

Making the Case for a Low-Barrier Shelter



Low-barrier solutions for high-barrier communities

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[A shelter's] **political significance** is traced to the way in which it partakes in boundary work by defining who is worthy of support, who is to count as a citizen, and which lives matter.



Evans, J. (2011). Exploring the (bio)political dimensions of voluntarism and care in the city: The case of a 'low barrier' emergency shelter. *Health & Place*, 17 (1), 24–32.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES



- + Differentiate between high- and low-barrier practices
- + Evaluate local needs and advocate for change
- + Implement a variety of low-barrier practices

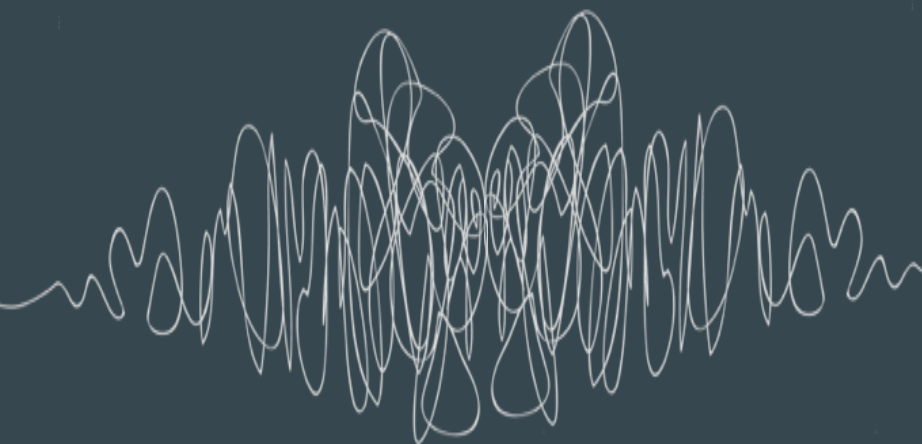
A photograph of a low-barrier shelter. In the foreground, a wooden bed frame is visible, covered with a blue and white patterned blanket that has fringed edges. A dark blue garment is draped over the side of the bed. In the background, another bed is partially visible, covered with a red and yellow striped blanket. The room has a simple, functional appearance with a wooden floor.

Low-Barrier Shelter

Low-Barrier Shelter

Planning

Implementation



A Low-Barrier Shelter is...

- + People, property, partners, pets
- + Driven by actual community needs

What happens in a high-barrier shelter?

- + Prioritize the least vulnerable
- + Unresponsive systems
- + Increase in Chronic/Unsheltered populations
- + Rule enforcement
- + Outreach works harder



Although mandated policies claim to prioritize [the most vulnerable], this group is excluded from services precisely because of the complexity of their needs...



Quirouette, M. (2016). Managing multiple disadvantages: The regulation of complex needs in emergency shelters for the homeless. *Journal of Poverty*, 20 (3), 316-339.

A background image showing a person's profile from the side, wearing glasses and holding a mobile phone to their ear. They are also holding a piece of paper with some text on it. The image is slightly blurred and has a grid overlay.

CASE STUDY

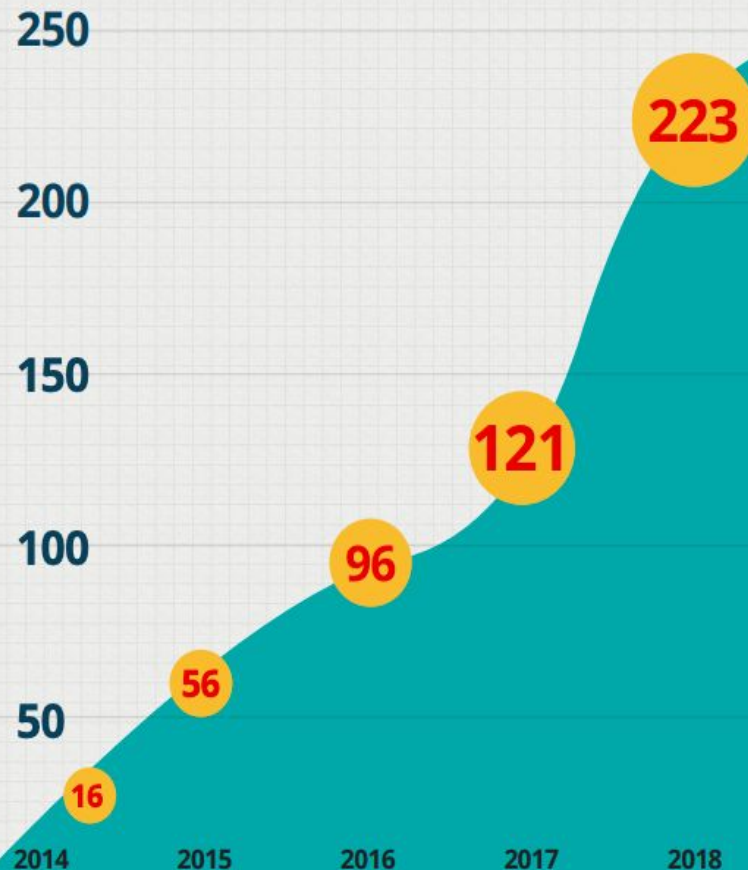
Gainesville, FL

- + **114-bed LBES**
- + **Full* LB since 2016**
- + **25% jump in housing placements**
- + **2x CH rate**

CASE STUDY

Gainesville, FL

Annual Housing Placements



A close-up portrait of an elderly woman with long, wavy white hair and thin-framed glasses. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white.

CASE STUDY

Gainesville, FL

People Served in Shelter:

- + 2012: 500 CoC-wide
- + 2018: 1500 CoC-wide

Past 5 years:

- + 36% ↓ PIT Count
- + 48% ↓ Unsheltered

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a person's face, showing their eye and part of their nose and mouth. The person has dark skin and short, dark hair. The background is out of focus, showing greenery and a path.

CASE STUDY

Gainesville, FL

2005

- + 900+ Unsheltered**
- + Empty beds**

2019

- + 461 unsheltered**
- + 99.8% occupancy**



Low-Barrier Solutions

Basic Assumptions



- Homeless people are... people.
- People have a right to food, shelter, dignity, respect.
- Integrity is critical.



Despite being widely used multifunctional institutions, emergency shelters cannot ‘fix’ the very complicated problems homeless people face.”

Quirouette, M. (2016). Managing multiple disadvantages: The regulation of complex needs in emergency shelters for the homeless. *Journal of Poverty*, 20 (3), 316-339.

Low-Barrier Solutions: PEOPLE

“We need to do background checks on every person who comes into shelter!”

- + Background checks on every person who enters
- + Look up DOC and SO info, make a case note
- + No one is precluded from receiving services

Low-Barrier Solutions: PEOPLE

“We need RULES! SO. MANY. RULES!”

- + Expectations set the tone for the campus
- + There are already laws against crime
- + What do people want? To feel safe

GRACE

Campus Expectations

- + **Respect the rights, peace, and property of everyone**
- + **Work on a housing plan to the best of your ability**
- + **No sex, drugs, weapons, gambling on campus**

Low-Barrier Solutions: PEOPLE

Focus groups yield expectations that work

- + Are any current rules unnecessary for us to provide a safe environment?
- + What expectation is hardest for you to follow?
Do you think it's reasonable?
- + Do you feel they are being upheld consistently?

Low-Barrier Solutions: PEOPLE

“Low-barrier shelters are not safe.”

- + One major incident in 5 years
- + .0075% (1 in 13,300) of people served
- + .0001% (1 in 819,000) of service interactions

Low-Barrier Solutions: PEOPLE

“We don’t have enough staff to be low-barrier!”

- + Re-train existing staff
- + “The GRACE Way” training
- + Housing-focused... *volunteers?*
- + Where are your conflicts starting?

Low-Barrier Solutions: PEOPLE

“If we don’t tell people how to live their lives, how will they know what’s best for them?”

- + Shelter workers. Not saviors
- + Your guests are in crisis. Fix the crisis

“ This programmatic environment encompasses a much greater degree of tolerance for disruptive behaviors than would be found elsewhere in the shelter system (Parr, 1997, 1999). ”

Evans, J. (2011). Exploring the (bio)political dimensions of voluntarism and care in the city: The case of a 'low barrier' emergency shelter. *Health & Place*, 17 (1), 24–32.

Low-Barrier Solutions: PROPERTY

“We don’t have the ____ to accommodate property!”

- + In-kind storage units
- + Locked storage for valuables
- + Amnesty boxes

Low-Barrier Solutions: PARTNERS

“We don’t have the ____ to accommodate partners!”

- + Security cameras?
- + Rearrange existing space
- + What are you doing if you don’t allow partners?

Low-Barrier Solutions: PETS

“We just don’t have the _____ to accommodate pets!”

- + You must allow trained, working service animals
- + “Is that a service animal?”
- + Expectations built on safety

Low-Barrier Solutions

“If we build a good shelter, people will come from everywhere!”

- + Prioritize beds for local residents
- + GRACE: 80% of beds are locals
- + Local ID, ties to community

Low-Barrier Solutions

“If we don’t limit how often they can get help, they’ll keep coming back!”

- + 30-day LOS
- + People can return to shelter after exit
- + Who wants to be homeless, anyway?
- + Get the answers with your PIT



Shelters must be low barrier, focus on assessment and triage, and intentionally link to permanent housing resources so that people move through to housing quickly — this is ‘Housing First’ at its best.”

Miller, K. (2016). Using shelter strategically to end homelessness. *U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness*. Retrieved from [https:// www.usich.gov/news/using-shelter-strategically-to-end-homelessness](https://www.usich.gov/news/using-shelter-strategically-to-end-homelessness).

Low-Barrier Solutions

“Housing First means we don’t need a shelter!”

- + Key element of the system
- + Local acuity scores
- + Housing First requires... Housing



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