

POINT SOURCE YOUTH ON BEHALF OF OCFS PRESENTS:

LOW BARRIER HOUSING FOR RHY PROVIDERS

Training 4 • 2023

Executive Summary

Low barrier housing provides the right to housing with few limitations on accessing services. Through this model, young people are able to avoid the trauma of being on the streets, which can negatively impact mental health and prevent educational attainment and general safety concerns.

Removing barriers for youth can positively impact the course of an individual's life, and the well-being of a community. Experts in the model will discuss ways service providers can guide their direct service provision through a low-barrier approach.

Speakers

Kellie A. Bryson, Youth Consultant, *Point Source Youth Youth Advisory Council*

Alex Hansen, Youth Action Board Facilitator, *Essex County Youth Action Board*

Valerie Douglas, Director of Counseling & RHY Services, *The Center for Youth Services*

Jason McLaughlin, Executive Director, *Wait House*

Jeffrey Moore, AVP RHY, *Rising Ground Inc*



Office of Children
and Family Services

The purpose of this resource is to provide information & guidance from experts in their field that is as updated and accurate as possible. It is not intended to give medical advice for individuals or organizations.

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“Make sure that the youth have choice in their own programming and that they are feeling safe about the choices that are being made. It is also important to have trainings for the staff around equity and adultism so that they can recognize which behaviors are maybe harming the young people.”

— Alex Hansen

Three Key Takeaways



1

Youth-led work and collaboration begin when providers involve young people, not just to inform their own programming but also to inform systematic decisions and organizational values. Having youth connections and perspective not only informs the outcome and barriers of the program but young people feel more connected and safer when decisions that affect them are made by their peers.

Using restorative justice models to facilitate shared values between young people and staff creates a sense of belonging for young people, bettering engagement and participation resulting in staff retention and support.

2

Be Creative! RHY Providers are required to assess the needs, and barriers of youth participants to evaluate services and resources, and not to inform qualification or entry into the program. It is essential that there are as few barriers as possible for young people to enter and receive services. During the intake and assessment processes, engage youth as authentically and transparently as possible. Be present by approaching youth with the intent to build a relationship and rapport rather than entirely focusing on the intake requirements.

Create a cheat sheet for yourself with the essential information you need for an intake or assessment and transform into a conversation piece, and move away from having a laptop or desktop in between you and the youth.

3

Young people have to navigate limited options and choices while entering the shelter system, which are often dictated by other systems. RHY providers face constant challenges exploring the limitations of these choices and barriers controlled by higher or different systems, which can result in compassion fatigue for many providers.

Making sure that staff are supported and have resources to address the emotional labor and compassion fatigue that often shows up when collaborating with young people who have limited choices is important. Managers need to provide training and spaces of support that can model for providers what it means to not shut down, blame and shame youth for the choices they are making or have made in the past.





Four Actions You Can Take Now

1. **Explore mediation opportunities to create a shared value set between staff and youth** that can be carried forward indefinitely, and present these values to youth participants in collaboration rather than a punitive approach.
2. **Assess if there is a “no entry allowed” list for your program.** If so, work with leadership and staff to dismantle that list and foster new relationships between staff and young people, while also allowing time for both parties to heal.
3. When challenging behaviors occur, **take a moment to reflect** on if there is a path to healing from this harmful behavior. Oftentimes there are paths to healing that will allow the person who exhibited the behavior to overcome and ultimately do what is necessary to restore trust and safety in their relationships.
4. **Create monthly spaces for staff at different levels** (i.e.: case management services cohort vs outreach services cohort) to engage and discuss their own barriers and gaps in services transparently. These spaces can help staff find support within one another, explore solutions and hold each other accountable. Give service provision staff the autonomy to lead and dictate the purpose and outcome of these spaces.

“The young people coming in [don’t have] a lot of choices and our responsibility is to be able to provide them with the choices that we can. We call it ‘sitting in the suck’ because all of the options kind of suck, but part of that is making sure that the staff is grounded in being able to overcome the compassion fatigue that comes with our roles. We have to figure out a way for staff to be able to continue to be able to sit in the suck, so how can we sit with them and not allow that frustration to overcome us.”

— Valerie Douglass





Additional Resources

- [Mediation Matters](#)

“It’s less about the diagnoses as it is about the behaviors. So we do not turn people away due to a diagnosis if they are able to have behaviors that work well with others and overcome challenges. We don’t want to punish youth for being youth! When you put a blanket around behaviors, that is not person centered care.”

— Jason McLaughlin