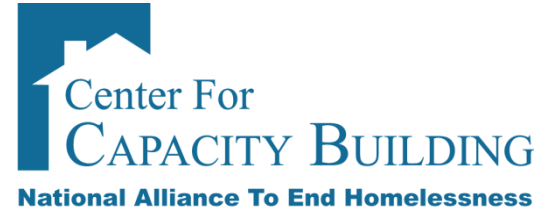


# Key Components of Effective Emergency Shelter

In an Effective Crisis  
Response System

Kay Moshier McDivitt

Senior Technical Assistance  
Specialist



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.

# Session Objectives

- Provide a **basic framework** for the **immediate** response to a community's homelessness crisis
  - Understand how the system components fit together and interact:
    - Entry to the homelessness system
      - Coordinated entry
      - Diversion
      - Prioritization
    - **Emergency Shelter/Crisis Beds**
    - Housing Interventions
- The key components of an effective emergency shelter within this crisis response framework

# 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?



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**Anxious**

**Excited**

**Confused**

**Exhausted/Overwhelmed**  
**Annoyed**

# Or...More Like This?









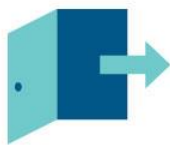
# HOUSING FIRST APPROACH



# SAFE & APPROPRIATE DIVERSION



# IMMEDIATE & LOW-BARRIER ACCESS



# HOUSING-FOCUSED, RAPID EXIT SERVICES



# DATA TO MEASURE PERFORMANCE

## THE FIVE KEYS TO EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY SHELTER



### HOUSING FIRST APPROACH

Align shelter eligibility criteria, policies, and practices with a Housing First approach so that anyone experiencing homelessness can access shelter without prerequisites, make services voluntary, and assist people to access permanent housing options as quickly as possible.



### SAFE & APPROPRIATE DIVERSION

Provide diversion services to find safe and appropriate housing alternatives to entering shelter through problem-solving conversations, identifying community supports, and offering lighter touch solutions.



### IMMEDIATE & LOW-BARRIER ACCESS

Ensure immediate and easy access to shelter by lowering barriers to entry and staying open 24/7. Eliminate sobriety and income requirements and other policies that make it difficult to enter shelter, stay in shelter, or access housing and income opportunities.



### HOUSING-FOCUSED, RAPID EXIT SERVICES

Focus services in shelter on assisting people to access permanent housing options as quickly as possible.



### DATA TO MEASURE PERFORMANCE

Measure data on percentage of exits to housing, average length of stay in shelter, and returns to homelessness to evaluate the effectiveness of shelter and improve outcomes.

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# “What If” Concerns about a New Shelter Model

---

- What if our clients aren't ready for housing?
- What if we are putting people's safety in jeopardy?
- What if we are setting people up to fail by putting them in housing too quickly?
- What if there is no housing available?
- What if we don't have extra resources for these changes?
- What if staff quit?
- What if we need more training?

# Changing the Framework

---

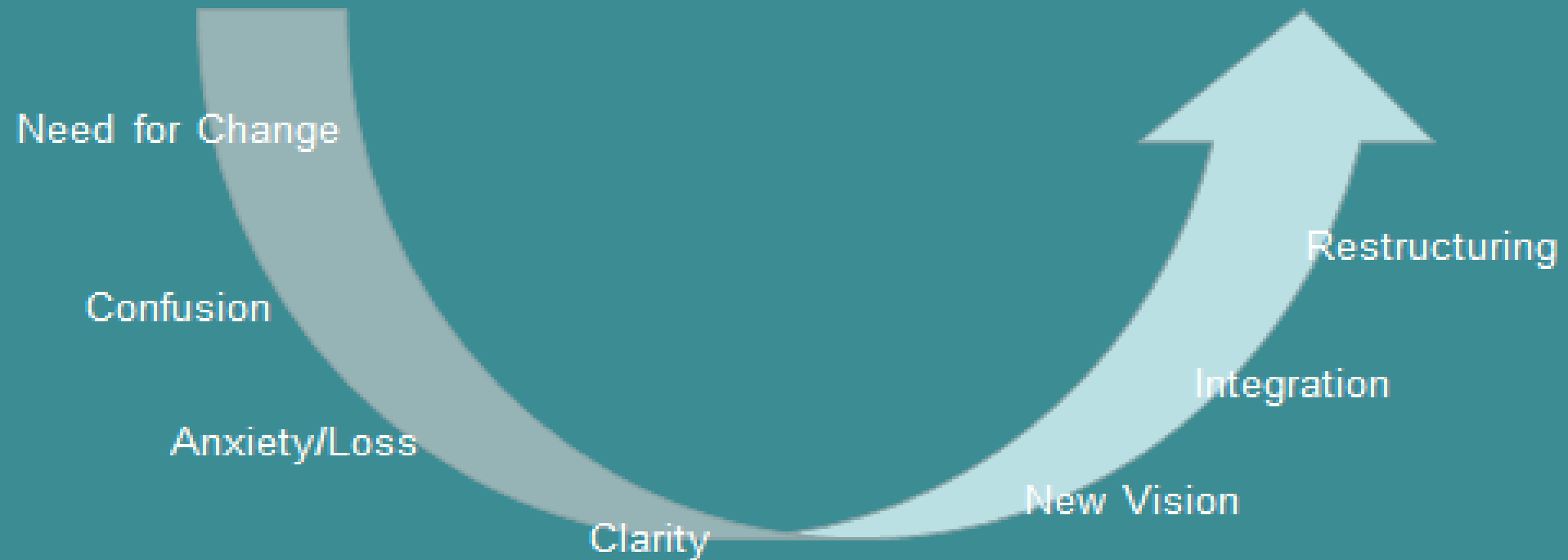


**SHIFT HAPPENS**

# Where are you in your Transformational Change?

Old Shelter Model

New Shelter Model



# MAKING THE SHIFT

Philosophical Shift



Practice Shift



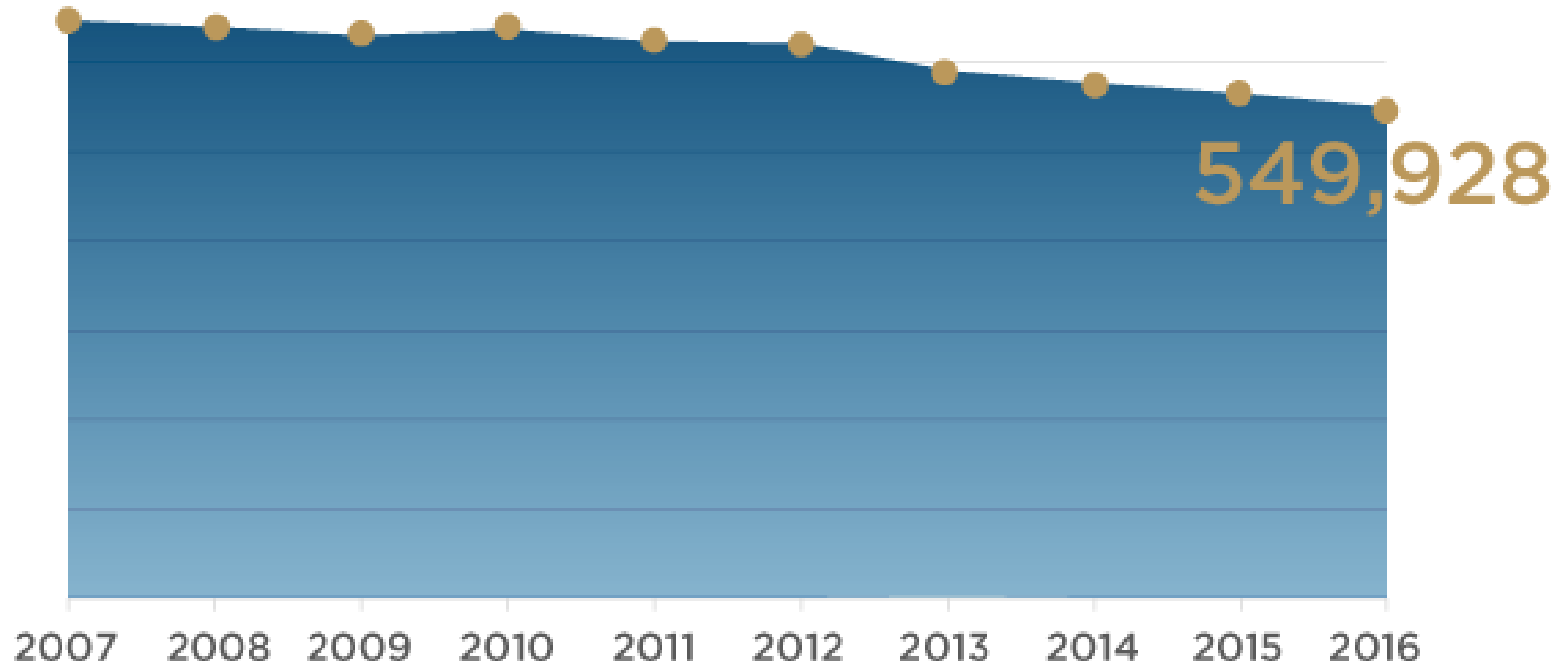
Operations Shift

# NATIONAL DATA

Emergency Shelter

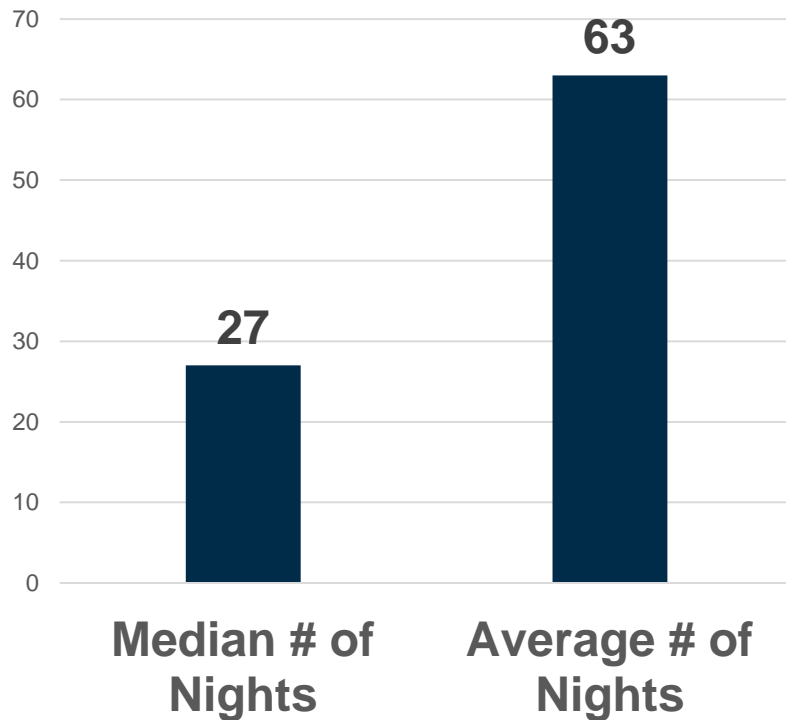


# Homeless Nationally

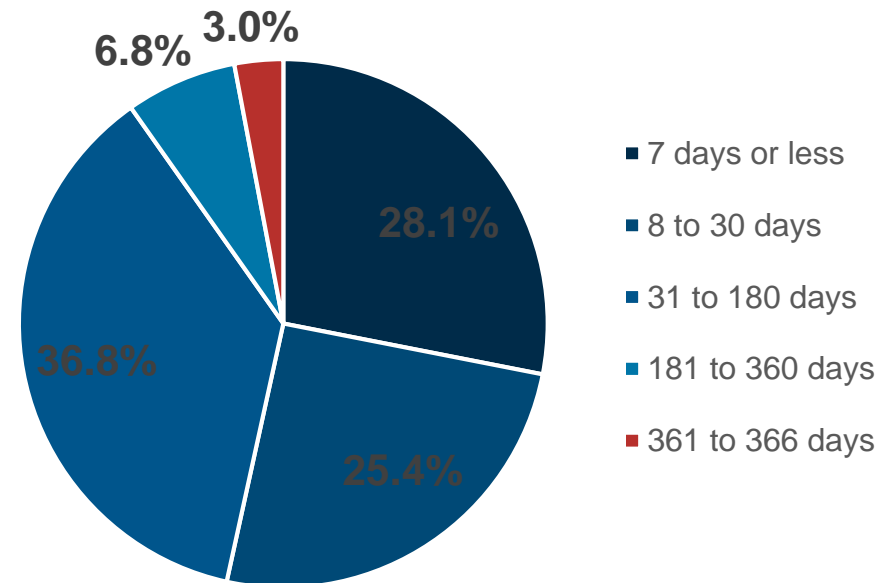


# Length of Stay in Emergency Shelter

National Length of Stay in  
Emergency Shelter- 2016 AHAR



National Length of Stay in  
Emergency Shelter- AHAR 2016





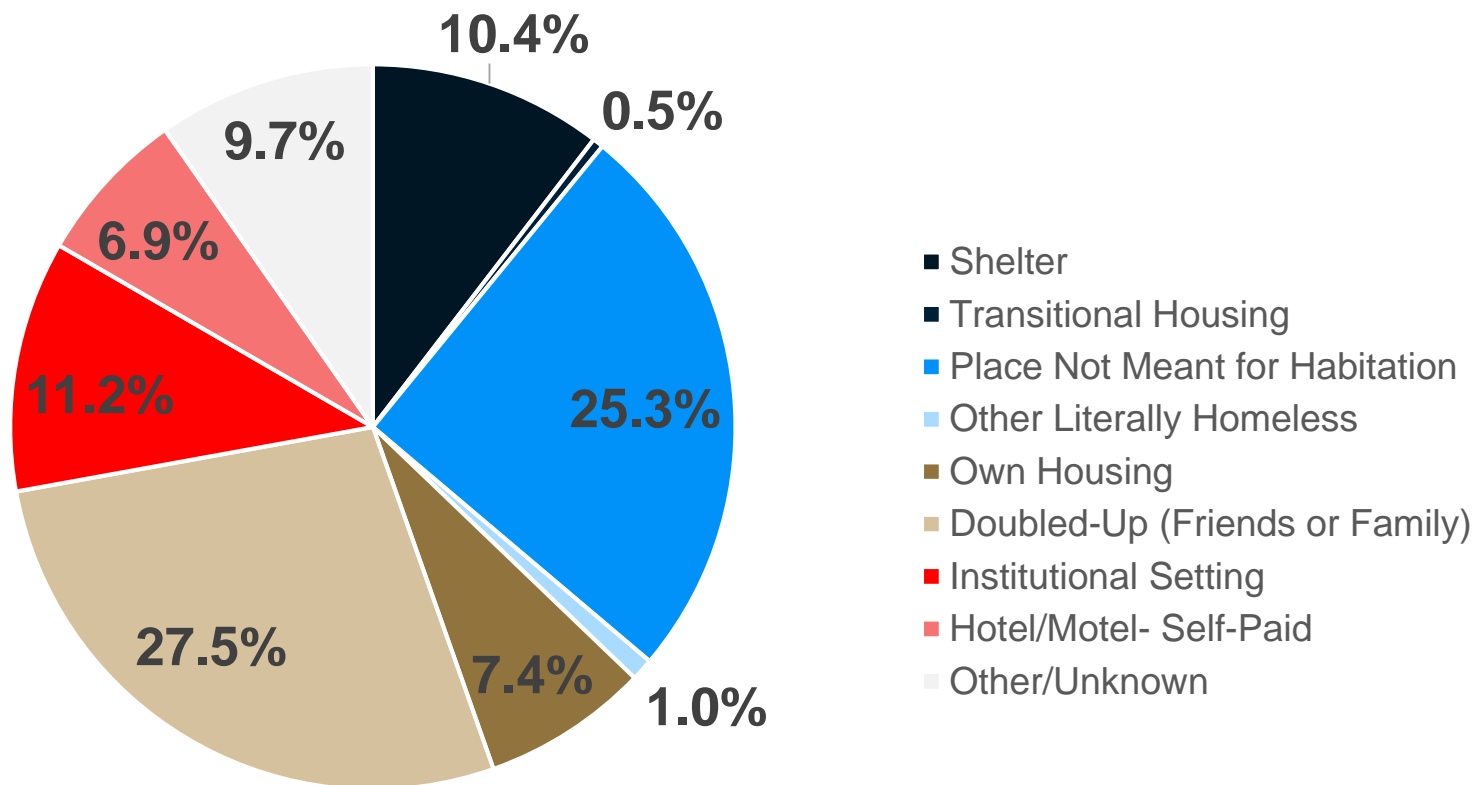


# **NORTH CAROLINA DATA**

Emergency Shelter

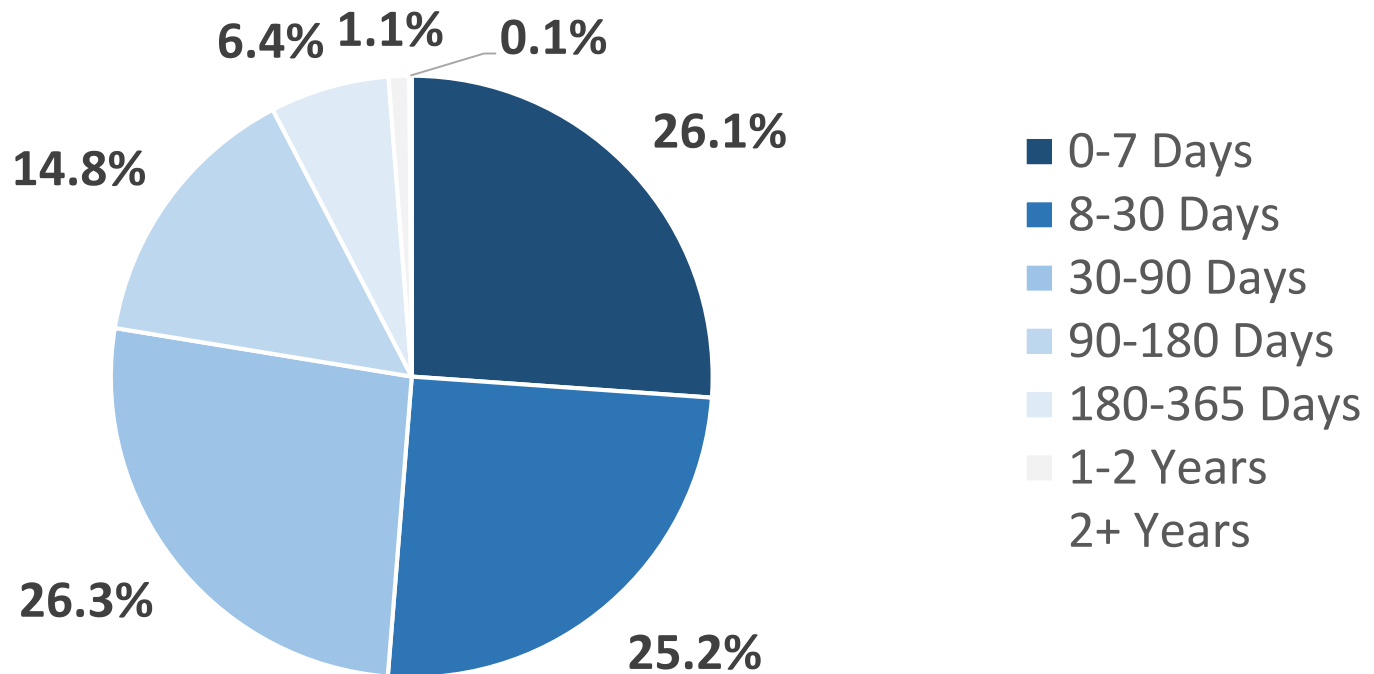


# Living Situation Before Shelter

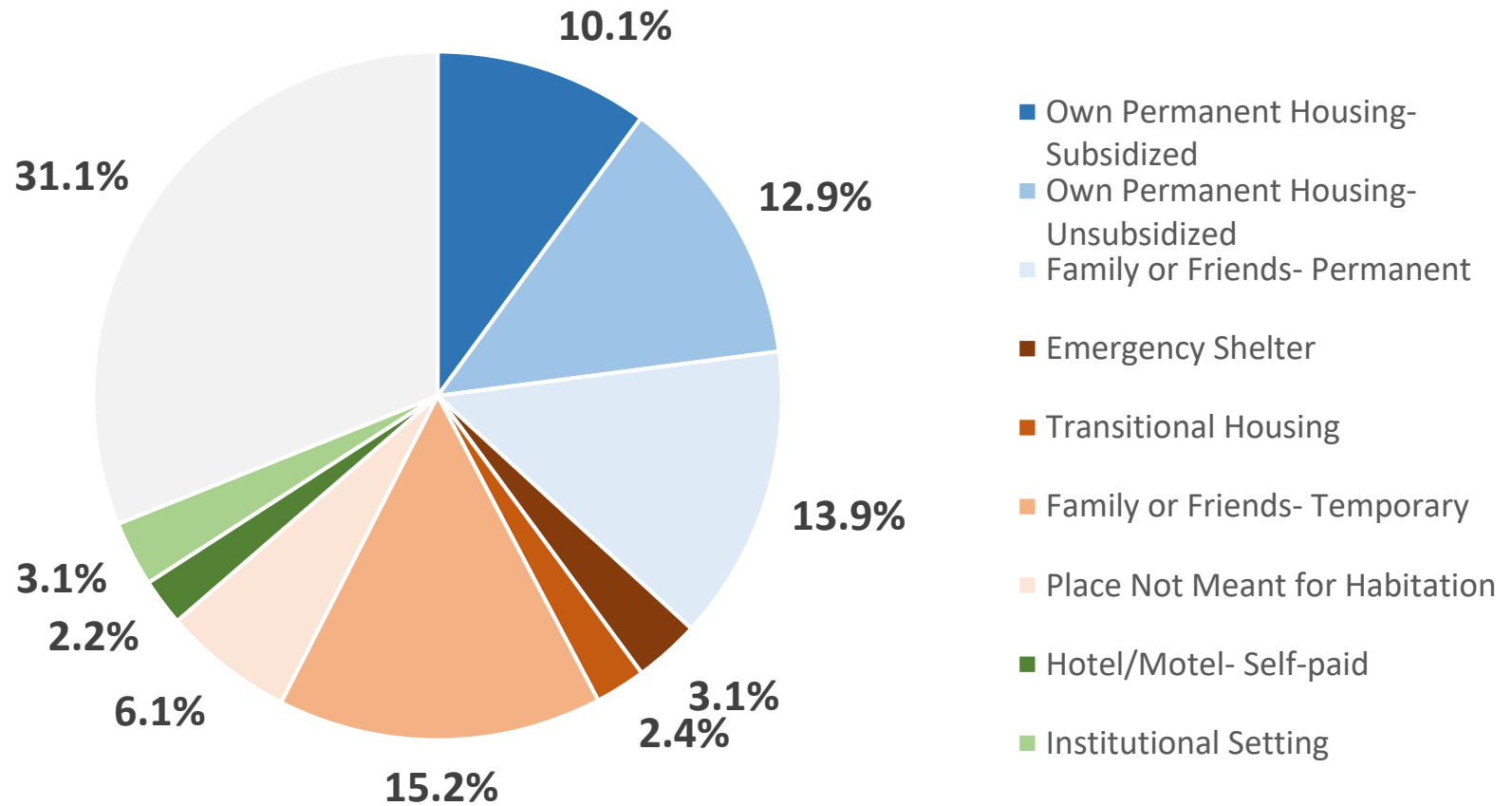


# Length of Stay in Shelter

## Length of Stay in Shelter



# Shelter Exit Destinations



# Percent with Disabilities

Mental Health	2674	15.6%
Alcohol Abuse	248	1.5%
Drug Abuse	366	2.1%
Drug and Alcohol Abuse	448	2.6%
Chronic Health	1120	6.6%
HIV/AIDS	141	0.8%
Developmental Disability	319	1.9%
Physical Disability	2178	12.7%

# Using Data to Improve Performance Outcomes

---

↓ DECREASE Length of stay

↑ INCREASE Exits to permanent housing

↓ DECREASE Returns to shelter

↑ INCREASE Shelter utilization

# WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT 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

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?

---

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

# Homelessness is Misunderstood & It Impacts Shelter Practice

- While there are over 43 Million people living in poverty, less than 600,000 will be homeless on any given night.
- Federal rent assistance programs only assist 5 Million people annually.
- 4.2% of the population in the United States lives with a Serious Mental Illness. Only 42% receive treatment or counseling.
- 7% of the population has an addiction or dependency on alcohol. 93% receive neither treatment or assistance with their problematic alcohol use.
- 3% of the population uses other illicit drugs. 88% receive no treatment or counseling.

# 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

# Most People Stay Housed

- Almost everyone with poor credit history is housed, not homeless.
- Almost everyone with a history of evictions is housed, not homeless.
- Almost everyone with a felony conviction is housed, not homeless.
- Almost everyone who is a registered sex offender or sexual predator is housed, not homeless.

-Orgcode

# 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





# ROLE OF SHELTER IN THE CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

Emergency Shelter



# Why are shelters so important?

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  - Average length of homelessness
  - Exits to permanent housing
  - Returns to homelessness



# An Effective Crisis Response System That Ends Homelessness...

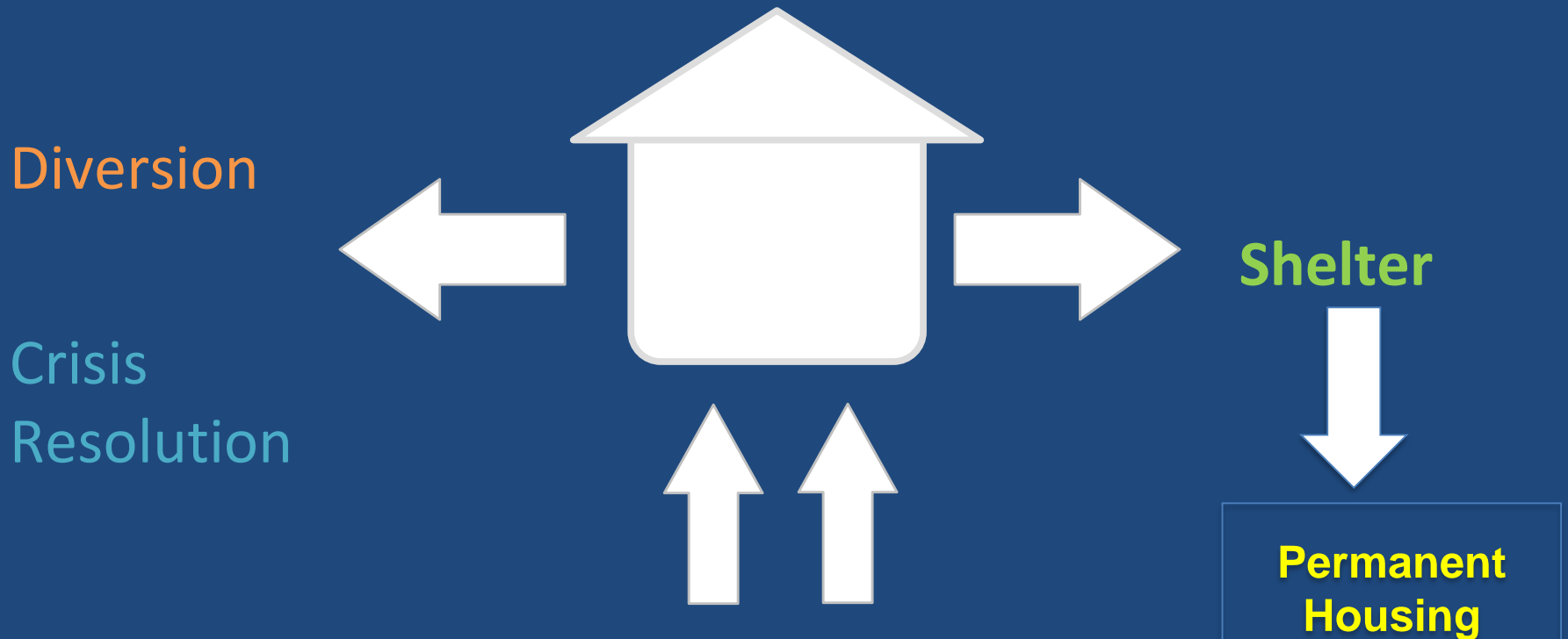
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**Provides immediate and low-barrier access to safe and decent shelter to anyone** that needs it and aims to **re-house** people as quickly as possible

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**

# ACTIVITY:

## Table Discussion - 5 minutes per question

---

- How do people access shelter in your community?
- How do people come directly to your own shelter?
- What is used to determine who will enter shelter?
- What do you do when shelter is full?





# 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



# HOUSING FIRST APPROACH

In Emergency Shelter



# Philosophy Shift Housing First Principles

- Homelessness is foremost a housing problem
- Everyone is ready for housing **now** if they choose
- 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

# Housing First Components of Shelters

---

Belief that issues that may have contributed to a household's homelessness can best be addressed ***once they are permanently housed***

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

# ACTIVITY:

## Are We a Housing First Community?

---

1. Complete the survey *(adapted from USICH tool)*
2. Take 5 minutes, at your table, to talk about your similarities/differences
3. Next, identify two things that are a challenge to becoming a “housing first” community.

---

***What if our guests aren't ready  
for housing? Aren't we setting  
them up for failure?***

**What if we decided that housing gives people a strong foundation for success and they have more potential to do well being housed than while being homeless.**

Success



# 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
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# **KEY COMPONENT: SAFE AND APPROPRIATE DIVERSION**

In Emergency Shelter



# 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





# Safe and Appropriate Diversion Practice Shift

- 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

# The Five C's of Diversion Practice Shift



- Commitment
- **Conversation**
- Creativity
- Connections
- Continuous

**Diversion happens at  
the front door!**



# Safe and Appropriate Diversion Operational Shift

- Shift in “Intake Process”
- Space
  - Privacy
  - Conducive to a conversation
- Job Descriptions
  - Incorporate diversion culture
  - Mediation skills
  - Right Fit

# 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



# KEY COMPONENT: IMMEDIATE AND LOW BARRIER ACCESS

In Emergency Shelter



# Immediate and Easy Access: Getting Into Shelter

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- Getting Into Shelter
- Shift in Practice
- Shift in Operations
- Examples





# Why do you think some people experiencing homelessness avoid shelter?

---



# Why Do People Avoid Shelters?

<b>They are too crowded</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>Bugs</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>There are too many rules</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>They are full</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>I can't stay with my partner/family</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Germs</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>They don't accept my pet</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>There is nowhere to store my stuff</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>They are too far away</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>I can't stay with my friends</b>	<b>13%</b>

# Immediate 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



# Prioritize, Prioritize



“The classic sense of a ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor just got flipped on its head”

-Iain DeJong

- The MOST acute, highest needs people are your priority; **such as unsheltered individuals and families who are at greatest risk for severe health and safety consequences if not sheltered.**
- NOT the most compliant, motivated, and “housing ready” people.
- Fill your shelter with those that need it the most, not those that got their first.
- **Do not require** service participation to stay in shelter

# Immediate Access Does Mean:

---

- **Screening people in, not out**
- Shelter is open 24/7
- 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
- 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

# Immediate and Low-Barrier Access

---

- Serving households of any configuration including couples without children, persons identifying as LGBT, two-parent households, mothers with teen boys
- Serving people using substances and/or with mental illness, regardless of treatment compliance
- Configuring space to serve different configurations of households and accommodate special needs

# Are You Screening People In Or Screening People Out?

---

Low Barrier Does NOT Mean Requiring:

- Income at entry
- “Employability”
- Exhibiting a “desire” to change
- Having a “good” attitude
- Being cooperative
- Seeming “motivated”

# Table Discussion

**How can we ensure safety of residents if we allow persons under the influence to enter our shelter?**





# Table Discussion

---

**If we let people who are currently using drugs and/or alcohol, doesn't that jeopardize the sobriety of people who are trying to stay clean and sober?**



# Immediate and Low-Barrier Access

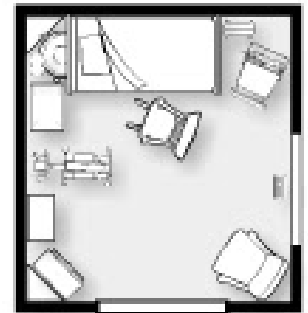
## Operational Shift

Since emergency shelters should serve people in an immediate housing crisis as quickly as possible...

- Shelter should be 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 Low-Barrier 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 Low-Barrier Access

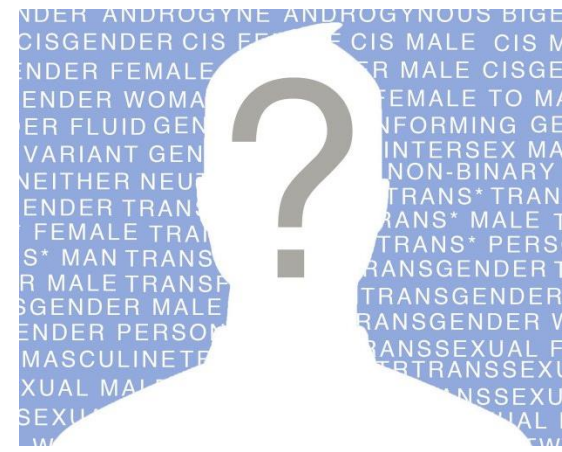
## Operational Shift

- Train staff in conflict resolution, crisis de-escalation, trauma-informed care
- Use motivational interviewing and strength based approaches
- Change staff role from being “program monitors” 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 case plan doesn’t seem to be working so the case manager should work with the client to revise it so it is more achievable”

# Equal Access Rule

Answers these questions:

- What criteria can I use to determine who is eligible for shelter or housing programs?
- What are the requirements around same sex couples, unmarried couples, families with teenage boys, or transgender clients?
- Can I ask people for an ID to verify their gender?
- How do I handle complaints or discriminatory comments from shelter residents?



# Equal Access Rule

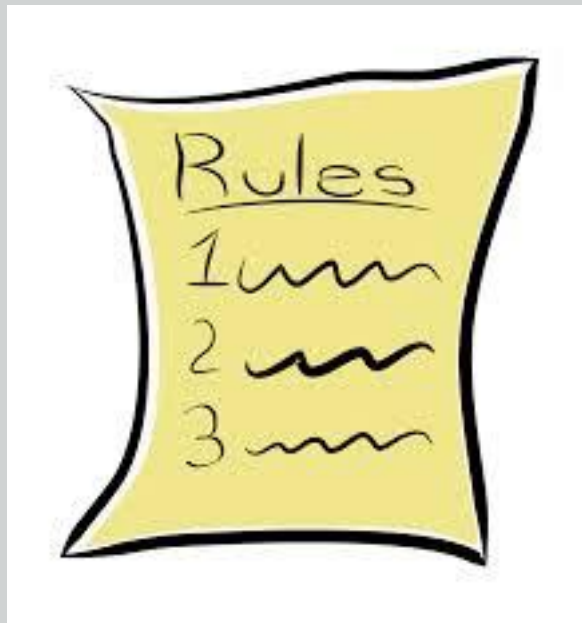
What it requires:

- ✓ 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



# WHAT ABOUT RULES?

The “Right Rules” in Emergency Shelter




# RULES

---

## ASK

- 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

# The Role of Rules

---



Promote safety

Don't try to change or control  
people or their behaviors

# 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 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

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

Restrict “barring” or service restriction rules to:

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

# Reviewing the Rules



# Re-tooling the Rules

---

## The “Marvin” Rule



# Simple, Safe, Behavior-Based Rules

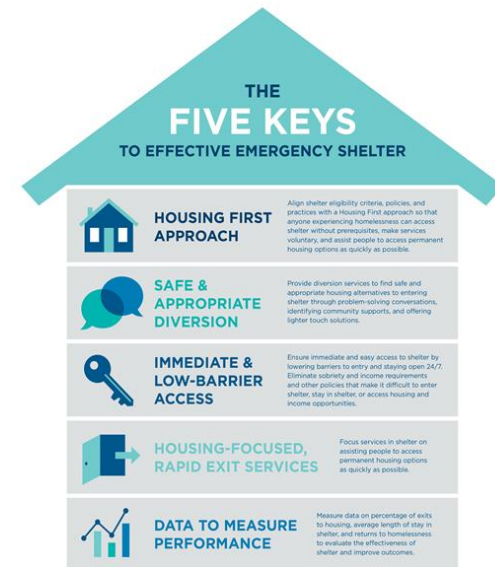
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- Treat everyone with dignity and respect.
- Use the shelter space in a respectful manner.
- Be a good neighbor.
- No weapons are allowed in the shelter, and nothing may be used as a weapon inside the shelter.
- Substance use is not allowed on the premises.



# 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





**TAKE  
A  
BREAK**

# **KEY COMPONENT: HOUSING FOCUSED, RAPID EXITS TO PERMANENT HOUSING**

In Emergency Shelter



# Key Elements of Emergency Shelters in an Effective Crisis Response System

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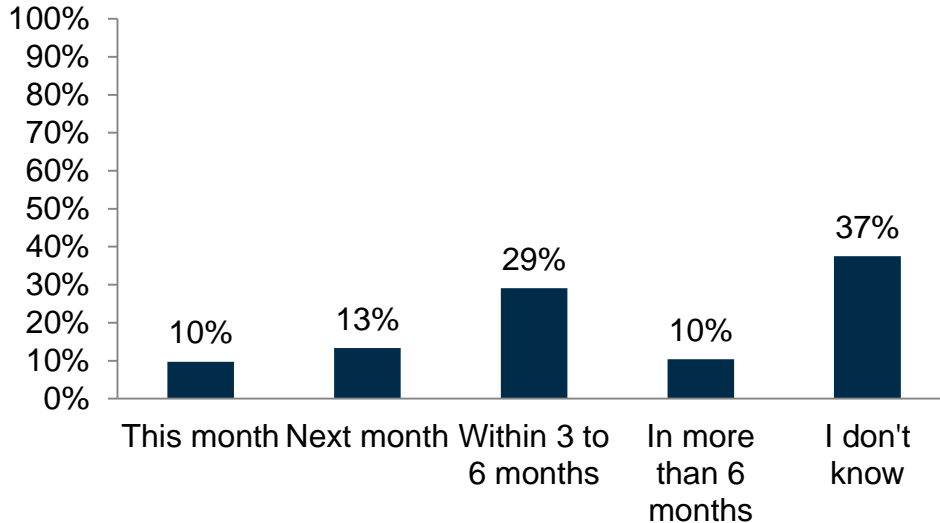


**I tell my staff, ‘if you’re not talking about housing, you’re having the wrong conversation.’**

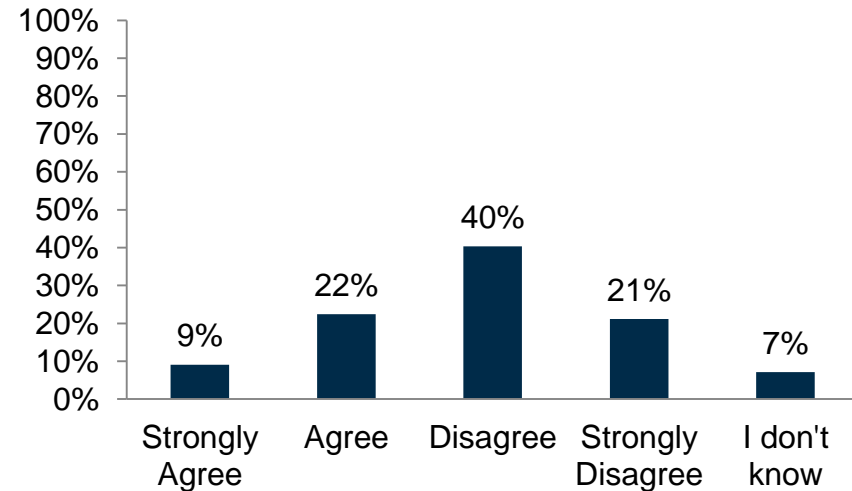
Deronda Metz, Salvation Army, Charlotte,  
NC

# Community Consumer Surveys

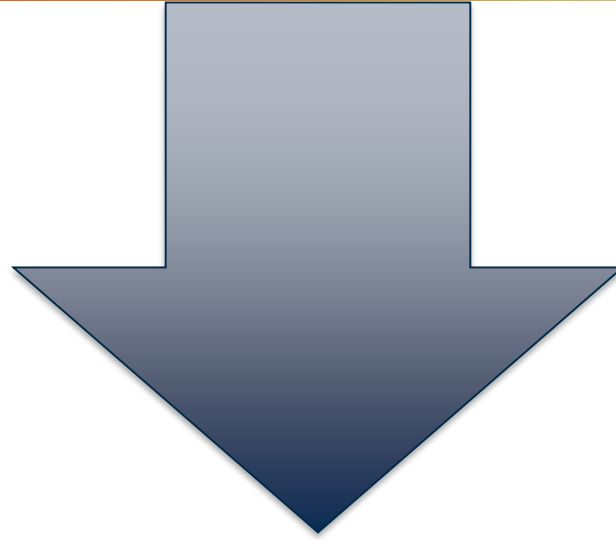
**If you are NOT currently in permanent housing, when do you expect to be?**



**Within one week of becoming homeless, I was assisted in developing a plan for returning to permanent housing within 30 days.**



# How Can I Help You?



## How Can I Help You Get Housed?

- Iain De Jong, "How To Be An Awesome Shelter"

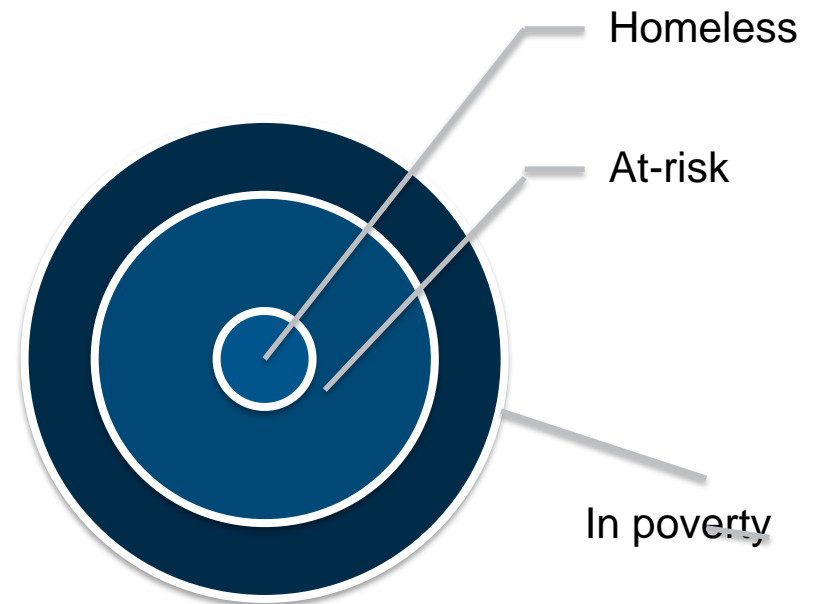
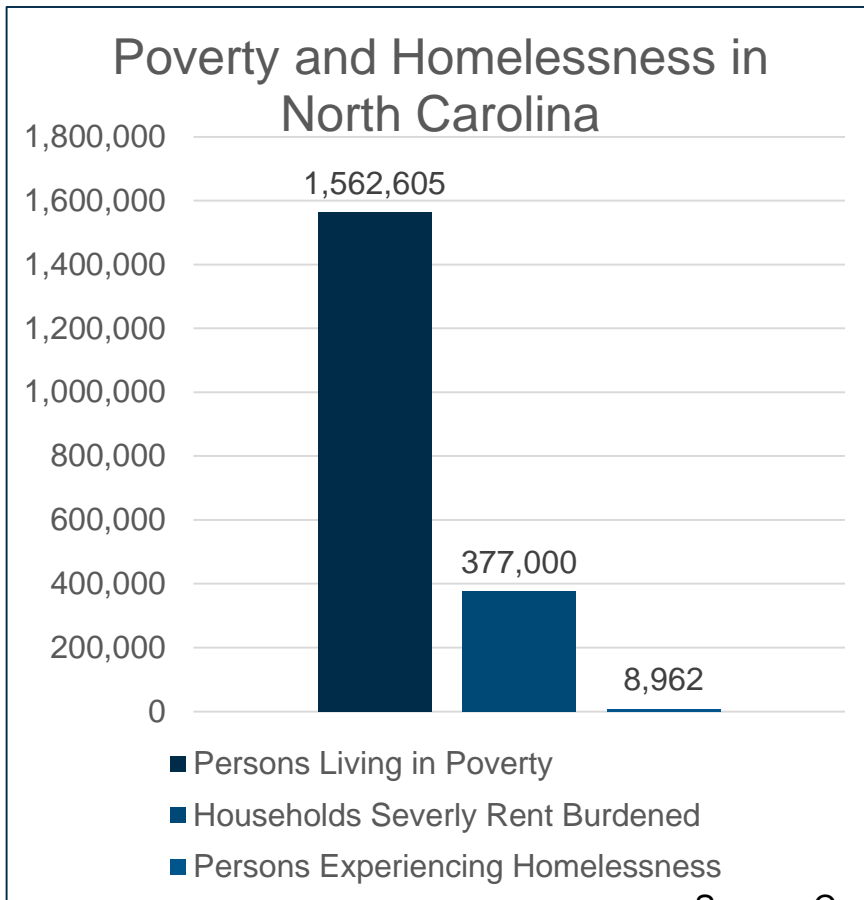
# Housing-Focused, Rapid Exit Services Practice Shift

Focus on permanent housing starts at the front door

- Shifting from “What can I do to help you?” to “How can I support you to obtain housing 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



# Homelessness and Poverty



Source: Census and HUD PIT Count

# 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



# Housing-Focused, Rapid Exit Services

## Practice Shift

---

- Shelters are not primarily meant to be employment programs, substance use recovery programs, or mental health services – can these services happen simultaneously or later?
- Shelters are primarily there to resolve a housing crisis
- Mandatory program participation does not result in better housing outcomes

# Housing-Focused, Rapid Exit Services

## 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

# Housing-Focused, Rapid Exit Services Operational Shift

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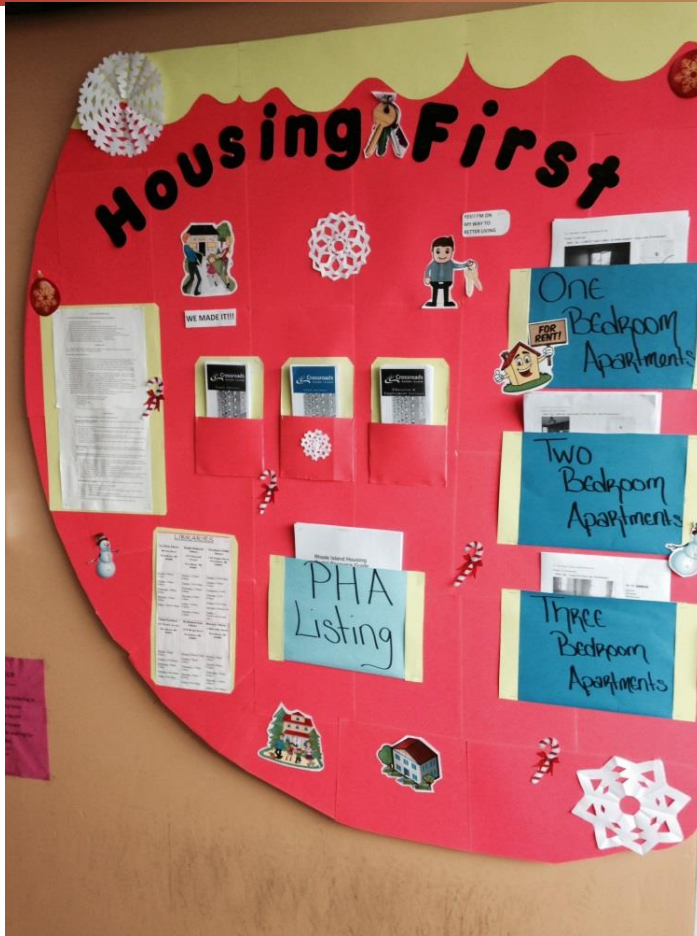
All written materials reflect housing-focused practice:

- Mission statement: is it about permanent housing?
- Job Descriptions
- Policy and procedures
- Client handbook
- Voluntary service participation
- Clear messaging to community and clients

# COMMUNITY EXAMPLE: The Salvation Army of Greater Charlotte Center of Hope

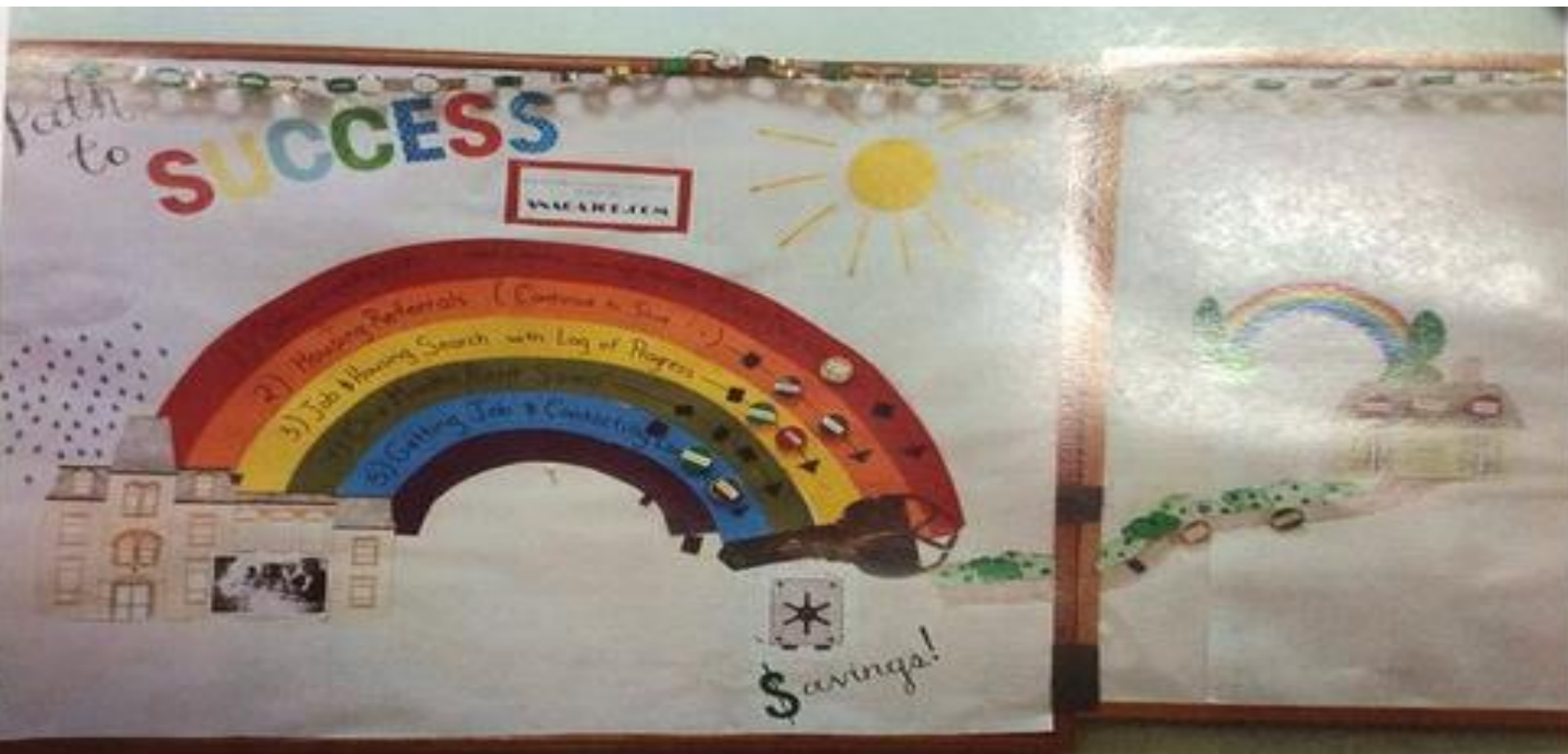
- Shelter staff used to hold a meeting every Thursday to discuss shelter rules and expectations. Clients and staff would leave this meeting “exhausted.”
- The shelter director now meets with residents weekly to discuss:
  - The national goal of ending homelessness
  - What rapid re-housing is
  - How 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

# COMMUNITY EXAMPLE: Crossroads RI Housing-Focused Messaging





# COMMUNITY EXAMPLE: Holy Family Shelter, CT Housing-Focused Messaging

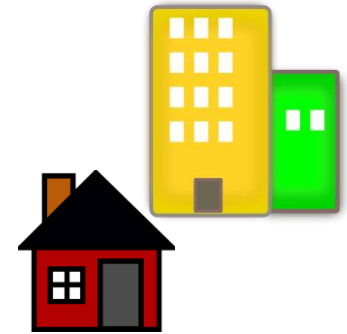




# ACTIVITY

## Rapid Exits To Housing

MOVE



### BRAINSTORM

- Develop a list of ways that you can decrease lengths of stay (from shelter entry) to exits permanent housing?



# ACTIVITY:?

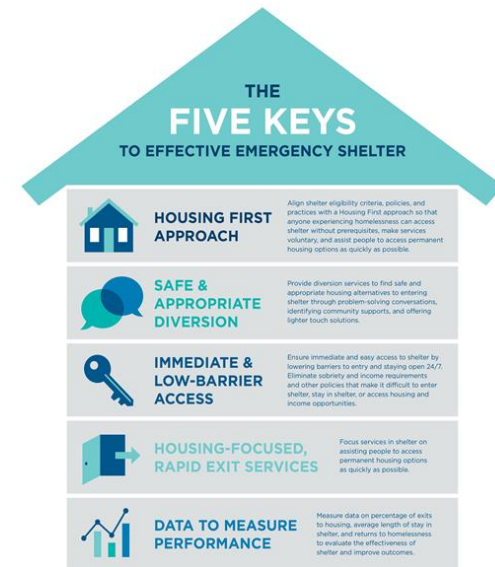
At your Table

Create a housing focused message, theme, or practice for your shelter(s)

How can you get your residents energized and focused on quickly moving to permanent housing?

# 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**



# Using Data to Improve Shelter



# ACTIVITY:?

At your Table – 5 Minutes

Discuss:

What do you currently measure and report on for your emergency shelter?

What additional things could/should you measure?

# Using Data to Improve Performance Outcomes

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↓ DECREASE Length of stay

↑ INCREASE Exits to permanent housing

↓ DECREASE Returns to shelter

↑ INCREASE Shelter utilization

# NEXT STEPS TO RETOOLING YOUR SHELTER

Making Shift Happen



# Next Steps to Re-Tooling Shelter

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- Identify a vision and core value that will drive the re-tooling and adoption of the new model
- Develop an organizational structure for the new model that includes a program flow chart
- Develop a plan to shift the organizational culture to adopt the new core values and vision
- Identify what in the current culture will need to shift to adopt the philosophy of the new model



# Next Steps to Re-Tooling Shelter

- Create an outcomes measurement plan
  - Get baseline data
  - Include outcomes and benchmarks to be achieved
- Develop a proposed budget
  - Identify the current funding sources that may need to be modified and points of contact for those sources
- Identify community partnerships and outside resources that will be needed to support households
- Develop a clear communication plan
  - Plan for internal communication to board and staff and external communication to the community and funders

# Make it Happen!

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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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Emergency Shelter Learning Series

THANK YOU!