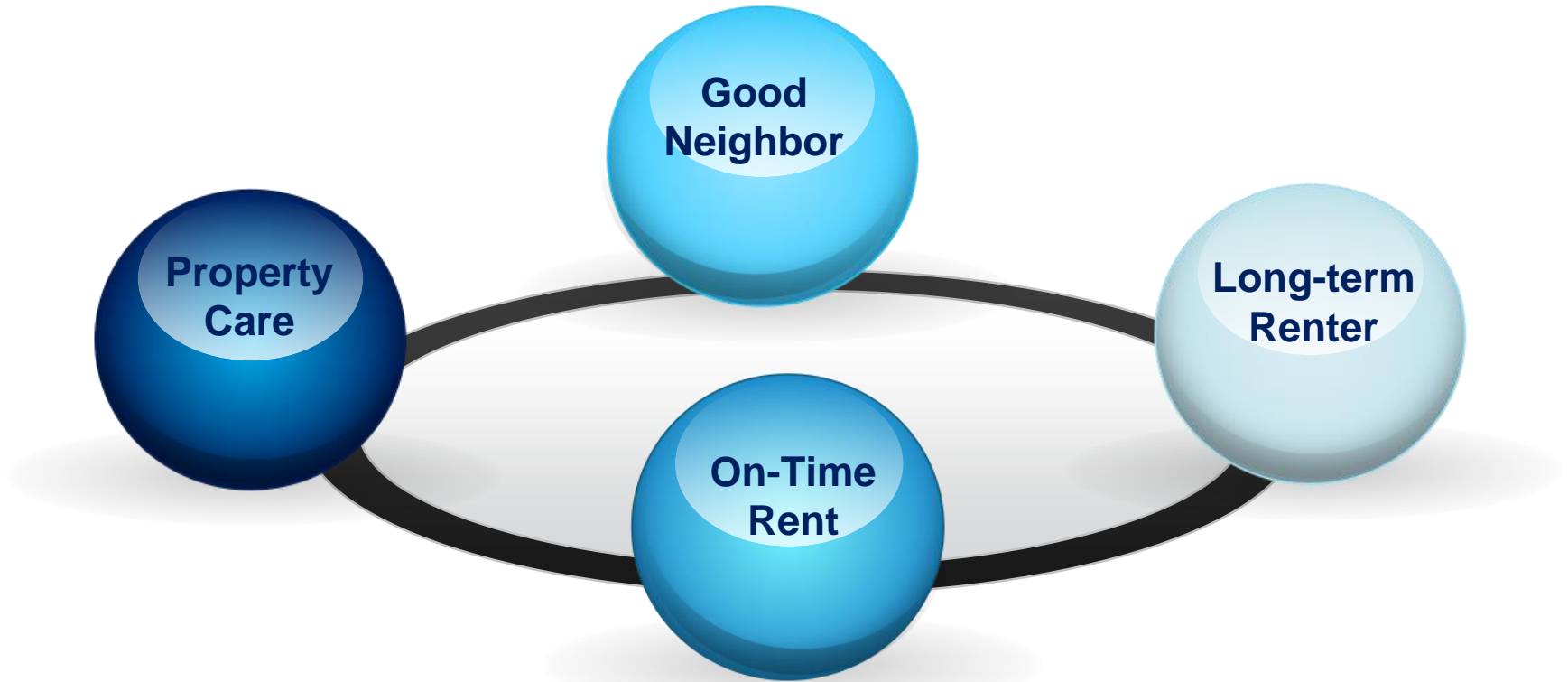
# Finding Housing Landlord Recruitment





# Finding Housing Landlord Engagement

## What Do Landlords Want?



# Finding Housing

## Landlord Engagement

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- Match the right tenant to the right landlord
- Follow through on your promises
- Return phone calls promptly
- Listen!!!
- Recognition
  - “Thank You” notes
  - Appreciation events - with FOOD!
  - Write-ups in organizational materials
- Convey positive impact on community

# COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY

## Landlord Recruitment Brainstorm

- Take 5 minutes and come up with a list of ALL the places where you could potentially find landlords with units for rent.
- BE SPECIFIC!!!
  
- Pick 2 you will follow up with next week!



# Breakout Activity

## Creative Housing Solutions

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- In five minutes brainstorm any potential housing solutions that can help people exit shelter more quickly.
- Who has the best list!
  
- Debrief
- Now, in chat identify one thing you heard that you can try in your shelter in the next month.

**LET'S TAKE ACTION!  
LET'S DO THIS! We WILL  
increase our exits to  
permanent housing!**





## Assignment

**In the next week, come in the front door of the shelter and then take time to walk around your entire facility and make detailed observations.**

1. What does the signage look like?
2. Is there easy access to materials on finding housing?
3. Is language person-centered, empowering, and does it create a sense of urgency?
4. What are some simple changes you can make to ramp up your housing focused messaging
5. Be ready to report out next week.

# Shift Happens

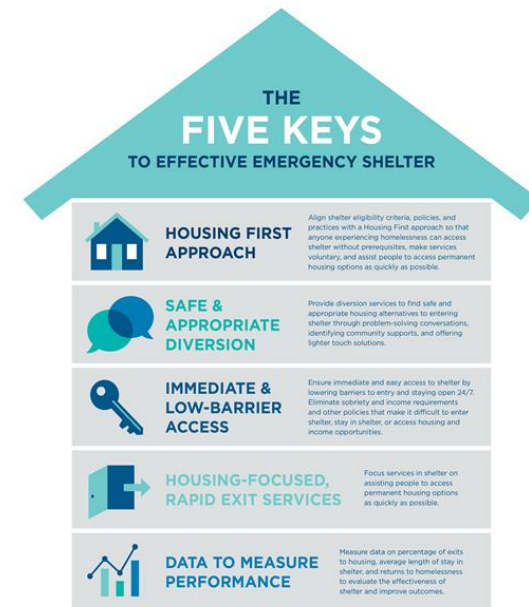


*Learning Together  
in a changing world*

***#shifthappens***

# Key Elements of Emergency Shelters in an Effective Crisis Response System

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- Immediate and Low-barrier Access
- **Housing-focused, Rapid Exit Services**
- Data to Measure Performance





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# Q&A



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