



Strategies for Increasing Retention and Preventing Negative Exits

M. Scott Young, PhD

Research Associate Professor
University of South Florida

Paul Smits, LCSW

Senior Policy Analyst
University of South Florida





Outline

- Retention overview
- Strategies for increasing retention
- Tips from seasoned Low Demand providers
 - Set the expectations
 - The program welcome
 - Maintain high level of engagement with residents
 - Attain and maintain resident investment in program
 - Help residents begin investment in their future
 - Leverage relationships
 - Link behaviors to an individualized Housing Plan
 - Minimize negative exits
- GPD definition of Negative Exits
- Summary of guiding principles for increasing retention and preventing negative exits



Retention Overview

- A Big challenge in Low Demand Programs
- Veterans in Early Recovery sometimes leave prematurely
- Often happens early in stay or after pay days
- The best time to start trying to optimize retention is on or before day 1



Strategies for Increasing Retention

- We recommend a multi-faceted approach
- One or two strategies alone are not likely to have much effect
- All staff need to understand the importance of retention and the many factors that affect it
- Many Low Demand Programs have been successful in increasing retention as they gain experience with the Low Demand Model and practice a comprehensive approach



VA NATIONAL CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS

Promoting data-driven, evidence-based solutions to end Veteran homelessness

Tips From Seasoned Low Demand Providers



Set the Expectations

- First, before formally admitting Veterans, use an orientation to introduce them to the program, its rules, and its policies
- Ensure that potential residents are aware of and understand the program rules, particularly those regarding discharge due to the number of days an unoccupied bed can remain open
- Remind residents that they should always come back and are welcome
 - Reassure them that they will not be discharged for using, drinking, or minor infractions
 - Remind them that they should not feel ashamed of slips
- Reminders should be almost daily
- Make sure staff model this core value of Low Demand Programs
- Ensure that residents who are “having problems” feel equally welcomed with those who are meeting their goals



The Program Welcome

- Set the tone with a welcoming environment
- Help them establish positive relationships with other residents and all the staff
- Consider using senior resident mentors for orientation and through the initial adjustment
- Ensure that every resident has a “go to person” when they need help or need to talk



The Program Welcome (Continued)

- Help the resident identify risks to their housing stability and jointly develop a plan to mitigate those risks
- At admission, get comprehensive contact information so that you can contact or locate residents if they leave prematurely (relatives, friends, their go-to places when they are homeless, etc.)
- Provide repeated reminders that residents should always return if they make premature decisions that involve leaving
- Staff should model non-judgmental behavior so that residents will not feel ashamed and will instead feel welcome



Keep Staff Engagement with Clients High

- When residents have problems, there may be a tendency of staff to avoid them
- When staff maintain high engagement through the highs and lows of resident recovery, retention increases
- All staff, including after hours staff, should be engaged with clients and familiar with principles of the Low Demand Model



Keep Resident Engagement with the Program and Their Peers High

- When residents are invested, they are less likely to leave
- Low Demand Programs have increased retention by involving residents in helping roles, including incentivizing chores
- Use peer mentors
- Find out each resident's skill sets
- Involve residents in activities based on their interests
- Give residents recognition and rewards for their helping roles
- Encourage resident participation and input in routine forums like community meetings
- Establish a culture of residents helping each other



Give Veterans a Voice

- Community Meetings
 - Have Veterans set up or assist with planning for some activities (movie nights, outings, etc.)
 - Encourage Veterans to give feedback and discuss community improvements that they would like
- Use a Shared Decision-Making Model
 - Discuss reasonable options Veterans can pursue regarding their recovery, and then support their choices



Help Veterans Begin Investment in Their Future

- Assist with all aspects of the permanent housing process
- Help residents acquire the things they need to move to permanent housing
- Routinely recognize and commend progress toward goal achievement, however large or small the progress may be



The Roles that Relationships Play in Retention

- Implement activities that help residents connect with one another, with staff, and with the program
- Peer Support programs
- Resident helping roles with their peers
- Helping the resident find “the right staff member or case manager” that they can connect with
 - Also helpful to identify fellow residents who are trusted and supportive



The Role of Housing Plans

- Develop individualized plans tailored to each resident's unique circumstances, including their strengths
- The plan should clearly outline what is needed for the resident to obtain permanent housing
- Develop the plan utilizing a shared decision-making model with both resident and staff involvement
- Break large goals down into multiple smaller and achievable steps so that progress can be easily assessed and monitored
- Routinely revisit the plan with residents to quickly recognize and address both progress and setbacks
 - Remember that it is ok, and even expected, to revise and update the plan



Minimize Negative Exits

Take steps to minimize discharges related to:

- Substance use
- Minor infractions
- Minor scuffles
- Contraband
- Curfew
- Non-participation and/or AWOL

Ensure that staff on all shifts are able to address these occurrences using a Low Demand approach.

Revisit program policies, procedures, and rules regarding these types of occurrences.



How Does GPD Define Negative Exits?

Negative Exits:

- Veteran was asked to leave because of violation of program rules (excluding exits due to threatened/actual violence to self or others)
- Failure to comply with program requirements
- Left the program without consulting staff

Exclusions:

- Veteran has a Length of Stay (LOS) of seven days or less.
- Veteran ineligible for VA health care.
- Veteran deceased prior discharge.
- Veteran placed into hospital, LT care facility or nursing home.
- Veteran discharged due to threatened violence to self or others.
- Veteran transferred to another residential program due to temporary or permanent suspension of program operations.



Summary of Guiding Principles for Increasing Retention and Preventing Negative Exits

- The Welcome
- Maintain Engagement
- Maintain Investment with the Program and Peers
- Maintain Momentum For Permanent Housing
- Reduce Negative Exits for the Small Stuff
- Whenever Possible, Take Residents Back When They Leave Prematurely



VA NATIONAL CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS

Promoting data-driven, evidence-based solutions to end Veteran homelessness

A Great Resource That You Should Review Is:

Preventing Negative Exits

VA Homeless Programs

June 2018



VA NATIONAL CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS

Promoting data-driven, evidence-based solutions to end Veteran homelessness

Questions/Discussion