Best Practices of Emergency Shelters: The Critical Role of Emergency Shelter in an Effective Crisis Response System

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National Alliance to End Homelessness

RESEARCH AND EDUCATION • INFLUENCING FEDERAL POLICY • BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY
The National Alliance to End Homelessness is the leading national voice on the issue of homelessness. The Alliance analyzes policy and develops pragmatic, effective policy solutions. The Alliance works collaboratively with the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to build state and local capacity, leading to stronger programs and policies that help communities achieve their goal of ending homelessness. The Alliance provides data and research to policymakers and elected officials in order to inform policy debates and educate the public and opinion leaders nationwide.

Working with a strong network of innovators, the National Alliance to End Homelessness identifies and evaluates hundreds of policy and program strategies and their impact on homelessness. The Alliance’s Center for Capacity Building helps communities replicate and customize the best of those strategies. The Center focuses on strategies that are cost effective, data driven, and can be implemented at a scale that can significantly reduce homelessness.
Who is here?

- Executive Directors/Program Directors
- Case Managers
- Rapid Re-housing Providers
- Transitional Housing, Permanent Supportive Housing, Services Provider
- Other stakeholders
Today’s Training

- The role of emergency shelter in an effective crisis response system

- Key components of an effective emergency shelter that quickly ends homelessness

- Shift current philosophy, practice, and operations
Key Components of Emergency Shelters in an Effective Crisis Response System

- Housing First Approach
- Immediate and Easy Access
- Housing-focused Services
- Rapid Exits to Permanent Housing
- Using Data To Be Better
Making the Philosophical Shift

Practice Shift

Operations Shift
Activity

Please complete the following sentences:

1. I believe that the role of emergency shelter in a crisis response system is to…

2. When any household enters shelter, the goal is to assist them to…
Homelessness in Connecticut
Homelessness in Connecticut

- 4038 people were homeless in Jan 2015
- Overall homelessness has decreased 10% since 2013
- People living in shelters is down 4 percent from 2014
- People living in shelters is down 32 percent from 2013
Homelessness in Connecticut

- Chronic homelessness has decreased 21%
- Connecticut functionally ended chronic homelessness among veterans
Shelters (From AHAR 2014)

1,488,465 people used homeless shelters

4.6 percent increase from 2013

6.3 percent decrease from 2007
Shelter Demographics 2014

Gender in Shelter
- Women, 31.7%
- Men, 62.3%

Gender in US
- Women, 51.4%
- Men, 48.6%
Shelter Demographics 2014

Age in Shelter

- Under 18, 22.30%
- 18-30, 14.70%
- 31-50, 26.40%
- 51-60, 17%
- 62 and Over, 3.80%

Age in US

- Under 18, 23.30%
- 18-30, 12.20%
- 31-50, 26.40%
- 51-60, 14.70%
- 62 and Over, 23.00%
Shelter Demographics 2014

Household Size in Shelter

- 1 Person, 63.90%
- 2 or More People, 36.10%

Household Size in US

- 1 Person, 12.70%
- 2 or More People, 87.30%
Shelter Demographics 2014

• Adults with disabilities were four times more likely to be in shelter than adults without disabilities
Living Situation Before Shelter

Before Entering Shelter

- Already Homeless, 40.70%
- Housing, 40.40%
- Institution, 11.40%
- Other, 7.60%
Living Situation Before Shelter

**Before Entering Shelter - Homeless Situation**
- Unsheltered, 46.70%
- Sheltered, 53.30%

**Before Entering Shelter - Housed Situation**
- Staying with Family, 41.3%
- Staying with Friends, 33.1%
- Rented unit, 22.8%
- Owned, 2.0%
- PSH, 0.9%
Length of Stay in 2014

Length of Stay in Emergency Shelter

- 7 Days or Less: 350,000
- 8 - 30 Days: 300,000
- 31 - 180 Days: 450,000
- 181 - 360 Days: 400,000
- 361 - 365 Days: 300,000
Key Elements of an Effective Crisis Response System that *Ends Homelessness*

An effective Crisis Response System provides **immediate and easy access to safe and decent shelter** to anyone that needs it and aims to **re-house** people as quickly as possible.
Low-barrier shelter is a cornerstone of a functional crisis response system.
Key Elements of an Effective Crisis Response System that *Ends Homelessness*

1. Access and Prioritization
2. Crisis and Interim Housing
3. Assistance to Return to Housing
Key Elements of an Effective Crisis Response System that *Ends Homelessness*

**Access and Prioritization**
- Outreach
- Coordinated Entry
- Diversion

**Crisis and Interim Housing**
- Immediate and easily accessible available for anyone

**Assistance to Return to Housing**
- RRH
- PSH
- Mainstream public housing
Key Elements of an Effective Crisis Response System that *Ends Homelessness*

- The community provides low-barrier shelter immediately to *any person* experiencing unsheltered homelessness who wants it.

- Some form of shelter (ES, TH, other temporary setting) is offered immediately (i.e., same day).

- The community ensures shelter is not contingent on sobriety, minimum income requirements, criminal records, or other unnecessary conditions.
Housing crisis resolution
Rapid re-housing
Permanent Supportive housing
Market rate housing
Voucher

CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM
How Can I Help You?

How Can I Help You Get Housed?

- Iain De Jong, “How To Be An Awesome Shelter”
Community Example: Salt Lake City, UT

- Targets all families in shelter or living on the streets
- Served 1,615 families 2009 – 2014
- Everyone received RRH assistance
- Average time in rapid re-housing is 110 days
- Average amount spent per family is $5,284 (includes financial assistance and all overhead costs)
  - $4,137 of direct financial assistance
- LOS in shelter reduced from 71 days to 41 days
- As of 2013, 87% of families never returned to shelter
Before we tried to change people, now we support change in people.

Staff Member, the Road Home, Salt Lake City, UT
Key Component

Housing First Approach: A Philosophical Shift
HOUSED PEOPLE ARE NOT HOMELESS
Activity

Are We a Housing First Community?

1. Complete the survey *(adapted from USICH tool)*
2. Find others from your community. Take 5 minutes to talk about your similarities/differences.
3. Next, identify two things that are a challenge to becoming a “housing first” community.
What Does Housing First Mean?

• Housing First is a philosophy shift from the traditional “housing ready” approach.

• *Everyone* is ready for housing, regardless of the complexity or severity of their needs.

• Housing First is not a “program”, it is a system-wide orientation and response.

Ann Oliva – SNAPS Weekly Focus
Housing First Principles

- Homelessness is foremost a housing problem and should be treated as such.
- Permanent housing is a right to which all are entitled.
- People should be returned to or stabilized in permanent housing as quickly as possible and connected to resources necessary to sustain that housing.
- Issues that may have contributed to a household’s homelessness can best be addressed once they are permanently housed.
Housing First Core Components

- Few to no programmatic prerequisites to permanent housing entry
- Low-barrier admission policies
- **Rapid** and streamlined entry into permanent housing
- Supportive services are voluntary
Homelessness and Substance Abuse in CT

**Alcohol and Drug Abuse in CT**
- People in CT dependent on or abused alcohol within the previous year: 243,000
- People in CT dependent on or abused illicit drugs within the previous year: 83,000

**2015 CT PIT Count**
- Total homeless persons: 4,047
- Chronic Substance Abuse: 410
Activity: Create a Timeline to Housing

1. Read your household scenario

2. Show the path of this household from being identified as homeless today until they exit to permanent housing (outreach, assessment, documentation, participation requirements/classes, program referrals, case management)

3. Show amounts of time it takes to make it to each next step
Activity

- ____ Days: Outreach
- ____ Days: Assessment
- ____ Days: Documentation
- ____ Days: Shelter Entry
- ____ Days: Life skills
- ____ Days: Program referrals
- ____ Days: Case management
- ____ Days: Exit to Housing
Key Component

Immediate and Easy Access
Immediate and Easy Access: Getting Into Shelter

- Getting Into Shelter
- Shift in Practice
- Shift in Operations
- Examples
Immediate and Easy Access Process of Getting into Shelter

- Coordinated assessment (CAN)
- Divert from shelter when possible
- Prioritize those with the highest need
  - Assess for crisis
  - Assess for acuity
Coordinated Entry

People With Housing Crisis Seeking Shelter

Diversion
Crisis Resolution
Crisis Bed
Permanent Housing

National Alliance to End Homelessness
Diversion

Where did you stay last night?

Why did you have to leave where you stayed last night?

Diversion should take place at the “front door”

What resources would help you stay there again?

Who might I contact that may be able to give you a place to stay for the next few nights?
Immediate and Easy Access
Does NOT Mean:

• First come, first serve
• Everyone calling needs a shelter bed
• Waiting in line to get the next bed
• Building more shelter beds
"Shelters were built around survival of the fittest methodologies. If you did what you were supposed to do, followed the rules…you’d earn your way back into housing. If you couldn’t follow directions, struggled with rules and were so overwhelmed by your circumstances…you’d be left to your own devices. Not only would you likely stay homeless, you’d be asked to leave the last safe place available to you in hopes that some time on the outside would help you learn your lesson and do better next time you had a “chance” to enter shelter.”

Meghann Cotter, Micah Ministries
Fredericksburg, VA
Entering Shelter
Practice Shift

• Low demand
• Serving the most vulnerable populations
• Eliminating long wait lists
Are You Screening People In Or Screening People Out?

Low Demand *Means*

1. Serving households of any configuration including couples without children, persons identifying as LGBTQ, two parent households, mothers with teen boys
2. Serving people using substances and or with mental health disorders, regardless of treatment compliance
3. Serving people with criminal history
Are You Screening People In Or Screening People Out?

Low Demand *Does NOT Mean* Requiring:

- Income at entry
- “Employability”
- Exhibiting a “desire” to change
- Having a “good” attitude
- Being cooperative and engaging
- Seeming “motivated”
Immediate and Easy Access
Operational Shift

Emergency Shelter = Immediate Response to a Housing Emergency

• Shelter is available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week, 365 days per year
• Staff available to allow entry as needed
• Connects directly to street outreach
Immediate and Easy Access
Operational Shift

• What does our space look like?
  – Configure it to serve more populations
  – Flexible spaces to accommodate special household needs
  – Private and confidential space for meetings
  – Space to store belongings
  – Accommodate pets if possible
Immediate and Easy Access
Operational Shift

• Staff are:
  – Trained in conflict resolution
  – Using motivational interviewing and strength based approaches
  – Not “program monitors” or “house parents”
  – Not using statements like, “they are not working the program” to exit people
Community Examples

Immediate and Easy Access
Homefull
Dayton, OH

• Serves as the coordinated entry assessment site
• Assessors also trained in diversion
• Families meet with assessors immediately, even on call during weekends
Key Component

Housing-focused Services
Housing-Focused Services

• Shift in Practice
• Shift in Operations
• Examples
Housing-Focused Services
Practice Shift

Emergency Shelter serves as temporary, short-term crisis housing with crisis services to alleviate people’s immediate housing crisis as a first step to being quickly and permanently re-housed.
Housing Focused Services

Practice Shift

• Focus on permanent housing starts at the front door

• Shifting the question from “what can I do to help you?” to “what can I do to get you housed 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  -Iain De Jong, *How to Be An Awesome Shelter*
Housing Focused Services

Practice Shift

- Focus on a “housing plan” vs “family plan” or “case plan”
- Identify barriers to housing and identify resources to address barriers
- Focus every in-person meeting on a quick move to permanent housing
- Create a clear “housing message” throughout the shelter
- Review and discuss the housing plan weekly at minimum
Are We a Housing-Focused Shelter? Questions to Ask

• What services are provided in the shelter, and what is the reason?

• Are all of the services focused on obtaining permanent housing?

• How often do staff talk to clients about housing?

• When does the conversation about moving to permanent housing begin?
Housing-Focused Services
Operational Shift

Staff job descriptions:

• Understanding of housing first principles
• Knowledge of housing resources in the community
• Understanding of client centered/client driven planning

Role of Executive Director is critical!
Housing-Focused Services
Operational Shift

All written materials reflect housing-focused practice:

– Mission statement: is it about permanent housing?
– Re-writing policies and procedures
– Client handbook
– Voluntary service participation
– Clear messaging to community and clients
Housing-Focused Services
Messaging
Community Examples

Housing-Focused Services
The Salvation Army of Greater Charlotte Center of Hope

• Shelter staff used to hold a meeting every Thursday to discuss shelter rules and expectations. Clients and staff would leave this meeting “exhausted”.

• The shelter director now meets with residents weekly to discuss:
  – The national goal of ending homelessness
  – What rapid re-housing is
  – How to start looking for housing right away

• This is an opportunity to inspire and empower clients to take ownership of their housing instead of telling them how to stay in shelter
I tell my staff, ‘if you’re not talking about housing, you’re having the wrong conversation.’

Deronda Metz, Salvation Army, Charlotte, NC
Key Component

Rapid Exits to Housing
Rapid Exits to Housing
Practice Shift

What services do we need to increase rapid exits to permanent housing?

• Rapid re-housing
• Connections to mainstream services
• Develop community partnerships
Rapid Exits to Housing
Practice Shift

Re-frame your messaging:

• Shelter is not a destination, it is a step to get you housed

• We are going to re-house you RAPIDLY

• You can be housed
Rapid Exits to Housing

Practice Shift

• What services or requirements are slowing down rapid exits to housing that we should eliminate or that can take place after housing is obtained?
  • Life skills, parenting classes, financial classes, job search classes
  • Can some of these happen later or be part of home-based services on a voluntary basis?
Rapid Exits to Housing
Operational Shift

• Staffing:
  – Housing Navigation/Housing Search Position

• Budget
  – Rapid Re-housing
The Salvation Army of Greater Charlotte Center of Hope

- Length of stay in shelter went from 6 months to 39 days
- What they did:
  - Removed barriers to entry
  - Implemented shelter diversion
  - Changed their communication with clients to focus on housing
  - Invested in rapid re-housing, reallocated $315,000 from transitional housing to rapid re-housing
Key Component

Using Data To Be Better
Using Data to Be Better

1. Measure Performance
2. Set Goals
3. Improve
4. Evaluate
5. Report
Using Data to Be Better

• DECREASE Length of Stay/Time Spent Homeless

• INCREASE Exits to Permanent Housing

• DECREASE Returns to Shelter
Using Data to Be Better

• **Decrease** the number of people being asked to leave because of breaking the rules, not participating in services, or timing out
Activity: Create a Timeline to RAPID EXITS to Housing

1. How can you reduce the amount of time it takes to get someone housed?

2. Show the path of this household from being identified as homeless today until they exit to permanent housing (outreach, assessment, documentation, participation requirements/classes, program referrals, case management)

3. What processes can be eliminated or changed?
WHICH RULES ARE THE “RIGHT” RULES?
The Role of Rules

Why do you have rules?

What rules are needed?

How were they developed?
RULES

• Which rules are needed to operate your emergency shelter?

• How can a shelter promote safety without creating unnecessary barriers to services and housing?
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.
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

-Iain De Jong, How to Be An Awesome Shelter
How Adults Respond

Reasoning Works!

• Presentation of facts relative to needs
• Alignment to values
• Appreciation of personal goals
• Assessment and reassessment of needs

-Iain De Jong, How to Be An Awesome Shelter
The Role of Rules

Promote safety.

-Iain De Jong, How to Be An Awesome Shelter
Changing/Controlling Behavior?
Or
Promoting Safety?

Sobriety

• Unruly inebriation is a safety issue
• People that drink or use other substances are not a safety issue
• Shelters are not (usually) designed to be drug and alcohol treatment centers
Changing/Controlling Behavior?  
Or  
Promoting Safety?  

No weapons  
• Weapons are a safety issue
Changing/Controlling behavior?  
Or Promoting Safety?

Belongings must be searched before entry

• Items such as weapons should be banned for safety reasons
• Let people check in belongings into plastic totes without search instead of barring people for having certain things
Changing/Controlling behavior? 
Or Promoting Safety?

No Entry With Criminal History

• Having a criminal history does not mean the person is a danger to others
• Leaves people with high barriers with nowhere to go
Changing/Controlling behavior? Or Promoting Safety?

Must participate in life skills classes

• Is this necessary to find housing?
• Does this slow down the housing search process?
Reviewing the Rules

• How does this activity/service get people into or hinder people from getting housing?
• How does this keep people safe?
• Is this rule about controlling or changing behavior?
• Does this rule hinder people from getting housed quickly?
Re-tooling the Rules

Which rules cause people to be kicked out the most?

– Decide which behaviors are a safety issue and which behaviors are a behavior management issue that was handled by asking the client to leave.

Restrict “barring” or service restriction rules to:

– Matters of violence (including sexual violence).
– Excessive damage to property.
– Theft.
Re-tooling Rules

1. **Review** incidents resulting in clients being barred
2. **Recognize** similar issues that could be handled in other ways
3. **Meet** with staff and clients to discuss changing the rules and gather input
4. **Review** each rule for whether it helps people get out of shelter into housing - or whether it inhibits this from occurring quickly?
5. **Rules** that remained should be directly related to safety
6. **Post** new rules and let them take effect in 30 days
7. **Hold** frequent meetings with staff and clients to assess how the new rules are working and revise as needed
8. **Track** if the number of people barred decreases
Re-tooling the Rules

The “Marvin” Rule
A Few of the New Rules

• Treat everyone with dignity and respect.
• Use the shelter space in a respectful manner.
• No weapons are allowed in the shelter, and nothing may be used as a weapon inside the shelter.
Next Steps for Re-tooling Your Shelter

MAKING IT HAPPEN
Next Steps to Re-Tooling Shelter

• Identify a vision and core values that will drive the re-tooling
• Identify what in the current culture needs to shift
• Identify staffing needs, including revised job descriptions
Next Steps to Re-Tooling Shelter

• Ongoing staff communication and training; be prepared for staff turnover
• Update policies and managerial practices to accommodate the transition
• Talk to your board to get their support
Next Steps to Re-Tooling Shelter

• Focus on the outcomes that matter – rapid exits to PH
• Rethink current budget
• Identify community partnerships and outside resources that will be needed to support households
• Communicate, Communicate
## Make It Happen!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People Receiving Services</th>
<th>People Providing Services</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safety</strong> = Minimizing loss of control over their lives</td>
<td><strong>Safety</strong> = Minimizing loss of control over the environment</td>
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**Safety means:**
- Maximizing choice
- Develop authentic relationships
- Exploring limits
- Defining self
- Defining experiences without judgement
- Receiving consistent information ahead of time
- Being free from force, coercion, threats, punishment, and harm
- Owning and expressing feelings without fear

**Safety means:**
- Maximizing routine and predictability
- Assigning staff based on availability
- Setting limits
- Defining client problems/diagnosing
- Judging experiences to determine competence and appropriateness of services
- Providing information as time allows
- Threatening force to de-escalate a situation
- Reducing expression of strong emotion
Make it Happen!

What is one thing that you will do in your shelter/community/program in the next week as a result of today’s training?
Anything We Missed?
Contact Us!

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