



Rethinking Shelter Models:

Transitioning to Low-Barrier, Housing-Focused Approaches

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Housing as a Human Right: From Innovation to Impact

October 9, 2024



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WELCOME!!



PERSON-CENTERED AND TRAUMA-
INFORMED CONSIDERATIONS IN A
HOUSING FOCUSED SHELTER

THE NEXT 15(ish) MINUTES:

Key Insights- I will share learnings and insights that I've gained from shelter staff and guests with a lot more expertise than me

Lowering Barriers and Being More Housing-Focused- I will share common themes from shelters who have been successful in lowering barriers and becoming more housing focused

Common Pitfalls- I will share some of the most common area's where I see shelter's struggling to make improvements





You'll have **more success**

changing your shelter to meet the needs of people

rather than

changing people to meet the **needs of your shelter**



5 THINGS SUCCESSFUL SHELTERS HAVE IN COMMON

1. Clarity of **purpose**
2. **Authentically** incorporate the voice of persons with **lived experience**
3. Consistent and deliberate with their collection and use of **data**
4. Believe they are part of the **process toward solutions**, not the solution itself
5. Continuously find ways to **screen more people in than out**



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE LOWER-BARRIER?

Low Barrier Does Not = No Rules

Think of a really vulnerable individual in your community experiencing homelessness.

Can they access shelter?

LOWER-BARRIER SHELTER

- ⚡ Unwavering in their commitment to establishing safe, supportive, and **trauma-sensitive** environments
- ⚡ Ensures the **most vulnerable** people with multiple challenges can easily **access shelter**
- ⚡ Avoids the **imposition** of a specific moral or religious view
- ⚡ Does not have **required** programming as a condition of stay
- ⚡ A place of **RADICAL ACCEPTANCE**



LOWER-BARRIER SHELTER

Supports people to **meet expectations** rather than **penalize for breaking rules**

Low barrier does not mean no barrier. Some activities will not be permitted. Expectations of safety, for example, need to still be met.

Safety in low barrier is accomplished by lower staff to patron ratios. If you do not increase your staff levels, keeping a low barrier environment safe is extremely difficult, if not impossible.



Strive for no less than one direct service staff for every 20 shelter patrons at all times. Lower ratios are beneficial at busier times (e.g., wake-up; mealtimes; in the evening after dinner).





Unsheltered homelessness always has a relationship to shelter:

- Rejection of shelter
- Rejected by shelter
- Operating hours of the shelter
- Lack of space in shelter
- Reputation of shelter
- Proximity to shelter

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A HOUSING-FOCUSED SHELTER?

The Super Condensed Version

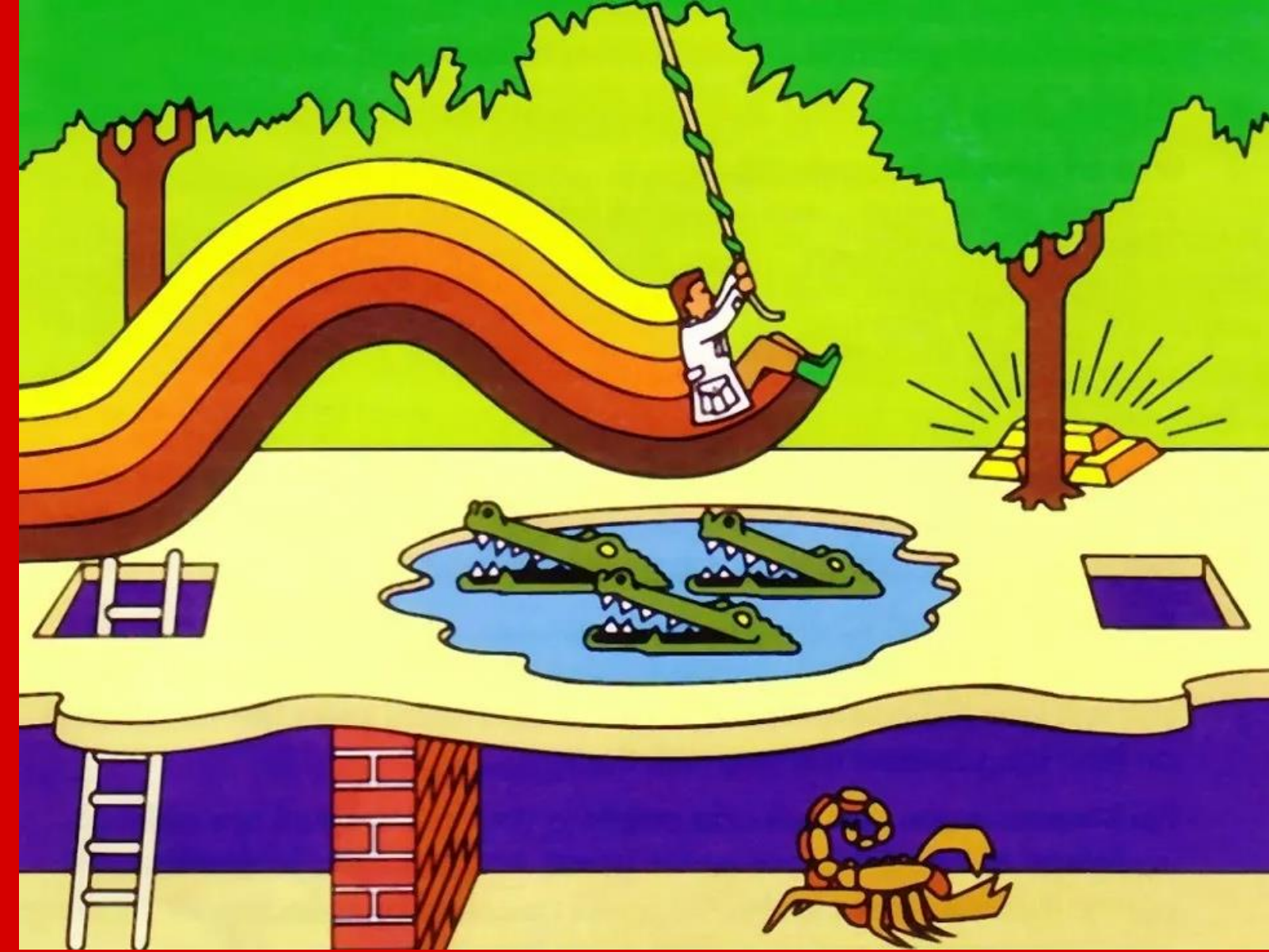
HOUSING-FOCUSED SHELTER

A **housing-focused shelter** is **unrelenting** in focusing on **housing as the solution to homelessness**. This happens through Coordinated Entry as well as outside Coordinated Entry

A housing-focused shelter accepts responsibility for shepherding the household through **all aspects of the housing process**

A housing-focused shelter sees the **purpose of shelter as the process of getting people re-housed** rather than a destination to participate in programming, rehabilitation, treatment, stabilization, or housing readiness





COMMON PITFALLS

USING THE TERM “CAUGHT”



If staff use expressions like “I caught” to describe behaviors witnessed, chances are they are policing people and exercising social control rather than supporting guests to meet expectations.

“LEGACY” RULES

Do you have any rules that are only in place because they've always been in place?



INADVERTENTLY INCENTIVIZING LONGER SHELTER STAYS

Avoid any program that makes shelter stay **a requirement** for participation (for example, a sports team made up of shelter guests; employment opportunity that requires being a shelter guest)

Avoid any program that has **multiple steps or weeks to graduation** (for example, a four-week budgeting class; a six-week life skills class; etc.)

APPROPRIATE AMENITIES & FOOD

If the amenities and/or food in the shelter are vastly superior to what they will have when they move from the shelter into housing you run the risk of inadvertently incentivizing a longer shelter stay.

Focus on simple, good quality, and easy to maintain items within the shelter.

Ensure food is nutritious, but closely resembles what people would be able to afford and prepare once they are housed.



CALLING PEOPLE “RESIDENTS”

Avoid language that projects a sense of permanency



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

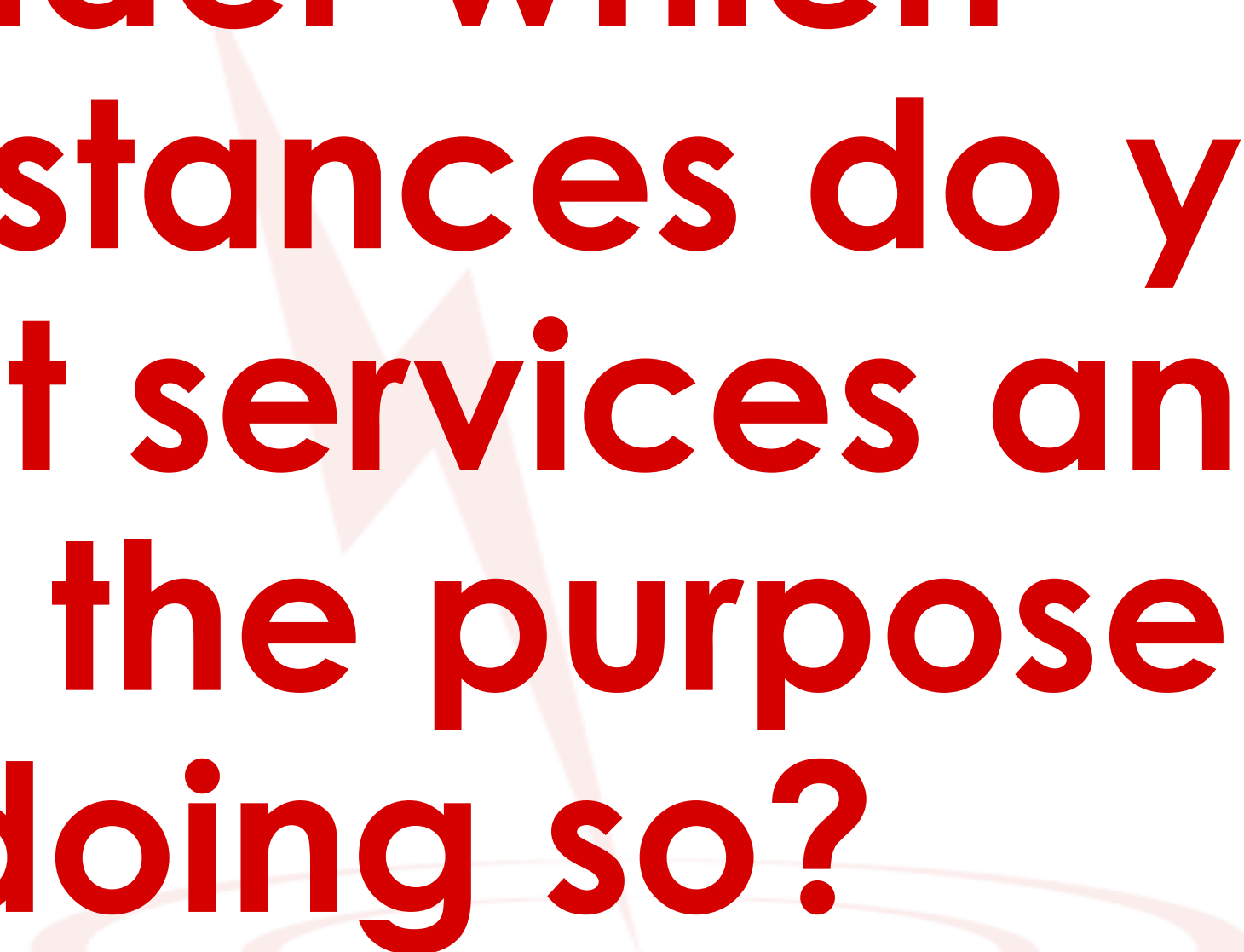
Understanding this transformation is **CULTURE** change,
not just policy change

**Does your staff have the
right training for the
current demands?**

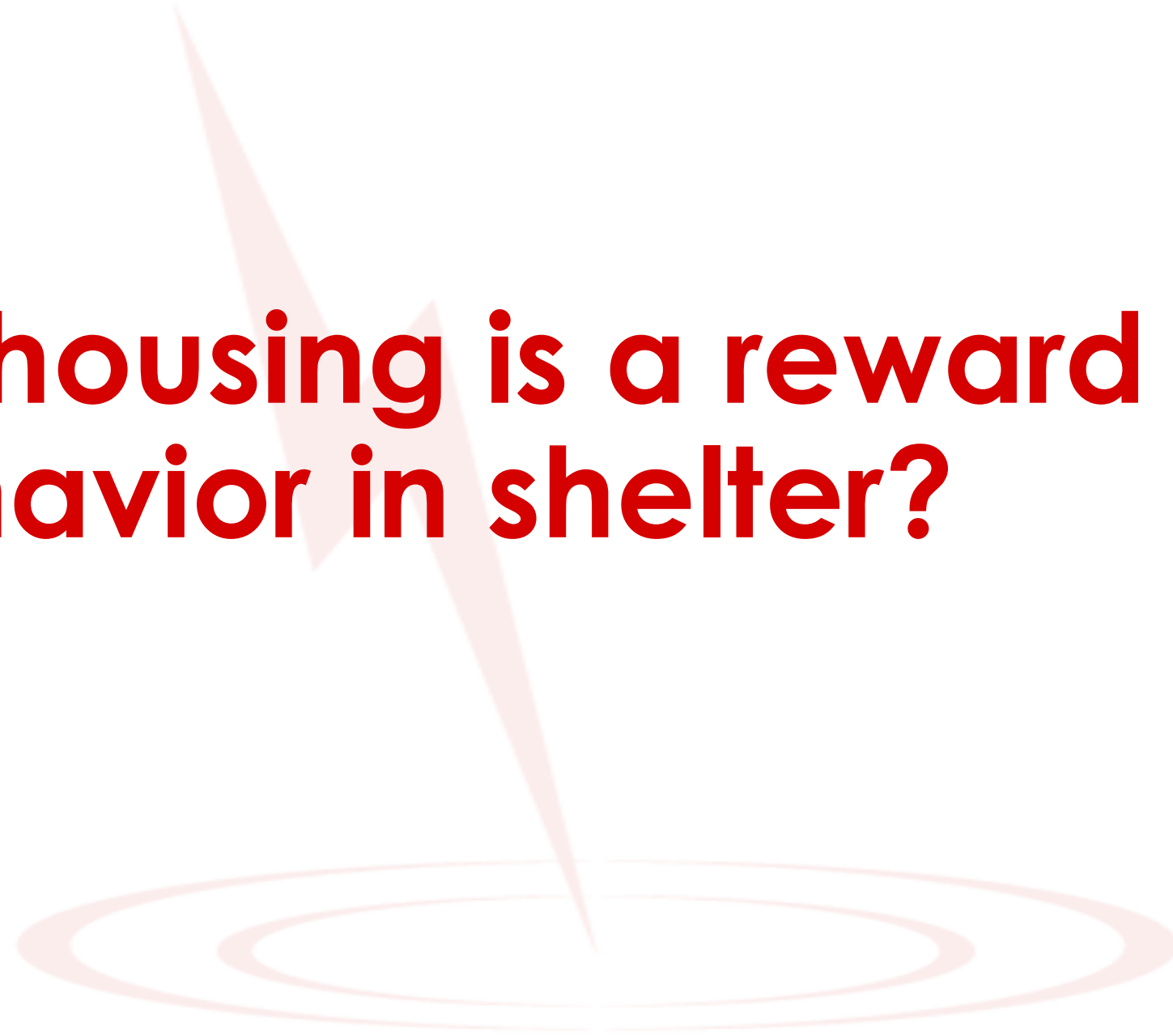


**Why are some people
choosing to sleep
outside when your
shelter has bed
capacity?**

**Under which
circumstances do you
restrict services and
what is the purpose of
doing so?**



Do you believe housing is a reward for good behavior in shelter?



Do you have any rules or barriers in place that are really judgements?



**What biases do you
have that might impact
the way you approach
your work?**



**How can we normalize
RADICAL acceptance in our
work?**



A large, empty room with rows of hospital beds and arched windows. The room is brightly lit, and the beds are arranged in neat rows. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

What problem is your shelter trying to solve?



THANK YOU

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Questions?

Thank you for attending the panel!

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Thank you to our Speakers!

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