SNAPs Office Hours June 26, 2025 Transcript.

[Speaker 5]
Welcome and thank you for joining today's conference snaps office hours. Before we begin, please ensure you have opened the chat panel by using the associated icon located at the bottom of your screen. You can submit questions throughout the presentation to everyone from the drop down menu in the chat panel answer your question in the message box provided and send audio lines have been muted until the Q and a portion of the call.

If you require technical assistance, please send a chat to the event producer with that. I'll turn the call over to Norm. So, please go ahead.

[Speaker 2]
Thank you so much and welcome everyone to our office hours. We haven't done 1 of these in a little bit. So we're very excited to be able to present to you today.

A reminder that our event host just mentioned this, but if you have questions, we are only doing those through the chat window. We're not going to do live questions and we're not going to use this sort of Q and a feature. So, if you have questions, please type them in the chat window and where it says send to please make sure they go to everyone and that will make sure that everybody gets to see the question and we'll get to see our answer.

If you have questions about any of the content we're presenting today, or any other questions you can submit them at any time and we'll, I can't promise we'll answer all of your questions, but we will do our best to answer as many of them as we can. We have a couple of great presentations today. We're going to have a brief presentation about the use of AI, artificial intelligence, that I think is a fascinating topic and I'm sure you'll be interested in.

And then we have a wonderful community spotlight that we will get to spend a lot of time on from Dallas. And so we're very excited about these. And again, want to encourage everybody to introduce yourselves in the chat if you'd like.

And feel free to submit any comments or questions and we'll do our best to answer throughout the session. We have a whole bunch of people. Actually, this isn't everyone who's on the line.

We have other snappers as well, who are here to help answer your questions in the background and in some cases live on air. And let's go to the next slide. And I'm quickly going to introduce Hannah Sims.

Hannah Sims is going to be presenting on behalf of Home Forward in Dallas. I'm sorry, Housing Forward in Dallas to about the incredible work they've done to reduce street and encampment homelessness in Dallas. But before we go to Hannah, we are going to, I'm going to turn things over to Thomas Bates from the SNAPS office and Thomas is going to walk us through a brief presentation on the use of artificial intelligence in in your homelessness work.

So Thomas, over to you.

On the next slide, please. My name is Thomas Bates. I am here at the SNAPS office, as Norm said, and one of the things that I work on with some other folks is artificial intelligence and how it can be used in our field.

Next slide, please. So we know there are a mix of feelings about AI in general. And to be clear, HUD is not encouraging or discouraging the use of AI tools, but we do want to help communities who choose to use those tools to do so responsibly.

And so one of the things that we want to emphasize is that you should really consider risks and rewards before implementing these tools. And the tools should not be used for to enter client PPI or PII, especially in tools like ChatGPT or Microsoft Copilot, where privacy is not assured. So – sorry.

I saw a note about my microphone, so I was making sure the audio was okay. The reason for that is that these tools typically will use the data you give them to train themselves and as a reference to answer other people's questions. So answering PII, PPI, depending on a bunch of different things may be a violation of privacy for the client.

The generative AI tools that we see right now, the ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, are not the only forms of AI that are out there. One of the ones that we see a lot are these note takers, for example. So you should be vigilant in your meetings to make sure that those tools are not exposing client confidential information to their models.

So, for example, in case conferencing meetings where you're discussing sensitive information, you would probably not want one of those tools active. As you're planning AI use in your communities or thinking about it, we would encourage you to consult your community members, your frontline staff, folks with lived experience in the planning and the actual implementation of these tools. Next slide, please.

So the tools are good at some things but not reliable and sometimes just bad at others. One thing they are quite good at are drafting things, playing with ideas. They are very good at generating Excel formulas or to help with things like programming.

They are unreliable with tasks that require human judgment, so anything that may involve a sensitive decision that you would want a human involved in. Also, current information can be difficult. Most of these tools have a cutoff of a couple years ago typically.

So if you were to ask it, hey, where was that emergency shelter that I heard about opening, it probably would not know the answer to that. If you have questions about the use of AI in your programs, what this looks like, what you can and can't do, we would really encourage you to submit an AQ. We know there's a lot of conflicting information out there, a lot of fear, uncertainty, and doubt.

There's also a whole other domain called machine learning, which is very similar and related, but it's not exactly the same. We are planning to publish some resources for communities that choose to use these tools and how to think about their implementation and where it makes sense to use them. One of our other principles is that we know the tools can be very time-saving, but some of the time that is saved in that use should be reinvested

into making sure that the output of them is actually being validated, making sure that the information is accurate, that it's reliable, essentially testing it, quality control.

If you're not already using tools like this – and we do have a poll that I forgot about, so if we can start that poll. I don't know how that works. If you're already using these tools, reflect on those and reflect on how you can center privacy.

And if you're not using these tools yet and you're interested in doing so, use this time to think about how to center client privacy if and when AI comes to your communities. There are a lot of interesting resources out there already for this field and for nonprofits in general, and there's a lot of analogous information from the medical world and legal world. Like I said, we have a team of providers that are working on some guidance or some educational resources, and we hope to put those out soon.

But in the meantime, that's sort of where we're at with AI. We are super curious as to how folks are using it and what concerns people have. Norm, any questions?

[Speaker 2]
Sure. Thanks for that, Thomas. I'm curious.

I know you've been experimenting, I should say, with some of the AI tools a lot. In just sort of your work, when have you found that they're most useful, and what are the kinds of things you think they're really helpful with?

[Speaker 3]
The thing that I have used them the most with are complicated Excel formulas, particularly things that I might know how to do them, but it might take me five minutes to sort of figure it out. If you just say in plain language what you want, like highlight this row if this, this, this are true, it is really good at just spitting something out that you can copy and paste into Excel. Anything that's script-based or formulaic, basically.

[Speaker 2]
So an interesting way to use it for data analysis. And I will say I've used it for even simple things like if I have to write a communication, I'll just ask it to write a first draft, and then it's very easy to then go edit and just sort of make the changes. I like the way you sort of talked about it is it's a good way to do sort of a first draft, but then you have to like really, you know, you have to do the sort of QC and make sure it's accurate and all that.

So, great. And if people have more specific questions, please submit the questions to our AAQ. This is a tough topic to talk about because people have different levels of sort of understanding or knowledge about AI stuff and AI gets thrown around a lot and it means a lot of different things.

And, you know, often people are talking about different things when they talk about it. So, thank you, Thomas. And also, thank you for leading the work on putting together materials.

I know these will be super helpful to people going forward. So thank you very much.

[Speaker 3]
Thank you.

[Speaker 2]
And Thomas, just before you go, can you tell where should people submit questions about AI? Can you just tell how that works?

[Speaker 3]
Yeah, they should submit a question on our AAQ desk, which is on HUD Exchange. And I think we can drop a link to the AAQ desk in the chat.

[Speaker 2]
Fantastic. Thank you very much. We're going to go to our next presentation.

I'm super excited to reintroduce Hannah and for Hannah to talk about the amazing work that you all have been doing in Dallas. So I'm just going to turn things over to you and let you show us all the amazing work you've been doing.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, thank you all very much for having me. It's a pleasure to be here. I'm very excited to talk about Housing Forward, the work that we've done to kind of transform our system over the past four years.

And also good to talk to you about my favorite thing, which is outreach and how outreach and encampment resolution kind of functions within Dallas and Collin County. So my name is Hannah Sims. I am the Crisis System Senior Manager at Housing Forward, which is the lead agency for Dallas and Collin Counties.

I oversee our coordinated outreach efforts, as well as Street to Home, which is our direct-to-housing encampment resolution work. I'm excited to really dig into that a little bit later in the presentation. But I always think it's helpful to kind of level set with what my own experience has been in our homeless response system in Dallas and Collin County and give kind of an introduction and description as to how we got to where we are as a system.

So I bring the perspective of a former outreach worker. I have seen firsthand how our system has evolved to meet the needs of our community's most vulnerable and to become a more efficient, higher capacity, collaborative community and set shared goals to get people housed as quickly and efficiently as possible. So we can go ahead and go to the next slide.

As I said, Housing Forward is a lead agency for Dallas and Collin Counties, and we really exist to support the work of our Continuum of Care partners. Locally, we refer to our Continuum of Care as the All Neighbors Coalition, and that coalition is made up of over 140 organizations that really fit into one of three categories. Our on-the-ground providers, where the magic really happens, they are the ones on the front lines, in the trenches, building relationships with our neighbors in order to get them housed.

We also work very closely with our cross-sector partners. An example of those partners would be our health care systems and our behavioral health care systems. And then also have worked to build strong connections with funders, as well as local municipalities throughout our Continuum of Care.

I believe we have upwards of 30 different municipalities and cities within Dallas and Collin Counties. So all of those organizations work very closely together. And on this next slide, I want to go over kind of the four shared goals and what system transformation really looked like within our community.

So, as I said, I have the perspective of a former outreach worker, and when I was an outreach worker right out of graduate school and was very eager, thinking I was going to go out and change the world, I found myself in a very frustrating position where I had a caseload of about 30 folks that were all living unsheltered. We did not necessarily have set-aside resources. We did not have efficient ways of communicating and collaborating.

And it's not that we were not housing folks directly from encampments, but it was not necessarily the norm. So in 2021, there was a large group of funders and a large group of leaders that came together and said, is the way that our system functions and the way that we do business to resolve homelessness going to get us to reaching the goal of ending homelessness? And it was a resounding no, it's not going to work the way that we're doing things now.

So our community and really the leaders of the All Neighbors Coalition sat down and said, what are our goals as a community and what do we want to accomplish? And those were to maintain an effective end to veteran homelessness. Our community effectively ended veteran homelessness last year and have continued to maintain that.

Our second goal was to see a 50% reduction in unsheltered homelessness by 2026. Our most recent PIC count data indicates a 28% reduction in unsheltered homelessness since 2021. And then our remaining two goals were to reduce family homelessness and use homelessness.

So then the question really becomes, how do we do that? And how do we design a system to support and drive progress to achieving those four goals? So we've really done that by implementing a large amount of diversion and navigation support and scaling diversion and our state of the homelessness address where we review PIC count data every year.

We were able to announce that diversion in our system has helped over 6,640 families and adults avoid long-term shelter stays and rapidly resolve their homelessness through their housing crisis. We've also drastically increased our system capacity by putting the right people in the right places, especially at Housing Forward to support strong project management and work very closely in tandem with our All Neighbors Coalition partners to drive those areas of work. And this transformation really started by ensuring our funding at the federal, local, and private dollars also had the capacity to reinforce these broad major system goals.

So on this next screen, I think a lot of people can relate to this in their community. On the next slide, you see that we had a steady incremental increase year to year, and we had just a constant kind of funnel coming in. So the question really became, how do we invert that funnel and curve the inflow to increase our exit pathways?

So on this next slide, I can start to kind of go over how do we start to do this to kind of shift that inflow? It really started by also ensuring that our partners were collaborating,

communicating, and working together, and also shoring up our rehousing dollars. We focused heavily on diversion.

And if we go ahead and go to the next slide, I believe we had a full 44% increase in our rehousing capacity. And as we started to kind of re-steer the ship in 2021, we have continued to see pretty significant decreases. And if we go ahead and go to the next slide, these strategic and collaborative approaches have really been able to set us apart nationally.

We have continued to have decreases in our point in time totals year to year. We were able to be part of the All Inside Initiative of the previous administration, and that also, we've continued to be one of the top performing continuums of care in the country. And all of that success is wonderful, but it is really attributed to the partners of the All Neighbors Coalition, the people that do the groundwork, and the people that are willing to sit at these tables with us and continue to iterate and design and co-collaborate systems, programs, and strategies that get us to achieving those four major goals that we set out in 2021.

I'm going to go ahead and go to the next slide. And this is really my bread and butter to talk about. It's my favorite thing to talk about is how do we specifically focus on reducing unsheltered homelessness?

Our primary tool for getting to that 50% reduction in unsheltered homelessness, right now I believe we're sitting at a full 28% since it was announced at our pit count results last month. Our primary tool for doing that and resolving encampments is called Street to Home. If we go ahead and go to the next slide, our primary goals for whenever we do Street to Home and when we launched it, we wanted to target priority locations, starting in kind of the downtown core of downtown Dallas.

Working with the city of Dallas to identify those locations, bringing the entire homeless response system to those sites, and then working very closely with partners over at the city to ensure that those sites are not reestablished and they stay cleared. This is the craziest group project that I've ever been a part of. There are a lot of different partners involved.

But the biggest thing that has allowed Street to Home to be successful really is the idea that we are bringing an entire homeless response system and partners to an encampment to resolve it right then and there. The next slide is going to show you three large zones in our downtown core. We launched the Street to Home initiative last July, on July 1st, and then we housed over 100 people in under 100 days in those first three colorful zones around.

The library is that large blue square. Our downtown central library had upwards of 50 people sleeping around it every single night. If you were to go down there early in the morning this morning a year later, you would not see anybody sleeping and there would be no structures.

We had a massive team effort to resolve homelessness for 107 people in under 100 days. Then we continued to prioritize investments into public spaces downtown to resolve homelessness. Between July and December of last year, we housed over 170 individuals.

Since we would have sent these slides over, we've been able to announce an end to unsheltered homelessness and sleeping in the downtown Dallas area and have housed over 250 people out of downtown in the past year. The primary way we have accomplished any of this work is massive amounts of collaboration with partners and stakeholders. There is an intentionality within the leadership of Housing Forward, the All Neighbors Coalition, and many different partners and stakeholders that I really appreciate as a project manager to know that our leadership is supporting the project management piece of this.

My job really is to ensure that our on-the-ground staff has every barrier knocked out of their way to house people as quickly and efficiently as possible. I always like to give the analogy and go with me on this that if the biggest toolbox we have is how we structure ourselves as leaders and project managers, the hammer and the screwdriver to the work is the communication between all of those parties, setting up daily manageable tasks for outreach workers, and then setting up project management and leadership structures that support that on-the-ground work. The way we structure our time is really the nuts and bolts of the whole operation. It's what keeps the whole thing together.

Setting goals and driving towards those goals and also breaking things down in a way that is very manageable for our on-the-ground staff to accomplish large goals like housing 107 people in under 100 days. I'm also more than happy to get into some of the nitty-gritty project management tools that we utilized over the past year in the Q&A section as well. If you go to the next slide, I think every person in our community that's ever sat in on a meeting has heard me stand on this soapbox and say that when we show up to resolve encampments and when we show up as outreach, we are accountable to one another.

I don't care how many different teams or organizations or mission statements might be represented. We show up as a single team, we speak as a single unit, and we have one another's backs. It is especially important in encampment work.

This is deeply relationship-driven. We show up when and where we say we will. We are present every single day of the week at encampment sites when we focus and target them.

That way we get people housed quickly, we meet our deadlines of closure, and then we keep those sites closed. Every single step of the way, we are data-driven, housing-focused, and action-oriented. This work commits you to being a lifelong learner of adjusting and iterating and being creative and flexible.

We are flexible to not only one another, but we are also transparent and reliable to one another, our leadership, but especially our neighbors and those who are the most vulnerable sleeping outside in our community. That's why we do all of this. The last slide is going to show you some lessons learned, and I think these are things that continue to keep front of mind in the work that we do here at Housing Forward with All Neighbors Coalition.

We deeply need integration of behavioral health care every step of the way. Coordinating and working well with our local government in our cities and local municipalities is pivotal. And ongoing sustainable funding is obviously a necessity.

The only other thing I think I would add to this that might not be specifically on this slide is that doing this in a way that is co-led with leadership and project managers and clearing

pathways for our on-the-ground staff to do their work and do it well is also a consistent thing that we learn and we continue to tweak. This work and our neighbors who experience homelessness have quite frankly taught me everything of value. I deeply believe that they are creative, resourceful, and whole people that deserve access and quick access to safe and affordable housing.

We are by no means perfect. As I said, this work commits you to a constant state of learning and tweaking and getting better and more efficient. And I also deeply believe that creating a highly efficient system also means that you have to create a culture of joy and fun.

If you would ever find us doing an encampment response early in the morning, you will likely find a bunch of outreach workers standing around in a circle going through very specific to-do lists for the day, but also having a lot of fun and hugging one another when they show up to work every morning. So doing this work in a city that I love with a team that I adore is quite frankly the privilege of a lifetime. So thank you all very much for having me.

Norm, I'll pass it back over to you and I'm happy to answer any questions.

[Speaker 2]
So thank you. I have to say this is kind of breathtaking that there's the work that you described is amazing. And I have so many questions and I just really want to have a conversation with you about different aspects of this because you brought up so many critical things that I just want to talk through a little more.

So you talked early on about the zonal approach, right? You picked certain areas within the city to focus on. Can you talk about what went into that decision?

How did you pick zones? And what was the benefit of doing that rather than just picking encampments in different places and doing it more as a larger downtown area?

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, we have been doing encampment decommissioning work for several years. And what Street to Home, when we launched it last year, really allowed us to do was take leadership capacity, project management capacity, and funding capacity to really focus on downtown where there was, I think, upwards, we estimated at the beginning of this and we ended up being right, over 250 people sleeping downtown any given night. And it's folks that they are not resistant to housing.

I am allergic to the idea that people are service resistant. I think it's incumbent upon us as system leaders to design services and deliver them in a way that actually meets needs. So this is folks that are sleeping near service providers in the downtown area.

And it was a problem for the longest time that people just said, downtown is kind of its own beast. We don't really quite know how to tackle that. And then we also find ourselves in a point in time where unsheltered homelessness is just not necessarily tolerable anymore.

It's not tolerable to us as system leaders, it's not tolerable to businesses and folks that are living downtown. So there was also, it was kind of this perfect storm of, we knew there was

a need. And there was also a deep pressure to address the kind of catastrophic homelessness that was occurring in our downtown core in Dallas.

The way that we started it was very specific. We picked those three zones because we knew where the most people were. And it was quite frankly the last area of downtown where you had set encampments.

I think one of the challenges that folks face in these urban cores is how transient folks are. So it was also, we picked those three zones because that's where the bulk of the people were. And then we started zoning out.

How do you do kind of a section at a time? And the zoned approach, I always think back to that old Shel Silverstein poem when that little girl ate a whale. An old grad school professor told me this is the only way you're going to actually get through this is if you do it one bite at a time.

And that's kind of how you solve homelessness. It's one person, one encampment, one unit application, one move in at a time. So that's a very long winded way of saying we just had to start somewhere and we just started bite after bite downtown.

[Speaker 2]
And did you find there were sort of like unexpected benefits of the zonal approach? Did having sort of a critical mass help? Did the fact that, I mean, you're essentially concentrating a lot of activity and resources.

Did that have any sort of impact? Were the individuals who are sleeping in those zones, did they sort of like have a different feeling? Did it feel like a different level of activity?

Can you talk about like what other benefits did you see from that approach?

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, the way that we also go into any encampment that we're solving, and we especially had to do this last year because we were working under tight lines. Is an utter transparency of this area is being closed. We're not just doing this to try to get you connected to services.

We're doing this to get you connected to housing, and we want you to work with us for the purpose of moving into housing. But we also want you to know that this area is being closed and there will be enforcement protocols around all of that. So when you also come in with that level of transparency, and then we are showing up every single day at 8am with a whole team of people, things start to move quickly.

And there's also a lot of buy-in that happens from the perspective of our neighbors, where they also are realizing this is a very different interaction than we've had, where many of them feel like they've been given the runaround. And when you have that much intentionality, there's a lot more buy-in from their perspective as well.

[Speaker 2]
And I'd love to hear about the sort of the getting buy-in of the different partners that had to be involved here. So let's start with the outreach workers. I mean, that's where you came from, but I often hear like outreach is incredibly challenging.

Big shout out to everyone out there doing outreach work. It's tough. It's amazing work.

But can you talk about what were the sort of, what were the initial sort of mindset changes or practice changes that you focused on among the outreach teams?

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, my own frustrations when I was an outreach worker is that outreach is inherently kind of this chaotic, not super efficient thing. It's inefficient to have a caseload of 30 people in 30 different locations around a huge city where you're sitting in traffic, you show up and no one's there. So it's inherently chaotic.

So my perspective is, how do I create a system and strategy for outreach workers to try to minimize as much of that chaos as possible? So we did not launch an encampment response just last summer. We had been practicing this for many years and doing a lot of co-designing with outreach workers.

Every single time we do a site like this, we have an after action meeting where we want and crave the feedback of outreach workers and system workers to tell us what works, but more importantly, what didn't work. So we had been going through this kind of practice of doing that with our outreach teams for several years already. But I think by the time we started this last summer, there was more buy-in and trust for them to give us real-time feedback and also trust that, you know, if I come to Hannah with a problem, that something is, I always think it's as silly as, I can't get someone's social security card ordered, that Hannah is going to try to put in place some type of system to where that's not going to be a barrier in my day to day. Something as silly as getting medical records and access to that shouldn't derail a whole timeline.

[Speaker 2]
So let's move on to some of the other partners. So you talked a lot about behavioral health and obviously like a crucial partnership here. But this is not the way the behavioral health system typically works, right?

Going into encampments and such. Can you talk about like how did that transformation process work? What kinds of engagement did you have to have with your behavioral health partners to start that and to really get them sort of integrated into the model you were trying to implement?

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, we're very grateful to our behavioral health care partners. Our local health care authority is called North Texas Behavioral Health or NHBH. And we started working with them probably six months to a year prior to integrate them into our encampment work.

And what that looks like on the ground level is a dedicated staff member who goes through, they kind of get blended in with our outreach teams. You might not even know you're talking to an outreach worker versus a housing case manager versus someone with the behavioral health authority. And that person really exists to do basic engagement assessment.

And then every single day is kind of in the face of folks asking if they want access to treatment or also want to be connected to like ACT or ICM teams as they get moved in. It is very hard for the housing system and the behavioral health care system. It is two completely separate things.

So figuring out how our teams also communicate was important. So we have a project manager with North Texas Behavioral Health Authority and one of our project managers here at Housing Forward. We host weekly collaboration meetings to figure out how our two systems actually communicating, what do we need to change.

And we're continuing to try to figure out how do we fully integrate that system into ours. But yeah, it is incredibly challenging work.

[Speaker 2]
Yeah. Can you talk about like how from the like thinking about sort of some of the encampment residents that you work with. Can you talk about some of the more common pathways that they had towards engaging with behavioral health.

Right. Like there are a lot of different ways they could engage. But, you know, maybe it takes several months.

Maybe people are actually eager. And once they know there's a professional available, they want to engage. Can you talk about what in your experience were sort of the common ways that the encampment residents engaged with behavioral health.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah. For the majority of the folks, I think their actual buy-in and desire to actively participate in behavioral health. That happens and that connection, they really take them up on that the closer it gets to move in.

And then especially at the time of move in when a housing case manager is getting more involved. We also will send an actor ICM team, depending on which path they're appropriate for out with the housing case manager. It is fundamentally easier sometimes for that connection to happen in one's own apartment once they're moved in.

But we also had a smaller subset of people over the past year of the 257 that we housed. We had an additional 27 that worked very closely with our complex needs team. And that probably made up 10% of the whole overall group of downtown that we would have housed.

But that 10% were folks that had significant behavioral health challenges or significant physical health challenges. And people that would really bounce back and forth between hospital systems, behavioral health care systems, housing system, criminal justice. And we had a project manager here at Housing Forward who managed that by name list of 27 people.

Managed day-to-day interactions of behavioral health care teams and outreach teams. And if, like I have an example of one woman ended up getting taken to the emergency room.

And then our complex needs work group worked to make sure she was discharged to our deflection center.

And then has been getting regular psychiatric care since then. So there's that group of people that needed really intense kind of daily project management. And then majority of other folks really ended up taking us up on behavioral health care integration the closer they got to move in.

[Speaker 2]
I see. That's interesting. So in a sense, like the move in was sort of the trigger that people would engage with.

That's fascinating. Speaking of the move in process, can you talk about how that worked and what resources were you able to offer? Were people being moved into site-based programs that were opening up?

Or were you relying a lot on market-based units? Can you talk about what that looked like?

[Speaker 1]
Primary housing resource that we used was community COCPSH. As well as housing choice vouchers that we had set aside as the primary resource for this initiative. Majority of our sites in Dallas are scattered site model.

We have an incredible landlord engagement team that is regularly meeting with landlords, placing holds on units. And then we have an online system called Padmission where we will go through and show neighbors what unit is available, which one you're most likely to qualify for, and then give them the choice of where they want to live. What's funny is I would actually say a move-in day is actually the most logistically challenging thing to pull off, which is funny because it is how you resolve homelessness.

The actual management of that and the chaos of that really is driven by our daily coordination meetings, as well as our daily morning huddles on site. I talk to these outreach workers probably more than I talk to my own mom, and I talk to my own mom with great regularity. We are constantly on the phone, on meetings, and taking advantage of spaces that we're together in person to get move-ins organized.

We're primarily utilizing vouchers and have worked very hard over the past four years to build strong relationships with our local housing authorities as well.

[Speaker 2]
I'm sure your mom appreciates the frequent contact. I want to talk a little more about the move-in process. Can you walk through, again, some of the common ways?

I think a lot of people are struggling with what you're talking about because the process of finding a unit and moving into a unit feels like it takes forever, and often up to four to six months, which doesn't really mesh well with this approach you're talking about. Can you talk about what did you guys do differently, or what does it look like for people to move out of the encampments? Did you utilize shelters or some other kind of temporary accommodations for a period of time?

How did you manage all that?

[Speaker 1]
Yeah. We do not use or utilize any type of shelter or transitional housing. We go directly from an encampment to a leasing office, and they move in that day.

The way that we've managed that and what we've learned over the years is by the time we're starting a location, I will also say this took us a long time to get here. The very first encampment we ever did had six people at it. Sometimes that scale is also helpful.

If you're starting an encampment that has 10 people at it, ideally your very first day of engagement, when you start telling people, this is closing, we're going to get you on a pathway to housing, you already have five units held. We try to not start a site without having at least 40% to 50% of the units already identified and held. Then we try to have as much of an inventory as possible.

Norm, ask me any other clarifying question to that answer, because that is the hardest part of this work.

[Speaker 2]
When you say a unit is held, you obviously have a subsidy available. Do you also mean you have found a landlord on the private market and there is unit 214 and are you paying holding fees? Yes.

There is literally a unit waiting for them?

[Speaker 1]
There is literally a unit waiting for them that we have held. We will also utilize private dollars to pay a landlord incentive. By the time that lease is held, every lease a landlord gets a $1,000 landlord incentive as well.

There is a large amount of private money that is also raised to put our money where our mouth is and get landlords to work with us and be willing to work with us.

[Speaker 2]
I see. Can you talk about on the landlord engagement and landlord relationship management side, how you work that part of it?

[Speaker 1]
When we first started this, this was the biggest bottleneck in the whole process. I have someone who is ready to apply for a unit and there is no unit for them to apply to. We have, over the course of the past four and a half years, built out a landlord engagement team here at Housing Forward.

They are some of my favorite colleagues and I never see them because they are literally driving nonstop every single day, engaging with landlords and also maintaining those relationships with landlords. We are utilizing private landlords all across Dallas and Collin County and have a team that also has real estate experience. Sometimes it's cold calling, sometimes it's relationships that they already have and really saying, we can help you get your building to capacity.

If you have openings and you fit this criteria and you're willing to take vouchers, COC, PSH or Rapid Rehousing, we can get your units filled very quickly.

[Speaker 2]
That's amazing. You're at a way advanced place in that process, but I think it's probably pretty daunting to think about starting that now and the level of effort it took to get there, but once you're there, it sounds like it unlocks a lot of opportunities for you. Nice work there.

Someone put in a question about, they think because of coordinated entry requirements, it would be hard to use COC funding for this. I will say that's 100% not true. Later on, we'll talk about how you can actually easily update your coordinated entry policies and procedures to work very consistently with this approach, but just wanted to throw that out there.

Someone had a question about whether you do master leases for those units, but it sounds like, do you do any master leasing or it's just holding fees that you use to keep those units available? How do you manage to give people choices? Do they just visit a few different apartments and you have a bunch of people visiting the cluster of apartments you've set aside and then just a market, whoever picks first?

[Speaker 1]
Exactly. We try to manage that chaos as much as we can on the back end and project management side. I should have said this at the beginning.

I have an outreach coordinator on my team named Haley, who takes much responsibility for all of the success we have on the ground. Between her and I, we try to mitigate that chaos as much as possible for our landlord team. The pad mission system is very helpful for showing people what units look like.

Most of our folks are very familiar with Dallas and know what area they would like to live in. We really do try to provide as much choice as possible. When possible and when we have the outreach and transportation capacity, we will take people to see the unit.

If for some reason they are seeing the unit for the first time the day of move-in, they always get to go walk around, make sure they like it and are comfortable with it before signing the lease. A lot of it also happens virtually with the actual submission of applications. Sometimes neighbors will give them a bus pass and give the landlord a heads up that they are coming and want to tour the property.

It's a hodgepodge way of doing it. We try to make sure everybody does see the property before they move in.

[Speaker 2]
Got it. I want to shift gears a little bit and talk about change management and what sort of structure you put into place here. I have found, and I assume you will second this, but the actual execution of these things is really challenging, frequently under-resourced and under-appreciated.

I want to talk about what were the critical elements of the structure you put in place to execute this Did you use sort of like an incident command structure like you see in disasters? Can you talk about what does that overall sort of management structure look like for these things?

[Speaker 1]
My CEO, Sarah, would have been on. She would have said incident command structure like half a dozen times by now. I'm glad you said it.

We model our project management on-site management and leadership oversight very similar to what you would see in an incident command structure. Something like if a natural disaster happened and people started to organize very quickly, that's exactly how we organize ourselves when it comes to street-to-home responses. Our hierarchy is very much set up like that, but we've also created kind of a daily meeting and weekly meeting points of communication to support that hierarchy structure.

Every single day we have a daily coordination call. That is where Haley on my team is going through name by name on our by name list of every single person that sits within that encampment that we're working on housing. Things on that meeting in the daily morning huddle get very, very granular and very small.

Things as specific as, okay, outreach worker John, we have five people going to DPS tomorrow. These are the people responsible for finding them. This is the time we're transporting them.

All that's happening in a daily coordination call and I am sitting on that call from a project management level thinking, what's working well? What is not working well? What do I need to take to my other project managers?

Then every Thursday, I have a project manager afternoon call with my counterpart from the city of Dallas, my director here at Housing Forward, and a couple other partners on our team to make sure our rehousing system is working quickly. That's where I'm going saying, these are my biggest bottlenecks. I need quicker access to unit inspections.

That's slowing me down. I need this business holder who is livid and tired of people sleeping on the front door of their business. City of Dallas, I need you to do some relationship management.

Then we're generating asks for our leadership to where every Friday morning, we have a leadership call where my CEO, Sarah, sits. Then we have our assistant city manager. We also have the CEO of our public improvement district downtown, Dallas Downtown Inc., where project managers are responsible for reporting out progress, raising red flags and concerns, and also giving week-to-week updates on if we're going to hit those targets or not, if we need to adjust deadlines, and then making very specific asks for our leadership to clear pathways for us.

[Speaker 2]
Can you talk about who participates in the daily meetings? To what degree do you have some of the city agencies or behavioral health? Who's in those meetings?

[Speaker 1]
Behavioral health care is on those meetings. Daily coordination huddles, they happen with outreach. Any housing case manager that is going to start working with our neighbors is on that call.

Who else is on there? We utilize navigation capacity for a large portion of last year's success with 107 and 100 days. We had navigators on that call.

Gosh, who else was on there? A lot of it really is outreach doing the day-to-day task-oriented stuff. We have outreach, housing, critical documents, behavioral health care.

When we could have access to a street medicine team, we would have them present.

[Speaker 2]
Can you talk about critical documents? This is something that trips. It feels so solvable.

It trips up a lot of these efforts.

[Speaker 1]
Anytime I talk to somebody and they tell me they have their idea, I'm like, incredible. We are light years ahead. That's awesome.

We have a really good relationship with our hospital system, Parkland. Majority of folks that have experienced homelessness in Dallas for an extended amount of time have at some point engaged with the Parkland health care system. We have a relationship and agreement with them to get certified medical records.

That allows us to send off critical documents. That starts the second we meet somebody. When I referenced earlier that this is like a whale that you have to eat a bite at a time, when we give our outreach workers super tangible daily and weekly targets, when we started this last year on July 1st, I said, okay, by July 3rd, when we're all leaving for the weekend, I need at least 60% of the by-nameless to either have all of their critical documents uploaded or I need every single person to have a release of information sent in for medical records. Then by the next Tuesday, I said I need every single one of those medical records sent off and requested social security cards for.

We set daily targets like that. Much of the birth certificates were ordered online. Then we try our best to get people their state ID as well.

It is one of the most annoying barriers and bottlenecks when someone is ready to apply for a unit and they don't have an ID and the landlord requires it. I will also say really quickly, the other thing that we've tried to do is work with landlords to accept the community ID. One of our partners, the Stupot will generate a community ID and we will try to pay a risk fee and have also worked well with our housing authorities to give us a window of grace until housing case managers are also able to obtain all critical documents.

[Speaker 2]
That's great. You have other partners that maybe aren't involved on a daily basis, but like law enforcement and sanitation and maybe transportation. Obviously, it depends on the

specific circumstances of the encampment, but how do you engage some of those other partners as well?

[Speaker 1]
My primary interaction with them is through my counterpart over at the City of Dallas. I work very closely with the city's director of the Office of Emergency Management and Crisis Response. As we're handling the housing side of things, I'm updating him weekly on my Thursday project management call saying we're on target, go ahead and start setting up code, law enforcement, either police or marshals to be present the day of the actual closure.

All of that stuff is happening in background, but most of it really is driven by the City of Dallas. That has looked like many different iterations, but we've really built a very collaborative relationship with them as well.

[Speaker 2]
That's great. I want to, again, shift gears just a little bit because our purpose to have you on today was not just for you to get to talk about all the great things you're doing, but to help others on the call follow in your footsteps and do similar things. Can you talk about what incident command structure is not something people just learn in social work school or whatever?

Can you talk about what resources, how did you build this up? How did you train everyone? Did you read a book about this?

How did you get to understand what kind of structure you needed to put in place?

[Speaker 1]
I would say sometimes I forget how far we've come from when I was an outreach worker and sitting and talking about it. It's a very sophisticated thing now, but we started this in very small incremental ways. We are continuing to refine, but I would say it starts primarily with agencies getting in the habit of talking to one another.

Any system leader on this call that has the ability to intentionally build relationships with your continuum of care partners, whether that is local business stakeholders, your local municipalities and cities, or whether it's also getting a cup of coffee with a project manager from a housing team where there's a ton of turnover in their case management. I think it really comes to building relationships over time, building trust with your partners, and then also, quite frankly, delivering at a system level, whether that is something as simple as a return email and phone call and giving someone an answer by the end of the week. Housing Forward did not use to operate in that way.

We did a lot of relationship management and mending of relationships because our system was really broken. That happened incrementally over time where we also had to regain the trust of our continuum of care partners. That is small incremental progress in relationship and communication building.

[Speaker 2]

The sort of ground level relationship building seems to have been a huge part of this. Can you talk about because there are a lot of people working on ground level relationship building and a lot of COCs where there are really good relationships between partners. Can you talk about the next step of how did you learn about and figure out how to implement sort of a structure that was this focused and daily meetings and all the other stuff you were doing that ensured success?

[Speaker 1]
Yes. From the Housing Forward perspective, we sit in a unique space because you have all of these different spheres of influence happening. You have city and local government.

You have housing and housing forward. I do think a lead agency sits in this unique place where you are kind of accountable to all of those different partners. Hiring good project managers that are relationship oriented but also will not necessarily just take no for an answer.

You're not going to find many folks at Housing Forward that are just going to assume something gets done. That also took us a long time. I'm a very different project manager today than I was 18 months ago.

Thank goodness for that because this is a lot to manage. I do think having very strong intentional project managers and communication structures in place allows you to get there. We're working on projects now where we're trying to figure out what communication structures look like.

That is a constant iteration in developing agendas and project management tools and templates that allow you to utilize those spaces to where a meeting is actually really productive and there's accountability for what the next week is going to look like.

[Speaker 2]
The relationship with the city is often the hardest one. I think there are a lot of COCs that are led by a nonprofit and really struggle with their relationship with the city and county governments. Can you talk about how did your relationship with the city come about?

Who took the first steps? What were those initial conversations like? How did that evolve?

[Speaker 1]
Yeah. Much of that probably predated me but I think it really would have been in 2021 when we went through that system transformation. I think there was a lot of willingness to all sit at a table and say we're not going to point fingers.

I'm going to try to assume as much good intention as I can in our partners. I also need to understand I think Housing Forward did a good job of saying what are the pressures that the city of Dallas is under and how do we work and complement one another to also relieve some of your political stress because what I appreciate about Dallas is one thing that we can all agree on is that there is an issue. We might not always agree on how to solve it but I'll also give credit to the city of Dallas and their commitment to resolve homelessness through housing we're greatly appreciative of but I do think those initial conversations that probably

happened four to five years ago that I was not necessarily at the table for there was a lot of I think intentional thoughtfulness amongst leaders that happened at that time.

I will say also just the willingness to all sit at a table together and even engage in that conversation was a pretty remarkable step from where we were at seven years ago.

[Speaker 2]
Yeah. First of all let me just I just want to point out that four to five years ago actually isn't that long ago right? Like it's you obviously this stuff takes a long time to build and there's a lot that goes into it and looking back you were amazed at how small you started and how long it took but again four to five years is like that's a doable time frame to think about an initiative so that's really impressive but I know a lot of people probably wanted to copy and paste the work you all have done do you have resources that are shareable that or can you point to maybe not resources that are Dallas specific or your agency created but you know what resources you would recommend people turn to or how should people get started on this?

[Speaker 1]
Yeah. There's a pretty decent amount of information on Street to Home and kind of the history of housing on our website if that's helpful we have also done I could try to find the resources whenever I first started here I was given articles by our team at the time as we were starting the system transformation on system transformation and facilitative leadership and different project management tools that we've utilized I'm happy to send those over to your team as well if I can find them our website has a pretty decent amount of information on system transformation and how we got here.

[Speaker 2]
That's fantastic. So Hannah I just want to thank you so much for spending this time with us. This is a great conversation.

I learned a lot. I just judging from the chat window I think a lot of people learned a lot and we will try to share as many resources as we can but I just really deeply want to thank you and again congratulate you for all the work you've done. Homelessness has been going up in most communities lately and you all have really countered that trend and you've done it very intentionally and very skillfully and it's just really impressive and I'm happy to get to talk about great stories like this so thank you so much.

If you do have more questions for Hannah you can just go ahead and post those in the chat window. Meanwhile we'll try to answer some other questions here. I'll be honest I've been so focused on the presentation I haven't had a chance to really tee up questions but let me let me go through some of these we have here.

There are so many questions Hannah about what you were doing but let me sort of pick out a couple of these. I think we actually covered some of these. I do want to talk a little bit about coordinated entry because this is something that I hear a lot about from communities about how they're struggling to do encampment work with coordinated entry.

Do you know how you all did that? How you arranged your coordinated entry? I know you use for example special NOFO resources for a lot of these for a lot of these housing placements but can you talk about how you did it?

And I'm happy to talk about some other ways and I think Brett one of the our snappers also probably has some ideas about that.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah I know years ago whenever we set those large community goals we also ensured that our coordinated entry prioritization policy aligned with those goals. For example veterans are prioritized for housing resources as well and we specifically utilized our coordinated entry to prioritize folks at specifically located street to home locations. So yeah to your point Norm everything does continue to run through coordinated entry.

We referred to that locally as coordinated access.

[Speaker 2]
And you just developed a policy that would allow you to work with specific encampments or with zones or you know however you did it right? Like I think you overthink coordinated entry sometimes.

[Speaker 1]
And that was all led to by our All Neighbors Coalition leadership. So that's not necessarily something housing boards said we're doing this. Those continuum of care leaders and providers also sat in a room and went through the muck of figuring out how do we actually prioritize our resources for the folks that need them and how do we prioritize them in a way that aligns with our goals.

But yeah.

[Speaker 2]
Yeah and also we have a lot of technical assistance available if your coordinated entry is slowing you down on this please reach out and we would be happy to help you with any other ideas about how to do that. I mean from a I don't mean to imply that it's this simple but from a stepping back perspective you just need to put a policy into place that describes how you are prioritizing people. It can't be discriminatory but nothing you talked about would be considered discriminatory and you just have to explain what you're doing and be transparent and you know in a sense it's that simple although the specific words and such take some crafting and such.

I want to just ask Brett real quick. Any additional thoughts about that and any tips for people about using coordinated entry there?

[Speaker 4]
Not much to add although I think Hannah you all were intentional if I remember correctly. A lot of folks are concerned that people are jumping the line or you're serving unsheltered over emergency shelter and you were intentional if I remember correctly. If you want to talk about how that works in your community.

[Speaker 1]
There is a whole section on our website on our coordinated entry and coordinated access system. Just because we're housing we're prioritizing veterans and folks at encampment there are coordinated resources for folks in shelters and that are on what we call the normal pass queue. That might not be a veteran or one of our resources.

I always divert to my supervisor who is our director of coordinated access. I'm told this is the size of encampment we can address and there is also consistent housing happening outside of our system as well.

[Speaker 4]
I think what we've seen some communities do to be able to separate it out if they have resources coming up for folks with histories of unsheltered homelessness they have to find a way of tagging their folks in whatever system they use to create their list. A marker in HMIS or if you're using a spreadsheet they have a way of tagging in their sign name list folks that might be eligible for those resources that are prioritized for unsheltered.

[Speaker 2]
Thank you, Brad. Also, I will say we are working on some additional TA resources that we hope to have done at some point soon about using coordinated entry to help with encampment resolution. A couple additional questions.

Inspections. So you talked about you identify units, you identify units, you pay holding fees. Where do you do the inspections in that process?

[Speaker 1]
The majority of folks that were housed last summer we worked with the Dallas housing authority. They conduct all inspections. So they have all of those inspections happen through the housing authority.

So we're primarily collaborating with the housing authority and landlords to make sure those inspections happen quickly and that the units will pass inspection but we're not actually conducting any of them.

[Speaker 2]
And we had a couple questions about how the services and case management work. The outreach workers are engaging with people initially and there's a housing navigator that's working with people initially. Is there a different case worker that works with people once they've moved into their unit?

How does that transition work?

[Speaker 1]
Whenever we have, so outreach is the primary kind of initial relationship and touch point for folks. And then we very quickly start bringing out the housing teams. The housing case manager is the one that comes out on site to do the actual housing program enrollment.

And then we also try to ensure those are also the same people that are identifying a unit and completing a unit application with the neighbor. So we involve housing fairly early in

the process. So again, there's a lot of people involved that a neighbor might not even know the difference between who's with housing, who's with outreach.

The one thing that we really try to clarify as those relationships are built is who their housing case manager is going to be. So they have at least met them and had several interactions with them by move-in day. And then that housing case manager is present for a lease signing and then does their first case management session with them at that lease signing and once they move in.

[Speaker 2]
That's great. And how about the transition from the behavioral health side? So people engage with behavioral health.

You mentioned that the move-in is often a spur to get people engaged in behavioral health. But does the way people engage with behavioral health change from the time they're in the encampment and the time they're in housing or are they essentially seeing the same behavioral health specialists or how does that work?

[Speaker 1]
There would be different teams. So typically the person who we have on site isn't calling the appropriate entity and then connecting them to the housing case management. So by the time someone's moved in, a lot of that relationship with behavioral health is also driven by the housing case manager and their relationship with the neighbor.

It will likely end up being different people and different teams between encampment interaction and post-move-in.

[Speaker 2]
For the people you've housed so far, can you sort of qualify or quantify or just sort of talk about the amount of behavioral health services that people seem to be utilizing once they move in? I know there's no sort of normal example. There's a lot of variety.

But can you talk about what level of engagement have they had and has that changed? It's been a year since last summer, almost a year. Has that sort of gone up or down as time has gone by?

[Speaker 1]
I don't know the exact percentages. I think I looked probably two months ago and last summer about 60% of folks that moved in engaged with behavioral health. Majority are utilizing behavioral health care resources for medication management.

We had several people who once they were housed, they engaged in medical detox programs and outpatient programs as well. I do not know the percentage off the top of my head of that 107 last summer.

[Speaker 2]
That gives a good sense of the kinds of things people are engaging with. That's interesting. There are a lot of sort of really weird detailed questions about CRMs and such, but I think we're good for now.

I again want to thank you. I know a lot of people had questions about the COC funding process. I did quickly message in the chat window that we don't have anything to share right now, but we will send out a message soon with more information about the COC funding process.

I really want to thank you for sharing your time and congratulate you for the amazing work you all have done. It really is inspiring. I know there are a lot of you who are on the call today who are doing similar work and have had a lot of success trying to ramp up this work.

Kudos to everyone who is engaged in this work. It's exciting to see and we're eager to partner with you to move these initiatives forward. With that, I want to wish everyone a great rest of the day.

I want to thank the snaps team behind the scenes who put this whole session together. I want to wish everyone a great day and a great rest of the week. That's the end of our webinar.

[Speaker 1]
Thank you very much.

[Speaker 5]
That concludes our conference. You may now disconnect.