

Practices to Reduce Stigma and Discrimination Towards Older Transitional Housing Clients

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Background

- Homelessness is an enduring social issue across North America.
- Rates of older people experiencing homelessness are increasing.
- One contributor to homelessness is the stigmatization of and discrimination toward people experiencing homelessness—‘homeism’



Study Aims

1

What experiences of stigma and discrimination do older clients of a transitional housing program experience?

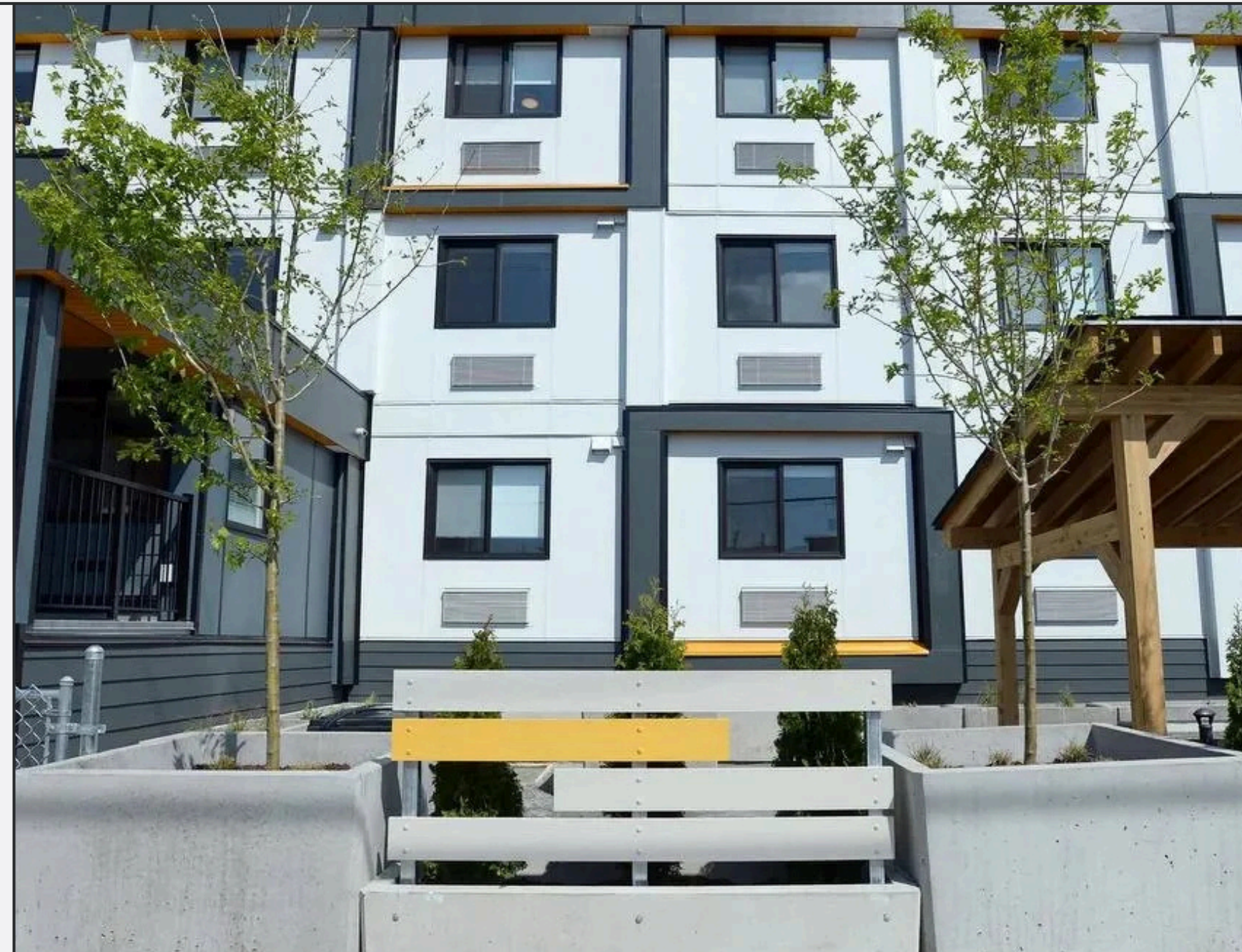
2

What program practices or operations are used to reduce stigma and discrimination towards clients?

Research Context

Dave's Place (pseudonym) is operated and managed by a not-for-profit organization that has the mission to support people experiencing homelessness.

The program aims to provide transitional housing for 10-12 months and individualized client support to up to 27 individuals at a time.



Methods

Study Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A large qualitative dataset of semi-structured interviews was reexamined for any mention or description of stigmatization or discrimination (homeism).
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Five providers (3 female, 2 male) Ten clients (all male)
Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) Data were examined for either firsthand experiences reported by clients or observed by providers.

Findings

1

Experiences of homeism – the ways in which clients self-stigmatize and are treated poorly by others, as well as the consequences of the shame clients have.

2

Program practices used to reduce stigma and discrimination towards clients.

Experiences of Homeism

“

**You kind of feel ashamed of telling them that you stay at a shelter...
I get this, kind of, like a stereotyping of, “Okay, stays in shelter, you
must be doing drugs, you must be a drunk. He must be a thief.**

(Client #1)

”

Experiences of Homeism

“

You're far more likely in a 12-hour period of daytime in a homeless person's life to run into 20 people that disdain you—they don't like you; they don't want you around...And so psychically you pick that up...And so, you develop this skill of how to combat it and how to come back to certain responses and how to deny and let your self-esteem get pressed down so much. (Client #4)

”

Experiences of Homeism

“

Say I live in [name of neighborhood]...I don't need to tell 'em I live here [at the housing site]. It's not their business. I live in [name of neighborhood]. (Client #7)

”

Experiences of Homeism

“

You have to be somewhat in denial, you have to be somewhat guarded, you have to be somewhat stronger than the average person because you deal with the shame and guilt of it every day. (Client #4)

”

Program Practices to Reduce Stigma and Discrimination Towards Clients

- Harm reduction approach
- Humanizing treatment
- Providing a stable address
- Arts-based and community building activities

Program Practices to Reduce Homeism

“

Maybe they literally just need that accepting, compassionate approach... A lot of people still carried immense shame and guilt when coming into our program and didn't want to be upfront with us. And it's like, 'Hey...as long as you're safe and we have a safety plan, let's work with that...I'm not asking you to change. If you wanna' change, great. I'm here to support you, but if not kudos to you, let's just make sure you're happy alive, and living.' (Provider #4)

”

Program Practices to Reduce Homeism

“

...wake up feeling more human, for one. You don't have to rely on those temp services to try and get yourself out of the [shelter]. And the affordable rent for getting back on your feet when you do get a real job. It's very helpful because then you can save before planning to move elsewhere. (Client #8)

”

Program Practices to Reduce Homeism

“

A place like this, you stay for a while. Now you have proven yourself to these people and now you got a reference to start off. And there should be more places like this place to give people a starting off place to start. (Client #1)

”

Program Practices to Reduce Homeism

“

...but I wanted to get the word out about [the program] for the community, you know? I don't know when they first opened this place up, if the community knew what was coming in, but I think it'd be good. We have good community relations. Like I'm just noticing right now that that garden looks terrible...I think I might be out there in the next couple of days pulling some weeds. (Client #7)

”

Discussion

- 1 Humanistic and nonjudgemental care in harm reduction approaches allows for increased respect, dignity, and access to care for people experiencing homelessness.
- 2 Inclusive and respectful treatment, as well as the ability of the program to offer affordable housing and a stable address.
- 3 Arts-based and community building activities offer ways for neighbors and clients to view people experiencing homelessness in a more positive light and, perhaps, reshape clients' sense of identity.

Thank You

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