

2023 VA Permanent Housing Conference

C5 Dallas Employing Housing First and Harm Reduction
Strategies to Support Successful Tenancy

Who is in the room?

- **SSVF Staff**
- **HUD-VASH Staff**
- **VA leadership**



Agenda and Learning Objectives

Agenda-

- Centering our role
- Harm Reduction
- Housing First
- The Role of a Case Manager
- Housing First and Harm Reduction Approaches
- A Note Before You Go!

Successful Tenancy: Using Housing First and Harm Reduction



*“**It is not our job** to pass judgement on who will and will not recover from mental illness and the spirit-breaking effects of poverty, oppression, stigma, dehumanization, degradation and learned helplessness.*

***It is our job** to form a community of hope which surrounds people.*

***It is our job** to create environments that are charged with opportunities for self-improvement.*

***It is our job** to nurture staff in their special vocations of hope.*

***It is our job** to ask people what it is they want and need in order to grow and then to provide them with good soil in which a new life can secure its roots and grow.*

***And then, finally, it is our job** to wait patiently, to sit with, to watch with wonder, and to witness with reverence the unfolding of another person’s life.”*

Pat Deegan – <http://commongroundprogram.com>



Examining the Helping Relationship

- Hubble, Duncan, Miller (1999) – Therapeutic Outcomes
 - 40% of outcomes are influenced by the client
 - 60% of outcomes are influenced by what helpers do AND don't do
 - 30% ability to be empathetic and warm
 - 15% offering hope
 - 15% providing explanations/solutions



Harm Reduction

Examples of Harm Reduction in Everyday Life



What is Harm Reduction

- A person-centered, social justice approach of intentional practices and policies designed to lessen the negative social, psychological, and physical consequences associated with certain behaviors, including substance use
- A pragmatic way to "meet people where they are"
- Aims to support people who use substances in making positive changes at their own pace and on their own terms

Harm Reduction Principles

- People use substances for all kinds of reasons and not all substance use is abuse.
- People can and do make rational decisions while using
 - Some ways of using drugs are clearly safer than others
- Emphasis is not on abstinence but instead on quality of life and reducing risk.
- Observed substance use is often an adaptive strategy for coping with trauma
- Requires non-judgmental and non-coercive services
- The individual knows themselves best.
 - Individuals have real involvement in developing programs and policies
- There are many social inequities that affect people's vulnerability to and capacity for dealing with substance-related harm.
- It does **NOT** mean providers ignore problematic usage or other risky behaviors.
- It does **NOT** result in providers landing on the "neglect" end of the dignity of risk continuum.

Harm Reduction and Housing

- We are trying to access housing or prevent housing loss.
 - We should NOT be trying to eliminate all substance use. This is not our current focus.
- What do we NOT have control over?
 - People's decision to use or not use
 - Landlords/Neighbors' response to tenants' behavior
- What CAN we control?
 - Our Assessments and rapport-building
 - Our interventions
 - Our biases/exhaustion/frustration

What barriers start to arise when substance use becomes a problem

- Noise Complaints
- Unauthorized guests
- “Heavy traffic” in and out of the unit
- Criminal activity
- Damage of property
- Unhygienic/unclean apartments
- Safety risks increase
- Engagement decreases
- What else?



What creative ways to address these behaviors?

Group Work – Interventions

Scenario 1: Casey doesn't like to party. She typically uses with her boyfriend and cousin. When using meth, they often stay up late listening to music and working on intricate projects (covering the bedroom walls with artistic photos from magazines). Casey has received two warnings about unauthorized tenants and a neighbor recently left a note on her door about the noise level?

- Using a harm reduction approach:
 - What questions would you ask Casey?
 - What intervention might you apply?
 - What suggestions might you offer to minimize the risk of violating her lease?

Harm Reduction Discussion

- Do you fully embrace it?
- What gets in the way of embodying a harm reductions approach?



Housing First

What is Housing First?

Definition

Housing First is an approach and framework that is centered on the belief that everyone can achieve stability in housing (directly out of homelessness) and that stable housing is the foundational platform for pursuing other health and recovery goals.*

A ***philosophy*** that homelessness can be most efficiently ended by providing someone with swift access to safe, decent and affordable housing

*U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. 2014

Housing First

- Housing and voluntary services are offered regardless of perceived or real barriers to housing, including lack of income, substance use disorders, criminal histories etc.
- Serve without pre-condition such as income, sobriety, criminal history etc.
- Evidence-based: Housing Solves Homelessness
- Not Housing Only: Includes program and community-based services to promote housing stability, including recovery and other behavioral health linkages based on Veteran's desires
- Recognizes the impact housing has on a person's life

Housing First



The Roles of a Case Manager within Housing First

The Role of a Case Manager within Housing First

Pause...and reflect on your biases!

- Biases are common among homeless resource professionals
- Contribute to disparities in housing placement
- Bias are habits
 - Social habits below the level of conscious awareness
 - Active despite attempts to not be biased

UNCONSCIOUS BIASES



The Role of a Case Manager within Housing First

- Trauma-Informed Care
 - Understanding, recognizing and responding to the effects of all types of trauma
 - Assists frontline staff in navigating participants' behaviors (disengagement, lack of trust, pre-occupations, etc.)
 - Ex. Homelessness is treated as a traumatic event
- Training Resource: Trauma Informed Care Webinars
 - <http://www.familyhomelessness.org/webinars.php?p=ss>

The Role of a Case Manager within Housing First

Help clients develop goals that preserve and maintain their tenancy

- ADL skill building
- Symptom management
- Safety and Crisis Planning
- Responsibilities of tenancy – paying rent and utilities on time
- Interpersonal skills – building landlord and neighbor r/ships

The Role of a Case Manager within Housing First

Landlord Retention Tips

- Be quick and responsive; have a back up contact if you're out sick or on vacation
- Be clear about your role while supporting the landlord
- Have a programmatic strategy to check in with landlords directly
- Keep data on your landlords- who is willing to hard people with high barriers?
- Recognize landlords- events, letters from your ED, certificates, luncheons
- Support landlords- landlord education, landlord/tenant relationships, etc.
- Share openings you can't fill- landlords want their vacancies filled, pronto!

Housing First and Harm Reduction Approaches

Housing First and Harm Reduction Approaches

Transitions from Homelessness to Housing

- Can be scary for Veterans
 - Especially those for long histories of homelessness and are accustomed to institutionalized and structured settings (e.g., military, prison, treatment, etc.)
 - May be first independent housing situation
 - Have realistic conversations to plan transition into housing

Housing First and Harm Reduction Approaches

- Low barrier, nonjudgmental and Trauma-Informed
- Equitable services for all
- Therapeutic alliance
- Meeting Veterans “where they are at”
- Many Veterans, particularly those with complex medical and behavioral health needs, distrust providers
 - Have had poor experiences with providers
 - Challenges navigating complex systems

Housing First and Harm Reduction Approaches

Veteran-Centric – not a one size fits all approach

- Understanding the lease
- Creating realistic budgets
 - Rent,
 - utilities,
 - food,
 - drugs/alcohol/cigarettes,
 - gambling
- Opening a bank account/check writing/addressing an envelop
- Visitors/guests
- ADLs/hoarding: VNA, homemaker, OT/PT
- Using appliances, cooking, etc.
- Navigating transportation
- Access/connection to needed services
 - (substance use/MAT, mental health, medical care, case management, etc.)
- Harm Reduction strategies/resources: naloxone, drug testing, SSPs, using alone, etc.

NEEDS WILL CHANGE OVER TIME

A Note Before You Go!

Discussion on Outlier Bias

Outlier Bias

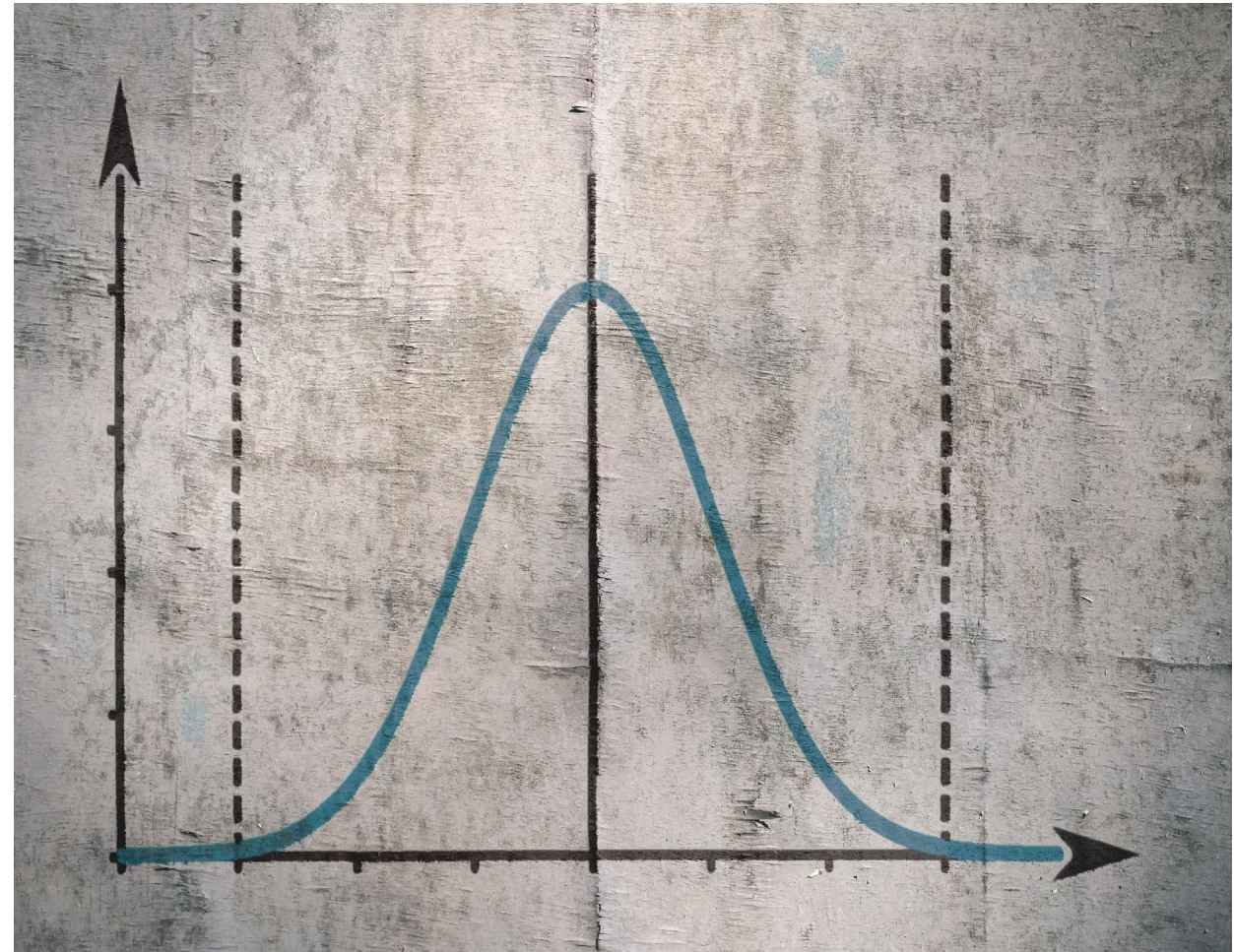
In a distribution of variables, outliers lie far from *the majority* of the other data points as the corresponding values are *extreme* or *abnormal*.

2021 SSVF Annual Report shows of Veterans served:

- 66% had one or more disabling conditions
- 74% earned less than 30% of AMI

And yet...

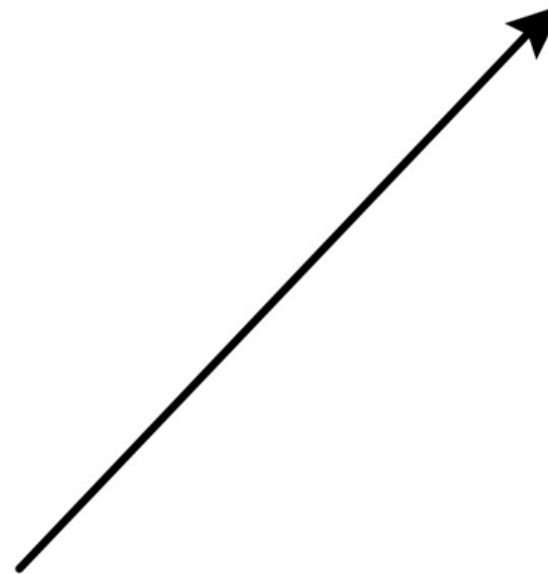
- 75% of Veterans served exited to Permanent Housing (PH) in FY 2021, 79% since SSVF began
- In FY 2021, 69% of Veterans with zero income at entry exited to PH and 76% of Veterans with <\$500/mo exited to PH



Final Thoughts

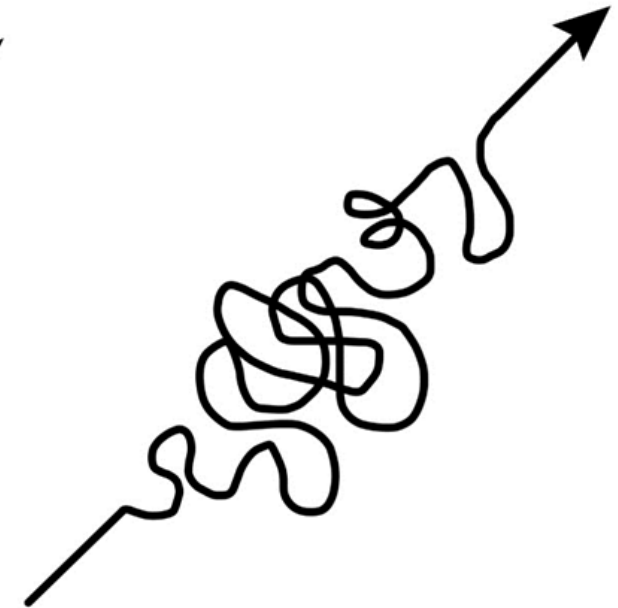
- Harm Reduction and Housing First can be challenging
- Veterans may still lose their housing, overdose, relapse etc.
- Reframe as learning opportunities, keep trying, rapid re-housing
- Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders often co-occurring with the experience of homelessness
- It's about the behavior – not necessarily the use
- Ask questions! Learning is ongoing

SUCCESS



what people think
it looks like

SUCCESS



what it really
looks like

Rock, Paper, Scissors

- Reinvent the classic game, please identify the most ***challenging*** part of the lesson (rock), the ***main idea*** (paper), and less important details they might ***discard*** (scissors). This activity helps students consolidate their learning and identify areas for further study.

Questions and Answers

