

## A4. Implementing Effective Housing First Systems

*2018 Rapid Rehousing Institute*

# *Agenda*

1. Housing First Overview
2. System Implementation of Housing First
  - Program Design
  - Program Alignment
  - Governance Considerations
  - Coordinated Entry
  - Training and Professional Development
  - Funding Incentives
3. Project Implementation of Housing First
  - Housing Barriers
  - Housing Service Design
4. Community Example
5. Discussion



# *We all Share the Same Goal: Housing*

- Ending each person's episode of homelessness as quickly as possible;
- Assisting the person to acquire permanent housing;
- Promoting housing stability to reduce the likelihood that the person will return to homelessness, at least in the near term



*And we share an approach to achieving that goal: Housing First*

**Housing First** - is an approach used to quickly and successfully connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment or service participation requirements.



# *Why Housing First?*

- Homelessness is solely defined by a lack of permanent housing – permanent housing is then the solution to homelessness
- Research supports the effectiveness of Housing First approaches
- People want housing, first.
- Adopted, promoted and supported by USICH, HUD, and the VA



# *Housing Can Work for Anyone*

- People with little income (or even zero income) can – and do -- successfully obtain and retain housing
- People with multiple or serious barriers can – and do -- successfully obtain and retain housing
- People with disabilities can – and do – successfully obtain and retain housing



# *People can be successfully housed*

- Participant characteristics are less important to success than project and system fidelity to the Housing First model.

So...

- ✓ How do you support fidelity to Housing First principles across a community's system?
- ✓ How do we assure fidelity to Housing First principles within and across projects?



# *Let's just remember why it's hard to exit homelessness...*

- **It costs a lot to secure new housing.** People became homeless because they couldn't pay the rent and don't likely have money for new housing costs.
- **Consumers are being screened out by landlords** because of low income, poor rental history, poor credit and/or criminal histories
- **Stress overload** impairs the cognitive skills needed to secure and retain housing. The severity and duration varies for each individual.





## *Let's also remember...*

*Housing First is a response to the immediate CRISIS of Homelessness.*

- Does not seek to address every personal problem that a person may have before or after the crisis
- Should seek to assess and address the conditions that created the immediate crisis so a person can be returned to permanent housing as quickly as possible
- Should allow for self-determination in the types of goals and services a household engaged in



# *Housing First System Overview*

- Striving for consistent application of Housing First principals and practice across all components of a community's system.
- System Components include:
  - Project design
  - Project alignment
  - Trainings and professional development
  - Coordinated entry policies and priorities
  - Governance & Written Standards
  - Project monitoring, ranking and prioritizing



# *Housing First: Project Alignment*

- Align all projects under a standard expectation for using specific housing barrier assessments regardless of any other common CE assessment or psychosocial scoring
- Align landlord engagement and management protocol across providers; share landlord lists including risk tolerance, to promote rapid housing matches
- Identify projects with greater capacity/ability to serve higher barriers households and target referrals accordingly
- Consider service availability and budgets when reviewing overall service portfolio; allow for higher per-cost outcomes when serving higher barrier households
- Ensure housing supports examine the depth, breadth, intensity and duration of services provided based on housing, not all life challenges, consistent with a progressive assistance approach
- Sober Housing: Sober housing can be consistent with Housing First if the participant CHOOSES that type of environment – ensure system has options that are appropriately targeted



# *What is happening in your community?*

Are you aligning projects within your community under the housing first model?

*...if yes* – How are you doing this? and why? What are the common expectations?

*...if no* – Are there steps you could take to begin this discussion locally?

Pro Tip: Advocate for a “project mapping” meeting where the full portfolio of housing can be reviewed and discussed within the context of housing first implementation and needs.



# *Housing First: Governance Considerations*

- Establish Housing First as part of the Governance Charter's vision/mission statement and adopt by full CoC endorsement
- Create Written Standards that promote Housing First practices, including housing barrier assessments in housing search/support
- Create Housing First review committees/workgroups that evaluate project adherence to housing first and offer suggestion for improvement. Include persons with lived experience in governance design.
- Create System and project level case conferencing guidelines and policies that seek to expedite housing for high barrier households, even if housing solution is less than ideal.



# *What is happening in your community?*

Have you incorporated housing first into your community's Governance?

*...if yes* – How is your community doing this?

*...if no* – Are there opportunities to incorporate Governance changes over time?

Pro Tip: Review your CoC's Governance and Written Standards and mark places where policy is inconsistent with Housing First. Bring suggestions to CoC Leadership



# *Housing First: Coordinated Entry*

- Incorporate housing barriers into your assessment tools and process, not just psychosocial measures of vulnerability
- Adopt Dynamic Prioritization to ensure that all available resources are targeted to households who need them most, rather than serving lower need households before higher need households
- Assume many who you think “need” PSH can be successful in RRH, but adopt policy to allow for project transfer when things don’t work out
- Focusing resources on individuals with long lengths of time homeless and deeper Housing Barriers
- Referral accountability: Don’t allow arbitrary referrals refusals by providers
- Ensuring non-homeless providers and systems know how to refer into CE and to the crisis response system
- For particular high barrier (sex offender, violent offenders) need system level strategy that looks at all and any resource, including housing partners, that can allow for a housing placement.



# *What is happening in your community?*

Have you incorporated housing first into your community's CES policy?

*...if yes* – How are you doing this? and why?

*...if no* – Why not and do you have reservations?

Pro Tip: CoC should review periodization strategy to ensure that typical vulnerability assessments do not ignore actual housing barriers.





# *Housing First: Training and Support*

- Establish minimum onboarding requirements CoC-wide to train staff on Housing Barrier Assessments and Housing First practices.
- Consider pool funding across project for training to bring in local experts and/or TA.
- Establish quarterly peer learning/sharing experiences to support Housing Barrier or Housing First practice.



# *What is happening in your community?*

Have you established trainings across your community's system?

*...if yes* – How are you doing this? and why?

*...if no* – Are there affordable ways to offer and combine training costs?

Pro Tip: Create a workgroup to compile a list of online Housing First materials that all CoC Project Staff are expected to read/review as part of their ongoing professional development.



# *Housing First: Funding Incentives*

- Evaluate and monitor fidelity to Housing First as part of annual monitoring visits
- Ranking and Evaluation - Incentivize Housing First in project ranking. For instance, scale ranking to allow more negative outcomes when projects commit to serving more challenging households
- Ensure all funded projects or any endorsed for funding are committed to CoC CES and Prioritization protocol
- Fund new projects that can demonstrate an adherence to Housing First. Don't just sign the letters of support!
- Refuse endorsements for private funding without demonstration of Housing First



# *What is happening in your community?*

Has your CoC established oversight and monitoring protocol on housing first across your community's system?

*...if yes* – How are you doing this?

*...if no* – Could some new approaches be implemented prior to the next major NOFA cycles?



# *Housing First: Project Design*

- Consistent application of Housing First principals and practice across all components of a project.
- Project Components include:
  - Design – outreach, assessment, landlord engagement and housing placement
  - Policies and Procedures, including fiscal and admin
  - Training – ongoing and onboarding
  - Staff support, evaluations and supervision.



# *Project Design: Assessment Considerations*

- Presumed psychosocial problems may actually be symptoms of stress overload caused by homelessness; symptoms that will decline after they are stably housed.
- Psychosocial problems may not actually effect the housing crisis and barriers (i.e. if I have severe substance use disorder but pay my rent and don't cause problems, my substance use is not a housing barrier)
- What gets assessed during the housing placement process can be different than the CE common referral protocol
- Homelessness programs that focus on treatment, sobriety, and other "housing readiness" indicators as a condition of housing are less successful



# *What to Assess in Housing Plans*

- ***Tenant Screening Barriers*** (TSBs) reduce a person's ability to obtain housing because of landlord screening criteria.
  - Income and employment history
  - Credit history: Excessive debt, unpaid or late payments, court judgments (especially if debts are rental arrears to a prior landlord)
  - Criminal history
  - Past housing experiences: Evictions
  - Landlord references: Rent paid on time? Lease violation notices? Conflict with landlord or other tenants? Damage to the unit?
- ***Housing Retention Barriers*** (HRBs) are *demonstrable* risks because they jeopardize:
  - Paying the rent in full, on time
  - Caring for the unit
  - Following the lease
  - Interacting with the landlord or other tenants



# *Assessment: A Housing First comparison*

## **Assessing Housing Barriers**

- Increases access to housing by reducing landlord “risks”
- Increases housing retention by preventing recurrence of past housing instability
- Increases coordination between providers
- Focus on specific housing barriers and support other personal challenges later or in context of housing

## **Traditional Vulnerability Assessment**

- Landlords do not screen on the basis of personal issues
- Personal issues may not be the cause of housing instability
- Different programs will have different definitions of psychosocial issue – and different approaches to working with the same household
- Behavioral and mental health issues often not the root of housing instability



# Screening Report



PRINT



GET HELP READING A REPORT

Recommendation: **Decline**

The credit history for this applicant contains adverse events that indicate a significant risk in the applicant's ability to meet the lease terms. The risk is significant enough that you should not lease to this applicant without additional financial security (e.g. a cosigner/guarantor). At this point no further steps are necessary other than to communicate your decision to the applicant.



Credit Score

**513**

RANGE 350-850



Criminal History

**3**

RECORDS FOUND



Evictions

**1**

RECORD FOUND



Employers

**1**

EMPLOYERS ON FILE



Collections

**5**

COLLECTION ACCOUNTS



Public Records

**4**

RECORDS FOUND

## Income reported by the applicant

*This should be independently verified*



**\$1800**

Monthly Income

**Employed**

Source



# *So, how does information on Tenant Screening Barriers affect a project?*

- By looking at the diversity of Tenant Screening Barriers, it's possible to **recruit** sufficient partner landlords who would be willing to accept tenants with those “risk factors.”
- For program participants with especially high Tenant Screening Barriers, a program can identify additional **landlord incentives** that could be available as needed on a case-by-case basis.
- Assessing Tenant Screening Barrier creates **consistency**. Your project will be using the same tools landlords use.



# *Assessing Housing Retention Barriers*

- Review the tenant screening information to see if there are any *repeated* situations associated with housing loss.
- Talk with the program participant about the TSB report, patterns — discuss the details, the WHY.
- Make your own observations, over time, during home visits. Don't try to identify every possible problem at the first interview!
- Maintain contact with the landlord (through both routine check-ins and call-backs) to identify and respond to landlord concerns that could jeopardize housing.



# *TSBs as a Staff Framework*

- The case manager can ***match*** the tenant with one or more landlords who have already been recruited and are willing to accept a person with that profile.
- The case manager can negotiate pre-approved ***incentives*** with partner landlords to house a program participant who has higher barriers.
- The TSB profile is a clue to patterns that may have caused past problems that could recur and jeopardize future housing. These are ***Housing Retention Barriers*** the participant and case manager will work to prevent.



# *Housing Retention Barriers*

Some program participants have had prior incidents of housing instability. The causes of those incidents, if there is a pattern, are Housing Retention Barriers. For example:

- Multiple lease violations due to misunderstanding tenant responsibilities; or failure to control guests' behavior; or loud music
- Repeated failure to pay the rent because the person never had enough money at the end of the month; or because she kept loaning the rent money to her mother (who didn't pay it back).



# *What do your direct service staff do with information about Housing Retention Barriers?*

- Assist the household to secure a housing unit/location where past instability is less likely to recur.
- During home visits and communications with the landlord, watch for red flags that past patterns are beginning to recur.
- With the participant, create housing plans to prevent or resolve Housing Retention Plans (e.g. review lease requirements, rehearse responses to complaints, increasing income, budgeting, securing free or reduced-cost goods/services to free more income for rent, etc.)



# HUD Housing First Checklist and Resources

# Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO)

## Austin/Travis County CoC

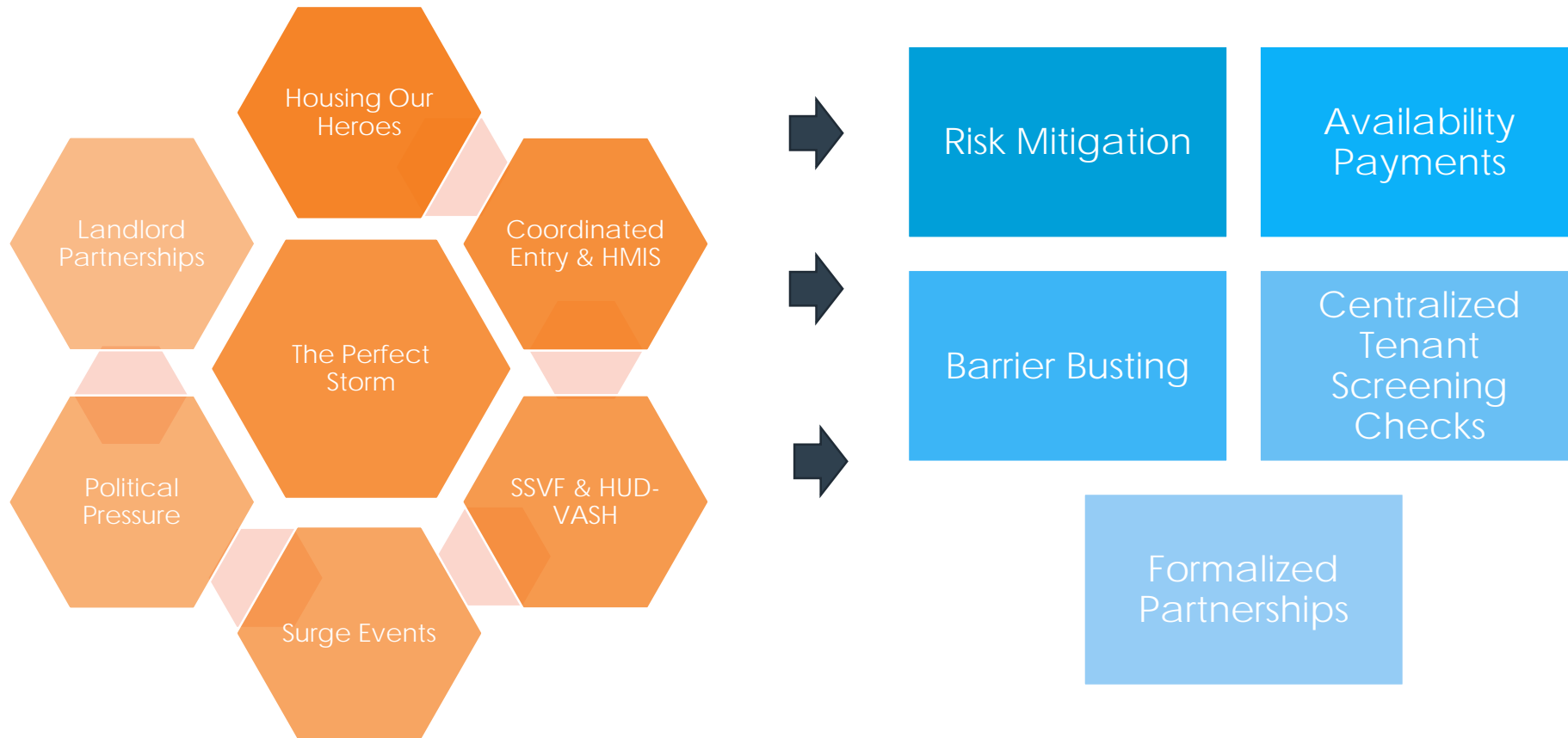
Allison Mabbs  
Coordinated Entry System Coordinator





# Austin's Housing First Story\*

## Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness



\*Well, part of the story anyway...

# Department of Community Housing

**Role: Create low barrier permanent housing opportunities**

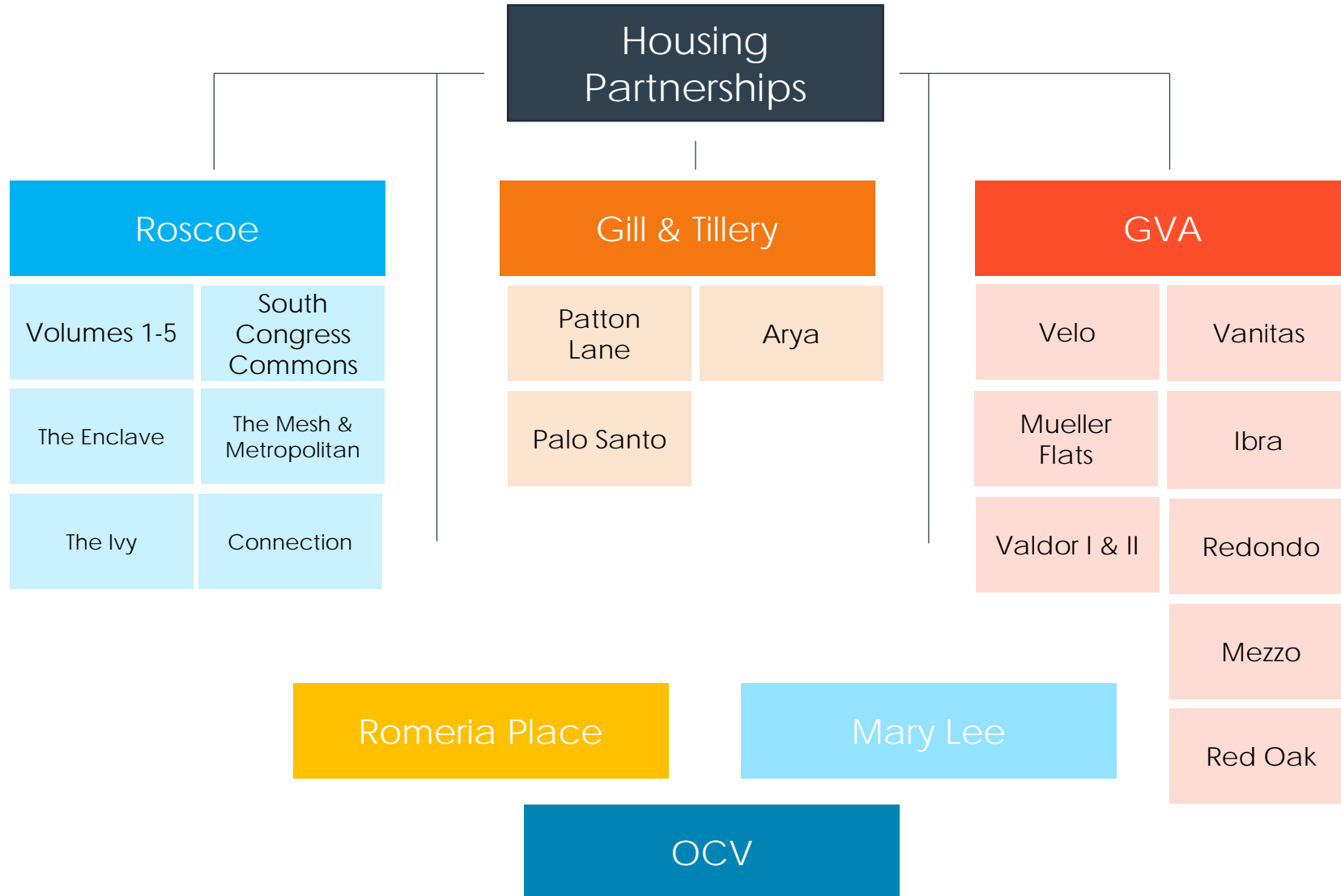
## **Team Members**

- Bree Williams, LMSW, Director of Community Housing
- Abby Tatkow, Realtor, Community Housing Program Manager
- Nadia Carlson, Community Housing Liaison
- Kaylin Rubin, Community Housing Liaison
- Quen Jones, Community Housing Liaison

## **Landlord Outreach Tools**

Risk Mitigation	Incentive designed to minimize financial risk to landlords
Availability Payments	Financial strategy to expand stock of low barrier, higher opportunity housing
Relationship Building	Prioritizing and nurturing landlord relationships
Tenant Screening Checks	Quantifying all rental barriers of every household

# How do all the tools come together?



# Gill & Tillery Partnership



## ALTERNATIVE SCREENING FORM

### SCREENING PROCESS

Gill & Tillery LLC agrees to work with ECHO and partner agencies to successfully place households in available units to achieve the community's goal to end homelessness.

When receiving an applicant from one of ECHO's partner agencies, the landlord/property management company will apply the alternative screening criteria to that applicant. ECHO's partner agencies include the Veterans Administration, the Housing Authority of the City of Austin, Caritas of Austin, Front Steps, The Salvation Army, and other local supportive housing providers.

### SCREENING CRITERIA

Beginning 5/18/2017 Gill & Tillery LLC will apply the following alternative screening criteria to households exiting homelessness who are receiving supportive services from a partner agency:

#### 1. Income requirements

- Gill & Tillery LLC will cooperate with the appropriate funding source's process when considering households supported by subsidies. Subsidies may be provided by the Housing Authority of the City of Austin, the Housing Authority of Travis County, or by a local nonprofit agency.
- When considering applicants not supported by a Housing Choice Voucher, Gill & Tillery LLC will allow partner agencies to submit documentation of the household's plan to pay rent timely, including the partner agencies' ability to provide the household financial assistance and/or the household's plan to increase income; this process is to replace common income requirements.

#### 2. Prior tenancy history

- Gill & Tillery LLC will not deny for negative rental history. Partner agencies will be focused on supporting households to abide by the lease contract and house rules, and build positive rental history.
- Partner agencies are expected to coordinate efforts to satisfy prior rental debts. Documentation of paid debts and/or documentation of intent to pay debts can be provided. Extenuating circumstances that make such a written agreement unfeasible will be considered.

#### 3. Credit history

- Gill & Tillery LLC will not deny for negative credit history, with the exception of 1) applicants that have more than 1 cleared bankruptcy and/or applicants that are in the process of a bankruptcy.

#### 4. Criminal history

Gill & Tillery LLC will

- Deny applicants for sex offense, murder, manslaughter, arson, and/or kidnapping convictions on a case-by-case basis.
- Deny applicants with convictions for drug-related criminal activity for manufacture or production of methamphetamine.
- Deny applicants for violent felony convictions within the last 5 years, but allow for appeals and consideration of extenuating circumstances.
- Deny for non violent felony convictions within the last 2 year, but allow for appeals and consideration of extenuating circumstances.
- Not deny for any misdemeanor convictions; to include Class A, B, and C charges.
- Not deny for arrests wherein the applicant was not convicted, nor for any perceived patterns of arrests or convictions.

Persons with disabilities have the right to request reasonable accommodations.

By signing below, Gill & Tillery LLC agree to apply the alternative screening criteria and process as described above to applicants referred by an ECHO partner agency.

 Gill & Tillery  
Signature and company name if applicable

5/18/2017  
Date

Please contact Abby Tatkov, ECHO Community Housing Liaison, with any questions related to the above process.

Abby Tatkov

(512) 710-6779

Abbytatkov@austinecho.org



# Questions? Ideas?

Bree Williams, LMSW

Director of Community Housing

(512) 940-9690

[breewilliams@austinecho.org](mailto:breewilliams@austinecho.org)



# *Large Group Discussion*

- Who's working on training across their system?
- Who's working on building more emphasis on assessing housing barriers? Is anyone doing this across their system? Is anyone using the CE to assess housing barriers?
- What is your community doing to align with some of these Housing First system practices?
- What did we miss? Other ideas on how to promote Housing First locally?
- What obstacles do you face in moving forward?
- Who in your community guides these decisions and could you connect with them when you go home?

