



No Bars to Home

**Meeting the Housing Needs of People
Impacted by the Criminal Legal System**



www.homebaseccc.org

About Homebase

This report is prepared by Homebase: The Center for Common Concerns. Homebase is a California-based non-profit dedicated to building community capacity to prevent and end homelessness. In 2019, Homebase launched a Criminal Legal System Initiative (CLSI) to improve outcomes for those impacted by the criminal legal system, decrease system-involvement through housing solutions, improve public safety outcomes, and reduce strain on public resources. Through education, collaboration, and cross-sector partnerships, we can resolve the crisis of homelessness among people impacted by the criminal legal system.

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ISSUE STATEMENT

The harm experienced by people exposed to both the criminal legal system and homelessness cannot be overstated. People with histories of incarceration – specifically, time spent in jail or prison – are ten times more likely to experience homelessness than the general population.¹ Not having access to safe, stable housing can make successfully rejoining communities after incarceration much more difficult. The trauma and stress of both incarceration and homelessness impede seeking healthcare, maintaining employment, successfully completing post-release supervision, and rebuilding relationships.

The significant challenges that people exiting jails and prisons face as they reenter our communities often generate new layers of trauma. There are housing shortages nation-wide, and throughout California and Bay Area communities. Affordable housing is scarce, with demand continually outpacing supply.² The challenge to secure safe and sustainable housing is particularly acute for people impacted by the criminal legal system. The same vulnerabilities and risk factors that contribute to contact with the criminal legal system are also associated with an increased risk of homelessness.³ The experience of incarceration – i.e., extended periods of forced separation from families and communities, and living in institutional settings designed for punishment rather than treatment – can exacerbate vulnerabilities, including worsened mental and physical health and frayed social supports. This experience can then lead to an increased risk of homelessness. Furthermore, existing housing and service programs can replicate the isolation and lack of personal control of jails and prisons, which retraumatize participants and hinder positive community reentry.

To make matters worse, the United States has many laws that criminalize poverty and homelessness, creating a devastating cycle of incarceration and homelessness. This cycle of criminalization and homelessness has an outsized impact on communities that are already marginalized in the United States. For example, Black adults comprise 13% of the U.S. population but represent 33% of the prison population and 43% of the adult homeless population.⁴ Women are nearly twice as likely as men of the same race to be homeless after incarceration.⁵ Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are incarcerated at three times the rate of heterosexual people⁶ and experience homelessness at two times the rate of heterosexual people.⁷ One in six transgender people have been incarcerated, and 47% of Black transgender people have been incarcerated.⁸

Housing is the solution to homelessness. As we work to try to address the outstanding demand for housing in our communities, we must consider the safety and wellbeing of the people most harmed by homelessness and housing instability. To achieve true public safety, decrease systemic racial and ethnic disparities, and create thriving communities, there is an urgent need to ensure access to safe housing for people impacted by the criminal legal system.

This report highlights **essential elements** and key takeaways of successful housing programs supporting people impacted by the criminal legal system, with a particular focus on people who were formerly incarcerated. Through partnerships between homeless service providers, criminal legal system stakeholders, and people with lived experience of incarceration and housing instability, communities can prevent homelessness and reincarceration for our most vulnerable neighbors.

¹ National Local Income Housing Coalition, *Formerly Incarcerated People are More Than 10 Times More Likely to be Homeless* (2018), available at: <https://nlihc.org/resource/formerly-incarcerated-people-are-nearly-10-times-more-likely-be-homeless>.

² National Low Income Housing Coalition, *The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes* (2021), available at: https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/Gap-Report_2021.pdf.

³ The Prison Policy Initiative, *Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among formerly incarcerated people* (2018), available at: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/rates.html>.

⁴ National Alliance to End Homelessness, *Racial Inequalities in Homelessness, by the Numbers* (2020), available at: <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/racial-inequalities-homelessness-numbers/>.

⁵ The Prison Policy Initiative: *Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among formerly incarcerated people* (2018), available at: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html>.

⁶ The Prison Policy Initiative: *Visualizing the unequal treatment of LGBTQ people in the criminal justice system* (2021), available at: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/03/02/lgbtq/>.

⁷ UCLA School of Law Williams Institute: *Homelessness Among LGBTQ Adults in the US* (2020), available at: <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Homelessness-May-2020.pdf>

⁸ The Prison Policy Initiative: *Visualizing the unequal treatment of LGBTQ people in the criminal justice system* (2021), available at: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/03/02/lgbtq/>.



DEFINITION OF TERMS

This report uses several terms in specific ways.

We refer to environments as **carceral** if they use elements of restriction or removal from chosen community, surveillance, and/or restriction of personal autonomy. Environments, policies, and programs that are explicitly designed not to do these things are referred to as **non-carceral**.

Community Supervision refers to the process where a person lives in the community under the supervision of a parole or probation department. Generally, **parole** applies to people who have been conditionally released from prison after serving a significant portion of their maximum sentence. Typically, people on **probation** are under the supervision of their local probation department and, in California, may have been incarcerated in jail or prison.

We use the term **criminalize** to indicate an act or behavior that has been made illegal.

A **Harm Reduction** philosophy recognizes drug and alcohol use and addiction as a part of participants' lives. Participants are engaged in nonjudgmental communication regarding drug and alcohol use and offered education regarding how to avoid risky behaviors and engage in safer practices, as well as connect to evidence-based treatment if the participant so chooses.⁹

Housing First is an evidence-based approach to meeting the housing needs of people experiencing and at risk of homelessness. This approach prioritizes providing permanent housing to allow participants to meet their basic needs before managing other services. Services are available but not required for participants to access permanent housing.¹⁰

People impacted by the criminal legal system refers to people who have come into contact with law enforcement and/or the judicial system, including those who have been arrested, detained, and/or incarcerated, regardless of conviction. Impacted people may also include the families and friends of those who come into direct contact with the criminal legal system.

We refer to **people who were formerly incarcerated** to describe people who have previously been incarcerated in jails or prisons.

Permanent Supportive Housing refers to long-term housing assistance (including supportive services) provided to assist people with disabilities who are experiencing homelessness to live independently.

Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) seeks to reduce the amount of time a person experiences homelessness through short-term, tenant-based rental assistance and supportive services.¹¹

Transitional Housing refers to housing with supportive services to facilitate a successful move to permanent housing within 24 months.

Trauma-Informed Care is an approach to providing care and services that emphasizes sensitivity to issues related to a person's trauma. It encompasses four concepts: trauma awareness, an emphasis on safety, opportunities to reestablish control, and having a strengths-based approach to rebuilding.¹²

⁹ National Harm Reduction Coalition, *Homelessness and Harm Reduction* (2020), available at <https://harmreduction.org/issues/harm-reduction-basics/homelessness-harm-reduction-facts/>.

¹⁰ National Alliance to End Homelessness, *Fact Sheet: Housing First*, available at: <http://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/housing-first-fact-sheet.pdf>.

¹¹ National Alliance to End Homelessness, *Rapid Re-Housing Toolkit* (2016), available at: <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/rapid-re-housing-toolkit/>.

¹² Design Resources for Homelessness (2010), Hopper et. al, available at: <http://designresourcesforhomelessness.org/about-us-1/>.

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

Increasing housing access for people impacted by the criminal legal system is a multi-faceted issue. To make meaningful change in this space, effort must be taken across multiple systems, and the voices of impacted people and communities must guide decision making at every juncture.

This report highlights five **essential elements** that may be of particular interest to homelessness response system partners, housing programs, reentry housing providers, and others who influence housing program design and management. Furthermore, we hope that the **community highlights** inspire conversation and collaboration among these partners.

The report also provides useful information for partners outside of homelessness response and housing, including useful guidance for reentry providers and other programs who have not historically provided housing on how to responsibly move into this space. Law enforcement, community supervision entities, courts, and other criminal legal system partners seeking to interrupt the custody-to-homelessness cycle can draw inspiration from the report's **essential elements**. Criminal legal system partners can identify future partnerships and consider new uses of resources. Together, we can forge paths toward better serving people currently caught at the intersection of our criminal legal and homelessness systems.

Unique California Challenges

The homelessness system of care has a number of evidence-based housing practices to support housing retention and stability including Housing First, harm reduction, and trauma-informed care. However, these principles may conflict with certain laws, regulations, and funding restrictions imposed on programs with participants who are impacted by the criminal legal system.

For example, in California, reentry housing for people exiting county jails is often funded through Public Safety Realignment, and frequently mandates sobriety for participants.¹³ This requirement can present challenges for Housing First programs and creates housing access issues for the estimated 65% of people in prison¹⁴ and 63% of people in jail identified as having substance use disorders.¹⁵

The California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) prevents unlawful discrimination in employment and housing contexts.¹⁶ Among its many provisions, FEHA addresses housing decision-making based on criminal history information, including when such decision

making may rise to the level of unlawful discrimination.¹⁷ Although this law is a solid step forward, a number of challenges remain, including:

- Enforcement of FEHA;
- Laws and regulations that restrict housing access based on specific conviction histories;
- Ongoing stigma, biases, and subjective assessment of moral deservedness that can limit access to housing and housing programs for people impacted by the criminal legal system;
- Lack of recognition of, and processes to adequately capture, homelessness vulnerability in populations impacted by the criminal legal system across homelessness systems of care.

Despite these challenges, the featured **community highlights** demonstrate the feasibility and importance of incorporating a Housing First approach to meet the housing and service needs of people who were formerly incarcerated.

¹³ Assembly Bill 109, ch. 15, Stats. 2011 For more information, see 2011 Public Safety Realignment Act: Ninth Annual Report on the Implementation of Community Corrections Partnership Plans (July 2021), available at: <https://www.bscc.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021-Community-Corrections-Partnership-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁴ National Institute on Drug Abuse., *Criminal Justice DrugFacts* (2020), available at: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/criminal-justice>

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Drug Use, Dependence, and Abuse Among State Prisoners and Jail Inmates, 2007-2009* (Revised 2020), available at: <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/dudaspi0709.pdf>

¹⁶ [Government Code, Title 2, Division 3, Part 2.8](#)

¹⁷ 2 CCR §12005 (2020). For full regulations, see <https://www.dfeh.ca.gov/LegalRecords/>





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: PATHWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY

Housing is an urgent shared need at the intersection of the criminal legal and homelessness systems. Across California, partners are working together to establish programs that support participants dually impacted by these systems to sustain long-term housing.

The programs highlighted in this report demonstrate effective strategies for providing dignified, non-carceral housing for people impacted by the criminal legal system in partnership with community supervision and other criminal legal system stakeholders.

This report is based on feedback from interviews of dozens of program participants and staff who shared successes, challenges, and lessons learned. Several themes regularly emerged across these interviews, serving as the foundation for the five *essential elements* to consider in effective program design, engagement, and support. These elements are:

1. Center People with Lived Experience in All Stages of Programming

Centering people who have been impacted by the criminal legal system is essential to creating an effective housing program. The deep expertise generated through personal experience can provide valuable insight at every stage of program development. Every program highlighted here includes leadership or staffing by people with lived experience in the criminal legal system and/or homelessness.

2. Incorporate Trauma-Informed Design Principles

Trauma-informed design is a way of creating built environments that are sensitive to the trauma that participants may undergo from the criminal legal system and/or homelessness. A crucial aspect of trauma-informed design in housing programs for these populations is creating a non-carceral atmosphere. Trauma-informed design and care can help create a sense of inclusion and community in housing programs, making them higher quality.

3. Lower Barriers Through Responsive Programming for Unique Subpopulations

Often when trying to connect people who were formerly incarcerated to housing, housing providers screen out subpopulations they think will be difficult to work with or have demanding service needs. This has the effect of creating additional barriers to housing for these individuals, many of whom are particularly vulnerable. Programs responsive to client input and the special needs of subpopulations are successful in helping the most vulnerable participants access and retain stable housing.

4. Build Transparent Cross-Sector Partnerships

By building relationships and clearly assigning roles between community supervision and housing programs, staff and participants take ownership of their respective duties and responsibilities. Transparent communication allows housing programs to focus on implementing Housing First principles and supporting participant stability in the community. This in turn helps housing programs build relationships with their participants because they can see the program is committed to their safety, dignity, and autonomy.

5. Respond to Intersectional Challenges

People impacted by the criminal legal system often experience myriad, interconnected challenges to stability and well-being. Recognizing the holistic and intersectional needs of their program participants, successful programs often strategically expand their service provision to address these core gaps and barriers that are not being met elsewhere in the community.

Each element is described in further detail below and is accompanied by *community highlights* – examples of promising organizational practices that successfully implement a given element to help an organization serve people who were formerly incarcerated.

The *community highlights* featured in this report are represented in the following programs:

- Anti-Recidivism Coalition (Los Angeles, California)
- Community Care Coordination Program (San Diego, California)
- Home Free (San Francisco, California)
- Homecoming Project (Oakland, California)
- InterFaith Shelter Network (Santa Rosa, California)
- Lao Family Community Development (Oakland, California)
- Project Rebound, California State University, Fullerton (Fullerton, California)
- RISE Program at St. John's Well Child and Family Center (Los Angeles, California)
- San Jose State University Record Clearance Project (San Jose, California)

Finally, the report provides a summary of *action steps* that programs and partners can take to integrate each element into their work.

ELEMENT ONE: CENTER PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE IN ALL STAGES OF PROGRAMMING

Centering people who have been impacted by the criminal legal system is essential to creating a meaningful and effective housing program. The deep expertise inherently generated through first-hand experience can provide valuable insight at every stage of program development, including conceptualization, design, planning, implementation, and evaluation. People with lived experience can also improve the effectiveness of programs by participating as program leadership; helping create a safe and trusting environment for participants through program design and policy; modeling successes and approaches to challenges; and providing peer mentorship.

Every program highlighted in this report includes leadership or staffing by people with lived experience of incarceration and/or homelessness. In some cases, this leadership resulted in the development of a completely new and innovative approach to housing; in others, this leadership is demonstrated in the day-to-day mentorship and support provided by peer counselors, housing navigators, and other program staff. The success of these programs demonstrates that centering people with lived experience of incarceration and homelessness is essential at every phase of development.

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT:

Homecoming Project

Oakland, California

Impact Justice's Homecoming Project is a house sharing program that matches people exiting prison with hosts who have vacant rooms. Although Impact Justice was not originally a housing program, the program was acutely aware of the far-reaching impacts of the criminal legal system and wanted to create non-carceral supports for people exiting prison. Recognizing that stable housing is essential to reducing the harm caused by the criminal legal system, the Project focused on housing for people who have served or been sentenced to more than 10 years in federal or state prison, a population with a higher risk of homelessness and a lower risk of recidivism.

Impact Justice has three pillars:

- Reduce the number of people entering the criminal legal system and repair harm outside of the court system
- Improve conditions for people living inside prison
- Provide reentry support for people transitioning from prisons to the community

Guided by the three pillars of Impact Justice and a creative approach to the sharing economy, the Homecoming Project matches participants with hosts (housing owners or renters who have vacant rooms). Participants are referred through parole agents, attorneys, counselors, and self-referrals. Hosts and participants go through a mutual selection process that includes a meeting over the phone or in person.

The ideal host is well informed about the criminal legal system, believes in second chances and redemption, and is committed to social justice efforts. Most hosts are homeowners, but some are tenants who have received permission to participate from their landlords. Many hosts have been personally impacted by the criminal legal system and understand the importance of stable, non-carceral housing. After completing a host readiness interview, hosts receive a program orientation, bi-monthly training, and a monthly housing stipend for six months.

Participants receive the support of a community navigator, a person impacted by the criminal legal system who acts as a life coach and case manager. Additional supports include care packages, monthly gift cards, weekly food delivery, clothing vouchers, and a cell phone with a paid six-month contract.

At the time of our interview, over 70 participants have been housed through the Homecoming Project and all of them continue to live successfully in their communities without reincarceration.

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT:

Anti-Recidivism Coalition

Los Angeles, California

The Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) provides a range of services for people impacted by the criminal legal system. Initiated as a mentoring program for young people who were formerly incarcerated, ARC has expanded to provide youth and adults with reentry services, including two site-based housing programs through ARC Housing.

ARC Housing programs are designed for two specific subpopulations: adults who were incarcerated for extended periods of time, and youth who were incarcerated. Each housing program includes stable, subsidized housing and access to a range of individualized services to support the transition back into the community. A key program component is ensuring that participants have sufficient income in place when moving to permanent housing. To that end, participants make monthly deposits, representing 50% of their earnings, into an ARC account. Participants receive assistance in establishing a checking and savings account and upon graduation, 100% of their savings are returned to them.

ARC prioritizes the lived experience and wisdom of people who are currently or were formerly incarcerated. More than three-fourths of the staff, including all life coaches, were previously incarcerated and are instrumental in fostering a sense of belonging and community for program participants. ARC provides a large support network that includes connections to employment and career pathways, education, and housing. The Ride Home Program, staffed by people impacted by the criminal legal system, provides critical support in the first hours after release from prison; a team of ARC staff members meet people at the prison gates upon release, transport them to their pre-approved transitional housing program, and guide them through the initial hours and days of reentry, a time period that is particularly challenging. During the ride home, the drivers share information about reentry resources and assist participants in purchasing a meal, clothing, and toiletries.



“They treat us like citizens, not inmates.”

— Homecoming Project Participant

ELEMENT TWO:

INCORPORATE TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Incarceration and homelessness are both known to cause trauma. This trauma can include physical injury and psychological damage from the severe stress of these situations. Because the effects can be long-term and wide-ranging, providers should serve these populations with proper training, care, and understanding.

Trauma-informed care is an approach to providing care and services that emphasizes sensitivity to issues related to a person's trauma. It encompasses four concepts: trauma awareness, an emphasis on safety, opportunities to reestablish control, and having a strengths-based approach to rebuilding. Even when a service is not meant to specifically treat trauma, it may be improved by considering how participants may experience the service differently based on previous traumatic experiences. Trauma-informed approaches are effective in improving housing stability and preventing homelessness.¹⁸

Trauma-informed design uses the principles of trauma-informed care to create built environments that are sensitive to an individual's traumatic experiences. It arose out of an understanding that physical spaces influence and are influenced by behavior. A crucial aspect of trauma-informed design in housing programs – particularly those that serve people who have been incarcerated – is creating a non-carceral atmosphere. This approach can include creating green spaces, flexible common areas, and a calm place of refuge from life stressors. Trauma-informed design and care can help create a sense of inclusion and community in housing programs, making them higher quality.



COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT:

Project Rebound, California State University, Fullerton

Fullerton, California

Project Rebound began in 1967 with the intention of assisting formerly incarcerated people to enroll at San Francisco State University and has since expanded to operate at 14 California State University (CSU) campuses. After receiving many letters from students who needed housing support, the program designed a housing initiative at California State University, Fullerton in 2018 to also ensure students had access to safe, quality housing.

To design housing for their students, Project Rebound solicited input from people with lived experience of incarceration, including community partners and their own Program Director. This team was guided by their commitment to creating a living space that promoted a

¹⁸ Design Resources for Homelessness (2010), Hopper et. al, available at: <http://designresourcesforhomelessness.org/about-us-1/>.

healing environment for their students, whether recently out of custody or farther along in their reentry process.

To do so, they needed a place that was distinctly different from carceral settings and traditional shelters. They signed a master lease for a house in a scenic neighborhood where properties have large lots and backyards. Being in a location with open spaces, no constant police presence, and homes built with pride and care felt distant from carceral settings and provided a fresh context for residents where they could gain a sense of independence, autonomy, and freedom. This trauma-informed design extended to the interior of the house where residents had an open community space, lots of natural light, and high-quality furniture.

The owner of the house leases it to the university and Project Rebound makes the payments. There are no house rules or restrictions beyond what the university requires. For example, Project Rebound students do not have curfews and have full access to their cell phones and computers. Because the house is considered part of university housing, participants must adhere to university housing rules such as no alcohol, drugs, or violence on the premises – sharing the same expectations as all other students living in university housing. With a safe and trusting environment, residents build a community with each other and focus on their education rather than their past incarceration.

The Project Rebound house at CSU Fullerton has space for six residents for as long as they are full-time students. A majority of all participants across campuses go on to complete graduate degrees, and the programs have a 0% recidivism rate.

“Without them, I would be sleeping in a tent.”

— InterFaith Shelter Network Participant



ELEMENT THREE: LOWER BARRIERS THROUGH RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING FOR UNIQUE SUBPOPULATIONS

There can be a disconnect between established, evidence-based approaches to housing and the rules and regulations governing many housing programs for people impacted by the criminal legal system. Housing First is an evidence-based approach that provides immediate access to housing regardless of a participant's sobriety or use of substances, completion of treatment, or participation in services.¹⁹ Services are informed by a harm reduction philosophy where tenants are offered education regarding how to avoid risky behaviors and engage in safer practices. Tenants are connected to evidence-based treatment if they so choose.²⁰ Services are client-focused and voluntary, and client choice and voice are respected.

People who were formerly incarcerated reflect diverse populations with different histories and needs. Often when trying to connect people to housing – a frequently challenging task – providers “screen out” or choose not to serve subpopulations they think will be difficult to work with or have demanding service needs. While providers may not intend to cause harm, this has the effect of creating additional barriers to housing for these individuals, many of whom are particularly vulnerable. People who have served long sentences, survivors of domestic violence who have engaged in criminalized behaviors, people with serious mental illness, households with undocumented members, and people on the sex offense registry are at particularly high risk of homelessness and are often populations who are screened out. Programs grounded in responsive programming that reflects client input and addresses the special needs of these subpopulations are successful in supporting the most vulnerable participants to access and retain stable housing.

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT:

Home Free

San Francisco, California

Five Keys is grounded in an understanding of the humanity of people living in jails and prisons and the value of opportunity and hope. Starting as a charter school in jails in 2003 and expanding to provide a range of reentry services, Five Keys came to recognize the unique needs of a subpopulation whose needs were not being met by most reentry programs: survivors of domestic violence who are criminalized for survival actions such as self-defense or being at the scene of a crime under the coercion of a person causing harm.²¹

¹⁹ California Welfare and Institutions Code § 8255 (b), available at: https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=WIC&division=8.&title&part&chapter=6.5.&article.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ S&P Analysis, available at: <https://survivedandpunished.org/analysis/>.

Home Free was created by Five Keys to provide a restorative environment for women who served long prison sentences resulting from their experiences of gender-based violence. After 10 to 40 years in a California state prison and a protracted history of trauma, participants are greeted with housing that is safe, non-carceral and transformative. Participants move into a private room in a shared apartment renovated by a team of professionals volunteering their time. The renovations focused on creating a space filled with natural light, access to garden space, and privacy – all elements that create a setting conducive to healing.

For Home Free, responsive programming means delineating the roles between supportive services, housing, and parole requirements. For example, while drug tests are required for people on parole, Home Free staff do not administer or manage this process, allowing them to maintain a trusting dynamic with participants and maintain Housing First principles. Responsive programming also means recognizing the need for a housing program that isn't focused on substance use disorders, is non-carceral, and is designed to respond to the needs of survivors. Services, which range from computer literacy to yoga, focus on healing and supporting clients to navigate the world in a new way.

At Home Free, participants are encouraged to participate in services, but housing is not contingent on service participation. In addition, participants stay in the program for as long as they need before transitioning to permanent housing. Whereas most reentry housing programs have strict time limits, this flexibility allows participants the time and resources to address their histories of trauma and long periods of incarceration.

Communities that implement system-wide Housing First practices are more cost-effective, successful, and better serve people experiencing homelessness. However, certain funding sources mandate requirements such as sobriety, monitoring, and program participation that are contrary to the Housing First approach. Home Free has developed a diversified funding pool that enables it to provide a housing program for women on parole while also maintaining a Housing First approach. With an emphasis on participant choice and voice, Home Free seeks to honor the needs and autonomy of participants while also adhering to funding requirements.



“They treat people like human beings. No one looks down on you, they were there to uplift us.”

— Homecoming Project Participant

ELEMENT FOUR:

BUILD TRANSPARENT CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

A common feature of successful programs is relationship building. By building relationships and clearly assigning roles between community supervision and housing programs, staff and participants take ownership of their respective duties and responsibilities. This transparent communication allows housing programs to focus on implementing Housing First principles and prevent reincarceration. This in turn helps housing programs build relationships with their participants because they can see the program is committed to their safety, dignity, and autonomy.

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT:

InterFaith Shelter Network

Santa Rosa, California

InterFaith Shelter Network (IFSN) started as a community based nonprofit organization providing transitional housing and services to people experiencing homelessness and expanded to include Rapid Rehousing in 2013. Six years later, in recognition of the deep intersection between homelessness and the criminal legal system, IFSN created a comprehensive, targeted program to provide housing for people who have been incarcerated in a California state prison. The rapid rehousing program has served over 190 households at the time of our interview.

IFSN provides both transitional housing and rapid rehousing:

Rapid Rehousing: IFSN has found that rapid rehousing provides the time necessary to build strong rapport with clients, and helps promote the healing, recovery, and stability people who have experienced incarceration often need. This model allows IFSN to better incorporate a trauma-based treatment approach with sufficient time for therapeutic interventions. IFSN's rapid rehousing programming runs for 12 months, with flexibility to extend supportive services in some of their projects. Program participants and their households receive free psychotherapy and landlord liaison support at any point, for life.

Transitional Housing: IFSN also partnered with local

probation to provide transitional housing for people on probation. The program currently serves 700–900 people each year out of seven locations. Three locations are dedicated to people under Post Release Community Supervision or otherwise under county probation supervision, including people on the sex offense registry; three locations are open to people on other forms of probation, including people involved with the local drug court; and the final housing location serves people experiencing serious mental illness who are in pretrial and may be in and out of custody.

IFSN's successes are inextricably linked to their cultivation of strong, cross-system partnerships grounded in clear and open communication. In addition to robust relationship building with public housing authorities and private landlords, IFSN has developed long-standing relationships with community supervision. County Coordinated Entry pop-ups occur regularly at mandatory Parole and Community Team (PACT) meetings, and IFSN engages in outreach at the local probation office as well. IFSN and probation regularly attend each other's participant-focused meetings.

Transparency, responsiveness, and dependability are essential ingredients in these relationships, and are crucial to IFSN's commitment to participant-focused service provision and advocacy. These ingredients allow IFSN to maintain their Housing First approach while working with people under community supervision with requirements that include sobriety. By identifying roles and responsibilities regarding sobriety and criminalized behavior collaboratively with participants, community supervision, and staff, trust and accountability increases all around.

IFSN puts client choice at the center of all housing decisions. If clients prefer sober housing, having drug or alcohol screenings occur in housing rather than at

“They allowed me to bring my dog into the housing and bent over backwards for me.”

— InterFaith Shelter Network Participant

a supervision office, or want to include sobriety as part of their long-term treatment and stability plan, IFSN supports them in these choices. IFSN also works with clients and community supervision officers to openly communicate about the best ways to honor client choice vis-à-vis meeting supervision requirements. IFSN implements a “no-secrets” policy that prioritizes client communication and personal responsibility; for example, if a client prefers to do drug testing at the housing program and receives a positive test, IFSN will support the client in reporting the result to probation and advocating for treatment or another preferred outcome. IFSN is committed to not exit anyone from its programs, barring a significant safety risk. Through consistent, clearly-defined delineation of roles amongst participants and community supervision partners, IFSN has seen increases in cross-system focus on treatment-oriented approaches to working with people post-release, and greater cross-system understanding and engagement in Housing First approaches.

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT:

Community Care Coordination Program - C3

San Diego, California

In 2019, San Diego County implemented the Community Care Coordination program (C3) to increase support for people with serious mental illness (SMI) returning to the community from local jails without stable housing. C3 provides post-release, peer-led care coordination and system navigation in the community to connect participants to permanent housing and supportive services immediately upon release. In addition to peer support specialists, the C3 team includes clinicians and a housing specialist. The program supports participants for 12 months post-release, with the option for extension to ensure robust connection to supportive services and the appropriate level of care. Ensuring this secure connection is essential to C3 participants successfully moving away from the program into more mainstream, longer-term community supports.

C3 initially focused on expedited in-reach to build rapport and create housing plans with individuals that were frequently in custody and experienced behavioral health challenges. The program has since expanded to work with a broader range of people with severe mental illness who are impacted by the criminal legal system and added dedicated programs for veterans and people with

cognitive impairments or other significant medical needs exiting custody. Early outcomes indicate that program participants are less likely to experience homelessness and reincarceration, reducing trauma, increasing community stability, and preserving system resources.

C3 is the fruit of a partnership between the County of San Diego’s Health and Human Services Agency’s Department of Homeless Solutions and Equitable Communities, Sheriff’s Department, Office of the Public Defender, Probation Department, District Attorney’s Office, City Attorney’s Office, and representatives of the County of San Diego’s Public Safety Group.

To maximize program efficacy, C3 emphasizes shared goals across partner entities – for example, the shared goal of participants successfully discharging from community supervision – and creates clear roles that play to partner and participant strengths. A shared understanding of the role each partner plays in supporting C3 participants to remain safely in the community forms the backbone for the program’s success.

C3 referrals are primarily made through Sheriff discharge planners and Public Defender mental health clinicians. C3 staff employ a practice of being present consistently at the time of client release, provider meetings, medical and other client appointments, and community supervision check-ins. This practice communicates their presence to the court, probation, and other criminal legal system partners. It also ensures that their clients know C3 is a reliable partner in their post-release stabilization process.

Individual relationships with probation officers and other partner agency staff have increased C3’s efficacy in supporting and advocating for their clients and has helped build their positive reputation with courts and other criminal legal system partners in the community. This systemic trust in the program is passed along to participants: criminal legal system partners know that if someone is working with C3 they will have consistent, quality support. This trust has allowed C3 to effectively work with clients and demonstrate to criminal legal system stakeholders the stabilizing impacts of housing. Early evaluation outcomes from the program’s second year show that 91% of participants experienced reduced contact with the criminal legal system and an increase in the number of days they spent in the community compared to the twelve months prior to enrollment. The program also demonstrated a 78% reduction in the number of days participants spend in custody.

ELEMENT FIVE: RESPOND TO INTERSECTIONAL CHALLENGES

People impacted by the criminal legal system often experience myriad, interconnected challenges to their stability and well-being. Recognizing the holistic and intersectional needs of their participants, programs often strategically expand their service provision to address these core gaps and barriers that are not being met elsewhere in the community.

Programs that are flexible and responsive to the unique and evolving needs of the community can expand who they are serving and have more impactful outcomes.

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT:

San Jose State University Record Clearance Project

San Jose, California

The San Jose State University (SJSU) Record Clearance Project started as an undergraduate class within the Justice Studies Department to assist clients coming out of jail or prison with expunging their criminal records. Recognizing that their clients were facing pervasive challenges in obtaining secure housing, the program expanded to include housing support and peer mentorship. The Project now hires former clients to assist people coming out of custody, supporting their reentry process to reach self-sufficiency and eligibility for expungement. In this peer-mentor-led model, former clients provide support, mentorship, and help accessing services.

To be eligible for the program, clients must be Santa Clara County residents who are unemployed and experiencing homelessness at the time of their exit from jail or prison. Clients are connected to the program through referrals from rehabilitation officers and the Reentry Resource Center, a county-run program that provides support and services to formerly incarcerated residents.

“Once I had my record expunged, I was accepted at an apartment that had previously denied me – I was jumping up and down with joy.”

– SJSU Record Clearance Project Participant

Within one week of referral, peer mentors meet with clients to start building a relationship. In most cases, mentors meet with participants several times before release to create a post-release plan, which includes finding housing, obtaining identification documents such as social security cards, and applying for mainstream benefits. Upon release, mentors arrange for participants to access a ride-sharing app and meet at the Reentry Resource Center, where the program provides rental assistance, bedding, a hygiene kit, a phone, and clothing before they arrive at their housing program. Many of the housing options selected by participants are well known to mentors because they themselves once stayed there. This familiarity helps mentors provide especially effective support. Once identification documents have been arranged, mentors focus on connecting participants to employment providers. Participants meet weekly with mentors and have the option to attend weekly support groups.

In the last three years, 218 participants have successfully exited the program through securing employment or housing.

“I was told, ‘we don’t want to put any stress on you, we want you to enjoy your freedom.’”

– Homecoming Project Participant

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT:

Lao Family Community Development

Oakland, California

Lao Family Community Development (LFCD) was founded over 40 years ago by Laotian refugees to help newly arrived Southeast Asian refugees in the Bay Area receive the support and services they needed. These services included workforce training, mental and physical health support, education, English language training, financial literacy training, childcare, food services, and victims' services. LFCD has since expanded to serve people of all ethnicities and nationalities, recognizing that different communities shared common challenges. Today they serve clients from 40 countries.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the technology boom resulted in skyrocketing costs of housing and homeownership in the Bay Area, and LFCD found that many of their clients were homeless or at risk of homelessness because they could not afford housing. Because of this dire community need, LFCD expanded into housing: it became a HUD-certified housing counseling agency, training clients on foreclosures and finding affordable housing.

LFCD began receiving letters from community members who were incarcerated, requesting help finding housing when they were released. Many of these people were limited English speakers who had served long prison sentences and sought out LFCD for its cultural competency. Once again, LFCD expanded to fulfill this community need even though they hadn't previously specialized in serving people in reentry. To gain expertise, LFCD received capacity training by the Alameda County Probation Department, trained its staff on barriers faced by people in reentry, and adopted fair chance hiring practices. After a referral from the probation department, participants enrolled in LFCD's reentry housing program receive free housing and food for up to 12 months while having access to LFCD's wraparound services. LFCD then helps participants find permanent housing, leveraging its existing relationships with landlords from decades of work with housing refugees.

LFCD is an inspiring example of an organization that expanded its services to meet urgent community needs. People turned to LFCD for these needs because the organization did unique work and built trust in the community



over decades. LFCD expanded responsibly by learning from federal and county agencies that had expertise and then training its own staff to make sure they were knowledgeable and capable of effectively serving their clients. As a result, LFCD's Oakland housing program now serves 150 people annually.

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT:

RISE Program at St. John's Well Child and Family Center

Los Angeles, California

St. John's Well Child and Family Center was established in 1964 as a pediatric health clinic. It has since expanded to serve low-income, uninsured, and under-insured patients of all ages in 20 site-based and mobile clinics across Los Angeles County. To better serve patients who were formerly incarcerated, the Center created the Reentry Integrated Services, Engagement, and Empowerment (RISE) program in 2016.

When a patient tells a St. John's clinician that they have been incarcerated, St. John's provides a warm handoff to a RISE community health worker. Most of these community health workers have lived experience of incarceration, which RISE identifies as being crucial to building relationships with participants and encouraging them to open up about their experiences and needs. The community health workers often do the work that traditional case managers don't have the bandwidth to do, helping participants receive more social service support and finding resources for participants outside of the clinic.

RISE's housing program began in 2020 and is meant to help participants who have been in prison or jail find and maintain permanent housing. Participants build a care plan with their community health worker and get

connected to a housing navigator. The housing navigator helps participants find housing and negotiate with landlords. RISE pays the first three months of rent and then gradually steps down its rental assistance until the participant can be fully responsible for payment. RISE's clinical component has been valuable in providing mental health support while participants make these housing transitions. Because St. John's has existing agreements with property management organizations, engaging landlords has not been a major barrier to RISE's work. Additionally, the program notes that building landlord relationships through transparency, consistency, and telling participants' stories has been crucial to engagement.

A commitment to evolve programming to best meet patient needs guides RISE staffing and design. Today, RISE is funded through the Board of State and Community Corrections to support housing for 176 individuals.

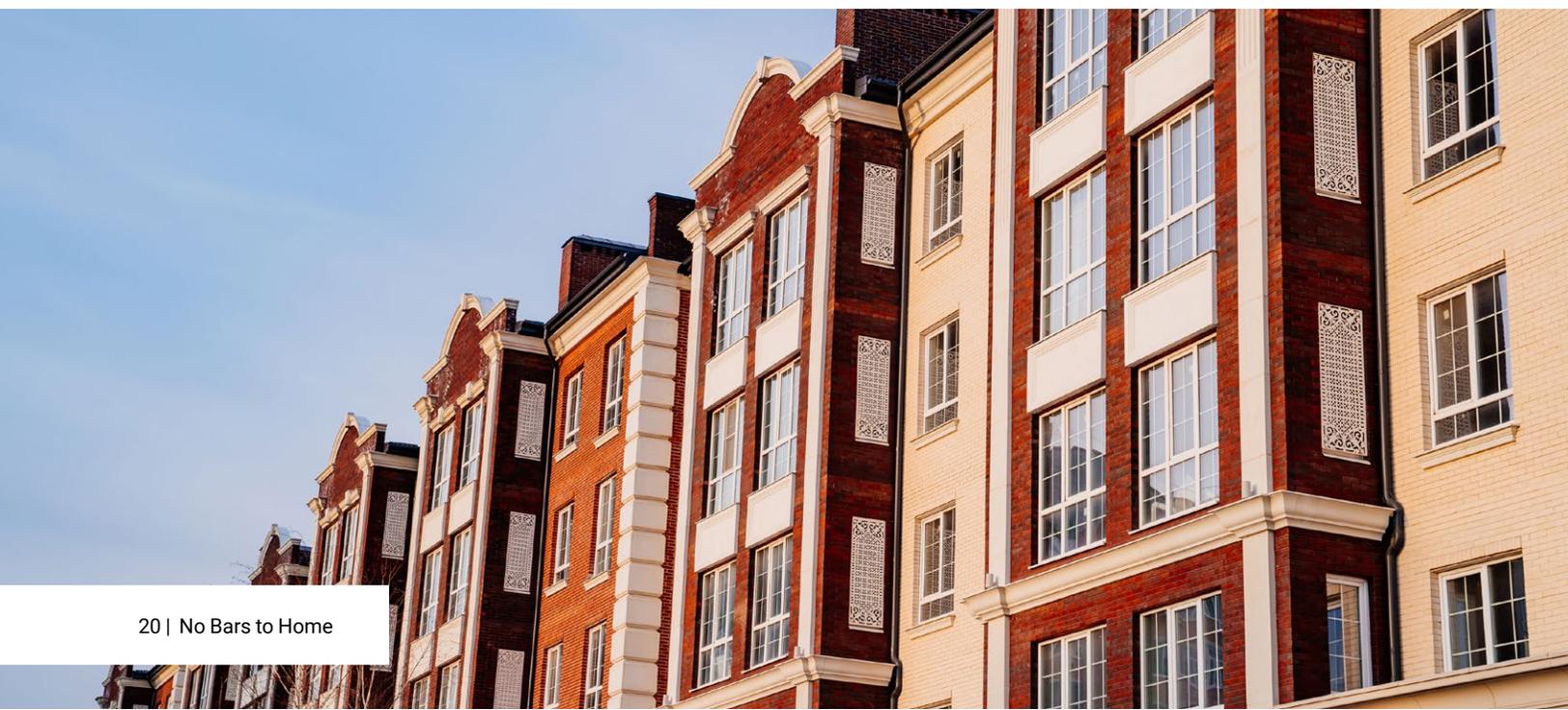
CONCLUSION: Key Takeaways

Providing housing for people impacted by the criminal legal system is an ongoing challenge without one simple solution. Everyone – whether entering the conversation as a housing provider, advocate, criminal legal system partner, or otherwise – has an important role to play.

The five *essential elements* described in this report are a valuable foundation for organizations to successfully provide housing for people impacted by the criminal legal system, particularly people who were formerly incarcerated. We hope that the insight of these elements and the *community highlights* inspire readers to serve these populations in their own work. The *action steps* described below are drawn from the successes of the highlighted programs, and can help guide planning, design, and implementation of these programs. Together we can build stronger communities by confronting systemic inequities and providing safe, high-quality housing for people impacted by the criminal legal system.

“The mentor program helped me alleviate my drug and alcohol addictions and also helped me to end homelessness.”

– SJSU Record Clearance Project Participant



ACTION STEPS

I. Engage Key Stakeholders

- **People with Lived Experience**
 - Hire people with lived experience of incarceration to provide guidance at all levels of program design and implementation
 - Take an expansive view of what areas of lived experience may be most beneficial to program participants and try to include these perspectives through staffing
 - Build peer support into program design
- **Housing and Criminal Legal System Partners**
 - Identify, partner, and learn from housing partners who prioritize working with people impacted by incarceration
 - If your entity/organization does not have the necessary expertise in housing or in working with people who were formerly incarcerated, reach out: find organizations with existing expertise; partner with and learn from them
 - Delineate transparent, mutually agreed-upon roles between housing providers and community supervision to support trusting relationships between entities and participants

II. Build Cross-System Fluency

- **Housing Partners**
 - Build expertise related to custodial trauma and trauma-informed care
 - Find opportunities for relationship building, collaboration, and information sharing, including with housing authorities and community supervision agencies
 - Create relationships between local Community Corrections Partnerships (CCP) to identify and direct funding to the systems with the greatest levels of responsive services and population-specific competency
 - Expand responsibly: imagine new possibilities but be honest about where more expertise is needed
 - Make sure you can secure the funding, staffing, and training necessary to provide high-quality services when you expand

- **Criminal Legal System Partners**

- Focus on housing as a tool to help people through periods of community supervision
- Connect participants to long-term community providers
- Internally educate on housing best practices. Partner with housing providers to implement these practices in a way that fulfills system mandates, while supporting positive housing and supervision outcomes

III. Utilize a Housing First Approach and Incorporate Trauma-Informed Design

- **Programmatic Considerations**

- Provide for participants' basic needs beyond housing, including food, clothing, hygiene, transportation, identifying documents, and communication (cell phone, minutes on phone, wifi access)
- Ensure that program staff are available to pick up participants, regardless of time of day, directly upon release; create staff incentives and training to help support this crucial initial connection
- Offer participants individual rooms immediately upon release to provide privacy and security, and help restore dignity and autonomy that may have been lost during confinement
- Design new and existing spaces in ways that foster community and are non-carceral
- Consider if program rules may re-traumatize people who have been incarcerated and regularly evaluate the true necessity of any of these rules, e.g. curfews and phone restrictions



Homebase

ADVANCING SOLUTIONS TO HOMELESSNESS