Santa Cruz Trauma Consortium

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California Center of Excellence
for Trauma Informed Care

Bibliography: Trauma Informed Solutions to Sheltering and Housing

General Overview of Trauma, Housing and Related Issues

How a society defines homelessness is a reflection of its values. Here in the US, the definition that the Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) uses is surprisingly strict, excluding people who are struggling with housing stability but have the occasional place to sleep, as well those who are at risk of losing housing. While people who are homeless often struggle with severe substance abuse and/or mental health issues, housing instability tends to precede these issues, worsen them, and then prevent people from entering programs designed to assist. In order to create effective measures, we must dispel unfounded myths and create rational definitions and public solutions, rather than seeing housing instability as an individual's responsibility and problem alone.

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Legislation, Funding Efforts, Advocacy

California, other states, and the federal government have approved budgets and programs to address housing and sheltering issues. In California, the most recent budget provided for about $600 million for homelessness and public housing projects. In addition, private entities are entering into the housing market; for example, joining hospital systems elsewhere that have helped to develop affordable housing, HMO Kaiser Permanente plans to invest $200 million in community efforts to eliminate major housing instability in California. Some recent legislation is likely to have an effect on housing, such as the Family First Prevention Services Act, which is defunding congregate care within the child welfare system, directly impacting many children involved in foster care. This begs the question: how is this funding being used, and is trauma-informed care being used in motions forward?

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Poverty, Employment, and Financial Literacy

Often, critics claim that it is up to the individual and not the society to fix the housing crisis; people must find their own jobs and lift themselves up. However, this is much easier said than done when there are systemic factors fighting against any attempts to move upwards towards stability, from racial oppression to lack of sufficient jobs catered to both their skill set and the cost of living of their area. There are many factors hindering those suffering from homelessness, but no system working for their benefit on these factors. Instead, their efforts must be individualized, reducing effectivity and increasing the severity of the housing crisis.

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Trauma, Abuse, Domestic Violence

There is an undeniable correlation between past and/or present trauma, abuse, and domestic violence and future housing instability. Survivors may have to leave their partners for their own safety, but domestic violence shelters are often full and typically only housing survivors for a short time, after which they are left with no stable shelter for themselves or for their children. Not only does this instability make it difficult to leave abusive partners, but it threatens future economic stability, increasing risk for housing instability over the lifespan. To prevent housing insecurity in the first place, to address it as soon as possible when it occurs, and to reduce chronic or relapsing homelessness, connecting trauma as a casual force as well as trauma informed practices for housing and shelter programs are essential components of the solution.

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Housing Insecurity and University Students

While there are common images of who is homeless and why, housing insecurity can affect anyone. University students, particularly in high-cost urban areas such as New York City or San Francisco, or who attend schools with no housing, such as community colleges, are at particular risk for housing instability. Yet, being poor in college is seen as a momentary "rite of passage," delegitimizing the real struggles that students often face, such as hunger, domestic violence, and exploitation. As universities increase their student body sizes, many do not have

a plan to house them, leaving them to the vagaries of the private market, to take out interest-bearing loans for rent, and to choose dropping out as an economic decision.

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Trauma Informed Solutions to Housing

There are no simple solutions to housing insecurity, but there are practices that can increase safety to pave the path towards future stability. Nationwide, organizations and researchers are working to reduce the housing crisis through the lens of trauma informed care. Whether in a Housing First program for survivors of intimate partner violence in upstate New York, or in apartment complexes specific to those dealing with chronic traumatic homelessness, trauma informed care *can* and *should* be used to address the problems both deriving from and causing housing instability.

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