



Collaborative Understanding: Focus Group Findings to Elevate Homeless Services

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Agenda

- Introduction
- Purpose of Presentation
- Focus Group Findings: Insights into Client Struggles
- Shared Housing Information
- Perspectives from Shelter Clients: Tools for Success
- Program Advisory Committee
- 8 Dimensions of Wellness
- Conclusion

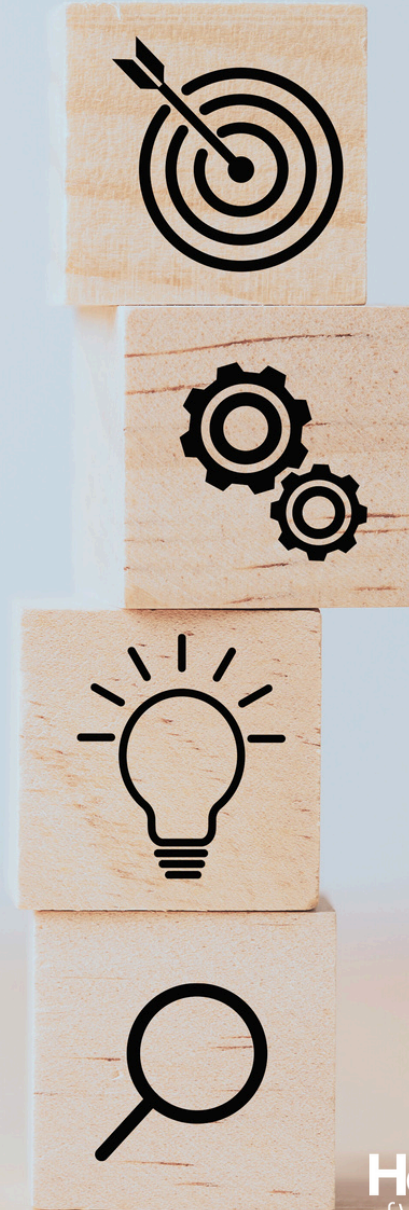


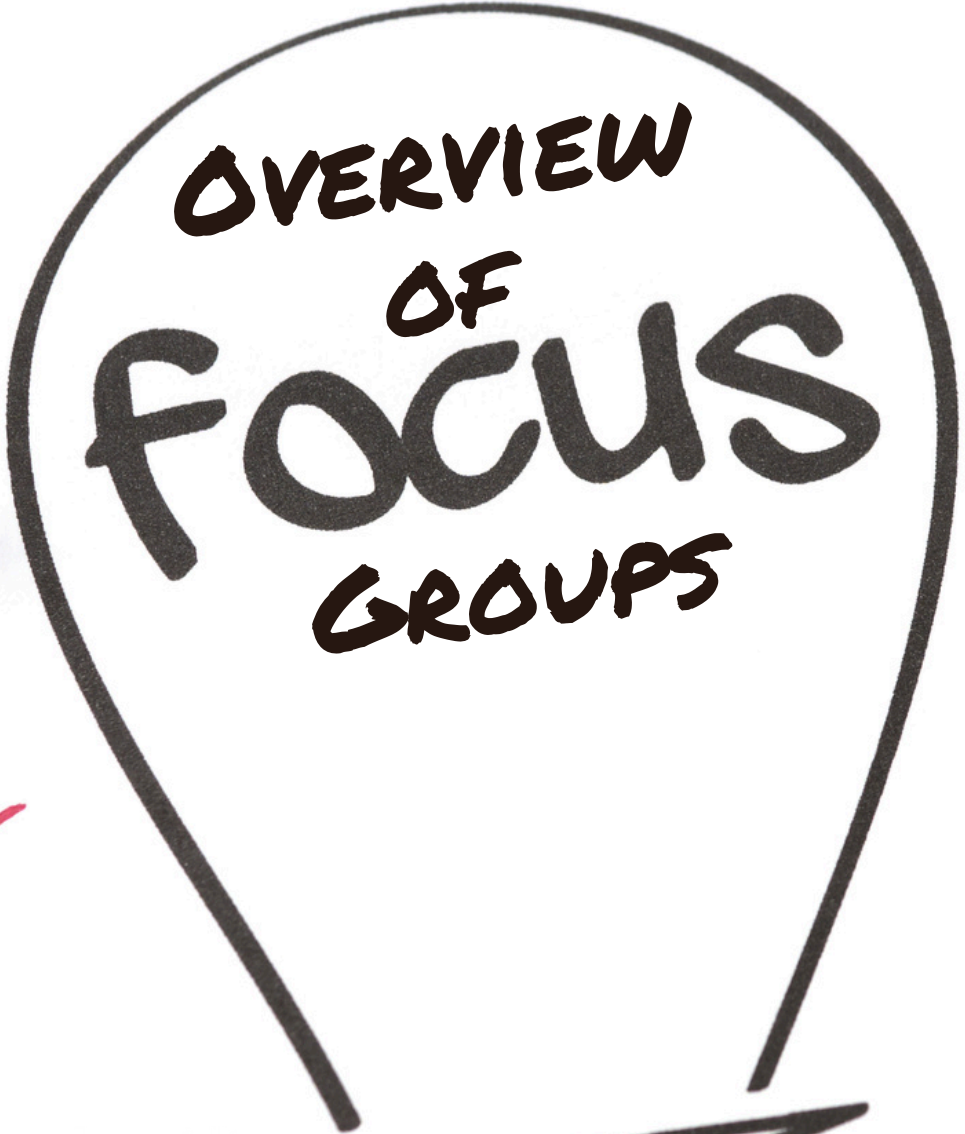
introduction

- Daniella Gallego, Community Engagement Coordinator
- Over 6 years of experience working in homeless services
- Personal and professional connection to homelessness
- Facilitator of Program Advisory Committee & Youth Action Board

Objective & Importance

- Presenting findings from focus groups with shelter and housing clients.
- Ensuring lived experience informs and shapes homeless services.
- "Nothing about us without us" – Centering client voices in system improvement.





development

leadership

analysis

question

Overview of Focus Groups

Total Participants: 58

Number of Focus Groups Held: 5

Participant Breakdown:

- **Buffalo City Mission: 24 participants**
- **Little Portion: 15 participants**
- **Community Mission: 3 participants**
- **Apartment Safety & Choice: 12 participants**
- **GOW (rural WNY): 4 participants**

Discussion Topics:

- **Buffalo City Mission: Barriers Exiting Shelter**
- **Little Portion: Homelessness and Healthcare**
- **Apartment Safety & Choice: Housing Safety for RRH/PSH Clients**
- **GOW: Post-Program Graduation and Support (RRH)**
- **Community Mission: RRH Journey and Post-Graduation Transition**

Focus Group Findings: Insights into Client Struggles



Struggling with Rising Rental Costs

Housing is increasingly out of reach for single individuals.

The Need for Support

Clients feel isolated during their housing search and seek an advocate.

Shared Housing

Most clients are unaware of this option but eager to explore it.

Facing Unexpected Costs

Fees like insurance and deposits often make securing housing even harder.

Transportation Difficulties

Limited transit options make it hard for clients to access both housing and job opportunities.

Challenges Faced by Shelter Clients

Challenges Experienced by Housing Clients (RRH/PSH)

Need for Continued Support:

- Feelings of isolation and fear of instability after housing.

Housing Quality Issues:

- Unsafe neighborhoods and poor maintenance.

Transportation Struggles:

- Limited access to public transit impacts jobs and services.

Financial Barriers:

- Credit issues, discrimination, eviction history create obstacles.
- Need for financial education on budgeting and credit building.



Data on Housing Challenges in WNY

1.

55% of Buffalo households are renters.

Nearly half of renters in WNY **pay 30% or more** of their income on rent.

1-bedroom rental cost in 2020: **\$703**

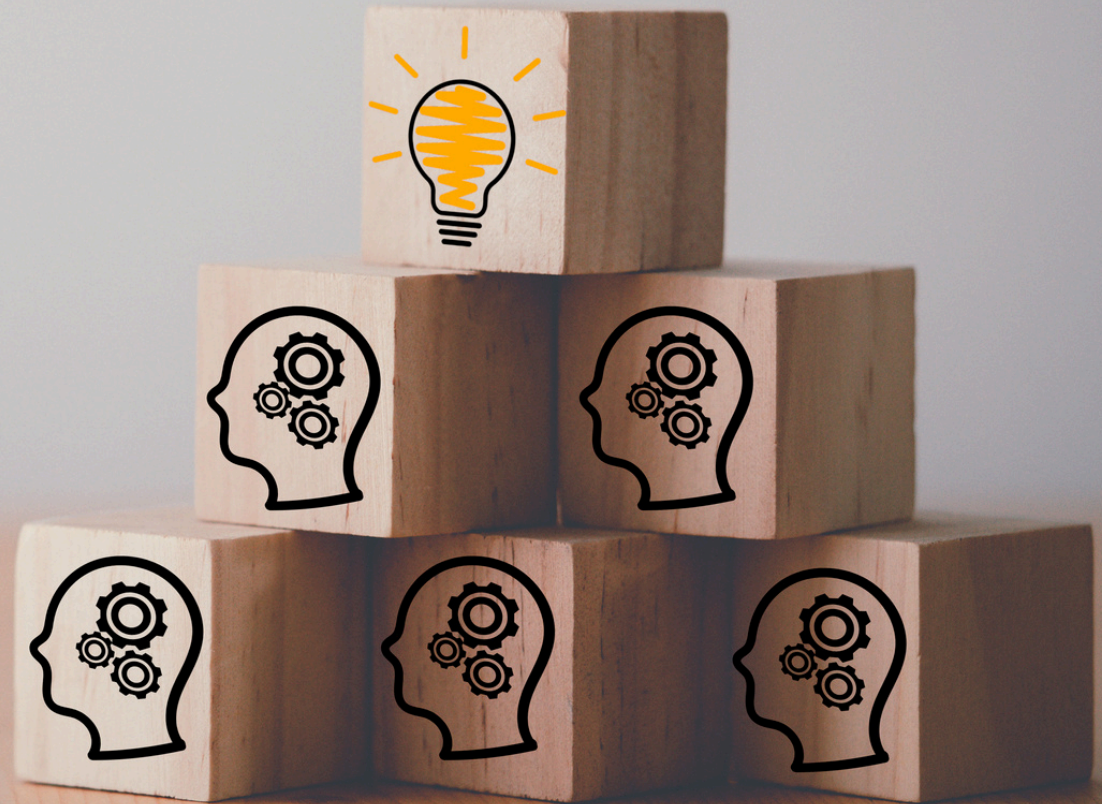
Projected 1-bedroom rental cost in 2024: **\$992 (41% increase).**

61% of housing units were built before **1939.**

Quarter of renters pay 50% or more of their income **on rent.**



Perspectives from Clients: Tools for Success



Shelter Client Perspective: Transitioning into stable housing

Shared Housing Initiatives: Educating clients on shared housing and helping them find suitable roommates or housing partners.

Employer Housing Initiatives: Collaborating with employers to provide housing support for their employees.

Transportation Improvements: Hosting bus transit navigation workshops to help clients better access jobs and housing.

Training Programs: Libraries offering free tech training and workshops to increase employability.

Resource Guides: Providing information on available services, such as healthcare and mental health resources.



Client-Driven Ideas for Improving Housing Access and Stability

Advocacy Support: Clients feel the need for caseworkers to advocate for them during landlord negotiations.

Tenant Rights Workshops: Educational sessions to help clients understand their tenant rights and housing laws.

Financial Literacy: Accessible workshops on budgeting, credit scores, and overall financial literacy to build stability.

Language Access: Clients emphasized the need for bilingual workshops and materials to assist non-English speakers.

Client-Centered Initiatives for Lasting Impact



Shared Housing: A Path to Affordability and Community Building

What is Shared Housing?: A housing model where individuals share living spaces to reduce costs and create stability.

Client Interest: Many clients are excited to learn about shared housing as a practical, affordable option.

Benefits:

- Reduces financial burden through shared rent and utilities.
- Builds a sense of community and combats isolation.
- Encourages partnerships and mutual support among housemates.

Addressing Affordability: Shared housing directly addresses rental costs, making housing more accessible to individuals with low or fixed incomes.

Amplifying Voices: The Program Advisory Committee

Composed of individuals 25+ with lived experience of homelessness within the last 7 years

Purpose: To involve individuals in decision-making for homeless service providers

Lived Expertise: Members use their experiences to create meaningful impact

Positive Impact: Recruited through focus groups, providing a safe space to share their stories

Encouragement: Providers are encouraged to invite clients to apply for the PAC



Empowering Clients Through the 8 Dimensions of Wellness

Holistic Approach: Focuses on eight areas of well-being—physical, emotional, social, financial, intellectual, spiritual, environmental, and occupational.

Building Confidence: Clients explore their strengths and build confidence across all aspects of life.

Community Connections: In-person sessions foster friendships, reducing isolation and creating a sense of belonging.

Life Skills: The program equips clients with essential life skills and helps build supportive social networks.

Moving Forward Together: Empowering Clients and Enhancing Services

Implement client-driven ideas to improve services.

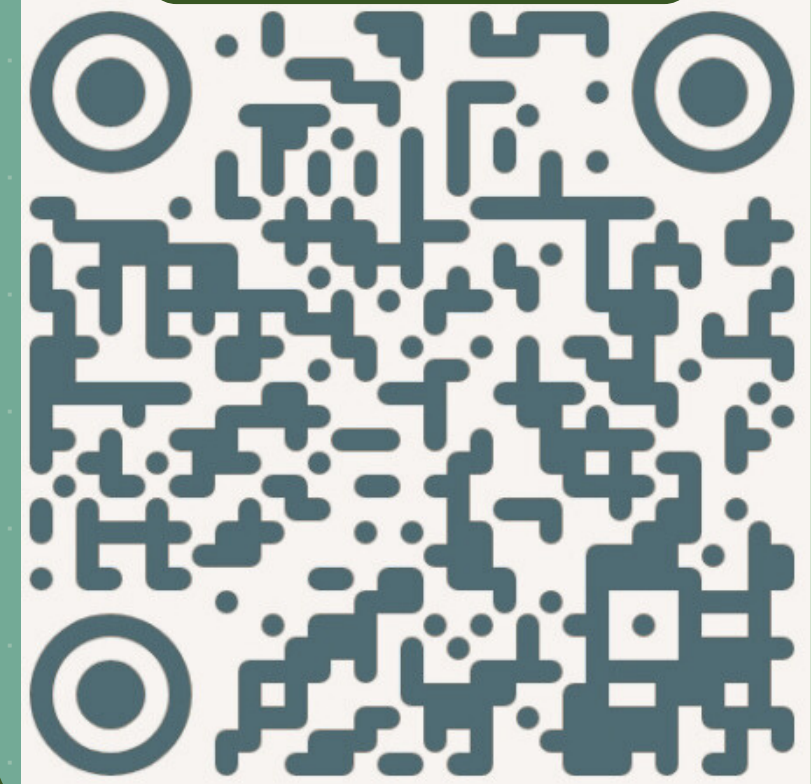
Advocate for better housing policies and tenant protections.

Continue including lived experience in future planning.

Encourage providers to host focus groups and support groups.

QR code: Sign up to engage in policy advocacy and conversations with HAWNY.

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C O N C L U S I O N

Centering Lived Experience for Lasting Change



Key Points: Understanding client challenges, embracing their ideas for support and change.

Empowerment: The 8 Dimensions of Wellness as a path to holistic support and community building.

Action: Urging service providers to integrate lived experience into ongoing planning and advocacy.

Final Thought: Together, we can create meaningful change by amplifying the voices that need to be heard.



Homeless Alliance™
of Western New York

Thank you

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