C2C HOUSING FIRST TOOLKIT

For developers and housing providers serving individuals with co-occurring and substance use disorders.

DECEMBER 2022

PREPARED BY:

Virginia Center for Housing Research
Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Virginia Supportive Housing
REAL LIFE
Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC)

INSIDE THE TOOLKIT:

Questions or Additions?
Please contact:
Mel Jones
Associate Director
Virginia Center for Housing Research
Mel.Jones@vt.edu

VT VIRGINIA TECH.

CONTEXT FOR THE TOOLKIT:

CONNECTION TO CARE (C2C)

C2C aims to advance practices that identify and leverage the critical junctures at which individuals with substance use disorder (SUD) seek and are linked to lifesaving services. The Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance coordinates the transdisciplinary C2C project team to apply evolving policy and practice innovations that reduce the risk of overdose and harmful impacts of addiction, and facilitate pathways to recovery. C2C engages designers, researchers, public health and policy experts, law enforcement and criminal justice, community-based treatment providers, and individuals with and in recovery from SUD.

Through stakeholder engagement with the Roanoke Valley Collective Response to the Opioid and Addiction Crisis (RVCR) in 2021, C2C completed a recovery housing study of the Roanoke Valley in Virginia that classified recovery housing needs within the continuum of care, from individuals in active substance use to those in long term recovery. Housing First was identified as a necessary approach, prioritizing housing as the foundation of success for engaging with treatment and achieving recovery, particularly for those early in the recovery process. Further, stakeholders suggested that Housing First programs for underserved individuals (e.g., people identifying as a part of a gender minority group) and/or hard to house populations (e.g., people exiting incarceration) merited additional investigation in order to promote the development of programs addressing these unmet needs in the community.

As a result, the goal of this toolkit is to help inform the development and operations of Housing First facilities. It includes findings from interviews conducted by the Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech with existing Housing First programs, who generously shared project budgets, Pro Formas, and programmatic documents. The toolkit highlights the utility of these documents for housing providers who are launching new Housing First programs or expanding their capacity to include more Housing First units and/or programming.

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CONTEXT FOR THE TOOLKIT:
ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED

Virginia Supportive Housing (Virginia)

We chose to interview Virginia Supportive Housing (VSH) because they are the largest supportive housing developer and manager in Virginia, supporting people with SUDs and connecting residents with recovery support services. VSH emphasized the importance of having two types of managers to promote the success of residents: a housing specialist *and* a case manager. The housing specialist helps the client manage housing agreements and advocates for the resident with non-VSH landlords, while case management provides clinical and other personal development support. This separation ensures that the clients' housing is not dependent on meeting clinical or other personal goals. VSH has provided the position description for their housing specialist as well as pro formas, house rules, organizational charts and other resources.

REAL LIFE (Richmond, VA)

We chose to seek information from REAL LIFE because of their focus on people in recovery who are exiting incarceration, as well as their smaller-scale emphasis on fundraising, rather than utilizing federal resources. REAL LIFE manages 12 houses and offers a 5-6 month program, though the amount of time residents can stay is not limited. Our contact at REAL LIFE emphasized that the amount of time residents need to stay is individual and some are not ready to leave after six months, especially those who have been incarcerated for a long time. Once residents are ready to leave, REAL LIFE works with a network of landlords to find appropriate, affordable housing. REAL LIFE does not depend on traditional housing or SUD treatment funding sources; rather, the organization fundraises in the communities that it serves. Our contact emphasized that opportunities to fundraise in the community are built through long-term relationships and mutual service.

CONTEXT FOR THE TOOLKIT:

ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED

DESC (Seattle, WA)

We reached out to the Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC) because of their commitment to inclusivity and their large housing portfolio. DESC was established in 1979 and has 17 supportive housing developments as well as scattered site units. Our contact at DESC highlighted their harm reduction practices, as well as their new clinic and permanent supportive housing development, Hobson Place. DESC provided their harm reduction training materials for our toolkit and also suggested that users consider attending the Housing First Partners Conference. DESC's collaboration with the City of Seattle and other city stakeholders is an important component of their success. The City provides funding for DESC services and provided capital for the Hobson Place development. The Metropolitan Improvement District funds a Street Ambassadors program that provides training and employment opportunities for residents in recovery, including street outreach. The Street Ambassadors program could be replicated in many downtowns and central areas with amenities.

DESC Hobson Place. *Photo credit: Walsh Construction Co.*

Each of the tools included in the toolkit below offer insights into the development of housing, and the operation of Housing First programs with attention to recovery.

We requested specific documents based on the expertise of the organization and the program personnel we interviewed. Each of the documents is categorized by its relevance to development and/or operations to help the reader focus their review on items that are relevant to them.

HOUSING FIRST FOR RECOVERY

- What is Housing First?
- Efficacy
- Political and Cultural Context
- Strategies for Increasing Access
- Other Examples of Housing First Programs

What is Housing First?

Housing First is built on the belief that all people deserve housing and that stable housing is a precondition for treatment (*Smith, 2021*). Housing First is an approach that can be combined with other housing models, wherein people suffering from homelessness are not required to address all of their problems, including behavioral health or substance use issues, or to complete a variety of treatment programs, in order to qualify for housing (*Housing First Fact Sheet, 2010*). The Housing First key principles include (*Smith, 2021*):

1. **Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements;**
2. **Consumer choice and self-determination;**
3. **Recovery orientation;**
4. **Individualized and client-driven supports;**
5. **Social and community integration.**

Duration of Housing First

Housing First ranges from rapid re-housing for those who need prompt, temporary shelter, to permanent supportive housing (PSH), which does not have a time limit if the resident qualifies, e.g. having a disability or being chronically homeless.

Layout of Housing First

Scattered Site

Residents are housed in individual housing units within a community.

Pros:
- "Normalizing" effects can aid client recovery by developing a sense of stability and responsibility within a community-based setting (*Guerin & Institute for Social Research, 2016*).

Cons:
- May lead to social isolation.
- Expensive in terms of the time and resources needed to connect clients with services (*Kresky-Wolff et al., 2010*).
- May lead to decreased usage of behavioral health services (*Henwood et al., 2015*).

Single Site or Project-Based

Multiple residents live in a single housing project or site.

Pros:
- Specialized programming is provided in a central location.
- Staff interact regularly with clients, helping to foster community and trust.
- May better prevent homelessness longer-term (*Collins et al., 2013*).

Cons:
- Can feel restrictive to residents.

Efficacy of Housing First

The Mental Health Commission of Canada's At Home/Chez Soi

The Mental Health Commission of Canada conducted the world's largest study of Housing First during a 4-year period across 5 cities. The study involved a randomized control in which 1,000 people were randomly assigned to Housing First and 1,000 were randomly assigned to "treatment as usual" *(Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2021).*

Year 1 Outcomes

~80% of people in the Housing First group stayed housed.

Residents' health improved, and they used fewer health services.

Negative involvement with law enforcement also decreased.

Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA)
Home & Healthy For Good

In December 2017, the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA) released a report that analyzed an individual's annual expenditure before and after receiving permanent assisted housing with a Housing First approach. Between 2006-2017, the program served 990 individuals.

- Medical Services, Shelter, and Incarceration Costs
- Housing First (HHG) Cost

Before Entering (6 months)

After Entering (6 months) $11,801

$0 $10,000 $20,000 $30,000 $40,000
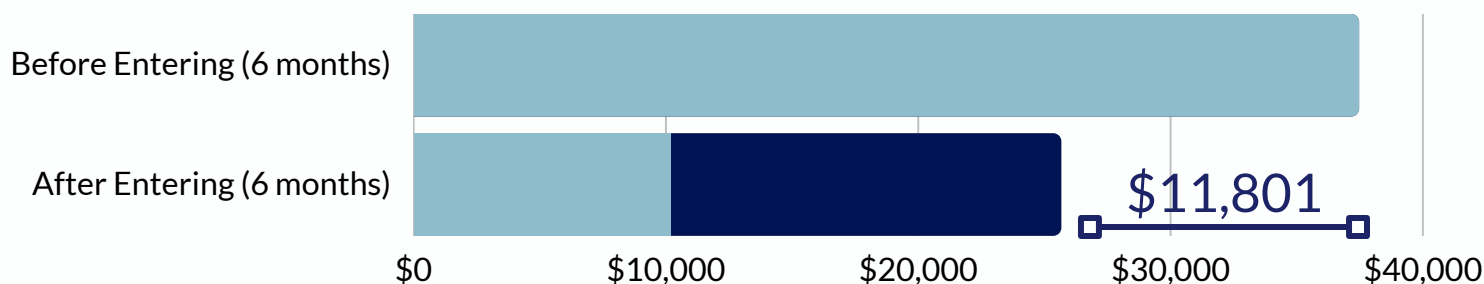
(Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, 2017, p. 9)

Mostly due to decreased reliance on costly emergency and medical services, access to housing through MHSA resulted in a total **estimated annual savings of $11,801 per person.**

The Political and Cultural Context of Housing First for Recovery

Harm Reduction

Harm reduction is a method that tries to lessen the harms associated with a specific behavior, such as substance use. Harm reduction recognizes that a continued degree of substance use in society is unavoidable and defines goals that minimize negative outcomes. Harm reduction stresses the importance of monitoring health, social, and economic outcomes rather than drug consumption (*National Harm Reduction Coalition, 2021*).

The rise of harm reduction in the 1980's coincided with the emergence of homelessness as a national social issue. As a result, the Housing First approach is based on harm reduction. These principles are a cornerstone of how the Housing First movement has made an impact in stopping the cycle of homelessness.

NIMBYism

NIMBY stands for "not-in-my-backyard" and refers to people who oppose certain developments where they live and work (*NIMBY Assessment, 2022*). Although various kinds of construction and development can elicit NIMBY reactions, supportive housing is one of the most common targets, specifically developments that provide recovery housing and Housing First.

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-02-09/what-s-the-best-way-to-define-and-explain-a-nimby

Objections to Housing First developments are frequently motivated by concerns about perceived negative consequences, such as increased crime or lower property values, that existing residents worry will impact them (*NIMBY Assessment, 2022*).

Addressing NIMBYism: RainCity Housing

RainCity Housing is a non-profit organization in Vancouver, British Columbia that provides housing to persons struggling with mental illness, SUD, and other behavioral health issues. Around 2007, the organization experienced a large amount of pushback and controversy as it prepared to build a housing facility to provide emergency shelter and transitional housing. Communities, business owners, and residents gathered at town hall meetings to express their dissatisfaction with the project. RainCity agreed to set up a formal community advisory committee to address any issues as they arose.

Six years later, the original NIMBY outcry had subsided as clients of this housing successfully integrated into the community and became employed. People who were opposed to the initiative observed that there were no negative externalities, and RainCity is now a community symbol for housing and behavioral health support (*Woo, 2012*).

Strategies for Increasing Access to Housing First for Recovery

Local Groups

- Take proactive steps to avoid project roadblocks due to NIMBYism.
- Create space and opportunities to engage and educate community members to address biases.
- Reference legislation such as the Fair Housing Act (FHA) to protect the prospective residents from discrimination.

Regional Entities

- Expand access by partnering with Housing First programs.
- Strive to bring together organizations and groups with complementary interests to facilitate strategic planning and action.
- Create funding opportunities for Housing First programs to better serve their community and promote a continuum of care.

State Governments

- Create grants and funding opportunities to support Housing First initiatives.
- Help to promote best practices for Housing First programs by fostering networks of technical support and standardized resources so that Housing First programs can expand and be replicated throughout the state.
- Combat stigma of legislators.

Sources of Funding & Technical Assistance

State

At the state level, funding may be provided through grants and trust funds to Single State Agencies (SSAs), local government entities, community and faith-based organizations.

- In Virginia, the Virginia Housing Trust Fund (VHTF) provides financing for Homeless Reduction Grants for Housing First Initiatives.

Federal

HUD & Federal Policy

- The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants
- American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
- Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP)
- Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act

SAMHSA

- Grants for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals (GBHI)
- Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH)
- Treatment for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness (TIEH)
- SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR)

Other Examples of Housing First Programs

MeckFUSE Program
Mecklenburg County, North Carolina
The program is a scattered-site housing program for homeless men and women with mental health issues who have used Mecklenburg County's jail, street camps, and shelters frequently (*MeckFUSE Program, 2022).*

Avalon Housing
Ann Arbor, Michigan
This program is a multiple, single-site housing program for homeless men, women, and families. Avalon Housing helps to develop and grow affordable housing centered around community care and integrated support.

Miriam's House
Lynchburg, Virginia
This program is a housing and community first supportive housing initiative and coordinated organizational effort that serves women, children, victims of domestic violence, and adults who are homeless.

New Hope Housing
Alexandria, Virginia
This program maintains a portfolio of permanent/supportive housing and Housing First units for chronically homeless individuals, as well as support services including medical, health, educational, and employment resources.

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C2C TOOLKIT MATERIALS
VIRGINIA SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Virginia

Virginia Supportive Housing's (VSH) mission is to end homelessness by providing permanent housing and supportive services. Founded in 1988, VSH was the first non-profit organization in Virginia to develop and provide permanent supportive housing for homeless single adults.

VSH Leadership Organizational Chart

👉 PPT | PDF

The senior leadership organizational chart for Virginia Supportive Housing (VSH) demonstrates the expertise and functions required to develop and manage permanent supportive housing. Other important components are highlighted by additional documents, such as the VSH Housing Specialist Job Description.

The organizational chart indicates that the executive director oversees departments including Finance, Client Programs, Revenue, Mission Advancement, Property Management, and Housing Development, with a total of approximately 30 senior leadership positions.

TAGS: Operations | Organization | Management | Leadership

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Housing Specialist Job Description

👉 **Word** | **PDF**

VSH contacts emphasized the importance of Housing Specialists to the success of supportive housing. This job description is for a full-time Housing Specialist in the Client Programs department of Virginia Supportive Housing. The Housing Specialist is responsible for the daily execution of multiple housing-related tasks for clients in VSH's scattered site permanent supportive housing programs.

An organization building up its housing staff will need to develop position descriptions for housing specialists.

TAGS: Operations | Roles | Case Management | Staff

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Sample House Rules for Residents (2019)

👉 **Word** | **PDF**

House rules as a condition of the lease agreement cover tenant expectations for conduct, maintenance, guests, etc.

Tenants living in supportive housing units must agree to rules and regulations to establish a safe living environment and community. Operators of supportive housing can tailor these rules for their tenants as needed.

TAGS: Operations | Rules | Lease

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Sample 2-Year Budget for Scattered Site Recovery Housing

👉 **Excel** | **PDF**

This document provides a sample budget for a scattered site supportive housing program serving 12 participants, including one-time start-up costs and annual operating expenses.

This budget can serve as an example of cost categories and needed functions pursuant to a small scale, scattered site supportive housing program.

TAGS: Acquisition | Start-Up | Operations | Budget

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Sample 1-Year Budget for Recovery Housing Building Services

👉 Excel | PDF

This document provides an annual sample budget for building and services expenses for 60 units of supportive housing.

This budget provides cost-categories for services, equipment, utilities, and other components of building operation and service provision. The example will help users query current costs and supplement as necessary to plan for the operations of a supportive housing facility.

TAGS: Operations | Budget | Services

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VIRGINIA SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

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Property Annual Operating Budgets (3)

Bliley Manor	Studios at South Richmond	Church Street Station Studios
8 units	39 units	80 units

☞ **PDF**   ☞ **PDF**   ☞ **PDF**

These documents provide annual building operations budgets for properties of varying sizes. Revenue and sources, as well as costs for staff, administration, utilities, maintenance and repairs, management, taxes and insurance, debt service, depreciation and amortization, are shown.

The operating budgets do not include the cost of supportive services (see above for services budget example).

TAGS: Building Operations | Budget

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Premier Circle Sample Budget and Pro Forma (2022)

👉 **Excel** (multi-tab)

This document provides development costs (sources and uses) and estimated annual operating budget for the Premier Circle permanent supportive housing (PSH) project in Charlottesville.

This pro forma and budget illustrate development and operating costs for housing providers.

TAGS: Pro Forma | Development | Operations

C2C TOOLKIT MATERIALS
REAL LIFE

REAL LIFE

Richmond, VA

REAL LIFE serves individuals who have been impacted by incarceration, homelessness, or substance use disorder by giving them an opportunity to overcome their personal and community barriers that hinder their pathway to a Thriving Life.

REAL LIFE Organizational Structure

👉 **PDF**

This document provides a six-tiered organizational structure for REAL LIFE, which is overseen by a Board of Directors, run by an executive and deputy director, and operated by a program staff including pathway navigators and employment managers, among others.

A clear organizational structure is helpful in the operation of a recovery housing program, to articulate points of contact for various program and participant inquiries, and to establish transparency regarding organizational roles.

TAGS: Operations | Organization | Management | Leadership

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REAL LIFE 2021 Annual Report

👉 **PDF**

This 7-page report covers REAL LIFE's 2021 program achievements and summary of the annual expenditures and revenues. The use of infographics makes the information easy to read. It is a best practice and expectation that nonprofit, community-based, and charitable organizations provide a summary of the annual activities conducted and the program outcomes, as well as be transparent regarding organizational finances.

This reporting informs stakeholders and supporters why it is important to invest in the organization's mission and how their support helps to achieve program outcomes.

TAGS: Operations | Organization | Management | Leadership

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REAL LIFE House Rules (August 2022)

👉 **PDF**

REAL LIFE house rules provide specific expectations regarding drug testing, personal behavior while living in the residence, and employment and curricular expectations throughout the program.

Setting clear standards for participant conduct that they agree to up front is an important step. While programs vary regarding their zero tolerance policies, rules for recovery housing programs are needed in general to ensure participant and staff safety and success.

TAGS: Operations | Rules

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House Application for Prospective Participants

👉 **PDF**

This 4-page application must be completed in full by prospective REAL LIFE participants to be considered for the program. The application covers criminal background and health and employment history, as well statements affirming the program rules. This document is complementary to referral systems and partnerships that support transition from correctional facilities.

Applications can be used to learn more about potential clients and evaluate whether the program is a good fit for the client. REAL LIFE refers prospective clients to other recovery organizations based on the needs and preferences of the client. The application process is also an opportunity for participants to review and formally agree to the program rules.

TAGS: Operations | Rules | Intake

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Proposed Annual Budget for REAL LIFE (2022)

👉 **PDF**

This is the 2022 approved budget for REAL LIFE's recovery housing facilities. Revenue comes from a variety of sources, including Individual Contributions, Foundations, Fundraising events, Religious Institutions, Government Support - VARR Housing Grants, REAL House Program Fees, and Jail Programming Contracts. Expenses include personnel and housing costs.

This budget provides one example of the cost of running a recovery housing program of this size, which could be informative for recovery housing programs that are launching or expanding.

TAGS: Operations | Budget

C2C TOOLKIT MATERIALS
DESC

Seattle, WA

DESC helps people with the complex needs of homelessness, substance use disorders, and serious mental illness achieve their highest potential for health and well-being through comprehensive services, treatment, and housing.

New Employee Orientation: Harm Reduction

👉 **PDF**

This presentation is used to orient new DESC staff to the principles of harm reduction, and describes techniques, supplies, and treatment options to lessen harm for people actively using substances.

Harm reduction is a cornerstone of Housing First programs, and understanding what it means and what it entails will help providers be more effective at articulating and implementing harm reduction practices. In-service trainings and discussions can also help staff explore how their values intersect with harm reduction methods.

TAGS: Operations | Training

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DESC's Harm Reduction Toolkit

👉 **PDF**

This toolkit describes the principles of harm reduction for new staff and providers, and outlines specific harm reduction practices that DESC uses, including managing alcohol and IV drug use, and steps to test for fentanyl and other contaminants that might be present in the drug supply.

Our contact at DESC emphasized that harm reduction information is important for all staff, including those that do not have direct contact with clients. DESC offers harm reduction training through a variety of modes, during the day and at night in order to include all staff.

TAGS: Operations | Training

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DESC 2021 Annual Report

👉 **Website**

This report, accessible online, includes a statement from the executive director of DESC, metrics outlining what was accomplished in 2021 in service to DESC's mission, updates on properties, staff, and services such as the mobile crisis team, advocacy work, information about the Board and volunteers, and a financial summary.

As one of the largest Housing First providers in the country, DESC's annual report exhibits the potential for growth and depth of service for other organizations supporting individuals with SUD while applying a Housing First philosophy.

TAGS: Operations | Organization | Management | Leadership

C2C TOOLKIT MATERIALS
Additional Information

List of Other Recovery Housing Toolkits 👈

Housing First Literature Summary 👈

Informational Resources Regarding Housing First 👈