Strategies for Increasing Retention and Preventing Negative Exits

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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
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
A Great Resource That You Should Review Is:

Preventing Negative Exits

VA Homeless Programs

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Questions/Discussion