



HOUSING FIRST

PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE



We humbly recognize the many people for whom life has had struggle, and who, at great personal cost, have informed us all of what "helping" should look like. Your collective wisdom has been ignored for far too long. That wisdom is what will lead us to an advanced idea of liberty and accountability in our community. This project is dedicated to you.

Also, we give special thanks to Dr. Sam Tsemberis and the many people at Pathways to Housing who had the courage to ask people what they needed and the tenacity to listen, despite centuries of practice that advised otherwise.





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Canada



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HOUSING FIRST PRINCIPLES

Housing First is made up of five interdependent principles. You may find these principles are intuitive, but upon deeper examination you'll find they require simple yet profound, transformative shifts in thinking. The principles are:

- Immediate access to housing with no readiness conditions
- Consumer choice and self-determination
- Recovery orientation
- Individualized and person-driven supports
- Social and community integration

TRUST THE MODEL

You may find that Housing First is a significant departure from how services are typically delivered, and it may be challenging to implement the model exactly as it is presented. However, the research proven results show that it is worth the challenge! Traditional methods work for many people who just need some support to get back into housing, but for people who are experiencing chronic homelessness, Housing First is a hugely effective solution. Because it is so effective, we recommend you implement the model 'as is' and see how it works. Despite any preconceived ideas, resist making changes to the model until your team has tried it for a couple of years.

In line with this long-term effort, discourage discharges by having a policy of not discharging someone for a year; if there is a situation after a year where someone is to be discharged, present the situation to a Discharge Committee first. Perhaps instead of being discharged, the person needs to be in a more supported housing setting, but with the same high level of interdisciplinary supports?

Start making decisions and changes to align with all five principles of the Housing First model, and use a Fidelity Scale to make sure you are staying true to Housing First. Maintain consumer choice and hope at each step, and strive to understand the intersecting experiences and barriers of each individual.

PEOPLE POWER

For the Housing First model to work, it needs people who are passionate about it. Build relationships in the community at your earliest opportunity. It is also imperative to hire staff teams who will create a 'critical mass' of internal champions, who are really curious about the model and who share its values. Management has to fully buy into the model too, of course. Have regular staff meetings where the focus is on strengths, on individuals (not policies), and on participants' choices. Also, integrate mental health and addictions experts on your teams, or in close partnerships. All levels of staff need training, fidelity checks, telephone consultations and in-person technical assistance from experts.

IMMEDIATE ACCESS TO HOUSING WITH NO HOUSING READINESS CONDITIONS

HOW DOES THIS PRINCIPLE BECOME PRACTICE?

Take people who've shown no evidence they can be housed, believe in them, and put them in good housing. This is profoundly de-stigmatizing. The only conditions are: 1) they must put 30% of their money towards rent, withdrawn through direct deposit; and 2) they must see a team member once a week.

The first step is to develop relationship with clients. It can often take six months to a year to engage someone, and often they engage through finding housing. You need to have housing available at a quick turnaround—this requires having staff working specifically on housing procurement. Finding housing is a collaborative process based on the person's choice. Ask them, "Where do you want to live?" It takes a lot of time, requires a strong belief in the model, and needs extensive community supports.

Don't be afraid of evictions because they are an excellent opportunity for change to occur. After an eviction, all the supports stay the same, except the person is in a new place. In order for this to be effective, in the ACT and ICM models, the Housing First team should not be the landlord. People need to be allowed to make mistakes, and face the normal experience of accountability. After a couple of evictions, you can write strengths-based, collaborative 'Housing Success Plans' with that person around what would help them stay in their new place, but be clear that this is not a contract.

This model is successful for 80% of participants—there are no common indicators to help predict who this won't work for, so we have to give it our all with each new participant.

Watch the video, 'Immediate Access to Housing with No Readiness Conditions'.

www.raincityhousing.org/hf-p-into-p/



How does the principle of 'immediate access to housing with no housing readiness conditions' fit with your values?

What will it take to make this principle a reality in Metro Vancouver, the second most expensive city in the world?

Think about a time when you were assessed before gaining access to something you needed, especially if your assessment didn't go well (examples include access to healthcare, job interviews, being evaluated at work, asking for a loan from the bank, etc.). **What was the experience like?**

Think about the last time you did a housing assessment. Describe the situation. What could have been different if this principle was at the centre?

How could you go further with this principle?



CONSUMER CHOICE AND SELF-DETERMINATION

HOW DOES THIS PRINCIPLE BECOME PRACTICE?

The principle of Consumer Choice and Self-Determination is based on the belief that people can succeed and change, that we need to respect their autonomy, and that we need to trust them with their own lives. It requires us to let go of the myth that people with mental illness can't function or think for themselves. This is a hugely transformative principle when put into action. Symptoms tend to improve when people are given meaningful choices. In addition to being ethical, it is also a clinical and therapeutic technique. While it is absolutely pivotal, it is also challenging for even the most experienced Housing First staff members because it is a practice of unlearning the habit of thinking we know what's best for others. In order to make it work, you need to be able to provide meaningful housing choices, and throw out your preconceived notions of who should go where. Local research on RainCity's ACT team shows that most people want independent, market apartments, but it really comes down to the individual's preference. Ask people, "What kind of living situation do you want? What neighbourhood would you like to live in? Would you prefer single- or scattered-site housing?"

Choice is not just about housing. Here are some examples of questions that respect people's choice-making abilities:

- Where do you want to live?
- Do you want/have a pet?
- Do you want to live alone, with a roommate, with your partner?
- Do you need a smoking or non-smoking home?
- What décor and furniture do you choose?
- Where should we have our meeting?
- What do you want to work on?
- Within the limitations, how can we get there?

Use motivational interviewing to help people problem-solve towards the practicalities of their goals. Support most choices people make. Get away from thinking of "good/bad" decisions, and ask, "What do you want?" Help people learn what the expectations/normal consequences are—don't protect them from learning opportunities, but support them through and reduce harm.

Watch the video, 'Consumer Choice and Self-Determination'

www.raincityhousing.org/hf-p-into-p/



RECOVERY ORIENTATION

HOW DOES THIS PRINCIPLE BECOME PRACTICE?

Recovery orientation is the belief that people can do well, define their own recovery, and achieve personal goals. This is not “recovery” defined by abstaining from substances, getting rid of mental health symptoms, or meeting the program’s goals. Instead, it is defined by the individual’s own goals for their life, which usually centre on improved quality of life, for example getting ID, working, seeing family, making a new friend, or having enough money for pet food. People experience recovery in the places where they feel the belonging, connection, reciprocity and dignity that we all long for. A recovery orientation helps shift a program away from being crisis driven.

A recovery orientation requires a systematic way to support people to work towards their individual goals in small steps, such as strengths-based recovery plans *in the person’s own words* that are reviewed with the person every couple of months. In order to be most effective, this approach needs to be required by management. Do not use people’s plans/goals against them; like everyone, the process of reaching their goals will take years, not months, and it will not be linear.

In general, it is essential to be strengths focused and to sustain hope, and do nuanced inventories of what’s working by asking questions such as, “What are you already doing?” When you are trying to ascertain which approach to take with someone, consider, “Is this hope inducing or spirit breaking? Does this approach inspire the person’s own well of energy?” One hope inducing approach (for both clients and staff team) is to include peer workers on the team; it increases safety, balances power dynamics, and reduces paternalism.

Watch the video, ‘Recovery Orientation’.
www.raincityhousing.org/hf-p-into-p/



How does the principle of ‘recovery orientation’ fit with your values?

INDIVIDUALIZED AND PERSON-DRIVEN SUPPORTS

HOW DOES THIS PRINCIPLE BECOME PRACTICE?

These principles guide the Housing First process, but don't prescribe it—the person's individual goals and desires prescribe it. Housing First is not 'one size fits all'. The person needs to be at the centre, and we bring in tools that fit. Embody a think-outside-the-box, innovative, can-do philosophy. Believe in people, and get to know them. Take on a long-term commitment to each person, and strive to be eternally hopeful and empathetic. See adverse events, not as failures, but as opportunities for everyone to look at alternatives and change. Everyone has their own story of resistance, survival and barriers, and there is not only one way out of homelessness. Do whatever it takes, and help people learn/get support around:

- Getting food
- Cleaning their apartment
- Managing their money
- Reducing risk
- Working
- Having guests
- Being in the community
- Interfacing with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD)

Remember, the system has failed this person in the past, so you need to do something differently. Work to remove long-standing, systemic barriers, and reduce organizational policies that get in the way. Provide a flexible policy structure for things such as money management, driving people in staff members' personal cars, giving people cigarettes, buying coffee, and using incentives for engagement. Have a strong focus on what works. From a public safety perspective, it is better if people have a home, than getting stuck in policies.

Understand and share insights about the context of what's going on. Come alongside clients with an understanding of the systemic issues they have faced in their lives, minimize control and coercion as much as possible, and really give people the opportunity to find their own recovery path. Part of this path is service providers taking on the momentum to change themselves, and to shed any ways they are repeating old patterns.

Watch the video, 'Individualized and Person-Driven Supports'
www.raincityhousing.org/hf-p-into-p/



SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

HOW DOES THIS PRINCIPLE BECOME PRACTICE?

Integration and inclusion is about all of us and the spaces we make in the community. Especially in the scattered site model, the onus isn't only on the participants to integrate—the community itself needs to become more welcoming, and we need to do community development. Provide education for landlords and other community members on anti-stigma, community-building, and myth busting. In order for social and community integration to become practice, it is important to have a variety of housing options that are part of the community, including many scattered-site and single-site options.

For those people who choose to move to a new area, this is a difficult experience for participants for about the first six months, as they are often lonely and feel isolated. The process of social and community integration takes at least a couple of years. In order to support them through this experience, give individualized supports for building their community, depending on what people are interested in. Examples could include:

- Orienting the person to their community, including safe/unsafe areas
- Encouraging them to take classes and attend social events as applicable
- Going to the library, shops, banks, grocery stores, bus stop
- Supporting them to get to know their neighbours
- Making space for peer groups to meet, tell their stories, cook together, go for walks, and learn from one another

Watch the video, 'Social and Community Integration'.
www.raincityhousing.org/hf-p-into-p/



How does the principle of 'social and community integration' fit with your values?

Metro Vancouver is commonly acknowledged as an unusually difficult city to integrate into for anyone. In light of this, what barriers do you think people face when moving into their new community? **What are some ways that this could be made easier?**

Imagine that you move someone into an apartment building. All the neighbours are really suspicious of them, and they are blaming any problems in the building on this client. **What creative ways could you help facilitate making space for this new community member?**

How could you go further with this principle?



SUMMARY

What questions are standing out to you?

What new possibilities are inspiring you?

What actions are you going to take to bring Housing First principles into the community?

RESOURCES FOR CONTINUED LEARNING

There is a wealth of resources available at the Housing First Toolkit website:
<http://www.housingfirsttoolkit.ca/>



