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Organizational Change: Adopting a Housing First Approach

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ADOPTING A HOUSING FIRST APPROACH

In the past decade, a significant shift has begun to occur in efforts to address homelessness, with agencies and communities increasingly moving away from shelter and transitional housing strategies toward prevention and Housing First approaches, which seek to maintain households in housing whenever possible and rapidly re-house those for whom homelessness cannot be prevented. The Housing First approach encompasses a diverse range of programs; however, they are guided by a number of principles.

Housing First Principles

❖ Homelessness is first and foremost a housing problem and should be treated as such
❖ Housing is a right to which all are entitled
❖ People who are homeless or on the verge of homelessness should be returned to or stabilized in permanent housing as quickly as possible and connected to resources necessary to sustain that housing
❖ Issues that may have contributed to a household's homelessness can best be addressed once they are housed

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How these principles are embodied in programming varies organization to organization; however, Housing First-oriented programs typically share a number of service delivery components, which may be provided by a single agency or through collaboration with other agencies, programs, or resources.

Housing First Service Delivery Components

❖ *Emergency services* that address the immediate need for shelter or stabilization in current housing
❖ *Housing, Resource, and Support Services Assessment* which focuses on housing needs, preferences, and barriers; resource acquisition (e.g., entitlements); and identification of services needed to sustain housing
❖ *Housing placement assistance* including housing location and placement; financial assistance with housing costs (e.g., security deposit, first month's rent, move-in and utilities connection, short- or long-term housing subsidies); advocacy and assistance in addressing housing barriers (e.g., poor credit history or debt, prior eviction, criminal conviction)
❖ *Case management services* (frequently time-limited) specifically focused on maintaining permanent housing or the acquisition and sustainment of permanent housing

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A growing body of research is documenting the effectiveness of the Housing First approach, particularly when used in working with homeless persons who have serious behavioral health and other disabilities.[1,2,3] This research indicates that the approach is effective both at placing and retaining persons in permanent housing and at reducing the costs associated with these individuals within the healthcare and judicial systems.

An evaluation of the Shifting Gears Initiative, a recent 9-site project sponsored by the Schwab Foundation, demonstrated that transitioning to a Housing First approach for families decreased the time families spent homeless and increased the number of families providers were able to serve.

> *Among Shifting Gears Initiative agencies, the number of days families spent in shelter or transitional housing decreased by 25 percent and 9 percent, respectively. The number of days it took for families to be placed in permanent housing decreased by 29 percent. And, the number of families the agencies were able to serve increased by 31 percent annually.*

Recent federal initiatives such as the HUD Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing (HPRP) funding authorized under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the enactment of the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act have further stimulated interest in Housing First models. HPRP provides a one-time infusion of 1.5 billion in new formula-allocated funding to entitlement jurisdictions to "*provide financial assistance and services to either prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless or help those who are experiencing homelessness to be quickly re-housed and stabilized.*" The HEARTH Act amends the McKinney-Vento Act to increase the flexibility of HUD's homeless assistance funding and directs that a portion be used for prevention and re-housing. These federal initiatives afford a prime opportunity for agencies to transition to a Housing First approach and for communities to begin to reengineer their homeless and mainstream systems of care to focus on the promotion of housing stability.

Why Change?

Most social service organizations aspire to be the best they can be at what they do within the context of their resources. Thus, when an agency undertakes any type of change it is usually done out of a desire to make the organization better in some way (e.g., to increase efficiency, improve consumer outcomes, better align services and mission) – to move the organization from "good to great."[4] It is important to keep in mind throughout that change is a process not a single event. Agencies in which change is embraced as a part of the organizational culture are nimble – able to adapt in response to internal and external changes in their operational climate.

> *Housing Opportunities for Women (HOW) in Chicago converted its site-based transitional housing program to a Housing First program after determining that the temporary nature of the program was actually contributing to families' destabilization, in contrast to the organization's stated mission "to provide permanent solutions to the problems of homelessness and poverty for women and children".*

Agencies that embrace Housing First out of a desire to improve housing outcomes for the households they serve will be motivated by their personal convictions, and therefore will be more likely to succeed than those who are changing due to external mandates. In this spirit,

organizational leaders interested in change must help all individuals affected by the change process to understand and embrace the reasons and benefits of change.

Questions to Consider Before Adopting a Housing First Approach

Adoption of a Housing First approach can take any number of forms depending on your organization's goals and current services. It may entail sweeping transformation or incremental change. If your organization is considering adopting a Housing First approach, there are a number of questions and issues to examine prior to making your decision.

1. Where does your organization fit within the overall homelessness prevention and assistance service system in your community (i.e., your Continuum of Care)? Would adopting a Housing First approach alter this role? If so, in what way? Would the proposed Housing First services fill an identified gap or need, complement or enhance existing services, or be duplicative?

2. Is the Housing First transition you are considering consistent with a direction in which the Continuum of Care (CoC) and Ten Year Plan are going? Are there strong proponents of the approach within the larger service system?

   If the Housing First shift your agency is considering is consistent with your CoC's priorities or approach, fills an identified gap or enhances services, and/or there are Housing First advocates within the larger system of care, you will likely be able to garner strong community support for the transition, which can be helpful in building commitment internally and as you introduce the change to your broader network of stakeholders (e.g., funders, donors, other community partners, etc.).

3. Is your agency a logical or potentially good fit for the Housing First service delivery model? To what degree does a Housing First approach align with the agency's mission, goals, values, and practices? Does the agency already provide Housing First component services (e.g. housing search and placement, landlord recruitment, rental assistance, in-home case management) or can it easily adapt to provide them? If yours is a multi-service agency and a wholesale philosophical and service delivery shift is not an option, can the approach be comfortably integrated into your overall service continuum or will there be tensions with other agency services or programs that will be hard to reconcile?

4. Who else in your community is providing these services? Are there ways to build on or pool expertise and resources across agencies or programs? Are there efficiencies that can be created by developing a strategy for working together? For example, Chicago's Housing Locator program, a citywide homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing program partners with the Emergency Fund, an agency that provides financial assistance for low-income families, to provide security deposits and first month's rent to households served though the program, enabling Housing Locator agencies to focus solely on the housing assessment, location, and placement process.

5. What level of transition will be required and what resources can be used to support it?

PHASES AND STEPS TO ADOPTING A HOUSING FIRST APPROACH

Once you have made a decision to adopt or incorporate Housing First within your organization, it's helpful to develop a roadmap for how this will occur. Whether your organization or program is planning to add Housing First services, transition current services, or transform your agency's entire service delivery approach, there are organizational change issues and processes that will have to be addressed. For many homelessness prevention and assistance organizations, the Housing First philosophy and service delivery model represent a new way of doing business. Thus, an organizational change management framework can be very useful in the change process.

The steps and suggested considerations described below are grounded in a human services organizational change model, research on the effective adoption and implementation of evidence-based practices within human service organizations, and the experiences of agencies that have successfully adopted a Housing First approach.[5,6] While framing the process in terms of steps suggests a linear progression, in actuality these steps may often overlap.

Phase 1: Assessment and Planning for Transformation

As you embark upon the transition, there are two design processes that must occur somewhat simultaneously – design of the Housing First service delivery model to be implemented and the organizational change process through which it will occur. The first process addresses the question: *What will the new service delivery model look like?* The second: *How will we get there?* These steps address both.

Step 1: Establish an agency cross-functional team to spearhead the Housing First change process.

The first step in the change process is to determine *who* will help you get there. At the outset, your organization must identify a team of agency stakeholders who will be responsible for planning for and designing the change process. Implementation research suggests that to ensure necessary buy-in, expertise, and effectiveness, this team should:

➢ Represent all levels of staff (e.g., managerial to front-line) and areas or programs (e.g., intake, shelter, and case management functions) within the organization.

➢ Be comprised of employees who are highly motivated and open-minded.

➢ Have a clearly identified, skilled team leader in a position of authority.

➢ Have a clear and well-defined purpose.

In addition to a clear charge, it is critical that team members have a solid understanding of the Housing First approach, why it is being adopted and the outcomes the agency hopes to achieve as a result, and a commitment to the transition.

➢ Have the authority and accountability to accomplish its charge and clear upper management support, including allocated work time.

It is critical that team members are empowered to make decisions regarding the transformation process and that work time to plan and design the transition is carved out of their existing responsibilities rather than added on top of them. Too often, planning groups fail because sufficient time and authority is not allocated for team members to get the actual work of the group accomplished.

Initial tasks the team must undertake include:

1. Put in place internal and external communication systems to communicate need and vision for change and progress being made.

   To cultivate support for the transition and address concerns, it is essential that key stakeholders including funders, Board members, management and front-line staff, and collaborating agencies who are not directly involved in the planning process are kept informed of progress. This can be done through periodic staff and Board retreats or meetings, the formation of a stakeholder advisory group, dissemination of written progress reports, and/or updates provided at regular staff meetings and other forums.

2. Develop and implement strategies for the involvement of front-line staff and consumers.

   Some agencies include front-line staff and consumer representatives as members of the transformation team. Others elect to develop advisory or task groups comprised of direct service staff and consumers or former consumers to provide input at key points in this process. Whatever strategy an agency employs, it is essential for front-line staff and consumers to be engaged in the change process.

   > Involving front-line staff and consumers in the change process:
   >
   > ❖ promotes buy-in
   > ❖ limits resistance
   > ❖ ensures that the model and approach developed are informed by their perspectives and experiences
   > ❖ involves them in troubleshooting and addressing potential obstacles or problems

3. Undertake a benchmarking process whereby the team examines features of successful Housing First programs to set benchmarks - essentially milestones, goals or indicators of success - for its own implementation.

Benchmarking involves the identification and adaptation of best practices from other successful organizations with the goal of improving your agency's performance. It is a critical component of both the program model and organizational change design processes. For purposes of adopting a Housing First approach,

> *Benchmarking is, "the process of identifying, learning, and adapting outstanding practices and processes from any organization, anywhere in the world, to help an organization improve its performance. Benchmarking gathers the tacit knowledge – the know-how, judgments, and enablers – that explicit knowledge often misses." The American Productivity and Quality Center (www.apqc.org)*

benchmarking entails examining the design and implementation of high performing Housing First programs locally and/or in other communities (through research and literature review, site visits, and other direct contact) and documenting the program aspects or processes that contribute to their success (e.g., program structure, staffing model, policies and procedures, performance measures).

Benchmarking is a powerful strategy for advancing understanding of and building commitment to the Housing First approach. Having team members conduct site visits to successful Housing First agencies, attend training, and/or inviting Housing First agency representatives to present to the team can afford team members the opportunity to learn first-hand about how effective Housing First programs operate. The team should also collect quantitative information about program performance to provide a basis for setting goals later in the design process. And in instances where the Housing First organization went through a significant transition to adopt the new approach, the team can explore lessons learned through the transition process and suggested milestones or benchmarks to gauge progress during the planning and implementation phases.

➤ Consider hiring a consultant with Housing First and organizational change expertise to assist the team in its work, if additional support is needed and resources permit.

> *A number of successful Housing First organizations, including Beyond Shelter in Los Angeles and HOW in Chicago offer consultation and technical assistance services locally and/or nationally. Other Housing First providers in your community may be able to recommend a local consultant, as well.*

Hiring short-term consultant services can add expertise to help the organization on the front-end until the team gains a full understanding of the Housing First model. Consultant support also can help ensure that the transition design process is well-managed, since other team members will inevitably have time constraints due to their normal job responsibilities.

Step 2:   Develop a shared vision for the Housing First transition and clarify the scope of change.

In essence, this step is about designing the Housing First program or approach (i.e. what it will look like). As part of this design process, the following questions should be explored, bearing in mind that the responses may vary for different constituencies (e.g. agency management, board members, staff in different functional areas, consumers, funders, other external stakeholders).

➢ What are the programmatic objectives and desired client outcomes?

Housing First programs typically aim to:
- reduce the length of time that households spend homeless or prevent homelessness for households at imminent risk;
- increase the number of households who obtain permanent housing or the rate at which households obtain permanent housing;
- increase the number of households who obtain needed supports to maintain their housing; and
- increase the number of families stabilized in permanent housing over time.

These are measurable indicators by which an agency can gauge the success of its Housing First approach. To establish specific and realistic outcome targets (e.g. XX% of households will be placed in permanent housing within 30 days of program intake), it is important to examine current agency outcome data on these indicators, and to benchmark your outcomes against those of other successful Housing First programs.

➢ Who will receive Housing First services?

Will all individuals/families the agency serves who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness receive these services or will a subset be targeted (e.g., individuals with disabilities, families with certain housing barriers)? If only a subset will be targeted, who and what is the basis for this determination?

➢ What will Housing First Services look like?

Housing First services typically include the following components:
- initial emergency services;
- housing and resource assessment and planning;
- housing placement assistance, including housing search and direct housing focused financial assistance (e.g., short-term subsidies, move-in costs, etc.); and
- case management to stabilize participants in housing and ensure community supports for maintaining housing are in place.

Yet there are numerous variations in how and by whom these services are delivered. For example, some Housing First programs provide housing subsidies directly; others assist participants in accessing subsidies. Some vest housing search, landlord recruitment, and housing placement services in their case management staff; others separate housing functions and vest them in housing focused staff such as Housing Resource Specialists. The desired model will also vary by the other programs and resources already available in the community and opportunities for collaborations.

➢ How will the Housing First services relate to the organization's current programs?

What is the scope of the change to be effected? Will Housing First services be added while maintaining existing services (e.g., transitional housing, shelter, etc.) or will current programs/services be converted? What is the rationale for the approach to be taken?

Ideally, the team's benchmarking process has well-positioned them to undertake this design process. A number of resources or tools also may be helpful in the process:

✓ *Housing First for Families: Research to Support the Development of a Housing First for Families Development Curriculum,* (http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1225) offers a fuller description of Housing First service components and discussion of commonalities and differences in their implementation across programs.

✓ *What Gets Measured, Gets Done: A Toolkit on Performance Measurement for Ending Homelessness* (http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/2039). This guidebook explains how to use a Logic Model to identify and align your objectives, resources, services, and target outcomes. While there are many different logic model templates available, a logic model can be as simple as the chart below.

Sample Housing First Program Logic Model					
Objectives	**Inputs**	**Activities**	**Outputs**	**Outcomes**	**Measurement Strategies**
[overall goal or measure of success]	[staff, funding and other resources]	[service components]	[way to measure your activities or level of effort]	[client-level outcome targets]	[methods for tracking data]
Reduce the length of time households spend homeless

Increase the rate at which households are placed in permanent housing | 2 Housing Specialists

2 Case Managers

Short-term rent subsidies

Landlord partners | Housing and Resource Assessment

Housing search and placement | the number of households to be served (e.g. 100 households served annually)

service units such as the number of assessments to be conducted, subsidies to be provided, case management sessions to be delivered | 80% of households will be placed in permanent housing within 30 days of intake. | HMIS data |

✓ Housing First Program Design Matrix – Developing a Program Matrix (or matrices) is a strategy for laying out the program is greater specificity, outlining the "who, what, when, and where" of the Housing First model, including the following program design elements:

1) Service Components (specific nature and scope of each service component, including frequency and duration of in-home case management services, financial assistance limits, etc.).
2) Target Population (e.g., eligibility for services, anticipated number of individuals/families to be served at any point in time and/or annually by each service component).
3) Staffing and Partner Agencies (who is responsible for providing each service component).

A sample Program Design Matrix can be found in Appendix A.

✓ Staffing Chart – Developing a staffing chart such as the one below is a straightforward way to outline new staffing needs and parameters and can be useful when considering the agency's current staff capacity and structure and how it will need to be modified (e.g., who on staff has the capacity to move into new positions).

Housing First Staffing Chart Template					
Job Title	**Description**	**Qualifications**	**Salary Range**	**No. FTEs**	**Supervisor**
HF Program Supervisor	Manages day-to-day operation of HF services; provides weekly individual supervision to Housing Specialists and Case Managers; facilitates weekly case coordination staff meetings; completes program monitoring and evaluation documentation; ensures all HF policies and procedures are correctly implemented; oversees professional development of HF staff; coordinates collaborative relationships and ensures optimal functioning among HF service partner agencies	MSW or equivalent required, LCSW preferred; 2+ years experience managing human service programs and supervising staff	$40,000 – $45,000	1	Director of Programs
Housing Specialist					
Case Manager					

✓ Housing First Participant Flowchart – Developing a Participant Flowchart is a good strategy for modeling a participant's movement through the proposed Housing First service components from the point of referral and intake and assessment through to housing stabilization. The flowchart should illustrate the specific service steps and key activities, the staff member(s) responsible for them, the time frame within which they will be completed, and so forth. This can be a particularly useful tool for helping staff to understand how the Housing First service delivery model will work on the ground and for outlining expectations with regard to the delivery of services. During the initial planning stages, the flowchart may present a general overview of participant movement. Greater detail should be added as specific policies and procedures are finalized. A sample preliminary flowchart can be found in Appendix B.

Step 3: **Undertake an agency self-assessment to determine readiness for change and potential accelerating (i.e., agency strengths) and decelerating (i.e., potential barriers or change inhibitors) factors.**

At a minimum, this assessment should examine the following:

➢ Alignment of Housing First approach with current agency mission, goals, values, and practices.

Are the agency mission statement and service goals broad enough to incorporate the shift, or will these require revision? Are there Housing First component services (e.g. housing search and placement, landlord recruitment, financial assistance such as shallow rent subsidies, in-home case management) that the agency is already providing?

➢ Organizational policies and managerial practices that may need to be changed to accommodate the transition (discussed in greater detail in Step 4).

➢ Level of commitment to adopting Housing First, or conversely any potential resistance to change, among stakeholders, including front-line staff, program managers, Board of Directors, clients.

The success or failure of an organizational change undertaking often rests on the degree to which staff behavior and attitudes change to align with the new model. Resistance is a common reaction to change and can be a positive force, if addressed constructively. (In fact, it has been suggested that the absence of resistance or conflict suggests that real change is not occurring.)

It is critical to assess and develop strategies for addressing potential resistance to ensure that it does not undermine or derail the transformation process. The strategies required will vary depending on the source or reasons for resistance. For some, it can be a defense against the inference that the old way of doing business (and their performance, by extension) was inadequate. Others may fear that they will lack the skills needed to adapt. Still others may philosophically disagree with the new direction and doubt its ability to succeed. Similarly, the team will want to cultivate everyone's commitment to change and support for the new model.

➢ The compatibility of current staff skill sets and those needed to implement new Housing First approach and service components.

Are current staff well-suited to the new service delivery approach? Will some or all require training and support to develop new skills sets? E.g., Do current staff have housing search, landlord cultivation, and housing placement experience and skills? If so, what type of training and support will be needed? Will new staff with different skill sets need to be hired? If so, for what additional skill sets will you have hire? According to Jim Collins, an expert on enduringly successful corporate and social service organizations, "getting the right people in the right seats on the bus" is an essential first step in transforming organizations from "good to great." Thus, careful attention to the capacity and readiness of staff and preparing them for the change is essential to the success of the endeavor.

One strategy that can be used to explore preparedness among staff and other key stakeholders is to develop a chart, such as the one below that assesses individuals or groups essential to the change process with regard to their readiness and capability to change.[7] This tool can also be used to evaluate progress during the change management phase.

Purpose of Tool: *To assess how prepared key stakeholders are to undertake the Housing First change process in terms of their capacity (i.e., knowledge, skills, and resources) and readiness (i.e., openness and commitment to the change), and identify strategies for increasing their preparation.*

***Sample* Stakeholder Capacity and Readiness Assessment**								
		Capacity			**Readiness**			**Support Required**
Stakeholder	**Role**	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**	
Mary White	Board President		✓			✓		
John Doe	Director of Programs	✓			✓			
Jane Smith	Clinical Coordinator		✓		✓			
Mike Brown	Case Manager			✓		✓		
Sue Jones	Case Manager		✓				✓	

➢ Funding opportunities and constraints.

It is critical to assess the agency's current sources of funding to determine the degree to which they can be used to support the new Housing First service delivery model. Are these sources flexible enough to permit their reprogramming? Will modifications to current funding need to be sought? Will additional sources of funding need to be identified and secured?

As noted previously, the current availability of HPRP funding and the upcoming changes to McKinney Vento funding afford real opportunities for agencies seeking to shift to a Housing First approach. In addition to resources to support the new Housing First model, the transition team should also consider whether there are resources available to support the transition process; for example, to hire a consultant or "change" project manager, or to purchase training for staff.

➢ Time constraints.

Are there internal or external drivers or time constraints that factor into or determine the pace at which the transition should occur, such as grant application cycles, seasonal service demands, Board of Director terms, or needs of collaborative partners?

➢ Baseline data regarding relevant current agency services and their outcomes.

As noted previously, an important component of the assessment process involves gathering baseline data on current program functioning and outcomes such as:
- Who is and is not being served?
- How long do participants remain in the program(s) on average?
- On average how many days pass between intake and permanent housing placement?
- How many participants exit program services with permanent housing in place?
- How many households are served annually?

While not all of this information may be readily available, it is important to gather as much as possible, as it is critical for establishing outcome goals and targets and evaluating the impact of the Housing First transition on the households the agency serves. It may also be helpful to gather similar information from the successful Housing First programs in the benchmarking process, to provide a point of comparison and basis for setting local goals.

Step 4: Develop a plan and time line for implementing the Housing First transition.

Once the assessment phase has been completed, a plan must be developed for implementing the Housing First transition. Simply put, this implementation plan outlines what needs to be changed, when the change will occur, and who will manage it. Depending on the scope of the transition and the organizational elements affected, this plan need not be very complex or over burdensome. At a minimum it should identify:

- the anticipated phases of the transition;
- specific tasks that will need to be completed;
- who will be responsible; and
- the time frame within which they will be completed.

If planned carefully, the implementation plan document can serve as a work plan or roadmap, and it can even be used to track progress on the implementation steps over time. For instance, the form could include space to document progress on tasks and to note issues that need to be communicated or escalated to upper-level management for resolution. Most transition plans will require tasks in the following areas. A sample plan is provided at the end of this step.

Staffing:

✓ Revision of organizational structure and lines of authority (will there be changes in the supervisory structure?).

✓ Development of job descriptions and position qualifications aligned with the new model (e.g., if existing case management staff will absorb housing assessment, search, and placement functions their job description will need to be modified, if a new Housing Specialist position is being created a job description will need to be drafted).

✓ Staff hiring, transition, or reassignment – If existing services are being converted, an important issue to consider concerns whether current staff will be transitioned into new positions or the agency will undertake a hiring/rehiring process in which current staff interview for new or revised positions. There are costs and benefits to either approach. However, when an organizational change represents a significant philosophical or paradigmatic shift, which is often the case when converting to a Housing First approach, requiring that current staff apply and interview for new or revised positions can function as a process through which staff commit themselves to the new approach. It also affords an early opportunity for getting the wrong people off the bus (i.e., staff who are clearly not a good fit with the new approach).

Policies and Procedures:

Adopting a Housing First approach often requires significant modification of program policies and procedures. Because front-line staff are most often responsible for the implementation of policies and procedures and consumers are the ones most impacted by them, the development or revision

> *A simple way to involve staff is to present initial policy and procedure drafts at regular staff meetings (or to host separate meetings) for review and feedback. In addition to garnering constructive feedback and suggestions from an "on-the-ground" perspective, this process often reveals issues which may generate the most resistance, as well as staff from whom resistance may be experienced.*

process should include strategies for their involvement.

At a minimum, adoption of a Housing First approach may require the following:

- ✓ Changes in referral processes and service eligibility.

- ✓ Revision of the intake, assessment, and service planning process and documents – as noted, a Housing First approach necessitates assessment and service planning explicitly focused on housing needs, preferences, and barriers; resource acquisition (e.g., entitlements); and identification of services needed to sustain housing.

- ✓ Revision of case management guidelines and documentation – a shift to a Housing First approach often necessitates changes in the focus and duration of case management services which must be reflected in case management policy and procedure materials.

> *For Raphael House in San Francisco, transitioning to a Housing First approach entailed shifting from a therapeutically-focused to a goal-specific case management model, which necessitated the development of new forms and goal achievement time frames.*
>
> *Seven out of nine homeless family providers in the Shifting Gears Initiative shifted from a zero tolerance substance use policy to a harm reduction approach in the process of adopting a Housing First model.*

- ✓ Changes in service discharge criteria – often organizations and programs that transition to a Housing First approach re-examine their policies related to program discharge and mandatory service participation. Many adopt a harm reduction approach to substance use focused on helping tenants avoid behavior that would result in lease violations and subsequent housing loss rather than sobriety.

Staff Orientation, Training, and Support:

The importance of staff training and support cannot be overstated; it is critical to not short-change this process.

- ✓ A plan must be developed for orienting all staff to the new Housing First service delivery model, ascertaining ongoing training needs, and establishing a regular schedule for providing training. The training itself may be provided through multiple avenues, including in-service training provided by capable agency staff or external technical assistance providers, attendance at relevant off-site workshops, or site visits to Housing First programs.

- ✓ In addition to providing targeted training (e.g., on housing location and placement for agencies that lack this expertise), it is important to include a plan for regular communication with staff about the implementation of the new approach. Staff meetings are good opportunities for promoting dialogue regarding the transition and for providing ongoing training and support. An implementation plan can also include timeframes for specialized focus groups, project briefings, or newsletters to engage staff in the process.

✓ Appropriate staff supervision is another critical dimension of staff support that needs to be consciously planned and implemented. For instance, it is not enough to train case managers on how to engage families using a community-based case management approach. Case managers will also need monthly, if not weekly, time with supervisors to both review difficult cases, to brainstorm the best methods of helping program participants to achieve their goals, and to address challenges they themselves may be experiencing in the transition process.

Community Collaboration:

More so than many service delivery models, Housing First is a coordinated service approach which requires that your organization is embedded within the larger homeless and mainstream service delivery systems and well-connected to a broad network of resources including public and private market and supportive housing providers; legal and financial assistance providers; education and employment training and placement; healthcare (including behavioral health); and child care, that can aid in the acquisition of housing and a households long-term stabilization.

✓ The transition team must identify the full spectrum of collaborative relationships or referral sources necessary to support households within the Housing First framework, working relationships currently in place, and new relationships that must be cultivated.

✓ To the extent that the Housing First transition requires that new collaborative relationships with other service providers and resources be established or that existing ones be expanded or revised, the plan should identify the steps to be taken and strategies for formalizing these collaborations (e.g., memorandum of understanding, linkage agreement, subcontract).

Funding Modifications and/or Acquisition:

✓ Based upon the funding analysis conducted as part of the assessment process, the transition management plan must outline the steps necessary for modifying current funding sources (renegotiating or amending contracts) and identifying and soliciting new funding, as warranted.

The sample Transition Plan template found in Appendix C offers a framework for outlining and monitoring the phases and tasks that may need to be completed.

Phase 2:   Managing Change

While the assessment and planning phase plays a key role in the success of the Housing First transition, research on effective organizational change highlights the importance of quick action to capitalize on the change imperative and early momentum.[8] This research suggests that ideally, the time lapse from the first discussion of the change idea to its initial operation be less than 12 months. The change management process itself will be structured and guided according to the transition management plan the agency transition team has developed. However, the process itself may or may not be managed by the transition team.

Step 1:   Determine who will manage the change process

Some agencies may choose to vest responsibility for spearheading both the Housing First transition planning and the transition management processes with the transition team. Others may disband the transition team once the transition management plan has been developed or shift its role to an advisory capacity, with the change process itself managed by the agency's Program Director and Program Management Team. While there are a number of factors to consider in making this decision, one argument for shifting responsibility to the Program Management team is to promote the institutionalization or internalization of the change by vesting accountability in the direct lines of authority.

Step 2:   Initiate the Housing First change process, monitor, and revise frequently

Communication and data are powerful tools critical to the success of the transition management process. Ensuring that there are regular and ongoing feedback loops with all key stakeholders permits timely assessment and recalibration of the change process, and affords mechanisms for communicating and celebrating incremental progress or successes, troubleshooting obstacles, and continuing to build commitment and ownership of the process.

Ongoing monitoring of the Housing First change process and its impact requires hard and soft data concerning both process and outcome indicators.

Process Indicators

Monitoring the transition process is about assessing whether it is going as planned, and if not, why not. This entails gathering and communicating data that can address the following questions:

> ➢ Are the transition tasks outlined in the transition management plan being accomplished and within the time frames specified?

> ➢ Are key stakeholders (service and management staff, funders, Board members) increasingly on-board and/or capable of implementing the new Housing First approach? If you developed a capacity and readiness assessment chart during the Assessment and Planning Phase, this can be used periodically to measure changes in stakeholder commitment and capabilities.

> ➢ Are transition efforts translating into behavior changes (e.g., are staff aligning their behavior with the Housing First service delivery model)?

To the extent that data suggests that the answer to any of these questions is "no" or that sufficient progress is not being made, the obstacles being encountered must be identified and strategies for addressing them developed.

Outcome Indicators

In addition to monitoring the progress and success of the change process, it is important to monitor its impact. Is adoption of a Housing First philosophy and service delivery model improving our targeted outcomes for the households the agency serves? As reflected in the

logic model template and discussed previously, identifying the data sources and measurement and tracking strategies for monitoring client level impacts is essential.

During the change management process and beyond client level data should be compiled regularly (on a quarterly or more frequent basis) and compared with previous baseline data to assess the degree to which the shift to a Housing First approach is:

> reducing the length of time that households spend homeless;

> increasing the number of households who obtain permanent housing or the rate at which households obtain permanent housing;

> increasing the number of households who obtain needed supports to maintain their housing; and

> increasing the number of families who are stabilized in permanent housing over time.

To the extent that outcome data reflects improved outcomes, the agency can celebrate "being on the right track" and additional enthusiasm and support will likely be injected into the effort. If outcome data does not reflect improved outcomes (and it may not, particularly early in the Housing First implementation process), these results must be unpackaged to identify and address factors that may be impeding the effectiveness of the model.

Recognize that outcome indicators will lag behind process indicators, since client outcomes will not be achieved until the program is implemented and clients are served within the new model. Outcome indicators can be measured for different cohorts of clients, such as those who enter the program within each quarter, so results can be regularly tabulated and compared.

The Human Element

The organizational change process is fraught with challenges in part because it is a human enterprise. Understanding and accepting this – rather than railing against this – is necessary to survive let alone succeed in the endeavor. As noted previously, resistance to change is often a key force in this process. This resistance may occur at any level of the organization and derive from numerous sources, including:

> A lack of information, understanding, or trust.

> Self-interest and the perception that they will lose something or somehow be short-changed as a result of transformation.

> Institutional inertia.

> Fears that they will be unable to adapt to the change, or lack the necessary skills.

> Differing assessments of the need for change and its costs and benefits.[9]

As described by providers who participated in the Shifting Gears Initiative, a common source of staff resistance in transitioning to a Housing First approach was a concern or belief that the approach simply would not work. Agencies who had previously invested in a housing readiness approach were particularly concerned that families would be "dumped" in housing which they would be unable to maintain, or that the agency would lose contact with the family and the family would fail to participate in other services and resources the agency had to offer. Another common fear among staff who lack housing placement experience was that they would be unsuccessful in locating housing.

Strategies for addressing resistance must be targeted to its underlying source. For example, common strategies for addressing resistance that is grounded in staff's lack of information, understanding or trust or fears regarding their capabilities to adapt include involving staff at all organizational levels in the planning and implementation of the Housing First transition, and providing education, training, and ongoing and open communication.

While it is important to do what you can to bring staff on board, keep in mind that sometimes it is necessary to change behavior before attitudes can shift. For instance, it wasn't until staff at Raphael House began implementing a Housing First approach and their fears about losing contact with families proved unsupported by their experience that their attitudes began to change as well.

It is also not uncommon to lose one or more staff as a result of the transition. This is not necessarily a bad thing. While agencies should make every effort to retain high performing staff, significant organizational change often results in a self-selection process, with staff who feel unwilling or unable to make the necessary changes opting to leave the agency. In the best of circumstances, this affords the agency the opportunity of hiring new staff who are open to and have perspectives and skill sets more aligned with the Housing First philosophy and model.

Conclusion

As outlined here, adoption of a Housing First approach requires careful preparation that addresses a broad array of program design and change process variables. Thoughtful and systematic planning, implementation, and evaluation will increase the likelihood of success. These processes must include a strong and committed coalition of stakeholders, a shared vision and service delivery design that is benchmarked against other successful programs, as well as special attention to human factors. Throughout the undertaking, it is important to bear in mind that at both individual and organizational levels, *change is a process not an event*, which occurs in incremental, discontinuous steps and generally results in significant disequilibrium. This disequilibrium, although often uncomfortable, is evidence that real change is taking place.

ENDNOTES

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APPENDIX A: Sample Housing First Program Design Matrix

Purpose of Tool: *The Program Matrix can be used to outline the key features of the component services of the service delivery model and to and by whom they will be provided*

Housing First Service Component	Service Description	Who Will Receive	Who Will Provide	Frequency, Duration, or Limit of Service	Anticipated No. to be Served Annually
Program referral	Potential participants are referred; referral documentation is reviewed for eligibility determination	Families who are homeless	Internal agency programs; CoC provider agencies; self-referral – referrals reviewed and eligibility determination made by Program Supervisor	One-time	150
Intake and Housing and Resource Assessment	Intake documentation and assessment of housing needs, preferences, and barriers; resource acquisition; and services needed to sustain housing	Families who meet HPRP assistance eligibility guidelines	Housing Specialist	One-time	100
Housing/ Resource Plan development	Action plan for locating and securing appropriate housing and housing supports	Families who meet HPRP assistance eligibility guidelines	Housing Specialist and participant complete plan	One-time with weekly progress review	100
Housing search and placement	Landlord cultivation; apartment search; landlord negotiation; unit rent reasonableness assessment; rental application, leasing, and move-in assistance	Families who meet HPRP assistance eligibility guidelines	Housing Specialist with participant		100
Financial assistance	Short- and medium-term rental and utility subsidies, security and utility deposits, moving cost assistance to be paid directly to housing, utility, or service provider	Families who have been successfully placed in housing	Housing Specialist	0-3 months (short-term); 4-18 months (medium term) with maximum 18-months assistance and $7,000 assistance cap per household; program will cover up to 50% of monthly rental and utility costs	100 total; 50 short-term; 50 medium term assistance
Follow up case management	Wraparound case management focused upon housing stability	Families who have been successfully placed in housing	Case Manager	Weekly to bi-weekly depending on need for a minimum of 6-months	

APPENDIX B: Sample Participant Service Delivery Flowchart

If potential participant is referred via internal staff or an external provider organization

⬇

Referrer completes referral documentation and transmits to program staff

⬇

Intake Coordinator reviews referral for completeness and eligibility and responds to referral source (within 24 hours)

If potential participant refers themselves

⬇

Intake Coordinator completes referral documentation via telephone or in-person with potential participant to ascertain eligibility (within 24 hours)

⬇

If eligible, Intake Coordinator schedules program intake meeting

⬇

Intake and Assessment

Housing Specialist conducts intake within 72 hours of referral – at intake a Housing and Resource Assessment and initial Housing Action Plan are completed, (meeting may occur at agency, referral source site, or other community location, as warranted).

⬇

Housing Search and Placement

Housing Specialist initiates housing search and works with participant to address any identified housing barriers (e.g., prior eviction, poor credit history) and apply for entitlements for which the household is eligible.

⬇

Participant and Housing Specialist view prospective units and conduct Rent Reasonableness Assessment for preferred unit

⬇

Participant and Housing Specialist meet with landlord/housing provider to complete rental application and review terms of lease

⬇

Participant signs lease and schedules move-in

⬇

Housing Specialist, Program Supervisor, and Participant meet to determine terms of financial assistance

⬇

Housing Specialist assists Participant with move-in logistics, as needed (process to be completed no later than 30 days from referral)

⬇

Housing-based Case Management

As household is preparing to move into unit Housing Specialist and Case Manager meet with participant to transition services and develop Housing Stability Plan

⬇

Case Manager conducts weekly, biweekly, or as needed in-home case management sessions to identify, link, and ensure the receipt of services and resources necessary to support housing stability (e.g., employment training and placement, childcare)

⬇

Participant household is stabilized in housing, as determined by significant progress on Housing Stability Plan goals

⬇

Housing-based Case Management

Participant transitions to monitoring status

⬇

Case Manager conducts monthly check-ins with household to monitor housing stability and address emerging issues that may threaten stability

APPENDIX C: Organizational Transition Plan Template

Purpose of Tool: *The left-hand panel of the tool can be used to plan and document the steps required to transition the organization, organized into general types of tasks (e.g., staffing, policies, staff training, collaborations, and funding.) The right-hand panel can be used by the team during the implementation phase of the transition to track progress on the steps, to flag tasks that need more attention (using Red, Yellow, and Green color coding, for example) , and to document specific issues that require Executive or Board level attention. The staffing panel of the table has been completed to illustrate how the tool can be used.*

Phase 1 Transition Plan					Phase 1 Transition Status			
Tasks	**Responsible Parties**	**Process**	**Target Start Date**	**Estimated Time to Complete**	**Status Update as of:**	**Risk Meter**	**Issues**	**Actual Completion Date**
Staffing								
e.g., Revise organizational structure and lines of authority	Director of Programs and Housing First Supervisor; approval by ED	Meet to discuss org chart and supervision responsibilities; draft and distribute to Mngt team for review; revise if needed; submit to Exec. Dir. for approval	7/1/09	3 weeks	Organizational structure complete; lines of authority drafted and circulated.	 	Prog Mngt split on supervision and lines of authority; need to resolve w ED prior to final revision	
e.g., Develop Housing Specialist job and qualifications description	Housing First Supervisor	Check HUD HRE for samples; call PHA for Housing Specialist posting; draft using agency template; circulate for feedback	7/1/09	3 weeks	Draft descriptions complete; circulated for feedback; ready to be posted	 		7/19/09
e.g., Revise Case Manager job description	Director of Programs	Review current job description; rewrite based on addition of Housing Specialist and changes to program goals; circulate for feedback	7/25/09	3 weeks	--			

Organizational Transition Plan Template (cont.)								
Phase 1 Transition Plan					Phase 1 Transition Status			
Tasks	Responsible Parties	Process	Target Start Date	Estimated Time to Complete	Status Update as of:	Risk Meter	Issues	Actual Completion Date
Policies and Procedures								
Staff Orientation, Training, and Support								
Community Collaboration								
Funding								