

# CT Outreach (OR) Training Best Practices in Outreach to Homeless People *Session #4: Working with People and their Pets*

JANUARY 28, 2025

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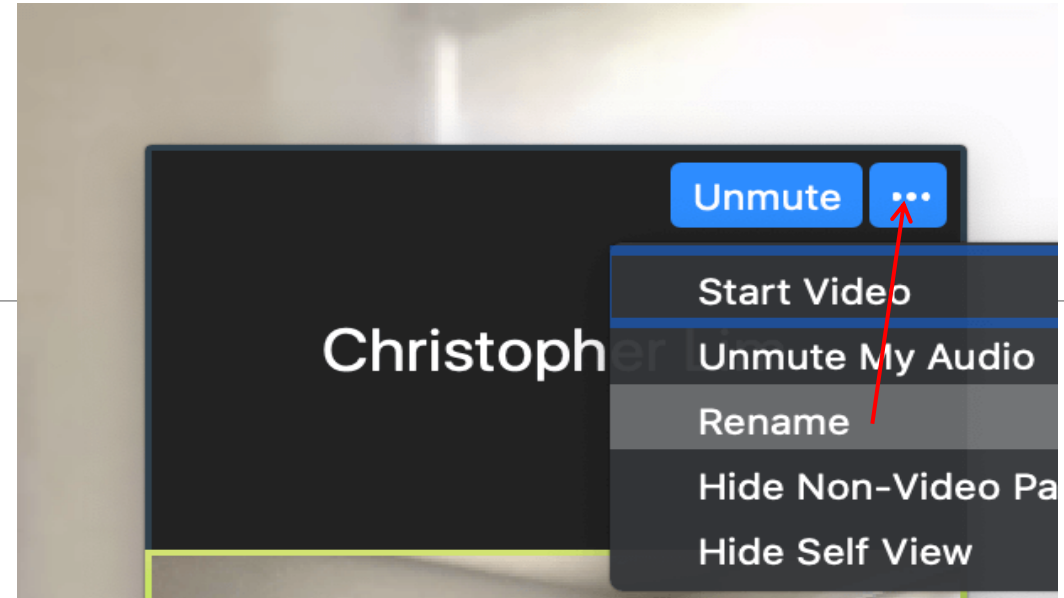
Suzanne Wagner & Lauren Pareti  
Housing Innovations



# Welcome

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- Introduce Facilitators
- Goals for the Session
- Housekeeping
  - PLEASE TURN YOUR CAMERAS ON AS MUCH AS YOU CAN.
  - Please put your name as you would like to be addressed as your screen name.
  - We will upload the slides to the chat box momentarily.
  - We love interaction – please raise hand, use emojis, type comments in the chat box or just unmute and talk!
  - The session is being recorded and will be posted to the web.
  - Today's session is 2 hours- some slides are for reference.



A group of people are seated around a long white table in a meeting room. They are engaged in discussion, with some looking at laptops and others talking. The room is brightly lit, and there are other people in the background, suggesting a busy, collaborative environment.

# We Love Interaction

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If you don't have a microphone, participate in discussions by joining via phone:

Phone: 646-876-9923

Meeting ID: 810 6676 8403

Passcode: 422407

# Who is with us today?

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**Please share in the chat box:**

- Your agency and role/title
- Your location
- The name of a pet you adore (yours or someone else's) and type of animal
- Or, if you are not a pet person, something else you find adorable.



# AGENDA

- Human-Animal Bonds
- Worker and Agency Roles in Supporting Human-Animal Families
- Legal Rights and Obligations
- Reasonable Accommodations
- Break Out Discussions
- Closing Comments
- Additional Resources





# Goals

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Provide information and resources to help outreach projects to accomplish these things:

- Keep people and their pets together and their bonds intact.
- Help intact families to access housing as quickly as possible.
- Support clients through any difficult decisions they may need to make regarding their animal family members.

*My **pet** is a part of  
my **family**,*

*if you do not understand  
that, then you do not  
know **me**.*

Poll: Do you currently have people on your caseload who have pets?

# Video: Judie, Melody, Anastasia, Roxy & Chris

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# Each Family Has Unique Story...

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- Some pets go from housing to homelessness together with their family.
- Some meet while they are experiencing homelessness.
- There are many reasons why people won't separate from their animals:
  - ✓ Animals are family and being a caregiver is an important role.
  - ✓ Animals provide companionship, support and love needed to cope with the stress and stigma of homelessness.
  - ✓ Animals may offer protection and help their humans to feel safe.
  - ✓ Animals are a social lubricant and help people to build community.
  - ✓ Animals don't care how much money or what kind of house you have.
  - ✓ Nearly a million shelter animals are euthanized annually in the U.S.

**Put in chat, raise hand, unmute: Other reasons people won't give up their pets?**

# Common Views about People Experiencing Homelessness & their Pets



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PEH are  
unable to  
take care  
of an  
animal.

The animals of PEH are often well-loved and cared for. Being responsible for the care of an animal can provide a critical role and structure & help people to take care of themselves.

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I feel  
sorry for  
the  
animal.

PEH show tremendous loyalty and commitment to and make sacrifices for their animals. They often spend more time with their animals than housed people.

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The  
animal  
would be  
better off  
in rescue.

About 6.3 million companion animals enter U.S. animal shelters annually. Keeping pets & PEH together saves rescue resources for animals that don't have someone who loves them.

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Pets are part of the family.

People have a right to live with their families.

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# Bonds with pets benefit mental, physical, and social health.

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- Scientific evidence demonstrates that pets improve heart health; alleviate depression; increase well-being; support child health and development; and contribute to healthy aging.
- Companion animals can assist in the treatment of a broad range of conditions.
- Documented benefits include decreased blood pressure, reduced anxiety, and enhanced feelings of well-being.





POLL: What benefits from a relationship with an animal have you experienced for yourself or a loved one?

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# Providing care for animals improves outcomes for people.

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- Resources for low-cost animal care in CT.
- Clients' may put their own lives at risk to ensure the safety of their animal family members.
- Worrying about the ability to provide food, shelter and health care to the animal(s) may be deeply distressing.
- Loss of an animal (death, surrender, run-away, removal) can trigger bereavement and grief and increase risk of self-harm.



# Group Discussions

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Introduce yourselves to one another

Share the current situation of unsheltered people with pets on your team and/or in your CAN

Discuss

- Challenges
- Successes
- Resources



# Worker Role in Supporting People & Pets

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- Show you care about clients' pets.
- Include considerations for pet family members when doing needs assessments and housing plans.
- Use a strengths-based approach to identify and build upon skills developed through pet care.
- Integrate interventions to problem-solve any issues with pet care/behavior in case management
  - *Facilitate access to available resources to help people care for their animals.*
  - *Ask your supervisor for help if you don't have the knowledge/skills/resources you need*





# Worker Role in Supporting People & Pets (2)

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- Communicate facts with compassion:
  - *Animal friendly housing options may be very scarce.*
- Advocate to keep the family intact.
- Help clients establish an emergency animal care plan.
- Understand [CT's Animal Cruelty Laws](#).
- Help clients to establish their own standards for adequate care – privilege and culture affect perceptions of adequate care.
- Help clients without judgment to define their non-negotiables & explore all shelter and housing options they are willing to consider



# Worker Role in Supporting People & Pets (3)

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- Assist clients to identify potential issues and plan how to support animals adjusting from outside to indoor living when transitioning to housing.
- Be aware of harm-to-self risks associated with pet loss and link to grief and bereavement resources.
- Provide support around very difficult decisions.





# Agency Role in Supporting People & Pets

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- Develop partnerships for resources for animal care (food, veterinary care, spay/neuter, vaccination, boarding, foster care, training, supplies).
  - *Animal welfare organizations are often eager partners – they don't want more pets in their system*
- Consider staff experience with and biases around animals when making assignments.
- Consider having one or more staff people serve as a primary resource for the team regarding animal related issues and resources.
- Ensure staff get the training & support they need (e.g., animal behavior, assistance animal rights).



## Agency Role in Supporting People & Pets (2)

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- Include guidance on interaction with animals and aggressive animals in your staff safety protocols.
  - *Urban Resource Institute has co-sheltered nearly 900 pets since 2013 with zero bites!*
- Develop a protocol for making animal cruelty reports.
  - A study of 6 co-sheltering facilities found that willful abuse was very rare
- Help staff to navigate complex legal, ethical, clinical, and practical issues through regular supervision.
- Advocate in your community for animal-friendly shelter and housing options.



[Pet-Friendly Shelters: 10 Lessons from the Field](#)

[Webinar: Low-Barrier Shelter: How to Become Pet-Friendly](#)

[Report: Co-Sheltering People and Their Companion Animals](#)

# Obligations of Shelters

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- A shelter accepting federal funding must comply with the American Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Fair Housing Act.
- The ADA requires that guide or service dogs be allowed entry into public buildings and public-access areas.
- The Fair Housing Act allows people with disabilities to request accommodations for assistance and emotional support animals.

# Obligations of Shelters (2)

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DOH requires:

- Shelters to admit people with service animals & make every effort to accommodate non-service animals.
- CANs to implement a plan to accommodate households with pets, emotional support, and service animals in shelter



Is it a Service Animal, Assistance Animal (includes Emotional Support Animals), or a Pet?

Is the animal a dog or a miniature horse AND trained to perform a specific task to help with a disability?

YES OR NO



## SERVICE ANIMAL

A service animal is any dog or miniature horse that is individually trained to perform tasks for the benefit of someone with a disability.

The tasks performed can include pulling a wheelchair, alerting a person to sounds, reminding a person to take medication, alerting to an impending seizure, or guiding somebody with a visual impairment, among countless others.

Service animals are permitted access to dwellings and short-term housing under the ADA, FHA, and RHA.



Is the animal a species that is a common type of pet\*?



YES OR NO



Does the animal alleviate a symptom or effect of a disability?

YES OR NO



## ASSISTANCE ANIMAL

An assistance animal can include any type of common household pet that alleviates a symptom or effect of the individual's disability and does not need to be trained to perform their benefit.

Emotional Support Animals are one type of assistance animal, but animals can be used as an aid for limitless disabilities, such as ADHD, epilepsy, cancer, heart disease, depression, etc.

Assistance animals are not protected in public accommodation, but are covered under the Fair Housing Act and Rehabilitation Act, so they have access to nearly all types of dwellings and many short-term dwellings.

Does an exception apply?

YES OR NO

And does the animal alleviate a symptom or effect of a disability?



PET



A pet is an animal that has no special training or specific role in directly helping an individual cope with a disability or condition.

While pets can provide emotional support and stability, the primary purpose of a pet is to provide companionship. Pets are not covered by the ADA, FHA, or RHA.



A verification requirement is necessary for assistance animals when the disability/related need is not obvious.

This includes a letter establishing that the person is living with a disability (general about the disability, specific about the symptoms) & has a related need for the animal (ie, the animal alleviates a symptom or effect of the disability).

# Is it a Service Animal, Assistance Animal or a Pet?

# Reasonable Accommodations



- CT State law protecting people with disabilities applies to all housing except: an owner-occupied building with no more than 2 rental units; room rental in a unit where the owner lives.
- Housing Providers are required to make reasonable accommodations to enable people with disabilities to access and retain housing.
- Accommodations can include exceptions to pet policies for Service or Assistance Animals.
- Requests for a reasonable accommodation may involve more than one animal – establish a need for each.
- Fees or deposits for service or assistance animals are not allowed.
- See [HUD Notice on Requests for an Animal](#) & [Interactive Tool: Requests for Assistance Animals in Housing](#)



# Reasonable Accommodations (2)

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- Documentation can come from receipt of SSI/DI/VA benefits, a physician, psychiatrist, social worker or other professional licensed to diagnose and treat the disability.
- The landlord/property manager cannot require medical records, diagnosis, details about the disability, a specific form, a notarized statement, or statements under the penalty of perjury.
- Granting an accommodation is not required but a good faith response is required.
- A reasonable accommodation can be declined when it is an undue burden on the landlord - usually based on cost or direct threat; decided case-by-case.
- Landlord resources matter - larger entities will usually be expected to make more changes than smaller “mom and pop” landlords.



## Reasonable Accommodations (3)

- May not limit the breed or size of a service or assistance animal.
- Consideration is allowed of specific issues related to the animal's conduct that pose a direct threat and cannot be eliminated or reduced (e.g., via a secure enclosure).
- Help clients to understand their legal rights and assess whether a request is reasonable

# Poll

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Adam has been on the streets with Rocko for 6 months. He found a great apartment in a 50-unit building owned by a landlord with multiple properties. The building does not allow pets. Adam is making a reasonable accommodation request. A Social Worker has written a letter stating that he provides disability related services to Adam, and Rocko is an assistance animal and is needed by Adam to alleviate multiple symptoms of his disability.

- Can the landlord require medical records?
- Can the landlord require Adam to get a smaller dog instead?
- Can the landlord decline the request because a dog similar to Rocko bit someone in one of their buildings?



# Best Practice: Reasonable Accommodation Request Letter

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Provide a letter from a professional licensed to diagnose and treat the disability and include:

- Client' name
- Statement that the licensed professional is providing health care or disability-related services to the client and the client's disability substantially limits at least one major life activity or major bodily function
- Type of animal
- Statement that the client needs the animal because it provides assistance or performs a task that the person needs because of the disability or because it provides therapeutic emotional support to alleviate a symptom or effect of the disability
- Signature, license number, and date



# Advocacy

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- Help landlords to understand how keeping the family together supports stable tenancy.
- Help landlords to understand their legal obligations.
- Partner with supportive housing providers to explain ongoing services that will be available to assist the whole family (people and pets).
- Help landlords to understand that discrimination is costly.
  - EXAMPLE: \$115,000 settlement with a Connecticut landlord who refused to make an exception to a no-pets policy for a disabled tenant requiring an assistance dog
- Connect clients with Legal Services, as necessary.

# HOUSING DISCRIMINATION



IS  
ILLEGAL

## Fair Housing Complaints

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- To make a fair housing complaint with **HUD** call (800-669-9777; TTY 800-877-8339) or use these links: [English](#) or [Spanish](#).
- To file a complaint with the **CT Commission on Human Rights** call (860)541-3403.

## Break Out Discussion

Susan is living in her car with 5 cats. You suspect that she has a mental health disability that she denies. She purchased a certificate online stating that the cats are assistance animals, and she believes that will suffice to get a reasonable accommodation. She is struggling to feed the cats, and she is heartbroken that one seems to be sick.

What next steps might be helpful?



# Closing

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- For many people, pets are family and provide companionship, support and love.
- Just like people who have homes, there is a wide range of abilities, views and financial preparedness among PEH regarding adequate animal care.
- Providing supports, resources and advocacy to help people remain with and care for their pets is a critical component of outreach work.
- Supervisors can help staff to navigate the complex issues that arise.



**WE ENVISION  
EQUITABLE ACCESS  
TO HOMES  
FOR ALL FAMILIES,  
REGARDLES OF  
THEIR COMPOSITION.**

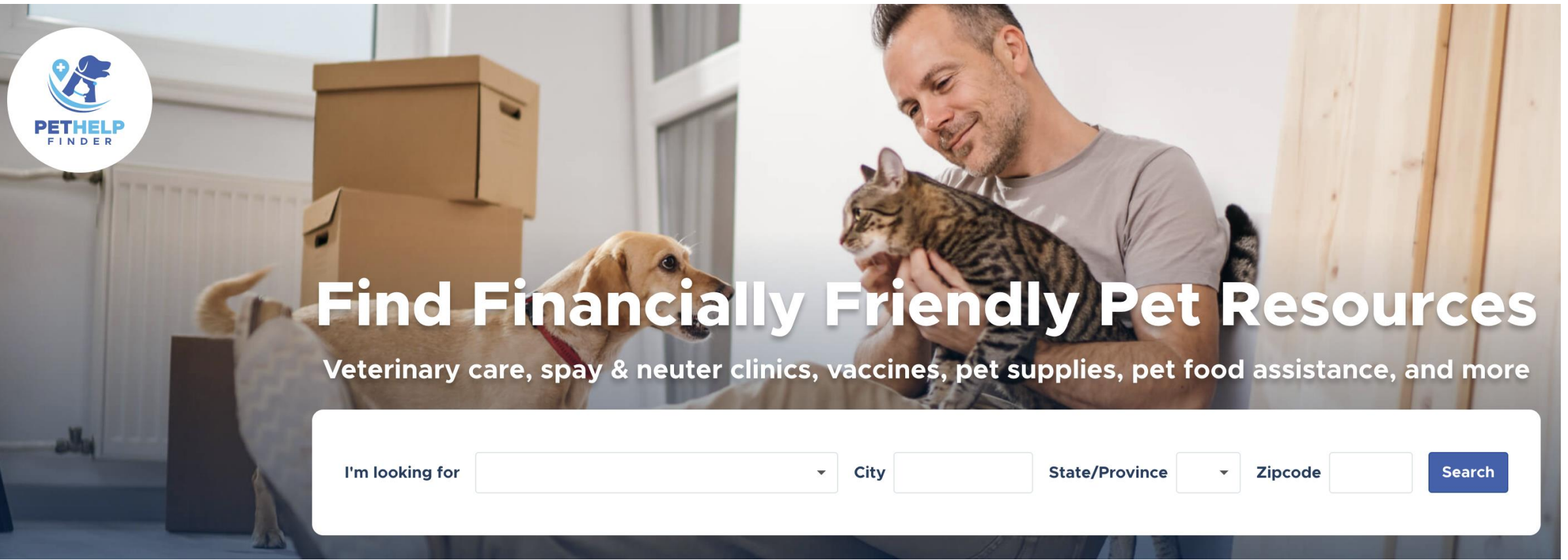




**LEARNING  
NEVER ENDS**

Additional  
Resources

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# Find Financially Friendly Pet Resources

Veterinary care, spay & neuter clinics, vaccines, pet supplies, pet food assistance, and more

I'm looking for

City

State/Province

Zipcode

Search

[PetHelpFinder](#) is a search engine for [financially friendly](#) pet resources - veterinary services, food pantry/supplies, and boarding services.



Help is available to keep pets and their people together!

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[My Dog is My Home](#) supports homeless services organizations to accommodate individuals experiencing homelessness alongside their animal companions. More information is available [here](#).

[A Multilevel Intervention Framework for Supporting People Experiencing Homelessness with Pets.](#)

[Improving Outcomes in Homelessness: Keeping People and Pets Together](#)



# Sample Policies for Shelter and Housing Projects

- [Sample Pets Policy](#)
- [Owner Acknowledgement](#)
- [Pets Supplies Needs Assessment](#)
- [Lease Addendum & Pet Registration](#)





**Purple Leash Project - Resources for Domestic Violence Shelters:** Grants to help shelters become pet-friendly; Engaging volunteers to help create pet-friendly spaces at shelters; training and resources

# Best Practices in Street Outreach

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Session 1: Values, Goals & Engagement - Slides: [Best Practices in Street Outreach, Session 1](#); [Recording](#)

Session 2: Housing First & Housing-Focused Case Management - [Slides](#); [Recording](#)

Session 3: Housing Application, Transition to Housing & Client Rights – [Slides](#); [Recording](#)



# Upcoming Outreach Webinars:

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- Supervisors Sessions: Supervising Street Outreach Staff & Programs
  - Wednesday, 2/5/25: 1:30 – 3:30
  - Wednesday, 2/19/25: 1 - 3
- Requirements for Agencies Receiving Outreach Funding – Date TBA

**NEW  
DATE & TIME**

# Communities of Practice: Schedule

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All meetings will be from 10-11 AM

- 2/13/25
- 4/10/25
- 6/12/25

**Zoom:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89707921341?pwd=E0HGHKt1R5SaZ5RTjiYajup7kklykT.1>

Meeting ID: 897 0792 1341; Passcode: 216034;  
Phone: 646-876-9923





# Quarterly Outreach Meetings

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Next Meeting: 3/19 at 1pm

**Join on your computer or mobile app**

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Passcode: YRSRpB

**Or call in (audio only)**

[+1 860-840-2075](#)

Phone Conference ID: 636  
766997#

# Street Outreach Training Inventory

Web-based training available on topics including:

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- Best Practices and Engagement Strategies
- Homeless Response System Overview
- Housing Options
- Housing Assessment & Planning
- Mental Health
- Crisis Intervention & De-escalation
- Harm Reduction
- Encampments
- Trauma-Informed Outreach
- Self-Care, Vicarious Trauma & Staff Resiliency
- Working with Special Populations (Youth, Older Adults, LGBTQIA, DV)
- Racial Trauma & Equity
- Disaster Response Planning



# Contact Info

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# Questions?

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