



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

“Introducing Housing First in a Rural Service System: A Multistakeholder Perspective”

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Quick Takeaways:

- The Housing First (HF) model prioritizes rapidly placing homeless people into housing without adherence to services beyond case management, in contrast to older models which prioritize stability first and then housing.
- Successfully implementing HF in rural areas requires communication and collaboration with existing service providers and stakeholders.

Study:

This study examined the introduction of HF in rural northeastern United States through an outside provider nationally known for its expertise in HF, funded by a grant from SAMHSA. They hired workers from the rural area, including local service providers. Researchers conducted interviews with local service providers to understand how HF did and did not fit into their existing service provider framework and to understand their feelings on HF.

Findings:

Many service providers were uncomfortable with the introduction of HF through an outside organization, feeling that the new service took resources away from existing programs. They also felt that HF was not well integrated with existing programs, and that there was a lack of transparency. Some respondents shared concerns that while HF was successful in urban areas, it could not fit the unique needs and restrictions of rural areas.

While researchers found that the introduction of HF did have an impact on existing institutional logic, they also found that the implementation of HF was hindered because of an incomplete understanding of its tenets and core ideas. Local service providers often incorporated the language of HF into programs without actually providing services that followed the consumer-driven client choice model of HF. This incomplete understanding also led local service providers to believe HF was a hands-off approach.

Local service providers did appreciate that HF focused on client choice. Many stated their belief that providing choice was valuable and lacking in existing programs.

Conclusion:

HF is not fully implemented in many rural areas, but it has the potential to improve housing outcomes. However, strong implementation and fidelity to HF principles is necessary for success. Communication and collaboration with existing service providers and stakeholders is necessary to explain HF and to obtain commitment.