

# Living Systems

## Designing supports for women on their path to self-sufficiency

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Women with young children are a growing population experiencing homelessness. Transitional homes, like HSH,<sup>1</sup> provide shelter and educational programming aimed at fostering the development of skills necessary to attain and maintain basic needs. The benefit of safe shelter provides those experiencing homelessness an opportunity to focus on emotional, social and academic development.<sup>2</sup>

Our partnership with HSH started by asking how designers might develop supports for women as they transition to self-sufficiency. We now interpret this union as a case study examining the intersection of design and public service. Our goal is to understand and implement design solutions that support the service delivery of HSH.

### EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

**SERVICE**  
Shottack  
Bitner  
Parker  
Edvardsson

**DESIGN**  
Dubberly  
Buchanan  
Sanders  
Manzini  
Hughes

**HOMELESSNESS**  
United States Interagency Council on Homelessness  
non-profits  
benchmarking

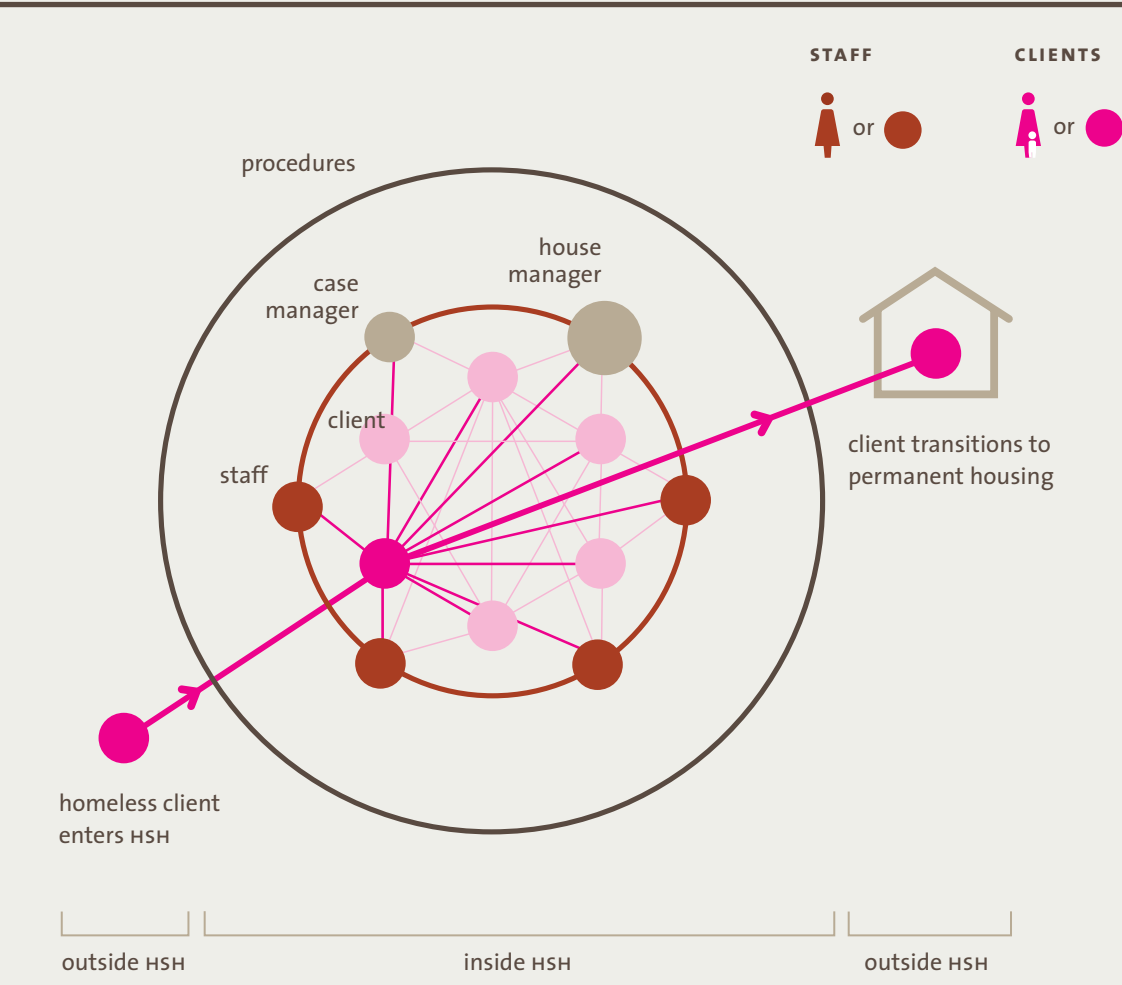
**CHANGE MANAGEMENT**  
Kleinman  
Billington  
Katzenbach  
expert interviews

### SERVICE OVERVIEW

Founded in 1971, HSH's parent organization offers services and resources to women addressing reproductive health care. HSH's mission is to provide a safe environment and supportive services to homeless women and their infants and children to help them prepare for independent living.<sup>3</sup>

Since its inception, HSH has helped over 250 women and nearly 600 children.

1 house manager  
10 staff, 1 assistant case manager  
Home to 6 women + their children, may stay up to 2 years  
One house with shared living spaces



### DATES OF OPERATION



### OBSERVATIONS & FINDINGS

#### Activities & Environment



#### Research Process

Engaging clients and staff in a variety of activities, the study started by trying to understand the service and client journey at a high level with the intent to support the client as she transitioned out of HSH. The research process clarified that the primary opportunity lies in supporting the transformation currently underway within the house to strengthen the service offering of HSH. The following is an overview of the learning outcomes gained, with the information subcategories to the right showing a granular view of specific findings.

**STAFF**  
Through interviews and journals describing activities and feelings, staff described tasks, responsibilities, challenges and rewards of their jobs.

In four separate posters where staff contributed content, staff showed the client's journey, staff-client interactions, what they do well, and areas to improve.

Staff rearranged Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and used this to inform a collage showing the skills needed to be self-sufficient; by grouping the ideas depicted in the collages, they framed six core competencies that women need to be self-sufficient.

**CLIENTS**  
Using card sorting activities as conversation starters, clients described their values, their support networks and the difficulty of various skills.

**PAST CLIENTS**  
Former clients talk about needs when leaving HSH through a questionnaire.

**GENERAL OBSERVATIONS**  
Photographs and observation are providing insights about the environment and interpersonal relations.

#### How Staff Spend Their Time

Six participants record their daily activities for up to five working days. They reported their current activity every two hours.



#### What the Staff Say

Staff talk about their jobs and the advice they give to clients during interviews and a collage activity.

"Where do we make a difference?"

"I'm having a hard time figuring out my role here. I feel like a body right now."

"You can't offer anything if you don't have yourself together. You can't give love if you don't love yourself."

"I always try to tell them that this is just a stepping stone, just do your best here because it's going to get better."

#### Six Core Competencies

Four staff members participated in a collage activity to identify the skills women need to be self-sufficient. They collectively derived these six areas of core competency that women should have when exiting HSH. We are currently working to understand if women acquire these skills during their stay at HSH.

- Community
- Parenting
- Health
- Self-Esteem
- Relationships
- Ability to Provide for Self & Family

#### What the Clients Say

Clients talk about their experience at HSH during interviews and card sorts.

"This place is very clean compared to the last place."

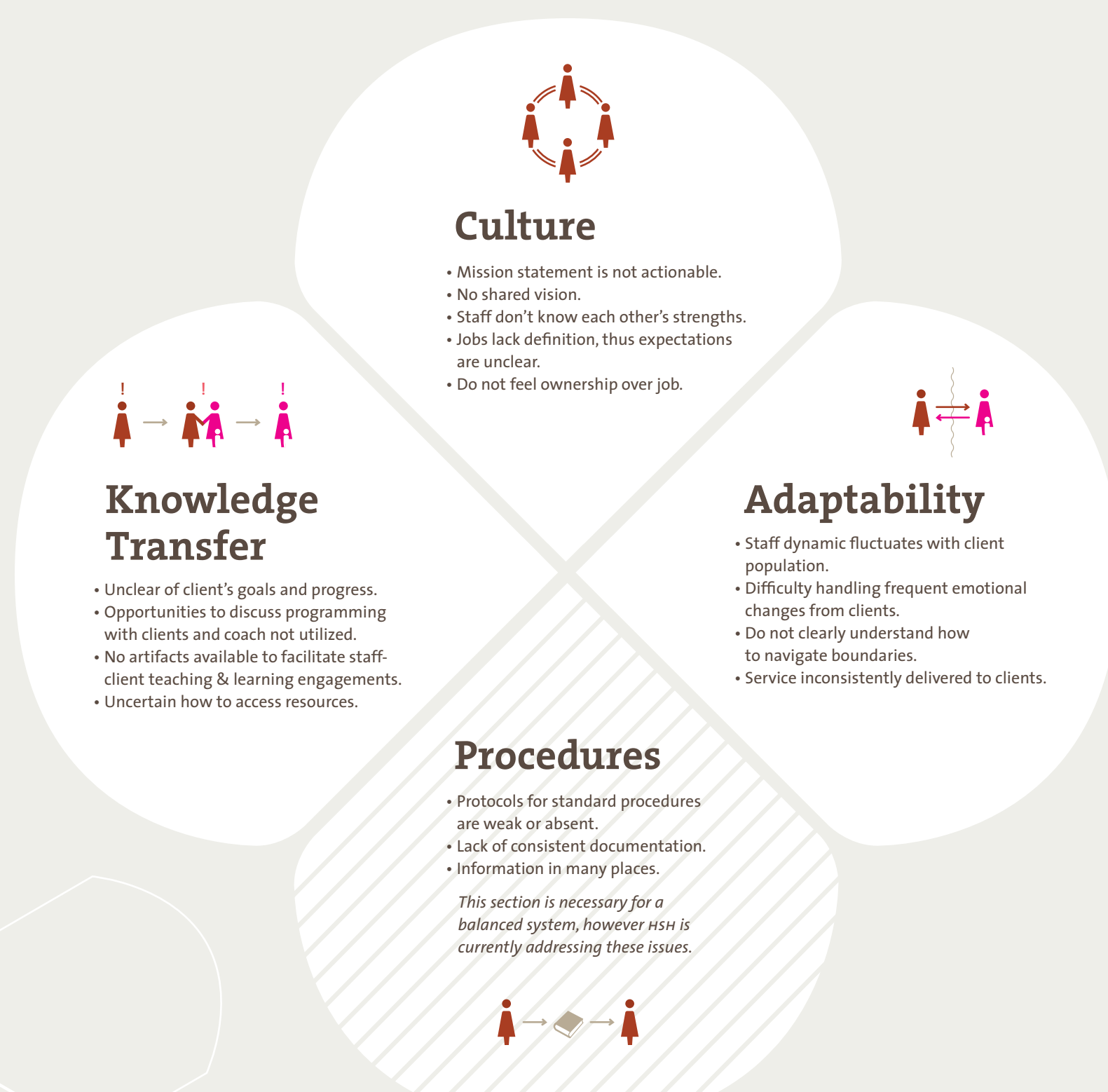
"I haven't learned much from groups."

"I don't do anything here."

"I always talk to Miss [ ] and Miss [ ] when I'm having troubles."

### SYNTHESIS & CONSIDERATIONS

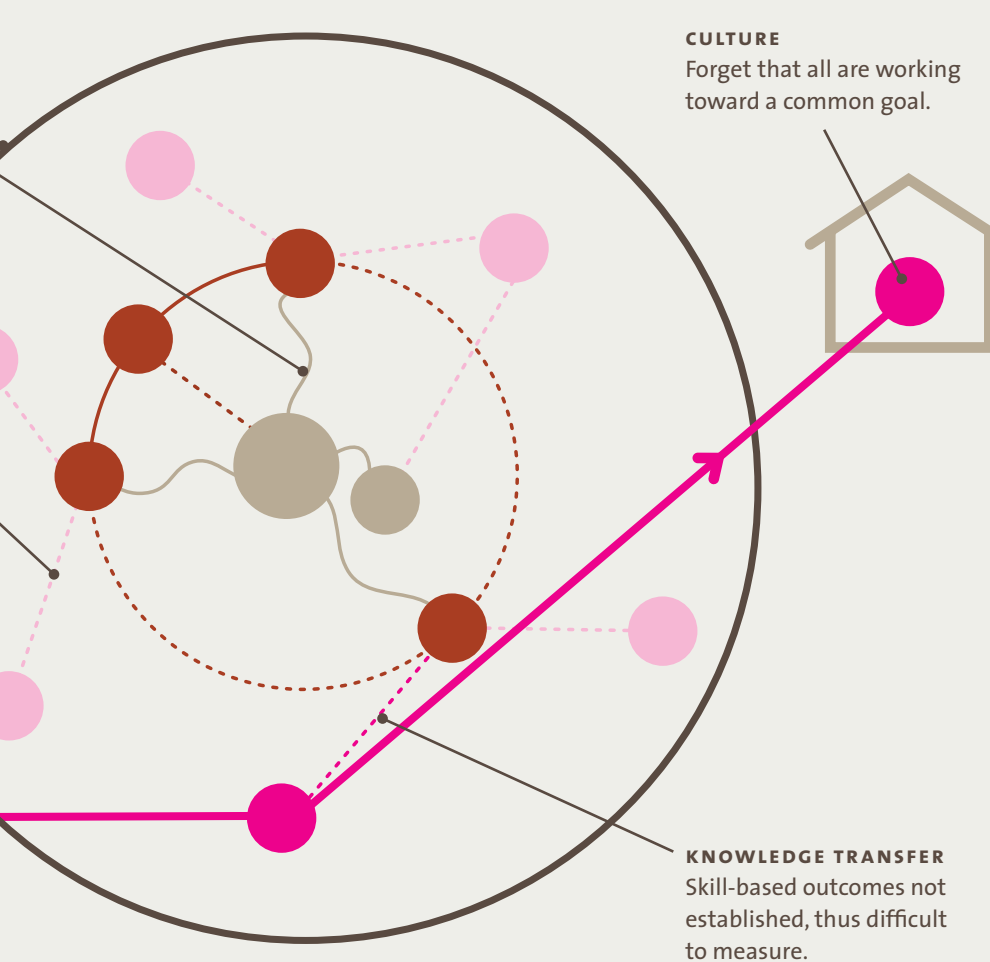
#### Areas for Consideration



#### Current

**PROCEDURES**  
Through new structures, new management working to gain credibility and foster sense of team.

**ADAPTABILITY**  
Challenges navigating boundaries to form appropriate relationships.



#### CURRENT: STATE OF HSH

HSH is comprised of dedicated and caring staff that currently face challenges to deliver the service they intend. Lack of protocols and artifacts, unclear expectations, and no defined roles lead to staff's confusion and uncertainty about how to invest themselves in their daily work.

It appears that most staff members previously maintained peripheral roles within the service. Responsibilities are unevenly distributed. All this is leading to a service inconsistently delivered to clients, strained relationships between staff members and between staff and clients.

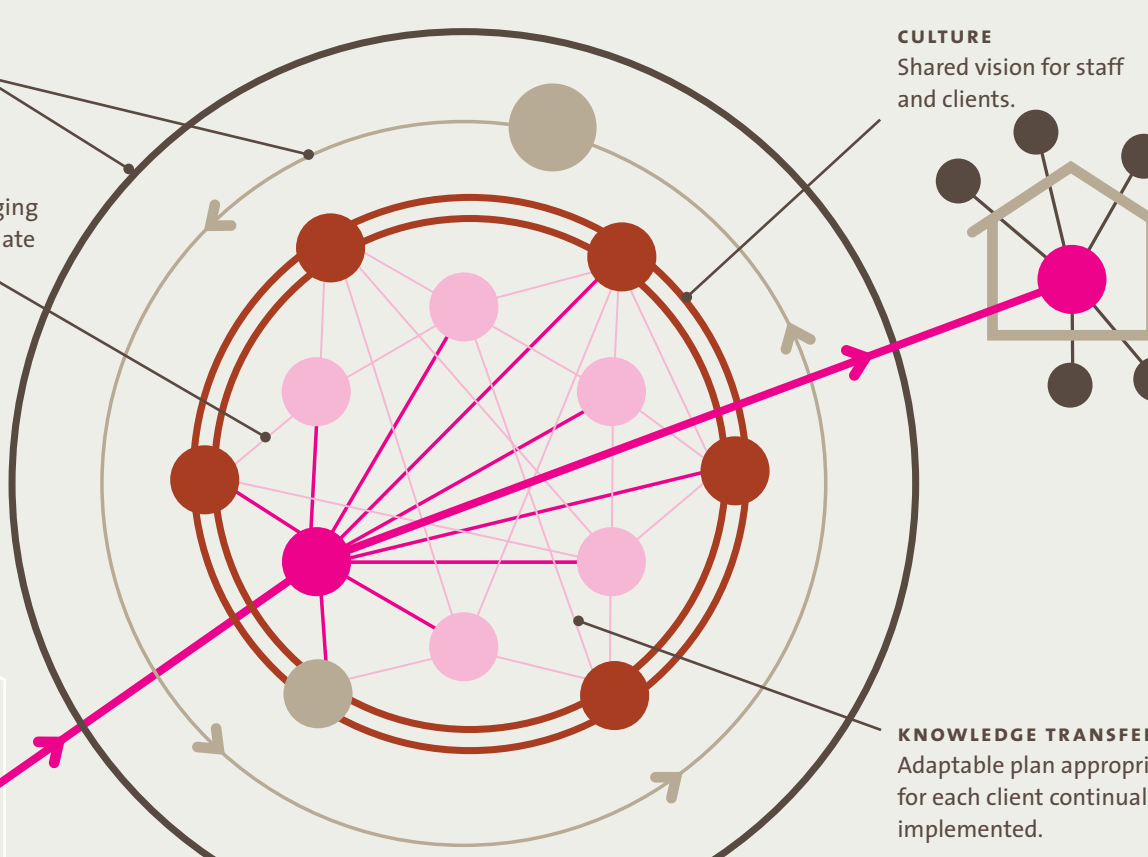
For the duration of our partnership, we will look at the Areas of Consideration and how they facilitate the achievement of the Six Core Competencies.

We hope that in creating a balance within these Areas, HSH's living system will be well equipped to dynamically respond to each client's unique journey.

#### Future

**PROCEDURES**  
Expectations clear and actionable.

**ADAPTABILITY**  
Service is capable of flexing and changing as needed for growth or to accommodate new clients.



#### FUTURE: SERVICE CONCEPT

An ideal state for HSH is a service with actionable goals, providing its staff with the autonomy needed to comfortably deliver the service to clients under conditions of continual growth and change. HSH management would assume a peripheral role providing continued support for the service structure, leaving the service delivery as the primary responsibility of the staff.

With HSH currently undergoing change, the time is ideal to shift the focus of HSH from permanent housing to the development of skills needed to attain and maintain housing. The Six Core Competency areas identified by the staff will guide this partnership moving forward. Our goal is to continue working with HSH to create the appropriate prerequisites (processes, attitudes, artifacts) to support the successful co-creation between staff and clients of their service.

### DEFINITIONS

**Adaptability**  
Having the tools and knowledge needed to nimbly adjust in order to maintain consistency through changing dynamics and varying situations.

**Culture**  
The environment cultivated by interpersonal relationships and a shared vision.

**Knowledge Transfer**  
Passing skills or information; can happen through various kinds of interactions, for example, a person engaging with an artifact or a person engaging with another person.

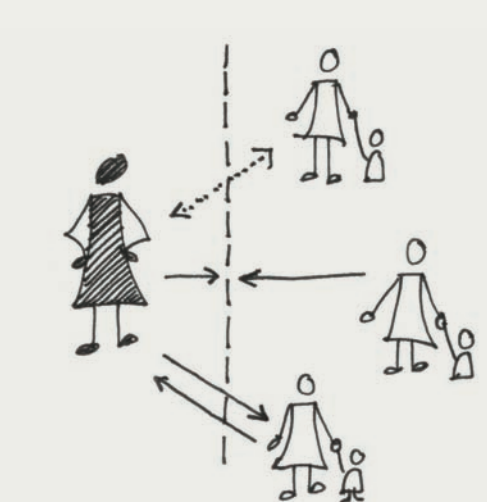
**Living System**  
Dynamic system comprised of multiple integrated procedures and interactions; able to flex and change as necessary to support survival and growth.

**Procedure**  
A prescribed set of steps that may include documents or other artifacts that are standard for certain situations; likely to accompany some form of documentation.

### THANK YOU

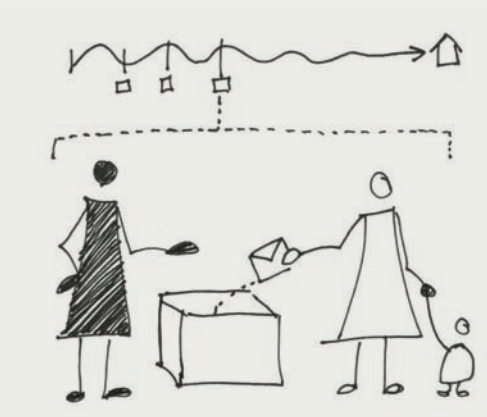
Thanks to our partners for their support.

### EARLY CONCEPTS



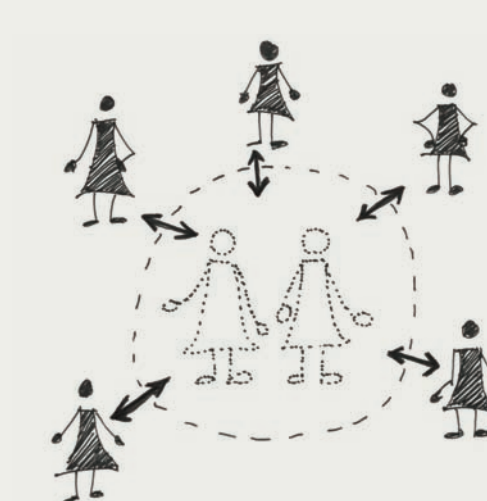
#### AIN'T NO MOUNTAIN HIGH ENOUGH

**Adaptability**  
Knowledge Transfer  
Tools help staff appropriately interact with myriad of clients and changing emotions; identify how engagements turn into teachable moments instead of just acting as a sounding board or crossing boundaries.



#### ABC 123

**Knowledge Transfer**  
Adaptability  
Clarifies sequence of major milestones for clients; time capsule treasure box upon move-in with special activities that require staff-client engagement at milestones markers; encourage self-reflection, granular goal setting.



#### I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAVINE

**Culture**  
Knowledge Transfer  
Procedures  
Makes thoughts tangible through concrete tracking system; ubiquitous documentation; help staff share information when not co-located.



#### WE ARE FAMILY

**Culture**  
Adaptability  
Building community and shared culture within the organization. Encouraging notes/mailboxes; new format for monthly meetings.

### TIMELINE

<b>DECEMBER</b> Outline and draft documentation paper.	<b>MARCH</b> Refine prototypes and testing.
<b>JANUARY</b> Storyboards and scenarios, concept validation.	<b>APRIL</b> Evaluate prototypes and develop future recommendations.
<b>FEBRUARY</b> Design and rapid prototyping.	<b>MAY</b> Final presentation and documentation.

<sup>1</sup> To maintain the privacy of our partner organization it will be referred to as HSH.  
<sup>2</sup> United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. "Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness." (6 December 2010).  
<sup>3</sup> HSH's parent organization's website. (6 December 2010).