Harm Reduction Strategies: Focus on Housing Stability

Sponsored by the Coalition for the Homeless and the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)

HOUSTON, TEXAS
SEPTEMBER 2014
Agenda

• Introductions
• Background and context
• Definitions and examples of Harm Reduction
• Harm Reduction and Housing First
• Reactance Theory and Stages of Change
• Housing ACCESS
• Housing STABILITY
• Supports for Practice
• Closing and evaluation
Housing Innovations

- Began in 2009
- Principals: Suzanne Wagner, Andrea White, Howard Burchman
- Senior Associate: Lauren Pareti
- Experience: Columbia University Comm. Services/CUCS, Burchman Terrio (decades)
- Expertise:
  - Developing, Operating & Evaluating Housing and Service Programs for Vulnerable Populations
  - Implementing Evidence Based Practices (EBP’s)
  - Staff Training
  - CoC Support and System Transformation - Housing Needs Assessments and Planning
  - Operating Coordinated Assessment Systems
Context

- Homelessness is a crisis for the person/household
- Resolving the housing crisis as quickly as possible is the priority of the homeless system
- Research shows that most housing crises are resolved with:
  - Rapid access to housing with financial assistance (maybe short or long-term) AND
  - Supports post-housing to focus on meeting lease requirements and achieving personal goals (maybe short or long term)
  - “Housing Readiness” pre-housing not supported by the evidence
- House people in spite of untreated substance use, mental illness and/or medical conditions – hard to stabilize while homeless
- Focus on behaviors and ability to follow lease and rules we all live by
Overarching Goal

Housing Stability

Measured by:
• No evictions
• Meeting lease/tenancy obligations
• No returns to homelessness

Benefits:
• Reduction in crises & use of costly services
• Improved health stability
• Rejoining community
21st Century Homeless Systems

- “Front End”/Crisis Response Programs to connect people to Permanent Housing (PH) options and Income as quickly as possible
  - Outreach
  - Diversion
  - Shelter, Interim/Temporary Housing, and or Stabilization Beds
  - Targeted Transitional Housing

- “Back End” Programs that offer PH exit options for those who need them using Coordinated Assessment
  - Rapid Rehousing – time-limited financial assistance and case management
  - Permanent Supportive Housing that employs Housing First Practice Principles – subsidized unit with support services available as long as person wants/needs
Homeless Programs Shift

CURRENT AND PAST

“Collection” of Programs

21ST CENTURY

System
Housing First

- Goal – Rapid Access to Housing
- Focus on Navigation and Stabilization
Changing Expectations

Full rights and responsibilities of tenancy
- Using structure of the lease to set expectations

Moving from crisis to planning
- May be from immediate to 15 minutes from now

Critical Thinking
- Using strategies and resources that work best for each person
Changing Expectations (Cont.)

**Structure and purpose**

Developing a structure and purpose to days that are different from when homeless

**Developing new or changed roles**

From homeless person to tenant, parent, worker, advocate
Housing First Definitions

Quick access system to housing with services provided post-housing

Program models - Permanent Supportive Housing, Rapid Rehousing

Housing not contingent on compliance w/services or pre-conditions

Services optional for tenants, but not staff – assertive engagement

Lease based

• Services provided post housing to promote housing stability and well-being
• Expectation that person/family is assisted to meet lease obligations and recover valued life roles
• Lease violations or risks to housing stability are triggers for Harm Reduction interventions
• Front End programs have critical role in housing prep and access
Core Elements of HF System

Admission/tenant screening and selection practices
- Regardless of substance use or medication compliance
- Services not mandated/treatment completion not required

Not rejected due to:
- Poor credit, financial, rental history, minor criminal convictions
- Lack of “housing readiness.”

Direct admission from
- Shelters, street outreach, drop-in centers
- Vulnerable people experiencing homelessness.

Supportive services emphasize engagement and problem-solving
- Services plans are tenant-driven without predetermined goals
- Participation in services/program compliance is not a condition of permanent housing tenancy.
- Use of alcohol or drugs alone (without other lease violations) is not a reason for eviction or not getting access to housing
## Tenant Lease Obligations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obligation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allow all neighbors to have quiet/peaceful enjoyment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Follow house rules and not engage in criminal activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain unit to meet health and safety standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dispose of garbage and waste appropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make rent payment on time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep utilities current and paid</td>
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</table>
Tenant Rights

- Right to live in decent, safe, and sanitary housing free from environmental hazards
- Right to have repairs in a timely manner
- Right to reasonable notice in writing of any non-emergency inspection or entry into unit. Tenants have a right to privacy and landlord may only enter the unit for a reasonable business purpose
- Reasonable accommodation for a disability (applies to all publicly subsidized and most landlords)
# Impact on Lease Compliance

## SUBSTANCE USE
- Rent arrears
- Disruptive guests
- Noise complaints
- Maintaining units to standard
- Traffic in and out
- Criminal Activity including holding drugs, dealing or allowing it

## MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES
- Rent arrears
- Switching night and day
- Noise complaints
- Keeping units safe and clutter free (maintaining units to standard)
- Withdrawal and not letting people in apartment
Key Roles –
Landlord and Service Provider

Landlord has a key role in helping people understand their obligations and comply with them. (Assertive approach)

Establish the **expectations** for the tenant

Social services staff provide and arrange for services needed to maintain housing and also function as advocates for the tenant.

Assist the tenant to meet the **expectations of tenancy**
Harm Reduction is a perspective and a set of practical strategies to reduce the negative consequences of drug use, incorporating a spectrum of strategies from safer use to abstinence.

Now applied to other behaviors besides drug use.
Harm Reduction Principles

- Participant identifies goals and path to achieve them
- Worker raises awareness of risk and strategies to reduce harm
- Abstinence or change may be a goal, but alternatives to reduce risk equally valued
- Does not condone risks that can cause serious harm
- Recovery as non-linear process
- Highly accessible: low barriers, informal atmosphere, extended hours
Harm Reduction based on open communication

This is the beginning of the conversation – everything can be discussed in terms of benefits and consequences.

Harm reduction is not applied in imminent risk to person or others – worker needs to be assertive.
Examples of Harm Reduction

Harm Reduction can be applied to many behaviors that have negative consequences

- Based on public health goals of preventing disease and promoting health

Examples

- Scheduling benefits or other appointments first thing in the AM
- Sleep medication if someone is responding to voices all night and will not consider anti-psychotics
- Changing shifts if unable to wake up early
- Going to an AA/NA meeting when still using or relapsed
- Direct vendor checks or rep payee to ensure rent is paid
- Budgeting for use, shopping sprees, other “needs”
- Partying/having fun otherwise, elsewhere
Enabling?

Beginning Stages of Change

- Harm reduction ENABLES person to look at behavior
- Harm Reduction ENABLES an evaluation of priorities
- Empowers people – ENABLED to exercise choice and control

Treatment is always an option and housing ENABLES people to consider it

Enable people to follow the same rules as everyone else
Reactance Theory

People work to maximize choice when freedoms are threatened

Rather than: “You can’t have that….”, “Let look at how you might get that….”
# Stages of Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Relationship to Problem Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Contemplation</td>
<td>No awareness of problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>Aware of problem and considering change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Making plans for how/when to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Changing behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>Change sustained for 3-6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relapse</td>
<td>Return to problem behavior</td>
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</table>
Supporting Choice

- Comfort zone
- Non-negotiable zone
- Conflicted zone
What does the individual bring to shared decision making?

Expertise related to their:

Preferences
Goals

Values
What does the worker bring to Harm Reduction?

Information related to:

• Options

• Risks/Costs

• Benefits
### Case management roles

- Structure regular planning meetings
- Support/assist individuals to negotiate their needs
- Fully embrace strengths-based approach
- Assist person to identify his/her personal solutions
- Participate in evaluation of the outcomes
## Harm Reduction Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Factors in favor</th>
<th>Factors against</th>
<th>Non-negotiable factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Eviction: tenant has ‘guests’ in apartment partying, disturbing neighbors** | • Tenant could explore shared housing or roommates if loneliness is an issue  
• Find another location to socialize  
• Find a time to socialize that is less disruptive to neighbors | • Could solve problem with landlord  
• Would reduce loneliness  
• Could have reduced impact on neighbors | • Person has strong preference for living alone  
• Would cost something to be somewhere else  
• ‘Friends’ aren’t up and don’t want to socialize earlier | • Only persons named on lease can live in housing  
• Drinking, smoking etc. may not be permitted  
• Must always allow neighbors ‘peaceful enjoyment’ |
# Harm Reduction Plan

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</table>
| Eviction: landlord smells marijuana coming from apartment; children in building | Stop smoking pot | • Solve problem with landlord  
• Save money  
• Expand possibilities for employment | • No commitment to giving up  
• Person has PTSD; marijuana helps | • Can’t disturb neighbors or smoke pot in building |
| | Find another way to consume marijuana or a substitute | • Addresses landlord concern  
• Allows for continued use for PTSD | • Cost, access  
• Legal and employability risk  
• May not work as well  
• May be addictive | • Tenants must pay rent  
• Relief |
Housing Perspective

Harm Reduction does not change expectations of a lease or in the community

The expectations include those relevant to everyone

The conditions of the lease must be made clear and consistently enforced
  - May not have been true in past housing

Access or lease issues will often be a reason to seek services

The worker focuses on behaviors that interfere with being a tenant

The tasks to both access and maintain housing may allow for brief periods of abstinence with can be built into the thinking of a HR plan

Connect access to services with goals of housing access/retention
Housing Perspective (cont.)

Criminal Risks are defined in the community and addressing those risks is often the subject of a harm reduction plan.

◦ Using on the street can get you arrested: what are the alternatives

Often life goals such as reuniting with family or significant others can be a motivator for changing behavior.

◦ The family may have difficulty dealing with behaviors associated with substance use, mental illness or other challenging behaviors and be reluctant to connect

Employment/money is often a motivator to change

◦ Barriers might include difficulty keeping to a schedule, pass a drug test, behavior associated with symptoms may interfere with work and/or interviewing
Housing Stabilization Services

Strategy to assist each person to access and maintain housing and establish a base in the community

❖ Priorities:
  ◦ Tenancy and Meeting Lease Obligations
  ◦ Income
  ◦ Services and Supports
  ◦ Achieving self-defined goals
Housing Focused Case Management

- Engagement around **Housing PLAN**
- Assessment around **Housing BARRIERS, STRENGTHS & PREFERENCES**
  - Housing History
  - Homelessness History
  - Preferences

- Case Planning and Goal Setting around **Housing STABILITY**
  - Offer and connect to needed services and supports
| Clarity and definition of worker and client role |
| Lens of housing stability                         |
| Behavioral focus                                 |
| Rights and responsibilities of Tenancy           |
| Services designed based on clients’ goals, needs and preferences |
| Move away from crisis                            |
| Regular staff supervision                        |
Housing Navigation System

- Landlord Pool – Housing Location Support
- Participant Education and Preferences
- Application and Certification Processes
- Coordinated Access Systems
- Case Management Support
Landlord and Property Manager Priorities

• Keeping unit filled
• Timely rent payment
• No trouble: follow community rules, don’t disturb neighbors
• Maintain Apartment
Strategies for Working with Landlords

Provide written program information and orientation materials

Explain role of CM as resource
  • Provide contact information
  • Means to resolve issue so that tenant can remain in housing

Engage in proactive outreach to landlords
  • Call each month after rent should have been paid

Identify resources for landlords, e.g., minor repairs to apartments
  • Sample letters for lease violations, rent bills, Landlord associations
Strategies for Working with Landlords

- Create a Network – Landlords know Landlords
- Recognize partners
- Explain need for assertive property management
- Ask landlord to copy CM on tenant notices
- Keep your promises
Housing Stabilization Process

1. Assess Needs & Preferences
2. Gather Documents
3. Housing Search
4. Applications
5. Subsidy Certification
6. Housing Selection
7. Inspection
8. Lease Signing
9. Move In
10. Maintain Housing
Access to Housing

Ensure everyone has information on the rights and responsibilities in each housing option.

- In order to make an informed choice people have to know what’s available

The path to each option is defined with the worker

- Including necessary documents, expectations of lease and time lines
- Risk is defined as both barriers to access and sustaining housing
- Several paths to overcoming the risks to tenancy are developed
Housing Location Process

- Education on Housing Options
- Educate on Tenant Rights and Responsibilities
- Assess Housing and Homeless History
- Negotiate Background Issues and Preferences
- Search and Matching with Choice
Focused Housing/Service Planning

- Limit the areas of intervention
- Focus on the most pressing needs that impact housing
- Relate all interventions to long term goals
- Be aware this may not be a linear process
- Be mindful about moving from crisis
Assess Housing and Homeless History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past housing experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current housing goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience as a leaseholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What they liked/didn’t like about previous housing and roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How person/family became homeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to access and sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to complete paperwork, view apartments, handle interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Needs and Preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to Significant Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to Services and Community Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit Size and Housing Density</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amenities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special accommodations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal v. acceptable, negotiable/non-negotiable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family Involvement

- Understand family background
- Learn about current involved family members
- Get permission to talk with them
- Is reunification or shared living a possibility?
- Would mediation help?
- Counseling?
Building Skills

- Educating on rights and responsibilities
- **Modeling** for people to negotiate for services and enlisting the service’s/support’s help
- Trying it out and debrief
- Establishing regular check ins to see if it is working
- Review cost and benefits – critical thinking
- **Recognizing** strong partners and good skills
- Renegotiate the relationship as necessary
- Focus on longer term planning (non crisis based)
Financial Needs/Requirements

Upfront cash needs

- Security deposit
- Rent
- Utility
- Moving costs
- Furnishings

Ongoing cash requirements

- Utility cost above ‘utility allowance’
- Tenant rent – minimum rent
- Other living expenses
Negotiating Preferences And Background Issues

Preferences
◦ Identify what is negotiable and what is not
◦ Let people dream a bit – what is their ideal, what do they have now, what would they accept
◦ See option available as step towards goal

Background Problems
◦ Identify what is different now from when issue occurred
◦ Plan for not happening again
◦ Line up supports
◦ Practice discussing with potential landlords
Transition Process

- Move into housing and get familiar with the unit and neighborhood
- Plan in place to maintain housing and role of worker/team defined
- Services and supports connected
- Meeting with landlord/managing agent and service provider handoff
Maintaining Housing: Structure Purpose and Role

- Being homeless is busy: the days are filled
- Applying for Housing is busy with specific tasks and roles
- As people transition to housing the roles and structure can be lost
- They may have no idea what to do with the case manager
- The lack of structure can lead to behaviors that prevent stabilization
Eviction Prevention

- Educating everyone on rights and responsibilities of tenancy
  - Tenants Rights in Texas:
- Regular communication with landlords to catch lease violations early
- Agreement with the tenant and landlord about working together
- Resources to address lease violations (back rent, clean up, APS, CPS)
- Knowledge of timelines for the eviction process
- Policies on involvement
- Crisis planning and prevention
Communication Structures with Housing Providers

- Clear guidelines about when to talk (monthly call or visit to landlord/property manager)
- Policies and Procedures for home visits, resolving problems and role, emergencies, on-call
- Address tenancy issues in team meetings and supervision
- Cross Training, In-Services and Trainings
- If resident services available: work together
Measures of Success

- Maintaining housing
- Increase income
- Network of supports
- Less emergency interventions: ER visits, hospitalization, incarceration, removal of children
- Structure and purpose in each person's life
Support for the Practice

- Buy-in at all levels of the organization from Executive Director to Line Staff
- Hiring, Supervision and Training
- Policies and Procedures
- Outcome Data
- Clinical Consultation
- Community Resources
- Program Design/Modification
Supervision:  
• At least: weekly individual supervision and team meetings with case conferencing (bi-monthly or monthly)

Case Conferencing:  
• Best practices, identify themes around barriers and resources needed, provide clinical consultation, ID systems issues and services needed

Team Meetings:  
• Informational, monitoring and support function, track where people are in the transition, identify common barriers, share information and resources among staff, identify people in distress or crisis, share successes and best practices

Training
Support: Clinical Consultation

• People are presenting with complicated clinical pictures
• Often issues and behaviors emerge over time
• Case conferences and clinical consultations are useful resources
• Need strong clinical expertise in the areas of: health, aging, mental health and substance use
• Consults and modeling are helpful for staff
Program Design Questions

Current Program
- Who are you serving
  - What is the percentage of high need/lower need individuals?
  - What does high need look like?
- What are the current requirements
  - What are the caseloads, What are the case management policies?
  - What are the outcomes, What is the flexibility in your contracts?
  - What program adaptations/modifications are required to implement HR and HF?
- What do you anticipate the challenges to be?
- What are your resources?
Program Design (cont.)

Is this program consistent with your organizational mission and goals?

What will the organization gain from implementing this program?
  ◦ Does this program address any issues for the organization?
  ◦ Considering the components of this program what are your resources?

What would you need in order to put these practices in place?
  ◦ What do you anticipate as the biggest challenges?
  ◦ What are your biggest resources?
  ◦ Where would you get additional resources and expertise?
Resources

- National Alliance to End Homelessness: www.endhomelessness.org
- US Interagency Council on Homelessness: www.usich.org
- Corporation for Supportive Housing: www.csh.org
- Community Shelter Board: www.csb.org
Additional Reading

Housing First Checklist Interagency Council on Homelessness:  
http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Housing_First_Checklist_FINAL.pdf

Harm Reduction Coalition.  Principles of Harm Reduction:  
http://www.harmreduction.org/about-us/principles-of-harm-reduction/


Additional Reading (cont.)

Housing First Manual:

Tsemberis, Sam J. Housing First: The Pathways Model to End Homelessness for People with Mental Illness and Addiction. Dartmouth PRC-Hazelden. 2010

Permanent Supportive Housing Toolkit:

http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Permanent-Supportive-Housing-Evidence-Based-Practices-EBP-KIT/SMA10-4510

Developing the Support in Supportive Housing:

Summary of Key Elements

Focus on Recovery (as defined by person)
- Goal Setting
- Connection to quality services and supports
- Empowerment

Long-Term Stability
- Use lease to structure the work
- Role and Expectations
- Move from symptom or crisis based service

Community Integration
- Considers purpose and activity
- Role and transition from “homeless” to “housed”
Effective housing stabilization requires informed staff and participants, competent practice, connections to resources and creativity.

Connect to what people want

Don’t assume what people know or don’t know

Be optimistic and have hope

Recognize and reflect on what has gone well. REPEAT
Discussion

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