

Eastern PA Training Series

Session Two: **The Role of Diversion in Shelter
and Effective Low Barrier Shelter**

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JOY (UNSPEAKABLE)
VOICES OF FIRE
FEAT. PHARRELL WILLIAMS

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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

11/7/2023

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



Who's Here?

- In Chat:
- Your name
- Shelter
- Region
- What was an aha moment you had in the first session two weeks ago...

Aha!

Review

The Critical Role of Emergency Shelter in Ending Homelessness in Eastern PA, and Incorporating Housing First into Shelter Practice



Why Are Shelters So Important?

- People in a housing crisis will always need a safe and decent place to go that is immediately available
- Shelters will most likely be the only place people receive help to resolve their housing crisis and get connected to permanent housing
- Shelter eligibility, policies, and stays impacts performance outcomes and **system flow**



Why Are Shelters So Important?

- The effectiveness of emergency shelter greatly impacts the performance of your crisis response system
 - Average length of homelessness
 - Exits to permanent housing
 - Returns to homelessness

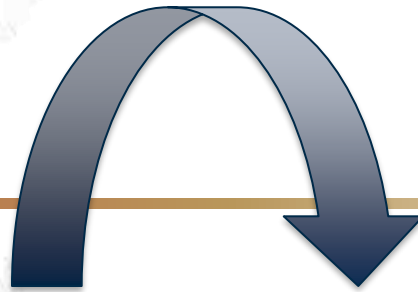
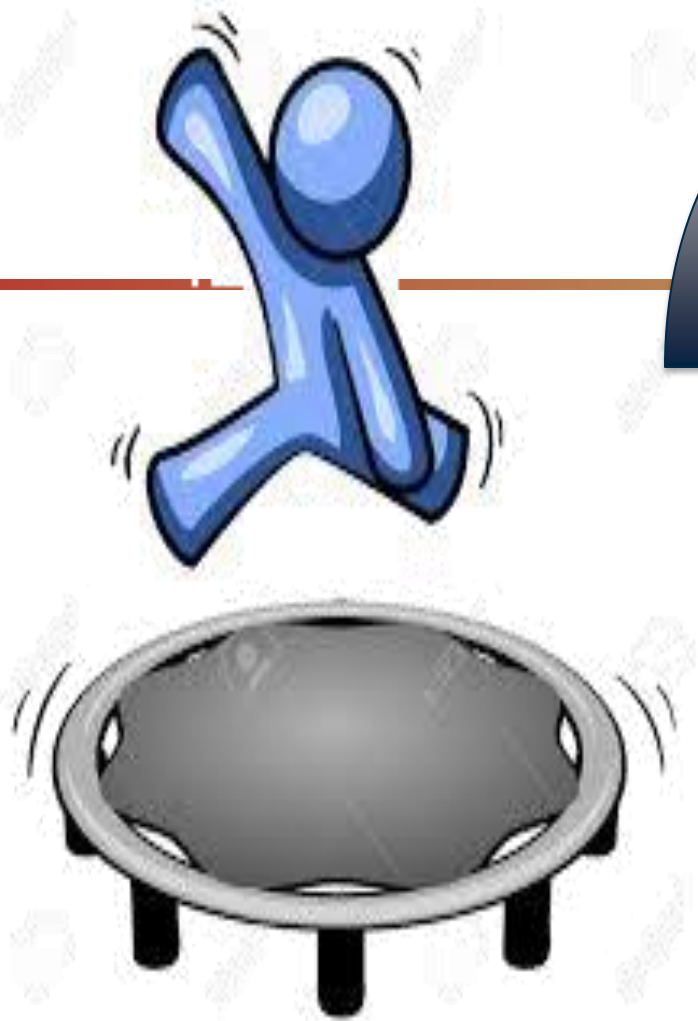


Effective Homeless Response System: Increase System Flow

System Flow:

An efficient and coordinated process that moves people from homelessness to housing as quickly as possible





Emergency Shelters in the CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

- Housing crisis resolution
- Shared Housing
- Family and Friends
- Rapid re-housing
- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Market rate housing
- Voucher

Review: Housing First Approach

Philosophy

- Not a “program,” it is a system-wide orientation and response
- Everyone is ready for housing
- Homelessness is a housing problem
- Housing First means housing fast

Practice

- Few to no pre-requisites to shelter entry
- Not screening for “housing readiness”
- Staff embrace “housing first” approach
- Services are voluntary and all are housing-focused
- Services come after housing



Review: Housing First Approach Reminders

Philosophical Shift

- Homelessness is a housing problem, and everyone is ready for housing now
- Housing first is NOT housing only
- Issues that may have contributed to a household's homelessness can best be addressed once they are permanently housed

Operational Shift

- Shift job descriptions, mission statement, and policies and procedures should reflect Housing First philosophy

Practice Shift

- Eliminate "Housing Readiness" Conversation
- Strength-based, Client-centered service provision
- Housing-focused services that are voluntary (no consequences)

Assignment

Evaluating Housing First In Your Shelter

Focus Areas



1. Does our mission statement reflect a Housing First philosophy?
2. Do our policies and procedures help or hinder the Housing First philosophy?
3. Do our job descriptions require an understanding of Housing First?
4. Are staff and board trained in Housing First Principles?
5. Do our staff reflect a Housing First approach in what they say and do?

Assignment Report Out



Advancing the Role of Shelter in
Reducing Homelessness

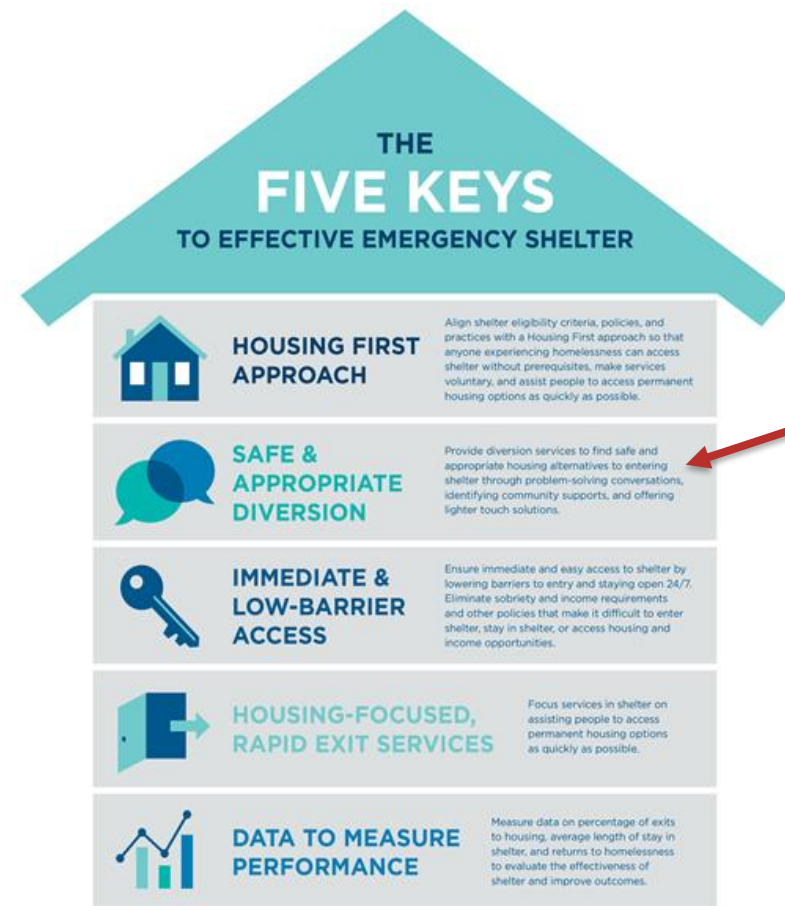
Philosophical Shift

Operational Shift

Practice Shift

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



DIVERSION

Avoiding the Trauma of a Shelter Stay



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**



Distinguishing Diversion

Consumer's Housing Situation	Intervention Used	Services Provided (In All Interventions)
AT IMMINENT RISK OF LOSING HOUSING (precariously housed and not yet homeless)	PREVENTION	Housing Search Rental Subsidy Other Financial Assistance Utility Assistance Case Management Mediation Connection to Mainstream Resources Legal Services
REQUESTING SHELTER (at the “front door” or another program/system entry point seeking a place to stay)	DIVERSION	
IN SHELTER (homeless/in the homeless assistance system)	RAPID RE-HOUSING	

Diversion is Solutions-Focused



Collaboratively working with household to develop creative solutions to their housing crisis



Facilitating connections to community resources and natural supports



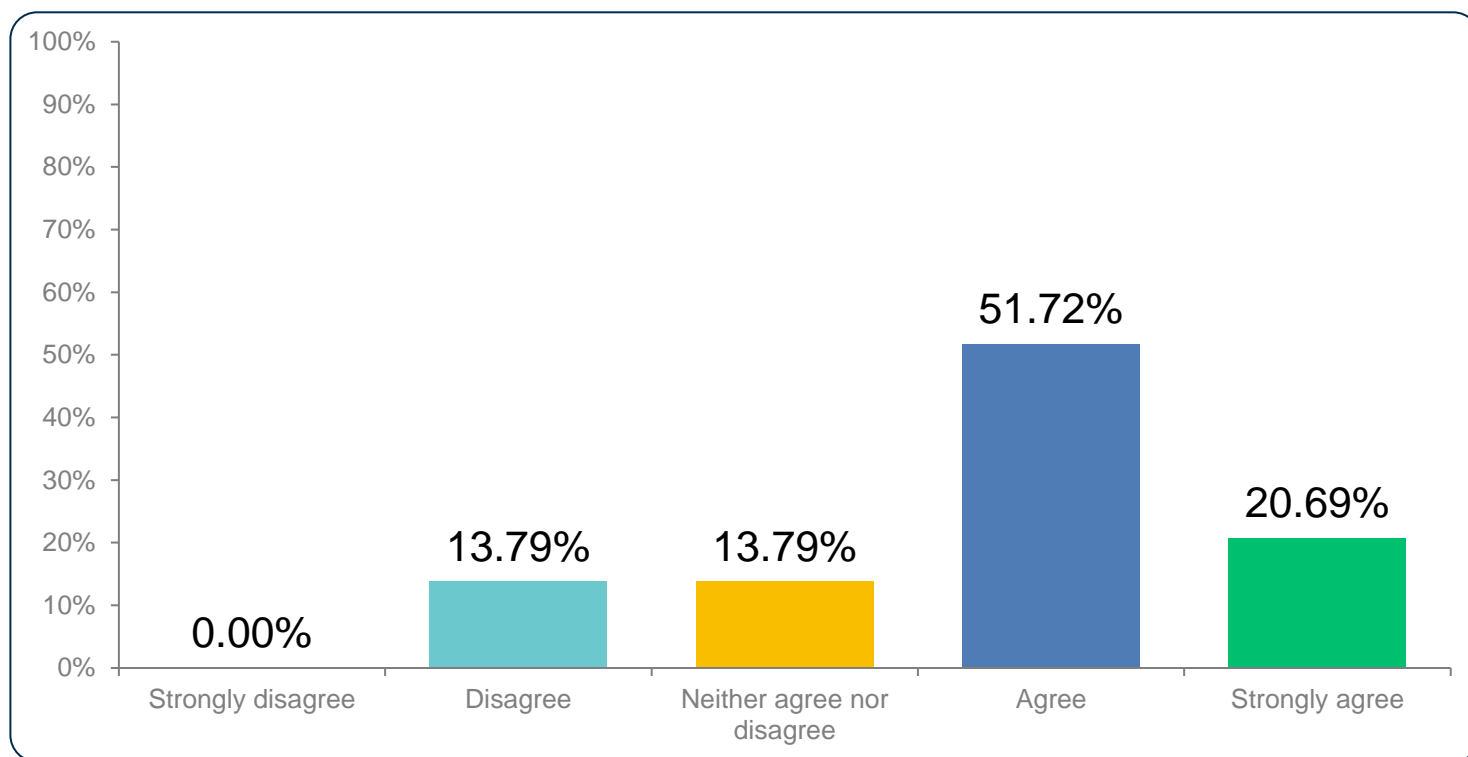
Solutions can be immediate, short-term, and long-term

The Role of Diversion in the Crisis Response System

- Divert people from entering shelter if they have **safe and appropriate** housing alternatives
- Provide access to crisis beds, if needed
- Enable “flow” through your system to housing
- “Front door” must be connected to permanent housing solutions



Whenever possible, our community employs strategies that prevent people from losing their housing and diverts them away from needing shelter or other housing assistance.



Role of Diversion and Problem Solving in Shelter

- 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.

Role of Shelter in Diversion

When we don't utilize diversion...

- People enter shelter when they could have been successfully diverted
 - Trauma is associated with shelter stays
 - Experiences of homelessness predict future episodes of homelessness
- Shelters become overloaded and cannot adequately respond to those who have no other safe alternative housing options
- Increase of unsheltered homelessness due to not enough shelter beds available

Things to Keep in Mind...

- Households experiencing a housing crisis are not significantly different than other poor households
- Majority experience homelessness due to a financial or other crisis
- Prolonged exposure to homelessness has a significant negative impact on adults and children
- Shelter is an emergency resource



What Do We Know About Shelter Stays?

Significant portion of people self-resolve or seek help from another system

Most people can exit homelessness with a light touch of services and assistance, and exit homelessness for good

People who have highest needs often lose shelter beds due to non-compliance issues

Minority of people need more intensive services and long-term housing supports

Problem-Solving Conversation

Possible Solutions to Avoid Shelter

 *Moving in with friends or family for longer-term period*

 *Return to their own residence*

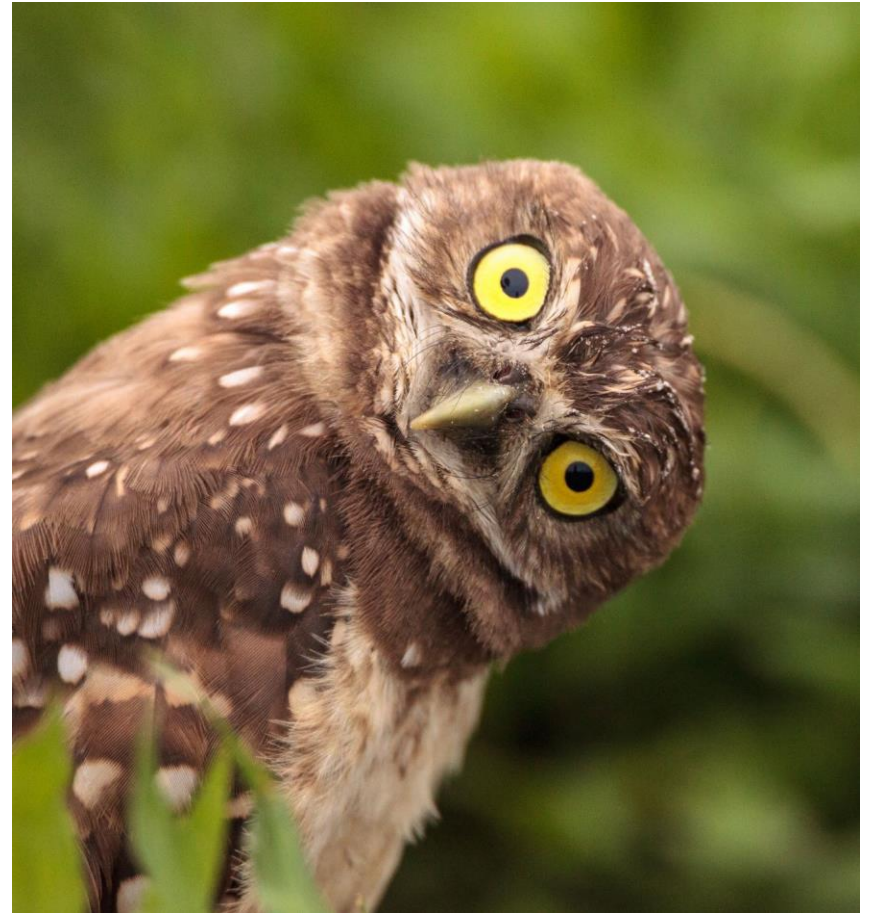
 *Temporarily stay with friends or family as they seek new housing*

 *Relocating permanently to a safe place out of town.*

 *Move to their Own Residence*

Questions

What questions do you have regarding Diversion?



MAKING THE SHIFT

Embracing Diversion



Safe and Appropriate Diversion Philosophy Shift

- Housing First orientation that promotes that..
 - Everyone is ready for housing now
 - People experiencing homelessness don't experience it in a vacuum: they have connections, skills, and resources
- Try problem-solving with every household before conducting an intake
 - You can't predict who you will be able to problem-solve with and who you won't
- You aren't helping someone by admitting them into shelter before trying to problem-solve

Safe and Appropriate Diversion Philosophy Shift

Diversion before Intake!

Shift From	Shift Towards
Are you willing to enter shelter and follow our rules?	Is the place you were staying safe? What can we do to help you remain there? What can we do to help you find a safe place other than shelter?
What programs are you eligible for? Who has a bed?	What would resolve your current housing crisis?
Beginning with eligibility determinations and intake questions	Begin with brainstorming and structured problem-solving conversations about household's situation and resources
Beginning with screening and assessment tools and shelter waitlists	Support crisis resolution to avoid shelter entry through problem solving conversation

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



Role of Shelter in Safe and Appropriate Diversion

Practice Shift

- Instead of immediate intake at shelter, engages clients in a conversation to identify safe alternatives to shelter
- Uses a strength-based assessment vs. a needs' assessment
- Assists in connecting to community resources to avoid a shelter stay
- Stay away from housing readiness conversations

Have all direct service staff been training in diversion/problem solving practices?

When Diversion Is Not Appropriate

Use Problems Solving, Housing-focused Services in Shelter

When a household is not diverted from shelter, the same diversion strategies - **effective problem-solving conversations, that are client-centered, and focus on creative solutions – should continue in the shelter** in order to quickly resolve a household's homelessness.

These continued strategies provide much needed **housing focused, rapid exit services** for all households assessed for housing and support services and **are critical for those who will not receive** interventions such as rapid re-housing or permanent support housing.



Safe and Appropriate Diversion

Philosophy Shift

- A call for shelter does not mean there is no other option
- Belief in a strength-based approach – clients are the best resource for problem solving
- Shelter is not a housing solution



Practice Shift

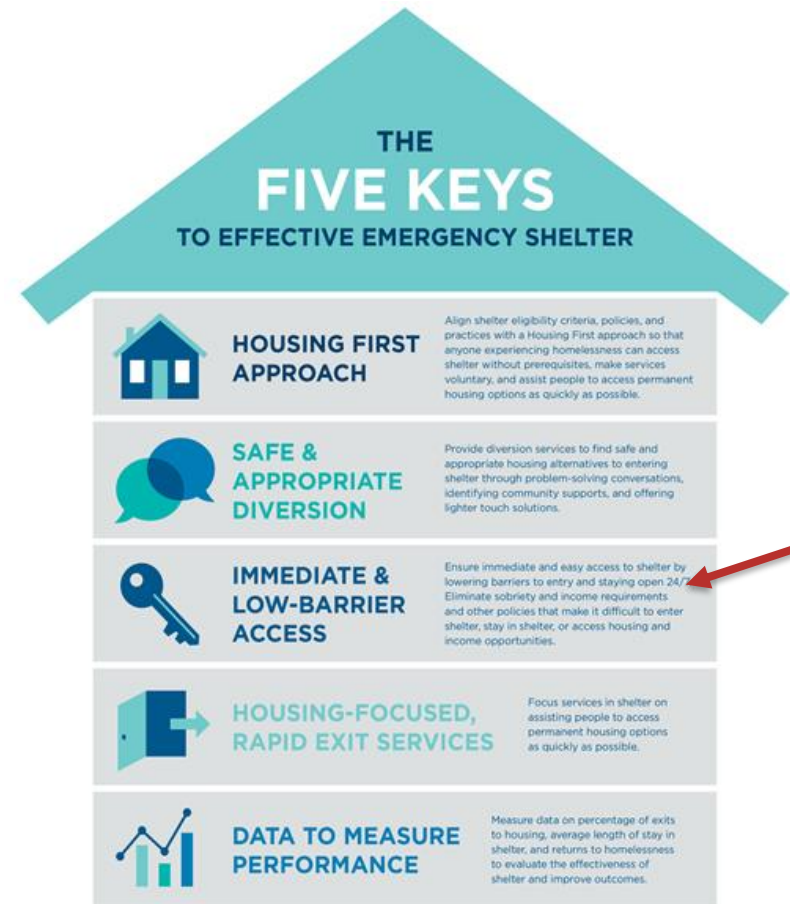
- Uses a strength-based assessment vs. a needs' assessment
- Instead of immediate intake, engages clients in a **solutions-based problem conversation** and identifies safe alternatives to shelter
- Assists in connecting to supports and community resources to avoid a shelter stay whenever possible

Break time!
See you back in 3 min



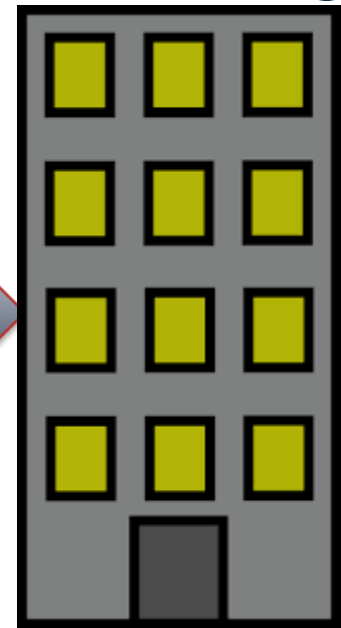
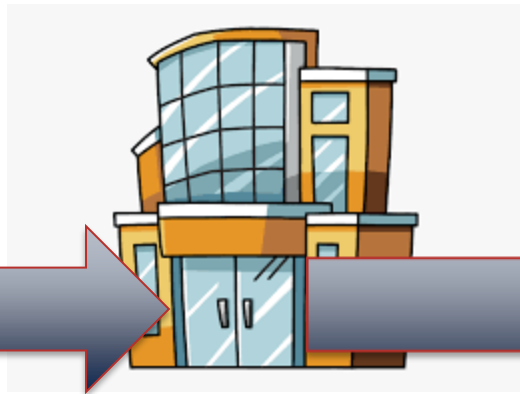
Key Elements of Emergency Shelters in an Effective Crisis Response System

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





People have to be able to get *in*...
...and be able to get *out* (to housing).



What are the future goals of the Eastern PA shelters?

- To provide temporary shelter

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

OR

- 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

DOES OUR SHELTER PROVIDE IMMEDIATE AND LOW- BARRIER ACCESS?



From the Field!

“ “ Before we tried to change people, now we support change in people.

Staff Member, The Road Home
Salt Lake City, UT

Breakout Discussion (5 minutes)

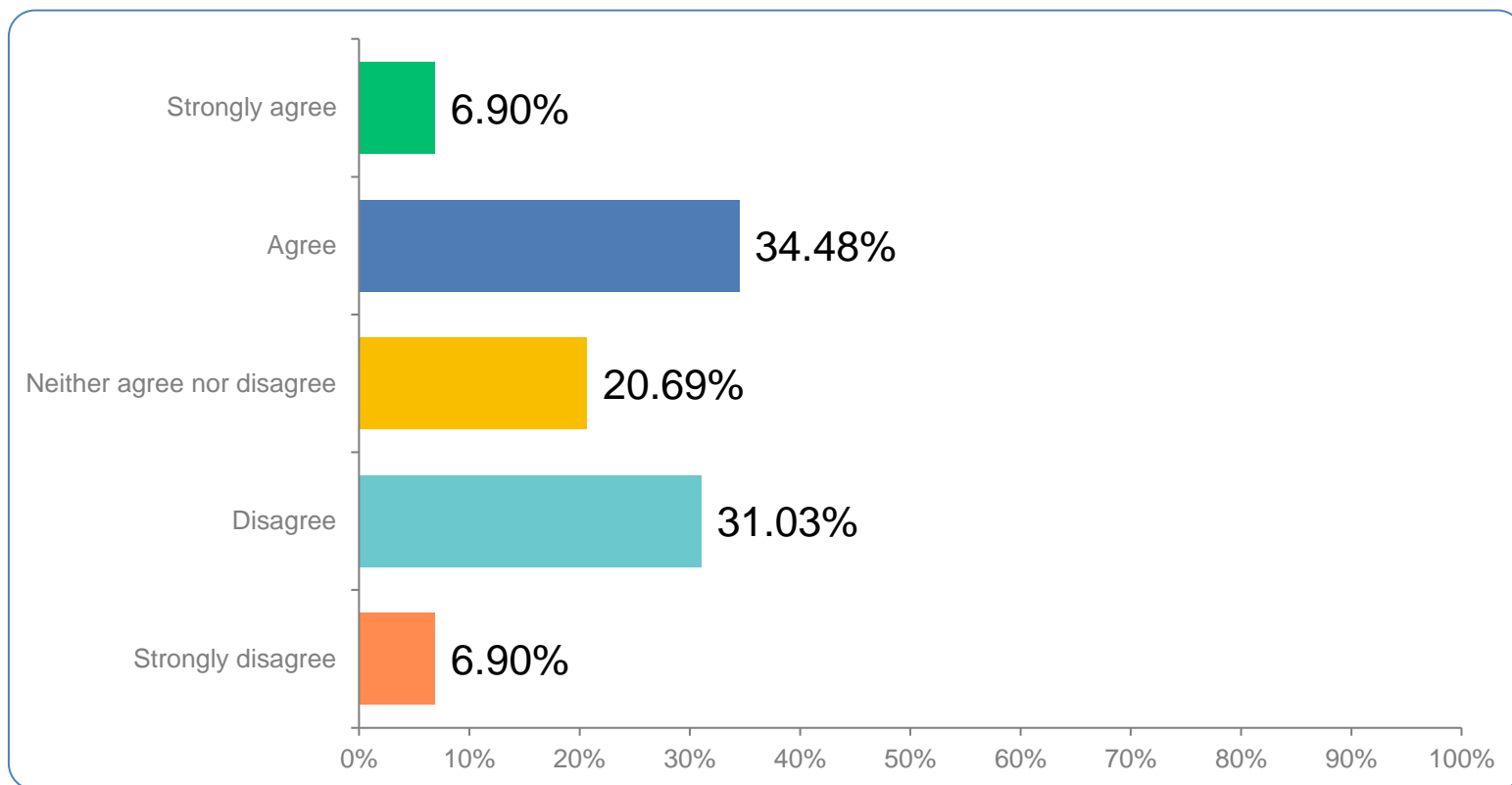
What does it mean to be a “low barrier” shelter?



Debrief



Shelters in our community are low-barrier and easily accessible to our fellow neighbours experiencing homelessness.



Immediate and Low-Barrier Access

MEANS...

- The most acute, highest-need people are prioritized for shelter **such as unsheltered individuals and families who are at greatest risk for severe health and safety consequences if not sheltered**
- You fill your shelter with those who **need it the most**, not those who got there first or can “comply” with the rules
- **You do not require** service participation to stay in shelter

Immediate and Low-Barrier Access



Requires **checking our own biases** about who we think “should” be in shelter and why we might feel anxious about serving different populations

- People shouldn't have to “earn” being in shelter
- We shouldn't be trying to heal or fix people's behaviors – it doesn't work
- We should be supporting change in people that **they** desire, rather than trying to change their behaviors

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.

Why People Avoid Shelters

"If there are too many rules, people won't go," warned Kendell Jackson, 29, who is living at the camp. "A lot of people out here have problems with authority, and they'll risk frostbite or worse to preserve their freedom."

Minneapolis Star Tribune, November 24, 2018

Immediate and Low-Barrier Access Philosophy Shift

- The most acute, highest need people are prioritized for shelter **such as unsheltered individuals and families who are at greatest risk for severe health and safety consequences if not sheltered**
- Fill your shelter with those that **need it the most**, not those that got there first or can “comply” with the rules
- **Do not require** service participation to stay in shelter

Immediate and Low-barrier Access

In Simple Terms...

Remove unnecessary barriers and improve access to shelter for those who need it most



Immediate and Low-barrier Access Does NOT Mean Low Expectations

LOW-BARRIER DOES NOT MEAN

- Not having rules or expectations of shelter participants
- Allowing people to act in ways that are unsafe to themselves or others
- Letting anything happen or letting everyone in
- First-come, first-serve
- Forgetting about safety of clients and staff

Immediate and Low-Barrier Access Practice Shift



- Change staff roles from being “program monitors” or “house parents” to being housing navigators and partners with clients
- Re-frame statements like, “they are not working the program, so they have to leave” to “the housing plan doesn’t seem to be working, so the case manager should work with the client to revise it so it is more achievable”
- Use motivational interviewing and strengths-based approaches

Immediate and Low-Barrier Access Operational Shift

Emergency Shelter = Immediate Response to a Housing Emergency



- Shelter is available 24/7/365
- Required staff training in conflict resolution, crisis de-escalation, trauma-informed care, harm reduction
- Policies and procedures are reviewed and updated regularly to ensure low-barrier access
- Connected to outreach and referrals from coordinated entry, if applicable

“I was so against the idea of going low barrier that I even wrote my resignation letter to quit. Then a lightbulb went off in me.

I got to speak with other shelters that have done this or are about to do this. I did so much research and found out everything I could about it. I got to see it through a different lens than clean and sober and I got on board. As soon as I bought in, the other staff did as well. Before, I was spreading so much negativity about it that there was so much fear from the staff. I turned that around after I starting believing in it.

To help staff buy in, I actually stopped drug testing without the staff knowing about it. I did this for an entire month and we had no issues in the shelter. Once staff learned this and knew that their fears did not happen, they were more willing to embrace going low barrier.”

We have been keeping a log of people who would get kicked out.

After going low barrier, I kept a list of people who relapsed and people really trying to work on sobriety. Our assumptions were that the people on this list would be the ones who would get kicked out first for things like behavior issues. When I stopped drug testing secretly, most of the people I assumed would have been kicked out did NOT cause behavior issues and did NOT get kicked out. Testing dirty did not indicate that they would cause behavior issues and get kicked out. This was a big surprise.

Since going low barrier I have seen some people I used to know living outside come into the shelter for the first time and get housed.”

-Shelter Provider in Napa, CA



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?

3 Minute Stretch Break



Brainstorm Activity

What changes can shelter make to:

1. Be accessible to all household configurations (Rooms 1&2)
2. Accommodate People's Possessions (Rooms 3, 4 & 5)
3. Accommodate Pets (Rooms 6 & 7)



Public Service Announcement

Equal Access Rule

What it requires:

- ✓ Determine eligibility regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status
- ✓ Must not discriminate against anyone because they do not conform to gender or sex stereotypes
- ✓ Grant equal access consistent with a person's gender identity



REFLECTING ON “RULING”





Sometimes I feel like a child, with everyone watching my every move. It's not a good feeling and it makes me feel like I did something wrong by being homeless.

Consumer, Family Study

How Adults Respond

Does not work

- Coercion
- Pressure to change
- Moralizing
- Telling clients what they should do
- Disagreeing, judging, criticizing, or blaming
- Bargaining
- Penalizing, warning, threatening

Retooling the Rules

DO promote safety.

DO NOT try to change or control people or their behaviors.

-Iain De Jong, OrgCode Consulting



RULES



EXPECTATIONS

Simple, Safe, Behavior-Based Expectations



Treat everyone with dignity and respect.



Use the shelter space in a respectful manner.



Be a good neighbor.



No weapons are allowed in the shelter, and nothing may be used as a weapon inside the shelter.



Substance use is not allowed on the premises.

DISCUSSION

- What rules do we have that get people 'kicked out' of shelter the most?
 - Where do they go?
- If someone is dismissed from shelter, can they come back?
 - If yes, what is the time frame until they can return?



The “Marvin” Rule

Is this rule addressing something likely to be an actual ongoing concern, or was it developed in response to an incident that happened one time and is unlikely to happen again?



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



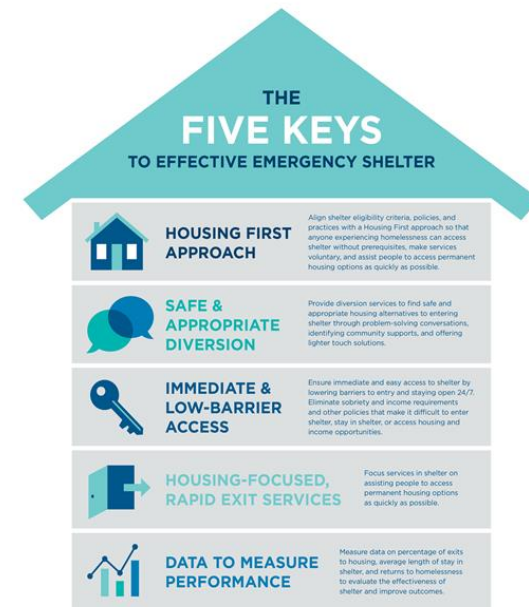
Assignment: Review of Current Practice

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?



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Q&A



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