

Where the Heart Is: Homeless Home-Visiting



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*The ache for home lives in all of us, the
safe place where we can go as we are
and not be questioned.*

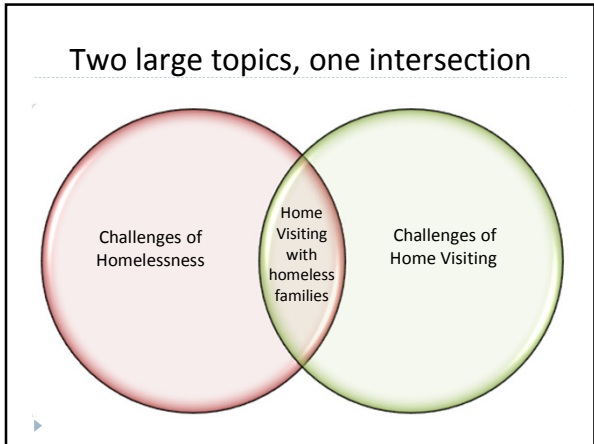
Maya Angelou



Introductions

Who we are
How this series came about





Homelessness

- Homelessness can look like:
 - Shelter
 - Couch hopping
 - Motels
 - Cars
- Highly mobile
 - Rent, eviction, repeat

A photograph of a tall, weathered sign that says "MOTEL" in large letters. The sign is situated in a flat, open landscape under a cloudy sky. There are some utility poles and a fence in the background.

Homelessness

- Temporary versus intergenerational homelessness (is it just homelessness?)
 - Financial difficulties v. long-standing abuse, neglect, trauma, family difficulties
 - Services are created for the more temporary homeless families, often do not include mental health

Services



- Ramsey County
 - CAHS
 - DV shelters
 - Home visiting programs
 - Child protection
 - Housing resources

Typical home visiting: Top ten objectives for home visitors

1. Get invited back after the first visit!
2. Convey an attitude of respect, kindness and acceptance.
3. Create an alliance to support and help family, not judge and criticize.
4. Establish mutually understood and accepted reasons for being in the home.
5. Maintain frame and professional boundaries

Typical home visiting: Top ten objectives

6. Demonstrate reliability, consistency, and predictability.
7. Support family's safety, protection, and stability.
8. Provide culturally sound information and community resources.
9. Think through issues with family.
10. Have planned ending so that relationship can experience healthy ending.

Typical home visiting challenges

- Triage issues
- “Office without walls” - professional boundaries, expectations, agenda
- Evocative nature of home-visiting
 - Self-disclosure: pros and cons
- Boundary issues with clients who have boundary issues: tv, visitors, privacy
- Personal safety, comfort, biases - interferes with concentration, shifts spotlight to HV
- Defining relationship: authentic but not reciprocal



- Home visiting is helpful for many but **not so effective at engaging homeless families**
 - Why?

Essential features of home visiting

- Regularity
- Collaboration
- Reflection



- Naturally included in home-visiting programs, **all challenging for homeless families**
 - Home visiting in the shadow of trauma

Regularity, collaboration, reflection

- Stability of a meeting place
- Communication – voicemail system, Obama phones (cut off after certain amount of minutes)
- Hours of availability for visits
- Hierarchy of importance
 - If something is immediate, it will take the place of something else.



Regularity, collaboration, reflection

- Lack of resources:
 - Transportation
 - Basic needs: Clothes, food
 - Child care
- Immediacy of needs often at odds with program goals
 - Parenting
 - Education
 - Public health

Regularity, collaboration, reflection

- Mental Health issues – almost always present
 - History of trauma, disruption, neglect, abuse
 - Substance use/abuse
 - Impulsivity
 - Parenting difficulties
 - Emotional/behavioral difficulties in children
 - Lack of stable relationships and support
 - Concept of supportive relationships may be different from home visitor's

When relationship is the problem, then relationship is the solution...but relationship is also the obstacle

“Home is not where you live but where they understand you.”
Christian Morgenstern



Making relationships with people who push you away

- May use very obvious strategies to keep distance between you and them
- May say rude comments
- May cancel, then blame you for not showing up
- May accuse you of doing things you did not do
- May try to “fire” you multiple times
 - Example
- Acknowledge what they say, remember that what they tell you is how they perceived the situation, whether or not that is actually how it was

Making relationships with people who test you

- Clients always test, but some more than others
- May ask for rides to multiple appointments
- May flat out ask for money
- Boundaries are hardest to establish because they will continue to test them
 - Example

People who say everything is fine

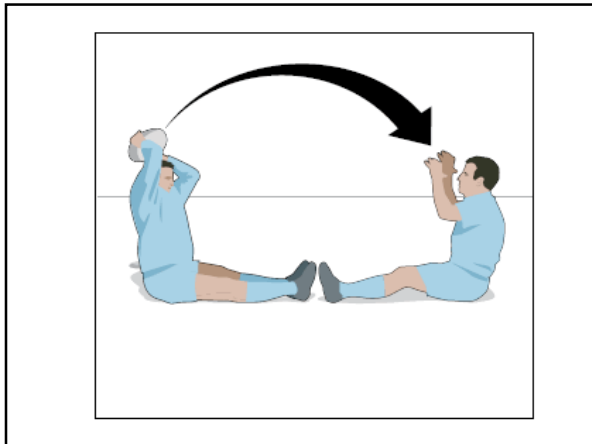
- Many families with Child Protection involved
- Families with substance abuse issues
- May “no-show” a lot and repeatedly have lengthy story about what happened
 - Example

To get past the first visit and hopefully to many more...

- Have a clear way to introduce yourself and what role you will play: Example
- Reduce expectations about...
 - having the same meeting time each week
 - being able to take responsibility to formulate or complete goals
 - for the family to even *have* goals
 - the family wanting to visit with you or that they think you have anything beneficial to share

To get past the first visit...

- Call, don't text
- Steer clear of saying what a long relationship you can have with the family
- Plan your schedule of visits according to how taxing they are
- Plan a comforting activity for yourself
- You are not the only one having to do work in this relationship — the client is already working just by showing up
- When they are able to *think about* your visits, open up the conversation with them about what they want for themselves



Phases of the work

- All relationship-based work goes through phases
- In homeless home-visiting, relationship begins with long-standing disappointment, distrust, pain, neglect, maltreatment, and feeling unwanted, misunderstood, and invisible
- Testing occurs throughout the relationship, not just in the beginning, and regardless of how many tests were passed before

Phases

- Length of time for phases is different from typical home visiting
- *Initial phase* begins with testing: "Here I am, can you handle it...?"
 - More testing, always testing -
- *Second phase* begins with the beginning of "thinking about" — beginning of reflective functioning, but just with the home visitor, not anyone else

Phases

- If you keep passing the tests, the work deepens
 - If you don't, what do you do?
 - Again, put the issue on the table
 - Still testing
- *Third phase:* Questioning - May start to check out what they are doing with what you think— another test
- *Fourth phase:* If you keep passing tests, then something shifts and they begin to trust
- **Even after trust is built, tests are being given.** Will you be there for them when they need you? Will you help them? Will you support them? Will you keep them in your mind when you are away?

Tests lead to relationship

- It's always a test but you have more confidence that there is a thing called relationship
- Then it's building on it —
- Does not generalize for a long time
- Predict that there are going to be mistakes and they will be done with you — *building elasticity*



Tests

- If you can get past the first few tests and your relationship has elasticity — it CAN bounce back if it falters
 - Here's who I am, can you handle it?
 - Nonverbal response: Here's who I am, and here's what I do. And I don't get mixed up about who is who and who is responsible for what.

“I don’t even look at you as a teacher or anything like that, I look at you like family, which is strange because I’m not really sure I know what that means.”
— Client

Lessons learned

- When you make a mistake don’t back away – put it on the table. Give the problem the words the client may not be able to find.
- Many clients are reactive and have not grown up talking out issues.
- Despite what I know, the hardest thing for me has been that I want to put responsibility on the parent.

Lessons learned

- When you start feeling irritated or annoyed, make sure to get out what you need to feel more at peace – otherwise, it will come home with you and back to your next visit.
- Families who struggle with relationship do not find it reassuring that we will be there for the long haul.
- It was my belief that obtaining housing was the family’s number one priority, and that getting housing would solve the family’s problems.

Thank you for listening!

We welcome your questions, comments, and feedback!

Please join us for the next talk in this series on homeless home visiting with

Sharon Henry Blythe, Director of the Visible Child Initiative on

November 13 from 8:30 - 10:30 AM.
