

Emergency Shelters

The impact of barriers on the most
vulnerable



Background

- Micah Ministries was founded in 2005 to address the needs of the street and chronic homelessness in Fredericksburg, VA
- Services include a basic needs center, cold weather shelter, respite shelter, permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, employment and assistance with mainstream benefits.
- Our work has resulted in a 58% decline in chronic homelessness over the last 5 years.



Understandings

SYMPTOMS

- Mental Health
- Chronic Illness
- Disability
- Credit
- Criminal background
- Low wages
- Lack of work
- Bad choices
- Drugs
- Alcohol
- Prescription Abuse

DIAGNOSIS

Support Network

- Family/friends lack resources to assist
- Behaviors threaten the family unit
- So many bridges have been burned that they can't even come up with an emergency contact
- Lack of responsibility on the part of family or friends
- Person removes themselves from family or friends

The Cliff

Stably
Housed

At
Risk

Imminently
At Risk



The view from the bottom



The plight of the unsheltered

- Less emphasis on measuring outcomes for the unsheltered
- No promise that someone will put their eyes on you every day
- Now, you not only lack a house you have to figure out how to meet all your other basic needs.
- You become a nuisance/criminal for doing the things that everyone else does indoors (trespassing, camping, going to the bathroom)
- The longer it goes on, living outdoors becomes “normal,” making transition back to housing more difficult



Are you cutting bungee cords?

How do the rules and procedures in place at your shelter impact the person's ability to:

- Get past the front door
- Keep their bed
- Maintain and/or get a Job
- Meet basic needs
- Resolve conflict/sustain relations with family/friends
- Access transportation
- Support their mental health
- Address physical health concerns
- Connect with mainstream services



Bungee Cord Cutters

- Breathalyzers and random drug testing
- Medication requirements
- Efforts to catch what people are doing wrong, rather than building on what they are doing right
- Black and white rules that don't consider circumstances
- Unreasonable limitations on technology
- Lack of support for disabilities, children, special needs
- Canned stabilization plans that require every person entering shelter to seek all of the same services.
- Standard timelines for getting a job.
- Required groups and classes



Getting to the top of the cliff

- Start housing/discharge planning at entry
- Prioritize based on vulnerability
- Priority ONE: plan for everyone to leave your shelter with at least another bungee cord (hotel, home of a friend/family)
- Consider alternate ways for people who struggle with congregate living access case management (i.e. hotel vouchers, quicker rapid re-housing, street outreach)
- Stop telling people what they can't do and start telling them what they CAN do.
- When experiencing negative behavior, consider who has the power and realign the scales



QUESTIONS?

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