



Shelter to Home Program Guidelines

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1. Purpose of Guidelines

This document provides guidelines, policies, and practices that apply to all individuals and families participating in Reclaim's Shelter to Home Program. It covers guiding principles, intended client experience while in shelter, and the way that shelter is connected to wider crisis response systems. The purpose of adopting these guidelines is to ensure that all individuals and families have a similar low-barrier entry experience, clear expectations of what support they will receive and what is expected of them, and an opportunity to achieve similar outcomes.

This document does not cover all operational needs and does not replace our operations manual for our Shelter to Home Program.

2. Role of Shelter in the Crisis Response System

Shelter is an essential component of the King County crisis response system for individuals and families, but it does not work alone or address all aspects of homelessness. In order to perform the key roles of shelter and ensure that there is coordination with other parts of the systems, our agency has defined the role of shelter to be primarily and most importantly:

1. To provide a safe, temporary place for individuals and families to be safe, get out of the elements, and have basic needs met when, without these services, people would sleep outside, in a vehicle, a place not meant for habitation, or remain in an unsafe housing environment.
2. To help individuals and families as quickly as possible by not creating unnecessary barriers that keep people in need from accessing shelter.
3. To serve as an entry point into the broader crisis response system designed to help end homelessness for individuals and families.
4. To help as many individuals and families as possible obtain a safe, permanent place to live.

3. Guiding Principles

To ensure common purpose and intention, the Reclaim Shelter Program adopts the following guiding principles. These principles are intended to inform shelter operations, both individually and collectively. Policies and practices will be evaluated at least once per year to ensure they are in keeping with our core set of principles.

- **Rapid shelter entry**

Shelter entry should be fast, immediate, uniform, inclusive, culturally responsive, and free of discrimination for any individual and family experiencing homelessness.

Federal laws prohibit discrimination in housing and community development programs and activities because of race, color, religious expression, sex, national origin, familial status, and disability. The HUD Non-Discrimination Statement can be found online at www.hud.gov.

- **Low barrier access**

The expectations on individuals and families needing shelter should be minimal, transparent and reasonable without preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, drug testing, or service/program participation requirements.

Classes, such as parenting, financial management, counseling, etc. can be offered but is not a requirement of shelter or services. While incentives may be offered for participation, an individual or family cannot be exited from shelter for choosing to not participate.

- **Housing First**

Shelter work will be informed by the Housing First approach that includes a quick and successful connection to permanent housing using the Coordinated Entry System and other strategies such as diversion and housing-focused supportive services.

- **Exit to Permanent Housing**

The objective is that the majority of individuals and families experiencing homelessness exit from shelter to permanent housing.

- **Trauma-Informed Care**

Homelessness is a traumatic experience. Trauma-informed care is a framework that integrates awareness and understanding of trauma. Shelter staff is trained in and mindful of the impact trauma has on everyday life and incorporates it when helping people resolve the experience of homelessness.

4. Stabilization Goals

In addition to shared principles, our shelter program has a set of four key goals for stabilization:

1. **Housing:** Moving from homelessness to housing is the primary goal of our shelter program. To this end, every individual and family will be supported to create a concrete plan and undertake action steps for moving to housing, ideally permanent housing.
2. **Financial progress:** To support permanent housing and other needs, most individuals and families will need to make financial progress. Reclaim will help clients set goals and undertake action steps related to obtaining all public benefits for which they are eligible, and obtaining or maintaining income, possibly through education, employment, job training, disability benefits, and/or financial counseling.
3. **Health:** Health is a necessary element of well-being for all individuals and family members. Reclaim will help clients set goals and undertake action steps related to obtaining needed physical, mental and/or behavioral health services and supports, both while remaining in shelter and, as possible, in the new location to which the client moves.
4. **Children services:** Children experiencing homelessness have unique needs and challenges different from their parents/guardians and specific to their age and stage of development. Reclaim will help families set goals and undertake action steps related to children attending and benefiting from school, childcare, medical, dental and vision services, as needed or requested.

5. Shelter Performance Outcomes

Shelters do not act alone and many individuals and families may need help from other programs to end their homelessness. Often, however, shelters are the primary or only intervention someone experiencing homelessness needs. Reclaim will work to meet performance measures that ensure:

- At least 40% of participants leave shelter directly to permanent housing.
- Fewer than 10% of participants leaving the shelter to permanent housing return to homelessness within 1 year.
- 90% of participants who enter our shelter will come from literal homelessness including families and individuals fleeing domestic violence.
- Maintain at least an 85% average unit occupancy rate.
- The average length of stay for 100% of single participants will be less than 90 days.

6. Admittance Policies

Moving into our shelter program should be a fast and low-barrier experience. The process for intaking someone should be expedient and as consistent as possible while meeting the specific needs of each participant and family.

A. Protection from discrimination

Fair housing laws protect those staying in shelters from illegal discrimination and harassment based on actual or perceived:

- Ancestry, national origin
- Marital status
- Citizenship
- Military and veteran status
- Disability, mental or physical
- Primary language
- Familial status
- Race, color
- Gender identity, gender
- Religious expression
- Sex, gender
- Genetic information
- Sexual orientation
- Immigration status
- Source of income

For additional information regarding these laws, visit: www.hum.wa.gov/fair-housing

B. Documentation needed for entry

While we encourage participants to show photo identification when entering our program, we understand this isn't always possible. In lieu of photo identification, we will ask permission to run your name through our local law enforcement agency to ensure we are not intaking a registered sex offender into our program. After entry into our program, our staff will work with each client to ensure they obtain identification that will be used to transition into housing.

C. Reasons someone may be referred to a more appropriate resource

There may be times, however, when another shelter may be a more appropriate resource.

The reasons our shelter may decline participation is limited:

1. Families may be referred to a more appropriate resource if the shelter cannot accommodate their family's size.
2. Reclaim may also refuse individuals or families who would require support for activities of daily living (such as dressing, toileting, eating, etc.) which our shelter is not equipped or staffed to support.
3. We are not able to provide services to registered sex offenders in our shelter.
4. Reclaim reserves the right to decline entry into our program(s) if the client has made prior threats to safety, been involved in destruction of shelter property, or participated in other serious or unlawful behaviors that resulted in previous exit(s) from our program(s).
5. Since we do not employ a mental health specialist, clients may be referred to a more appropriate program if they appear to be experiencing an active behavioral health crisis at time of intake.
6. If an individual or family is admitted and it is later determined that more clinical services are needed, Reclaim will work to locate a more suitable placement.

D. Priority for access to shelter

Entry into shelter are prioritized in this order:

1. Right of Return
2. Outreach referral, including The Front Door and SCFA Partners (if no other funder-designated set asides)
3. Other referral (hospital discharge, etc.)
4. Self-referral

7. Intake and Reviewing Shelter Policies

A. Welcome and expectations while staying in shelter

When individuals and families first arrive at shelter they may be in crisis or overwhelmed. The intent of the orientation is to make requirements and rules as limited and low barrier as possible while ensuring the safety of all people in our program. We want to ensure all participants understand any expectations or requirements of being in our shelter.

Our guidelines support a low-barrier approach to shelter services. Low barrier, however, does not mean there are no rules. Our Shelter to Home Program Guidelines, including the Animal Policy if applicable, are discussed and signed by all adults in our program. This is also an opportunity to execute a Consent to Exchange Information.

Topics that should be covered during orientation include:

- **Shelter is temporary:** The shelter stay is limited and intended to help individuals and families transition to a more stable place as quickly as possible. Each participant is encouraged to actively participate in the support provided to secure housing and meet other goals.
- **Rules about oversight of children:** Parents are expected to provide oversight of their child(ren) at all times, and may not leave child(ren) unsupervised. This applies to all minors (ages 0-17).
- **Substance Use:** The use of certain mind-altering substances is not permitted on site and can result in a warning or termination. This includes the use of street drugs, alcohol, and marijuana. If a participant has been using drugs or alcohol off the premises, they may still stay in the shelter as long as their behavior is not disruptive or dangerous to themselves or others.
- **Chores:** Individuals and families are expected to maintain their motel room in basic safe and sanitary conditions and to permit motel cleaning staff to clean on a regular basis.
- **Complaints & Grievances:** Information regarding the process for making complaints and grievances should be introduced briefly. It is not necessary to review the entirety of the policy as long as our staff makes it clear that there is one and leaves the information with the individual or family.

Additional information that may be offered at the introduction is about basic needs, along with case management expectations and availability. This is a good time to complete an Assessment of Immediate Needs. *Preparation for a higher level Needs Assessment and Housing Plan should not begin at this first meeting unless initiated by the individual or family. The focus of the first meeting should be to move people into shelter, allowing them to acclimate and rest prior to undergoing a full Needs Assessment and co-creating a Housing Plan at their first case management meeting.*

As a participant in King County's crisis response, Reclaim uses a confidential system called the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). All those enrolling into our Shelter

to Home program will also be enrolled in the county-wide HMIS system. Though we encourage clients to provide personal information, all clients have the option to enter the system anonymously. An HMIS Client Information Sheet is attached to these guidelines. All staff are expected to be able to explain this to participants and to answer questions.

B. COVID-19

King County Regional Homelessness Authority requires all of its contractors to be in compliance with all applicable public health recommendations and governmental orders and regulations related to COVID-19.

C. Notification Requirements for Federal Immigration Enforcement Activities

Prior to responding to any requests from an employee or agent of any federal immigration agency including the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations, Enforcement and Removal Operations, Customs and Border Protection, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Reclaim shall notify KCRHA immediately at KCRHAConnect@kcrha.org.

No access or information shall be provided without prior review and consent of KCRHA. Reclaim shall request the federal immigration authority to wait until a representative from KCRHA Connect Line is able to verify the credentials and authority of the federal agent and will direct Reclaim how to proceed.

D. Commitment to Culturally Responsive Services

Reclaim is committed to providing participant-centered and strength-based services that are:

- A. **Competent** as demonstrated by “the ability to honor, understand, and respect beliefs, lifestyles, attitudes, and behaviors demonstrated by diverse groups of people, and to diligently act on that understanding”.
- B. **Responsive** to cultural and linguistic needs of diverse populations.
- C. **Relevant** in addressing the cultural needs of diverse populations whose models of engagement or cultural standards differ from mainstream practices.
- D. **Accessible** through language, locations, and delivery style.

E. What to expect from staff

- A. Consistency** means you will know what to expect and be treated fairly. Staff are required to follow all of Reclaim's policies and procedures.
- B. Professional Boundaries** help to reduce misunderstanding about the nature of the relationship between staff and clients. As such, staff are instructed to not share their personal information like home phone numbers, personal email addresses, accept friend requests on social media, etc. Staff are also required to disclose any prior relationship with current clients.
- C. No favoritism**, in the form for personal gifts/money or rides outside of work.
- D. Confidentiality** protects your privacy and dignity. Staff will only discuss your -personal information with each other or with people you have given us permission to talk to about your situation. We do not post identifying or partially identifying pictures of anyone without a photo release. This release can be revoked by contacting the Executive Director at any time.
In public, staff will follow your lead in acknowledging each other and will never disclose that they know you from work. Feel free to nod, waive, say hi, and even have a quick chat, if you feel comfortable doing so.

If you feel that staff have not lived into these values, please let the Executive Director know.

F. Handling conflict

We try to minimize conflict amount participants by defusing the situation as much as possible. Conflict may be handled through face-to-face mediation and/or through the filing and responding to grievance forms.

Shelter staff are mandated reporters and must follow the laws regarding reporting to Child Protective Services and Adult Protective Services.

Family violence, intimate partner violence, or other violence is not acceptable and will be responded to immediately. This includes threats of violence. If reported, the situation will be investigated by the agency the next business day. The first priority is to ensure the immediate safety of all involved; therefore, roommates or families should be separated as soon as an act of violence or credible threat of violence has been reported. It is preferable that the parties are moved to separate motels.

A multi-disciplinary team which includes all staff members who interact with the individuals or family, such as shelter staff, housing navigator, case manager, etc. are brought into the investigation. The objective of the meeting is to assess the incident and, if possible, identify

the primary aggressor. Police officers who have direct knowledge of the situation should also be consulted when determining the aggressor. If deemed appropriate, the primary aggressor will be transitioned out of the shelter with the affected party or rest of the family permitted to remain. Transitioned clients will be offered appropriate community resources and referrals.

G. Grievance policy

When possible, issues arising in the shelter should be addressed immediately through conflict mediation and resolution with the affected parties. Everyone, however, has a right to file a grievance with Reclaim. Furthermore, HMIS clients also have the right to file a grievance with KCRHA. Grievance information and forms will be made available to all participants during their shelter orientation.

A ReclaimGrievance Form will be made accessible online, in the shelter orientation packet, and at The Front Door for easy access. Grievances that are not anonymous will require a response to the person making the grievance within (5) working days. If the grievance is regarding a particular staff person, neither that person nor anyone that they supervise will respond to the grievance. Anonymous grievances may be submitted but are kept for quality improvement purposes as they cannot be responded to.

H. Warnings and termination of services policy

The shelter is a behavior-based shelter in which people can stay, independent of their behavioral health status, so long as their behavior is not disruptive or unsafe. Unless there is immediate danger to staff or someone else, if a family member or members violate rules or expectations, they will be provided with warnings prior to being asked to leave. Reclaim will notify participants of both the Reclaim and KCRHA grievance policies, including providing them with a written copy of the Appeal of Termination form if service is terminated.

All warnings are recorded on a warning form. The first warning may be delivered verbally but any warnings thereafter on the same topic will be provided in writing to the participant. A third violation after two written warnings will be reviewed during a multidisciplinary care conference and may result in being asked to leave shelter and/or withdrawal of all services.

Possible reasons for termination of services include, but are not limited to:

- Violence against staff or other participants, or credible threats of violence will be investigated and may result in an immediate removal from the shelter and termination of all services.

Termination can be permanent or temporary. Permanent termination of services requires the approval of the Executive Director.

8. Housing Planning and Housing Search Support

As described above, rapid movement to housing is the primary goal of our shelter and of the regional crisis response as a whole. All individuals and families will be supported to co-create and carry out a housing plan that also covers areas of financial progress, health needs, and children's needs.

A. Co-creating a Housing Plan

The first approach to achieving housing stability should be through Diversion strategies. Diversion supportive services will be offered in the first seven (7) days to encourage self-resolution.

Within the first fourteen (14) days of entering shelter, each adult participant is offered a Coordinated Entry Assessment. At that time, individuals and families should also work with their housing specialist to co-create a Housing Stability Plan.

The Housing Stability Plan outlines an individual's or family's needs and resources. It also lays out action steps for what the family will do and what the housing specialist will do to support progress in securing housing and other goals. It will include goals, specific actions and mutual objectives related to securing housing, financial progress, and addressing health and children's needs.

The housing specialist and client will work collaboratively on the Housing Stability Plan. This plan will be utilized until the individual or family is permanently housed and no longer needs support from our agency.

B. Support provided by shelter for housing search

The work of finding suitable housing is a partnership between the participant and their housing specialist. While in shelter, engaging with the housing specialist will be encouraged but no specific service will be mandatory.

Support should include assistance with any part of the Housing Stability Plan including:

- Support for housing search activities, including advice on how and where to look for housing, sources of available units, assistance with transportation planning, and referrals to search assistance if not provided directly;
- Assistance understanding and completing housing applications;
- Assistance preparing for interviews with landlords including advice on do's and don'ts in the interview process;
- Support securing the documents needed for housing such as IDs, income verifications, evidence of past rentals or utilities, proof of disability, etc.
- Education about the things a landlord may consider in evaluating an individual or family for housing including their credit, rental and criminal histories, and support to address these. This may include referrals to entities that can help with repairing credit, addressing past evictions, etc.
- Education about expectations of renters including how to follow a lease and how to address issues with a landlord.
- Resources for mediation with landlords or other resources to lean on in case of a crisis once housed.

What each individual and family will need to find and secure housing will differ, and their housing specialist will work with each client to identify their needs and support them or connect them with services that can. Housing specialists will work with clients to identify housing and secure it as quickly as possible.

Some individuals or families may need or want an alternative to immediate permanent housing. The housing specialist will identify those who want transitional housing or that, after a period of housing searches, have been unsuccessful and need a longer term or more intensive program option.

C. Other services offered while in the shelter

The time that individuals and families spend in shelter is intended to be short and focused as much as possible on meeting immediate needs and the next steps to get into housing. Participants, however, may have additional goals or needs. The time in shelter is also an

opportunity to help clients make connections to other services they will need once they leave.

Housing advocates will work with individuals and families to identify what other needs (aside from housing) they have and how to assist with them. Participation in case management will be encouraged but no specific service will be mandatory.

Secondary areas of focus can include:

- Support to increase income, including applications for benefits, and support to pursue and secure employment
- Connection to school for children and childcare
- Transportation
- Ensuring basic needs, such as food and hygiene, are met
- Ensuring that clients and children have a primary health care provider or establishing one if needed

9. Handling of Mail

Our agency is able to provide all participants with a mailing address to use during their time with us. This service is intended to reduce barriers for those who do not have their own mailing address. Please note that no illegal items are to be received through this mailing address and you will be expected to file a forwarding address when you exit our Shelter to Home program.

Client mailing address: Reclaim
7829 Center Blvd SE, #239
Snoqualmie, WA 98065

All mail will be picked up at The Front Door (our community service center) during regular business hours. The address of The Front Door is:

8224 Railroad Ave SE
Snoqualmie, WA 98065

10. Length of Stay and Extension Policies

Emergency sheltering is intended to be very short-term, just long enough to address the initial crisis of homelessness, stabilize individuals and family members, and identify and implement a plan for a pathway out, ideally to housing or to another more suitable program.

Each individual and family has different needs and should not be held to arbitrary timelines if steps to address the crisis have not been successful and would result in someone being discharged back to homelessness or moving unnecessarily to another shelter. The Length of Stay and Extension Policies are intended to help keep shelter stays short and to provide methods to extend time when appropriate.

A. Initial stay and extensions

Our shelter program will have an intended initial length of stay of up to 90 days with the potential for extensions in 30 day increments thereafter. Extensions past the initial 90 day stay require a care review meeting to determine if an extension would likely result in a move into permanent housing or a more appropriate program. Client progress towards permanent housing will be reviewed on an ongoing, monthly basis.

B. Maximum stay and exceptions

The maximum stay in our Shelter to Home program is 6 months and this will be presented to the individual or family as a firm end date. Clients, however, should not leave one shelter to go to another shelter purely because of time limits. To avoid unnecessary moves to another shelter, short time-limited extensions beyond 6 months may be granted when:

1. An individual or family is already enrolled in Rapid Rehousing or another housing program, is in good standing with the program and actively engaged in housing searches. The Rapid Rehousing provider should support the extension.
2. An individual or family is waiting for a specific housing resource to become available and there is written evidence of that and a defined extension time. Examples include:
 - a. A lease has or is about to be signed but the unit isn't yet ready to be occupied;
 - b. A friend or family member has agreed to take them in but there is an explained delay before that can happen;
 - c. The individual or family is moving to a transitional housing program or other program but there is a delay in gaining occupancy that is out of that person's control.
 - d. The individual or family member is in an active crisis that is being treated or has an extreme illness or other medical reason why they should remain temporarily in shelter.

In all of the above cases, the time for the extension should be specified and supported by another party that is attesting to the reason for the extension.

C. Process for extensions

Written extension forms are provided by the shelter program manager to the client with updated exit dates. The Request for Extension Form will be used for all extension requests.

D. Re-entry requests

Clients can be granted re-entry into our program on a case-by-case basis so long as:

- At least 180 days has passed since you and/or your family left our program AND;
- Your previous exit was not due to major violations of our program guidelines.

Please use the Request for Re-entry Form to request re-entry into our Shelter to Home program. Requests are reviewed by the shelter staff and, once a decision is made, you will be informed of it by a member of our team.

11. King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA)

The King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA) is a regional governmental agency whose mission is to unify homelessness services and systems in order to reduce homelessness and bring more people inside. The majority of Reclaim's public funding awards are overseen by KCRHA.

A. Office of the Ombuds

Within the KCRHA systems lies the Office of the Ombuds which is dedicated to improving the quality of services for people experiencing homelessness by helping community members navigate the homeless system, resolve issues, escalate emergency calls, and proactively engage with the community to gather system feedback.

The Office of the Ombuds reports directly to the CEO and acts independently, with sole discretion to initiate and pursue complaints and inquiries.

To request more information, raise concerns, or file a complaint, please visit <https://kcrha.org/resources/ombuds>.



FORMS

- a. Shelter to Home Motel Guidelines
- b. Animal Guidelines
- c. Consent to Exchange Information
- d. HMIS Client Information Sheet
- e. Assessment of Immediate Needs
- f. Request for Extension Form
- g. Request for Re-entry Form
- h. Grievance Form
- i. Appeal of Termination of Services