RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE HOMELESSNESS FIELD: A VISIONARY SESSION

West Chester University

Dr. Brie Radis, Colleen Keeler, Sam Chiaffa, April Klecak, Wanda Johnson, Tashia Walton, Mariah Melendez, Amber E. Howard, MA, Christopher Hausman

Agenda

- Mindful Moment – Dr. Brie Radis
- Introduction and Housing First – Dr. Brie Radis
- What is West Chester University doing to support student homelessness?
  - The Promise Program
  - Main Campus Pantry
- Student Panel
- Visions for the Future
  - PASSHE Resource Pantry in Philadelphia – Colleen Keeler

My Housing First Journey

| Case Manager Role | Masters Level Case Manager: Mental Health Specialist | Team Leader | Clinical Director | Clinical Supervisor and Consultant |

Housing First Basic Tenets

- Housing as a basic human right
- Separation of housing and service issues/requirements
- Housing is not time-limited (permanent supported housing).
- Provide services with compassion and respect.
- Scattered site housing
- Self-determination and choice
- Recovery Model orientation
- Harm reduction

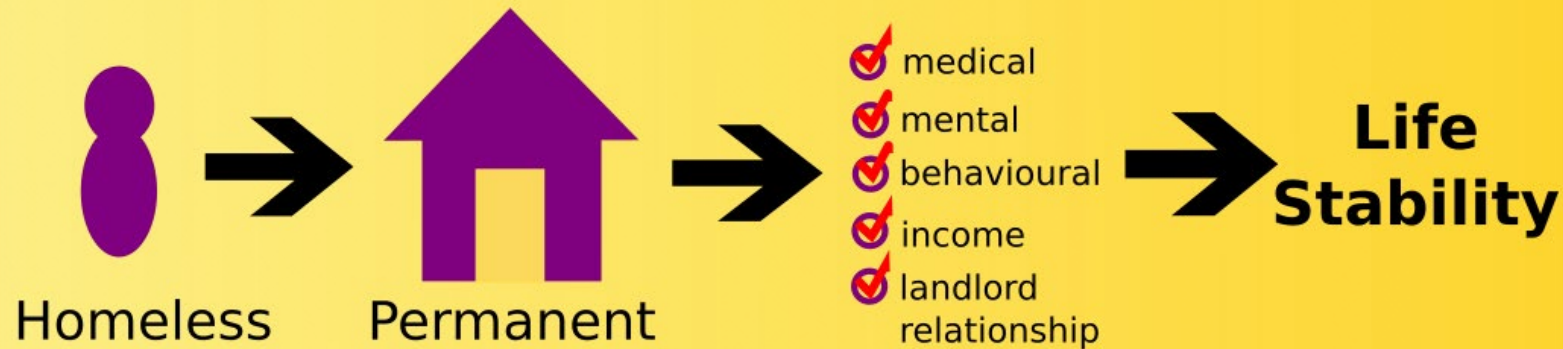# Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
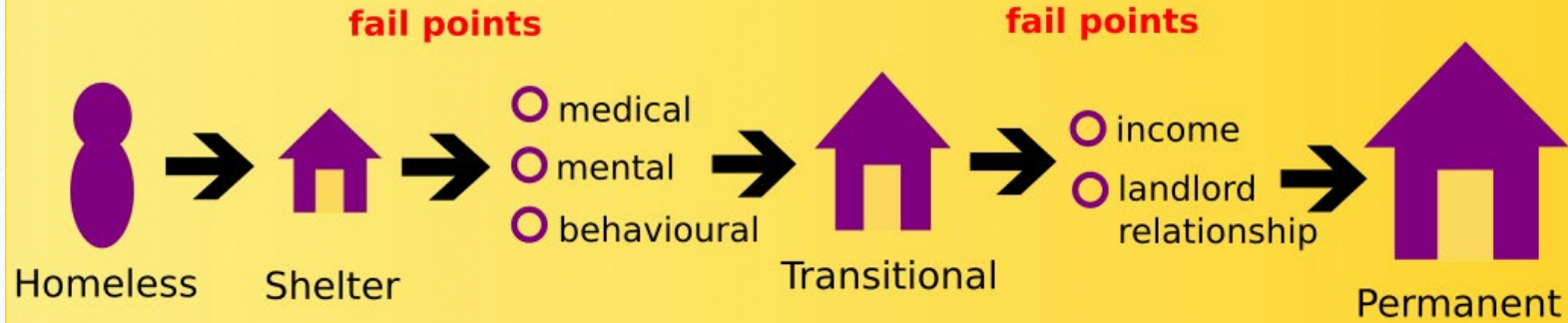
Image from Pathways to Housing

Benefits to Housing First

Initial data has shown that 80% of residents are still in housing a year after starting housing

Decreased Hospital Stays

Reconnection with Family Members and Support Network

Saves Money

Effective with the most fragile dually diagnosed clients who are chronically homeless

Why do individuals lose their apartments once they move into housing?

Leaving Apartment (90+ days)

- Prison
- Mental health or Substance Use Treatment
- Abandonment of apartment

Lease violations

- Drug and alcohol use in the public realm (ex. Having a lot of traffic, people staying over to use and being loud and disruptive).
- Not paying any bills (rent, utilities) refuses to let program become payee
- Hoarding of items
- Unauthorized individuals on the lease (either by choice or by force)

Lessons Learned about Best Practice for Housing First

- Importance of Trauma Informed Services

- Clinical Supervision

- Staff Training

- Coordination of Services

- Fidelity to the Model

- Staff Retention

- Partnerships with outside entities

- Less judgement

- Harm Reduction and a connection to Social Justice

Current Project Examining Harm Reduction Best Practices for practitioners working with youth who use drugs and/or trade sex

Qualitative Interviews in Portland, Oregon and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with providers

Students and Research recruit, interview, code to see the themes that emerge.

HARM REDUCTION MEANS RESPECT, DIGNTY, COMPASSION

Next Steps for Housing First

Housing First 2.0-What about the individuals who haven't been "successful" in scattered sites?

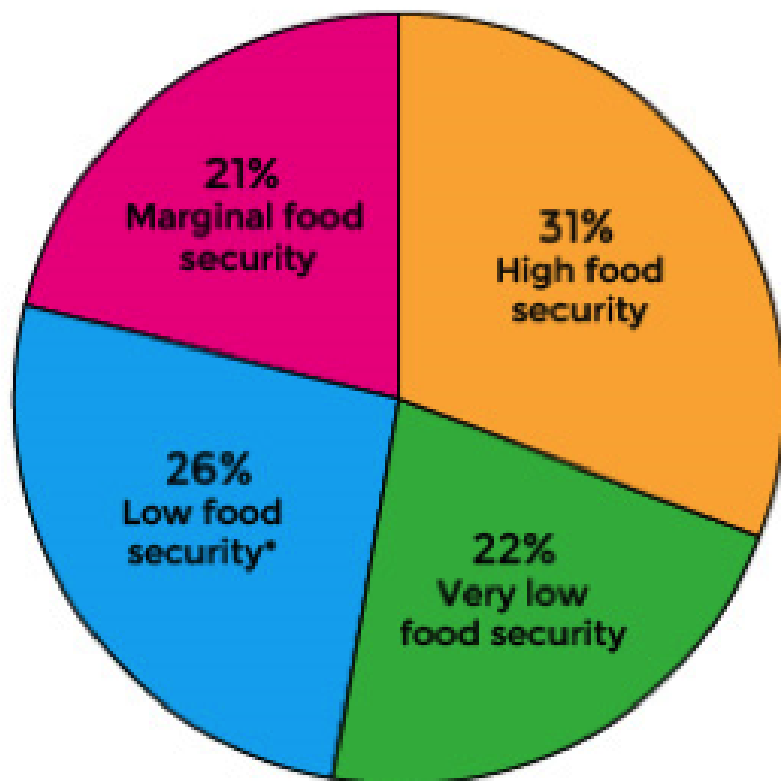Housing First for Families and Couples

Housing First and Aging In Place

Fidelity to the Model-Drug Use Epidemic

College Debt

- Student-loan debt is estimated to be 1.4 trillion, up 6 percent year over year and 116 percent in a decade

- Student-loan debt is now a bigger burden for households than car loans or credit-card debt

- Nearly 50 million adults are stuck working off their educational debt loads, including one in three adults in their 20s, erasing the college wealth premium for younger Americans and eroding the college earnings premium.

Hunger on College Campuses

21% Marginal food security

31% High food security

26% Low food security*

22% Very low food security

44 percent of students cut the size of their meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food.

15 percent of students lost weight because there wasn't enough money for food.

20 percent of students did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food.

*Low food security: food intake is reduced and normal eating patterns are disrupted due to lack of money for food.

Source: National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness

A LACK OF BASIC NEEDS AND SUPPORTS SHOULD NOT PREVENT STUDENTS FROM SUCCEEDING

"WCU takes pride in assisting former foster youth by providing an environment that nurtures their academic and personal development," West Chester President Christopher Fiorentino.

WCU Promise Program

- Supports at-risk youth 365 days a year

- This year, 70+ students who lack basic needs and supports are provided with resources to complete college

- Helps support students with access to housing over breaks, food and supplies from the Resource Pantry, monthly dinners that provide mentorship and a safe space to share successes and challenges, and more

The Promise Program

Miss West Chester University

- Allie Short, a social work major at WCU, has chosen homelessness as her platform as Miss West Chester University

- Short is one of ~70 WCY students who are homeless or former foster care youth, and seeks support through WCU's Promise Program

- "One of my goals as Miss WCU is to educate on homelessness, because there are a lot of homeless individuals on this campus, and people aren't really aware of it and don't always speak in nice terms about it."

WCU Resource Pantry

- Located on Main Campus

- Supports student success by minimizing food and basic need security and preparing students for life after graduation

- Open to all undergraduate and graduate students at WCU, regardless of need level

- Offers non-perishable food, fresh produce from the campus gardens, personal care items, school supplies, and winter and career clothing

Student Panel

- **Sam Chiaffa**, BSW '21, Red Cross House, Philadelphia
- **April Klecak**, BSW '20, Downingtown School Area District, Downingtown
- **Wanda Johnson**, MSW '20, RHD La Casa, Philadelphia
- **Tashia Walton**, BSW '20, Housing Authority of Chester County - Housing Locator Program
- **Mariah Melendez**, BSW' 21, Housing Authority of Chester County - Family Self-Sufficiency Program
- **Amber E. Howard**, MA, MSW '21, Project HOME- Advocacy and Community Engagement Intern; Former Case Manager
- **Christopher Hausman**, MSW' 21 Project HOME, Philadelphia

Sam Chiaffa - Red Cross House

- Red Cross House is a transitional housing facility service center for survivors of disasters in the greater Philadelphia area

  - This location is the only one in the country

  - Main goal is to assist families from disaster to recovery

  - Provides a 3-4 weeks stay to the families effected, three meals daily, and a case manager to assist them in developing an individualized long-term recovery plan

  - All services provided while staying at the Red Cross House are free of charge to the individuals

- Serves as an alternative to the shelter system, which lacks resources to offer similar opportunities for recovery and often forces families to live apart

  - Executing and maintaining the recovery plan helps ensure that those affected maintain a routine of normalcy

  - Case manager works with family to build a disaster recovery plan, with an emphasis on finding housing

  - Resources offered are from various public and private agencies

Sam Chiaffa - Red Cross House

- When families begin to struggle with maintaining their recovery plan, and have no friends or family to ask for assistance, their last choice is often a shelter

    - This stops individuals and families from reaching self-actualization in their current environment

    - Families are often separated or moved around across multiple shelters to accommodate their individual situation

    - Technological innovations like the Coordinated Assessment Model (CAM) can better assist shelters to accommodate homeless individuals on a technological level

    - Advocacy like the Gubbio Project can collaborate with local churches to allow homeless individuals a church pew as a place to sleep—no questions, no sign-in sheet, no intakes, just a welcoming area where individuals seeking shelter are treated with dignity

April Klecak – Downingtown Area School District

- Main goal is to provide homeless students/families in our district with the resources and supports they have rights to

- I meet with five students on a regular basis who have been identified as homeless youth in the high school

  - Even though none of my students are living on the street or in shelters, they are in living situations that "lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (McKinney-Vento Definition of Homelessness)

- During our meetings, we work through any school related issues related to their homelessness:

  - Transportation

  - Free/reduced lunch services

  - Family trauma

  - Clothing/school supplies/computer access

April Klecak – Downingtown School Area District
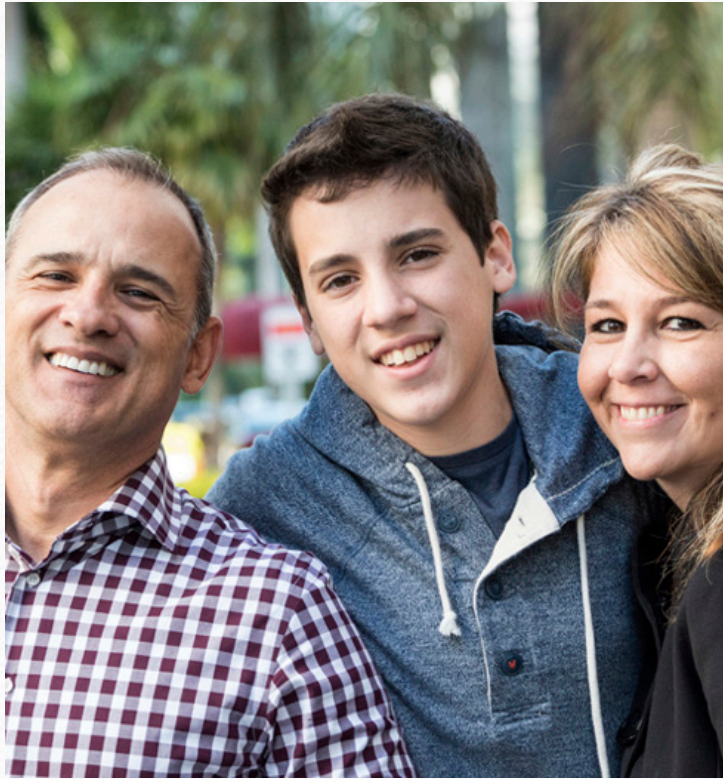
<u>Barriers in a School District:</u>

- Transportation
  - When a student is identified as a homeless youth in our district, we provide transportation regardless of where they are currently living

- Communication
  - Ongoing conversations between the staff within the 16 schools and Jamie (my supervisor and only social worker in the district) is not always as strong as it should be

- Discrepancies in homelessness definitions
  - McKinney-Vento Act and Housing & Urban Development (HUD) policies

Wanda Johnson – RHD La Casa Safe Haven for Homelessness Agency

- Main focus of RHD's La Casa is to provide a Safe Haven for young males experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia
  - RHD's La Casa is unique in its essence of community and the authenticity that exudes from both administration and participants
- Goal is to assist individuals by establishing relationships of trust and empathy, self-worth, empowerment, and reintegration into the community
  - Provides services to individuals who are living and coping with past trauma
  - Provides assistance with activities of daily living, mental health services, educational services, vocational services, healthcare, trauma recovery groups, and other therapeutic and supportive services that facilitate community reintegration
  - Fosters an environment that promotes family inclusion that helps connect individuals to their natural support system

Wanda Johnson – RHD La Casa Safe Haven for Homelessness Agency

- Barriers faced include the lack of available beds and lack of SEPTA Key cards for individuals to use

- Executive directors and policy makers need to understand there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution to homelessness

- We must continue to put pressure on our politicians and legislators for more funding for affordable housing for this population

Tashia Walton – Housing Authority of Chester County

- The Housing Locator Program's main focus is to assist people who are homeless, or in danger of becoming homeless, to find stable and affordable housing

- Once the Housing Locator Program receives a referral form from other partner agencies and/or shelters, we schedule an intake with the individual or family who is homeless

  - After the intake is completed, we start to actively search for housing

  - Goal is to find housing within 45 days

  - During this time, we are contacting landlords and visiting units to assist the individual and/or family find the housing that best fits

Tashia Walton – Housing Authority of Chester County

- Some of the barriers we face:
  - Clients not cooperating because of their disabilities and/or mental health/illness
  - Landlords not accepting the voucher or not working with housing assistance programs in general
  - Clients not liking the available units or the neighborhood
- We can work together to create more opportunities by educating landlords about the different programs and how they can provide assistance, not to only the clients but also the landlords
  - We can also be more proactive and support people who come through housing programs or receive housing assistance by helping them budget, maintain jobs, and do other things to keep secure housing

Mariah Melendez –Housing Authority of Chester County

- The Family Self Sufficiency Program (FSS) is for participants who have a Housing Choice Voucher

  - Resources offered through this program include but are not limited to: case management services, encouragement, and motivation to help families achieve their goals toward self-sufficiency

- Participants work closely with their Housing Specialist to identify both long- and short-term goals that will increase their potential to reach self-sufficiency

- If homeownership is the ultimate goal, participants are guided through the process of increasing credit scores, budgeting, saving toward a down payment, and increasing earning potential

  - First Time Home Buyer program assists participants by providing the information and support needed to successfully purchase a home should they choose to

Mariah Melendez –Housing Authority of Chester County

- Barriers the organization typically faces include:

  - Locating affordable housing for participants

  - Helping participants maintain affordability after coming off the voucher assistance

- Policy makers should focus on partnering with building owners to assist in providing more affordable housing to communities

- Advocating to cause a change within this social issue is a way to bring awareness and hopefully a change

  - Offering more building owners and landlords incentives so they also benefit from helping communities could be a great way to gain more partnerships

  - Educating them on what those benefits and incentives are may be a proactive way to get them to deeply consider partnering with assistance programs

Amber E. Howard, MA – Project HOME

- Founded in 1989, Project HOME is a non-profit social service organization in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

  - Aims to "empower adults, children, and families to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty, to alleviate the underlying causes of poverty, and to enable all of us to attain our fullest potential as individuals and as members of the broader society" (Project HOME, 2019)

  - Core issues of importance to the organization are affordable housing, opportunities for employment, access to medical care, and education

  - 11 PSH housing sites, 2 engagement centers, 2 safe havens, 1 Outreach Coordination Center, SKWC, HLC, SHRR, and at least two more PSH sites under development

- As **Case Manager** at the womxn's safe haven, role was to connect participants to supportive services and permanent housing

- As **intern** in Advocacy & Community Engagement Department, role is to support advocacy department in identifying issues of concern, development and carrying out of advocacy actions (e.g. GA Surveys, Homeless Memorial Day, SALSA actions-Federal Budget FY21)

PROJECT HOME

HOUSING | OPPORTUNITIES | MEDICAL | EDUCATION

Amber E. Howard, MA – Project HOME

- Barriers encountered:

  - Permanent Housing limited to participants that exhibit a willingness to commit to a life of recovery (e.g. sobriety and compliance with mental health treatment, namely medication) even as Philadelphia works to shift to a housing-first approach

  - Limits housing options for most vulnerable participants (e.g. residents of safe havens, engagement center participants).

- Exec Dirs. & Policy Makers must understand that **HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT- no preconditions**

  - There is no one-size fits all solution; recovery is different for everyone and there is no one way to get there

- Creating more opportunities for housing

  - Advocating and organizing for equitable policies related to housing and supportive services, renovating abandoned homes in underserved and low-income neighborhoods

Christopher Hausman – Project HOME

- Project HOME is doing a lot of work to not only build a diverse profile of housing opportunities, but also to provide the necessary resources to end chronic homelessness and poverty

- Project HOME is on the front line of homelessness with their Outreach Engagement Center

  - Partnership with the city of Philadelphia

  - Work 24/7 to offer support and shelter for those living on the street

Christopher Hausman – Project HOME

- Barriers include:
  - Government cuts/challenging hurdles to programs like general cash assistance, social security benefits, SNAP, etc.
  - Need for more low income and affordable housing
  - Ideally, there would be more funding to hire more staff members

- Directors and policy makers need to understand how government cuts greatly affect this vulnerable population
  - Getting the government to provide more funding to mental health programs and permanent supportive housing would go a long way to end homelessness and provide staff with the necessary resources to do so
- To create more housing and opportunities, we should encourage organizations to work collaboratively and advocate together to increase our strength and voice to encourage change at the macro level

Philadelphia Campus Resource Pantry

- WCU Pantry was developed without first conducting a needs assessment
  - Brought an overwhelming response of items without regard to which were most needed by students

- Philadelphia Campus plans to open a pantry after analyzing data from a needs assessment to prioritize resources and ensure that funding is used appropriately for supplies

Needs Assessment – Results

- 53% of participants said that if there was a resource pantry on the Philadelphia campus, they would use it

- 63% of participants indicated that weekday evenings would be most convenient time for pantry to be open

- **Dry Goods** were what participants indicated they would use the most, with 66% ranking this in their top 3

- Other items endorsed most by participants included **Personal Items** (55%), **Fresh Produce** (51%), **School Supplies** (45%), and **Feminine Hygiene Products** (43%)

Questions

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Resources
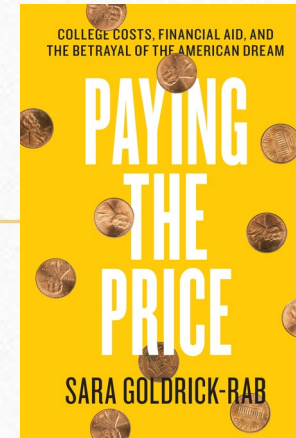
[Video Series about Housing First on YouTube from Rain City Housing Pathways to Housing](#)

[National Alliance to End Homelessness: What is Housing First?](#)

[Hud Exchange: Housing First](#)

[Housing Hub (Canada Housing First)](#)

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