

Strategies for Improving Parental Functioning within a Supportive Housing Context

The Challenge

Parenting a child who has experienced complex trauma is especially difficult, as is the case for most children in the child welfare system. Adding the contributing factor of homelessness to that trauma can increase the parent's shame associated with the child's behavior.

It is essential to create a culture within supportive housing programs that addresses shame and trauma, capitalizes on parents' intense desire to do well by their children, and restores and strengthens parents' ties to their children and social supports.



Parent functioning is defined here as **the ability of parents to flexibly, adaptively, and constructively raise their children in optimal health and well-being**. For any parent, this is a daily challenge. Parents in supportive housing programs bring along the extra challenges of past traumas, failures, and estrangement from viable social support.

This document identifies specific challenges to improving parent functioning within a supportive housing environment, and summarizes proven practices and strategies through multi-system engagement.

Parenting Challenges

From existing data, we know that **children and caregivers experiencing homelessness tend to experience high cumulative risk**. The risk factors in their lives tend to “pile up”. Many homeless children have behavioral and emotional problems and/or academic difficulties, a child who is homeless is not necessarily doing poorly – many show resilience and can be helped both by addressing risk factors and capitalizing on strengths.^{1,2}

Policy and practice within supportive housing for families should be informed by three key considerations;³

- **Addressing stress and trauma** when parent child interaction is impacted by experiences of trauma
- **Supporting child and youth development** within the context of housing
- Helping families build **protective and promotive factors** as a pathway to addressing trauma and supporting child and youth development programs.³

Supportive housing for families is different from supportive housing programs for single individuals precisely because there are at least two-generations in need of support and at least twice the opportunity to change a person's life course. Case management services for families living in supportive housing can help children thrive by helping parents nurture and support their children and assisting the whole family to increase stability.

Strengthening Families™ is a research-informed approach to increase family strengths, enhance child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.³ Effective interventions begin with a robust assessment and careful planning for staging interventions.

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10347426>

² <http://www.extension.umn.edu/family/cyfc/our-programs/ereview/docs/April2013ereview.pdf>

³ <https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Welcome-Home.pdf>

Effective Strategies for Improving Parental Functioning

The strongest programs are those that support parents' in a **highly sensitive, collaborative, and supportive fashion**. There is ample evidence that several parenting interventions can improve functioning, as well as cost benefit analyses that demonstrate the utility of these programs.⁴

Among the strongest programs are:

- Parenting Adolescents Wisely⁵
- Multi Systemic Therapy⁶
- Homebuilders⁷
- Parent Child Interaction Therapy⁸

Early on, supportive housing programs do well to establish a culture of support, acceptance, and intimacy among parents. Helping parents to feel competent and cared for creates optimal environment for parents to make needed changes.

Partnering to Improve Parental Functioning

Being a parent in supportive housing with an open child welfare case is a lot like managing a chronic illness. The stakes are high, involving multiple practitioners that need coordination. Healthcare innovations demonstrate that integrating care is a successful strategy for tackling chronic health conditions⁹. Integration relies in part upon the following: common vocabulary, commitment to coordination, and binding outcomes together.¹⁰ Supportive housing programs can be a place where these three elements come together. CSH Quality Supportive Housing includes coordination and integration.¹¹

Conclusion

Parent functioning is what brings families to the attention of child welfare and supportive housing programs. They arrive with predictable challenges and vulnerabilities that require a thoughtful and deliberate culture of care to make change. With a supportive environment, parents can engage in effective services best matched to their needs.



Parenting Strategies

Improving parent functioning depends largely on **connecting parents to the correct interventions at the right time and dose**.

Supportive housing programs have the added benefit of having an existing relationship with parents, additional resources to assist in delivering the best programs, and, ultimately, a vested interest in helping parents build and sustain the parenting skills and safe environment so that child welfare system is no longer necessary.

Optimally, housing and child welfare agencies work collaboratively to reduce challenges for parents, increase the use of shared resources and measure successes in a common fashion.



⁴ https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/nccan14_workshop_14_handout.pdf

⁵ <http://mstservices.com/target-populations/chld-abuse-and-neglect>

⁶ http://www.institutefamily.org/programs_ifps.asp

⁷ <http://www.pcit.org/>

⁸ <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/prevention-programs/parented/>

⁹ <http://www.integration.samhsa.gov/about-us/what-is-integrated-care>

¹⁰ https://www.integration.samhsa.gov/integrated-care-models/A_Standard_Framework_for_Levels_of_Integrated_Healthcare.

¹¹ https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wpcontent/uploads/2013/07/CSH_Dimensions_of_Quality_Supportive_Housing_guideb