**Adopted by ODFC Coordinating Council on June 8, 2015**

**CT 503 Housing First Principles**

Housing First is a programmatic and systems approach that centers on providing homeless people with housing quickly and *then* providing services as needed using a low barrier approach that emphasizes community integration, stable tenancy, recovery and individual choice.

Low barrier approach to entry:

* Housing First offers individuals and families experiencing homelessness immediate access to permanent supportive housing without unnecessary prerequisites. For example:
  1. Admission/tenant screening and selection practices do not require abstinence from substances, completion of or compliance with treatment, or participation in services.
  2. Applicants are not rejected on the basis of poor or lack of credit or income, poor or lack of rental history, minor criminal convictions, or other factors that might indicate a lack of “housing readiness.”
  3. Blanket exclusionary criteria based on more serious criminal convictions are not applied, though programs may consider such convictions on a case by case basis as necessary to ensure the safety of other residents and staff.
  4. Generally, only those admission criteria that are required by funders are applied, though programs may also consider additional criteria on a case by case basis as necessary to ensure the safety of tenants and staff. Application of such additional criteria should be rare, and may include, for example, denial of an applicant who is a high risk registered sex offender by a project serving children, or denial of an applicant who has a history of domestic violence involving a current participant.

Community integration and recovery:

* Housing is integrated into the community and tenants have ample opportunity and are supported to form connections outside of the project.

1. Housing is located in neighborhoods that are accessible to community resources and services such as schools, libraries, houses of worship, grocery stores, laundromats, doctors, dentists, parks, and other recreation facilities.
2. Efforts are made to make the housing look and feel similar to other types of housing in the community and to avoid distinguishing the housing as a program that serves people with special needs.
3. Services are designed to help tenants build supportive relationships, engage in personally meaningful activities, and regain or develop new roles in their families and communities.
4. Services are recovery-based and designed to help tenants gain control of their own lives, define their personal values, preferences, and visions for the future, establish meaningful individual short and long-term goals, and build hope that the things they want out of life are attainable. Services are focused on helping tenants achieve the things that are important to them and goals are not driven by staff priorities or selected from a pre-determined menu of options.

Lease compliance and housing retention

* Tenants are expected to comply with a standard lease agreement and are provided with services and supports to help maintain housing and prevent eviction.
  1. Leases do not include stipulations beyond those that are customary, legal, and enforceable under Connecticut law.
  2. No program rules beyond those that are customary, legal, and enforceable through a lease are applied (e.g., visitor policies should be equivalent to those in other types of permanent, lease-based housing in the community).
  3. Services are designed to identify and reduce risks to stable tenancy and to overall health and well-being.
* Retention in housing is contingent only on lease compliance and is not contingent on abstinence from substances or compliance with services, treatment or other clinical requirements. For example:

1. Tenants are not terminated involuntarily from housing for refusal to participate in services or for violating program rules that are not stipulated in the lease.
2. Transitional housing programs offer participants due process to resolve issues that may result in involuntary discharge (unless immediate risk to health and safety)
3. PH providers only terminate occupancy of housing in cases of noncompliance with the lease or failure of a tenant to carry out obligations under Connecticut's Landlord and Tenant Act (Chapter 830 of the Connecticut General Statute <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2011/pub/chap830.htm>).
4. In order to terminate housing, PH providers are required to use the legal court eviction process.

Separation of housing and services

* Projects are designed in such a manner that the roles of property management (e.g., housing application, rent collection, repairs, and eviction) and supportive services staff are clearly defined and distinct.
  1. Property management and support service functions are provided either by separate legal entities or by staff members whose roles do not overlap.
  2. There are defined processes for communication and coordination across the two functions to support stable tenancy.
  3. Those processes are designed to protect client confidentiality and share confidential information on a need to know basis only.

Tenant Choice

* Efforts are made to maximize tenant choice, including type, frequency, timing, location and intensity of services and whenever possible choice of neighborhoods, apartments, furniture, and décor.
* Staff accepts tenant choices as a matter of fact without judgment and provides services that are non-coercive to help people achieve their personal goals.
* Staff accepts that risk is part of the human experience and helps tenants to understand risks and reduce harm caused to themselves and others by risky behavior.
* Staff understands the clinical and legal limits to choice and intervenes as necessary when someone presents a danger to self or others.
* Staff helps tenants to understand the legal obligations of tenancy and to reduce risk of eviction.
* Projects provide meaningful opportunities for tenant input and involvement when designing programs, planning activities and determining policies.