



Topic: HomeRoom Network Community of Practice
Session 12 – Understanding a Housing First Approach
Date: 12/12/2023
Time: 1:00 pm – 2:15 pm EST

Materials

Presentation Slides: <https://cohhio.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/HomeRoom-Session-12.pdf>

Recording: <https://youtu.be/oFDNXIDr19Y>

1. Introductions
 - a. Aubre Jones, Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, Director of Training and Technical Assistance and Equitable Practice
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2. What is Housing First?
 - a. Housing First is a consumer-driven approach that provides immediate access to permanent housing, in addition to flexible, community-based services for people who have experienced homelessness.
3. History of Housing First
 - a. Housing First was birthed around 1992
 - b. Housing First becomes amplified nationally as a way to address *chronic homelessness*
 - i. The George W. Bush administration’s adoption of **Housing First** helped spur [a 30 percent reduction](#) in chronic homelessness from 2005 to 2007.
 - ii. The Obama administration continued this support for Housing First when it released its Federal Strategic Plan to End Homelessness in 2010.
 - iii. HUD and other agencies have made adopting [Housing First practices a priority for their staff and grantees](#)
 - c. Housing First emerged as an alternative to the linear approach in which people experiencing homelessness were required to first participate in and graduate from short-term residential and treatment programs before obtaining permanent housing.
4. Movement toward Evidence-Based Services
 - a. Housing First programs also create savings through reduced use of public systems, such as emergency departments, jails, and detox facilities. These savings can partially or totally offset the costs of Housing First programs.
 - b. The quality and volume of studies demonstrating the success of Housing First has prompted the US Department of Health and Human Services to include it in its [National Registry](#) of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices.
 - c. Without clinical prerequisites like completion of a course of treatment or evidence of sobriety and with a low-threshold for entry, Housing First



yields higher housing retention rates, lower returns to homelessness, and significant reductions in the use of crisis services and institutions.

5. Housing First Principles

- a. Homelessness is, first and foremost, a housing crisis and can be addressed through the provision of safe and affordable housing.
- b. All people experiencing homelessness, regardless of their housing history and duration of homelessness, can achieve housing stability in permanent housing. Some may need very little support for a brief period of time, while others may need more intensive and long-term supports.
- c. Everyone is “housing ready.” Sobriety, compliance in treatment, or even criminal histories are not necessary to succeed in housing. Rather, homelessness programs and housing providers must be “consumer ready.”
- d. Many people experience improvements in quality of life in the areas of health, mental health, substance use, and employment, as a result of achieving housing.
- e. People experiencing homelessness have the right to self-determination and should be treated with dignity and respect.
- f. The exact configuration of housing and services depends upon the needs and preferences of the population.

6. Takeaways

- a. Few to no programmatic prerequisites
- b. Low barrier admission policies
- c. Supportive services are voluntary, but can and should be used to *persistently engage* tenants to ensure housing stability
- d. Tenants have full rights, responsibilities, and legal protections
- e. Practices and policies to prevent lease violations and evictions

7. Common Challenges in Implementation

- a. Common challenges:
 - i. Time
 - ii. Historical exclusion-marginalization
 - iii. Cognitive impairment
 - iv. Intoxication
 - v. Demands of other systems that require change rather than motivating
 - vi. Personal biases
 - vii. Immediate needs trump goals
 - viii. Ambiguity and ambivalence
 - ix. Absent or reduced engagement that can come with depression and anxiety
 - x. Change is viewed as a linear event rather than an iterative process
- b. *“If you’re homeless, your life should be hard before it gets easy.”*
 - i. Critics may say ...“Housing First enables **those people** to continue their negative behaviors when we should be using our energy —



- and tax dollars — to help those who can prove they’re ready for recovery”.
- ii. These assumptions incorrectly assume that the only way for people to get well is to face the ‘natural consequences’ of their behavior.
 - c. Behavior modification in social service delivery
 - i. B. F. Skinner demonstrated that behavior could be shaped through reinforcement and/or punishment. Skinner noted that a reinforcer is a consequence that increases the likelihood of behavior to recur, while punishment is a consequence that decreases the chance.
 - d. Considerations in implementations challenges
 - i. Enter the 80/20 principle, otherwise known as the [*Pareto principle*](#). This principle, in essence, states that 80% of an outcome comes from 20% of its causes. It explains how small actions, a small group of people, events, or elements are responsible for a disproportionately large percentage of a result.
 - ii. Some clients cycle through multiple failed placements as they adjust to a housed life.
8. Housing First does not mean “*housing forever*” or “*no matter what*.”
- a. It means that a person is afforded an opportunity for housing with choice and without preconditions that are based on their disability. That person is offered an appropriate level of support to help them thrive in their unit and the community. If they break the law or the lease, they can be subject to eviction just like any other person who breaks the law or their lease. Actions have consequences.
9. Housing First is not “housing only.”
- a. For people with severe physical, behavioral, or substance use challenges—challenges that could force them back into homelessness if not addressed—we should be offering wraparound services on a Housing First basis.
10. Balancing Client Autonomy with Housing Stabilization
- a. Providing voluntary, supportive wrap-around services
 - i. The provider is obligated to bring robust support services to the housing.
 - ii. These services are predicated on assertive engagement, not coercion.
 - b. Assertive engagement
 - i. In traditional service models, clients with high needs have to go to where the provider is — like to a shelter, or in-house program.
 - 1. Maybe they show up, maybe they don’t.
 - ii. With ***assertive engagement***, providers meet people where *they* are — say, in a tent encampment — engage with them there, offer help, and then don’t take no for an answer. But they do it in a kind and empathetic way.
 - iii. Core concepts of assertive engagement:
 - 1. Racial Equity Lens



2. Anti-Oppressive Practice
 3. Empathy
 4. Strength-Based Approach
 5. Unconditional Positive Regard
 - iv. What does assertive engagement look like?
 1. Motivational approaches to build trust.
 2. In-person visits with clients
 3. Phone calls
 4. Letters
 5. Emails
 6. Contacting natural supports (e.g., friends, family, landlords, employers)
 7. Crisis intervention
 8. Payeeship
11. Closing
- a. Upcoming Sessions
 - i. Session Thirteen: Youth Dedicated Programming: Understanding YHDP/RHY/ODH Funds on 2/27/2024