Key Elements to Effective Emergency Shelter

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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 Providers
- Funders
- Continuum of Care Leadership
- City/County Government
- Other stakeholders
How are you feeling?

Anxious  Excited  Confused  Exhausted/Overwhelmed  Annoyed
Purpose

• **What** is the role of emergency shelter and how do we connect shelters to the system in a meaningful way?

• **What** are the keys to effective low-barrier, housing focused shelter?

• **How** should shelters implement the keys to effective shelter?

• **How** should communities use shelter data to assess the performance of emergency shelters?
Where are you in your Transformational Change?

Old Shelter Model

Need for Change
Confusion
Anxiety/Loss

Clarity

New Vision
Integration
Restructuring

New Shelter Model
MAKING THE SHIFT

Philosophical Shift

Practice Shift

Operations Shift
WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT EMERGENCY SHELTER STAYS

Emergency Shelter
What Do We Know About Shelter Stays?

• The majority of people who become homeless have relatively short stays in the homeless system and rarely come back to it (“transitionally homeless”)

• Families with long stays are no more likely than families with short stays to have intensive behavioral health treatment histories, to be disabled, or to be unemployed

The results suggest that policy and program factors, rather than household characteristics, are responsible for long shelter stays

Dennis Culhane, Testing a Typology of Family Homelessness Based on Patterns of Public Shelter Utilization in Four U.S. Jurisdictions: Implications for Policy and Program Planning, 2007
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 to exit homelessness for good (RRH)
- 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 (PSH)
Length of Stay in Emergency Shelter

National Length of Stay in Emergency Shelter - 2016 AHAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Median Nights</th>
<th>Average Nights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

National Length of Stay in Emergency Shelter - AHAR 2016

- 7 days or less: 28.1%
- 8 to 30 days: 36.8%
- 31 to 180 days: 25.4%
- 181 to 360 days: 3.0%
- 361 to 366 days: 6.8%
Things to Keep in Mind

• Households experiencing homelessness are not significantly different than other low-income households
• Majority experience homelessness due to a financial or other crisis
• Prolonged exposure to homelessness has a significant, negative impact on adults and children
Why do you think some people experiencing homelessness avoid shelter?
## Why Do People Avoid Shelters?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They are too crowded</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bugs</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are too many rules</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are full</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t stay with my partner/family</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germs</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They don’t accept my pet</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is nowhere to store my stuff</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are too far away</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t stay with my friends</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ROLE OF SHELTER IN THE CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

Emergency Shelter
Why are shelters so important?

• **Shelter** plays an **important role** in your system’s response to homelessness

• People will always need a safe and decent place to go when having a housing crisis

• The effectiveness of emergency shelter greatly impacts your system’s performance
  • Average length of homelessness
  • Exits to permanent housing
  • Returns to homelessness
An Effective Crisis Response System That Ends Homelessness…

Provides immediate and low-barrier access to safe and decent shelter to anyone that needs it and aims to re-house people as quickly as possible

AND….

The community ensures shelter is not contingent on sobriety, minimum income requirements, criminal records, or other unnecessary conditions
Creating Flow Through The System to Housing

Prioritize Unsheltered People With Housing Crisis Seeking Shelter
Housing crisis resolution
Rapid re-housing
Permanent Supportive housing
Other subsidized housing
Voucher

CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM
FIVE KEY ELEMENTS
Of Emergency Shelter
1. 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 permanent housing
• Rapid entry into permanent housing
• Services are voluntary
Sample Mission Statement for a “Housing First” Shelter

**OUR MISSION:** To offer safe, temporary, emergency shelter to individuals experiencing homelessness, while offering individualized housing solutions. Our goal is to empower our guests to quickly obtain stable, permanent housing. We are committed to advancing a collaborative, locally driven solution to ending homelessness in our community.

McKinney Shelter, Hartford, CT
2. Safe and Appropriate Diversion

**Philosophy**
- Belief that clients are the captains of their own solutions
- Belief that a call to shelter does not mean there is no other option

**Practice**
- Instead of immediate intake at shelter, engages clients in a conversation and identifies safe alternatives to shelter
- Uses a strength-based assessment vs. a needs assessment
- Assists in connecting to community resources to avoid a shelter stay
Sample Job Description for Housing Support Specialist (Intake and program monitor)

Housing Support Worker provides daily supervision, reporting and support services to clients in a low barrier residential facility that promotes a Housing First philosophy; primary responsibility is to facilitate an emotional and physical environment conducive to enhancing positive client morale and stabilization by ensuring the security and safety of the facility; maintaining appropriate records in addition to ongoing written and verbal communication with the supervisor in relationship to daily client activities; support and encourage clients in achieving goals outlined in their housing plans.

**Essential Duties & Responsibilities:**

- Serve as first point of contact to triage requests for emergency shelter. **Use shelter diversion techniques to assist households in self-resolving their housing crisis.**

- Prepare and complete intake packages for households unable to be diverted at entrance. Continue to use shelter diversion techniques to assist households in self-resolving their housing crisis throughout their stay.
3. Immediate and Low Barrier Access

Philosophy
• Shelter is life saving
• It should be easy to access for those that need it
• It should be easiest for the most vulnerable

Practice
• Few to no prerequisites to shelter – no drug and alcohol testing
• Referrals through coordinated entry - no waiting list
• Prioritize households with the most needs
• 24/7 access
• Equal Access Rule compliance
• Rules should only pertain to safety
Immediate Access Means:

- **Screening people in, not out**
  - Shelter is open 24/7 – no requirements for people to leave during the day
  - Connected to street outreach
  - 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 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
Example of Low-Barrier Guidelines

Resident Rooms

Respectful
- Quiet voices after 9PM
- Use child-friendly language
- Water only

Responsible
- Report damage, leaks, or sounds ASAP
- Wash laundry regularly
- Keep air vents open

Safe
- Lock your door when you leave
- Move beds away from ceiling fans
- Use a towel or mat outside of shower
4. Housing-Focused Rapid Exit Services

**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
- Moving people out of shelter quickly reduces the trauma of homelessness

**Practice Shift**
- Plan for rapid exit to housing at entry
- “If you’re not talking about housing you’re having the wrong conversation”
- Environment reflects a housing focus
- All meetings, policies, procedures, job descriptions, signage, client handbooks, etc. focus on housing
Housing-Focused, Rapid Exit 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
Job Description for Shelter “Case Manager”
Role – 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
Example of a Housing Focused Message

Developed by CRT in Hartford for McKinney Shelter and East Hartford Family Shelter
Example of Housing-Focused Shelter Messaging

Path to SUCCESS

1) Housing Providers (Continue to Scan)
2) Job Housing Search with Log of Progress
3) Getting Job & Connecting

Savings!
5. Using Data to Improve Performance

Philosophy
• There is always room to improve

Practice
• Measure outcomes, not outputs
  • Decrease length of stay in homelessness
  • Increase exits to permanent housing
  • Decrease returns to shelter
Use Your Data to Shift

- Which populations are using shelter?
- Average length of stay?
- Exit destinations after shelter?
- Frequent users?
- Long stayers?
WHAT ABOUT RULES?
The “Right Rules” in Emergency Shelter
The Role of Rules

Promote safety

Don’t try to change or control people or their behaviors
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.
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 making things easier for staff and not about being client-centered?
- 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 restricted 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

Message as “Expectations” or “Guidelines” vs. “Rules”

Restrict “barring” or possibly service restriction rules to:

- Matters of violence (including sexual violence)
- Excessive damage to property
- Theft
Reviewing the Rules

1. Review incidents that resulted in clients being barred and examine whether those rules are a necessity.
2. Recognize similar issues and identify new ways to manage those issues.
3. Meet with staff and clients to discuss changing the rules and gather input.
4. Review each rule. Do they help people get out of shelter and into housing quickly?
5. Eliminate rules that make it more difficult for people to get into permanent housing quickly.
6. Drop rules that don’t make sense, especially those created in reaction to a one-time incident that is unlikely to happen again.
7. Ensure that remaining rules are directly related to safety.
8. Post new rules and put them into effect within 30 days.
9. Hold frequent meetings with staff and clients to assess how the new rules are working and revise as needed.
10. Track the numbers. Are fewer people being turned away? Are people moving into permanent housing at a higher or faster rate?
NEXT STEPS TO RETOOLING YOUR SHELTER

Making Shift Happen
Next Steps to Re-Tooling Shelter

• Identify a vision and core values that will drive the re-tooling – Revise mission statement to reflect “low-barrier housing focused shelter”
• Identify what in the current culture needs to shift
• Identify staffing needs, including revised job descriptions and training
• Focus on the outcomes that matter – rapid exits to PH
• Rethink current budget – what can shift to assist with housing?
• Identify community partnerships and outside resources that will be needed to assist in housing and supporting households
• Communicate, Communicate, Communicate
Professional Development & Training for Staff:

- De-escalation training
- Non-violent Crisis Intervention
- Management of Actual or Potential Aggression
- Conflict Resolution
- Problem Solving
- Mediation
- Negotiation
- Trauma Informed Care
- Military Cultural Competency
- Military Trauma Informed Care
- Safe Talk
- Self Care
- Communication Skills
- Motivational Interviewing
- Diversity & Cultural Competency
- Critical Time Intervention
- Harm Reduction
- Suicide Prevention
- Overdose Prevention
Anything I Missed?
Contact

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