

Hope for Hoarding

From living on the street to living in supportive housing...safely & *sustainably*!

Lee Shuer, Becca Belofsky, & Christine Boehler

CUCS

center for urban
community services

Rebuilding lives together

2019

Supportive Housing Network of New York
19th Annual New York State
Supportive Housing Conference

THURSDAY
JUNE 13



Photo credit: ©Ben Helmer for Untapped Cities

During our workshop we'll discuss how we might help "Paul" as he transitions from street homelessness and a Safe Haven to living in an SRO.

- Strategies to help him with three common scenarios:
 - 1. New expectations for maintaining his living space
 - 2. Filling-up his SRO to unsafe levels
 - 3. Struggling with bed bugs
- We'll share why he and others tends to save things.
- Learn ways to educate and empower him to reduce clutter.
- Explore strategies that we can use with tenants who struggle with excessive clutter.

Building Rapport with Paul:

- Please refrain from calling him (or others) a hoarder. Hoarding is a behavior, not an identity. Hoarding Disorder is a mental health diagnosis. There are plenty of reasons why someone may clutter that are not related to an HD diagnosis. The word “hoarding” carries a lot of stigma; you may spark anxiety rather than comfort.
- Ask him what he’s most happy about regarding his move.
- Ask him what he’s concerned about regarding his move.
- Ask him what skills he has that will help him keep his new living environment safe and comfortable. Will he decorate it?
- Emphasize his strengths rather than his deficits.
- Provide him with a basic checklist so that he is empowered to know what “safe” looks like.

Reasons why changing collecting/saving behaviors may be especially difficult for Paul:

- It's not his priority at this time.
- Strong attachments and beliefs about his possessions that make it difficult to let go or resist acquiring.
- Difficulty with decision-making.
- Avoidance and excuse-making.
- Going for the short-term payoff.

What we want to help Paul avoid...progressing past “Level 3”
on the Clutter Image Rating.

(Google “Clutter Image Rating” to download PDF’s.)



Level 1



Level 2



Level 3



Level 4



Level 5



Level 6



Level 7



Level 8



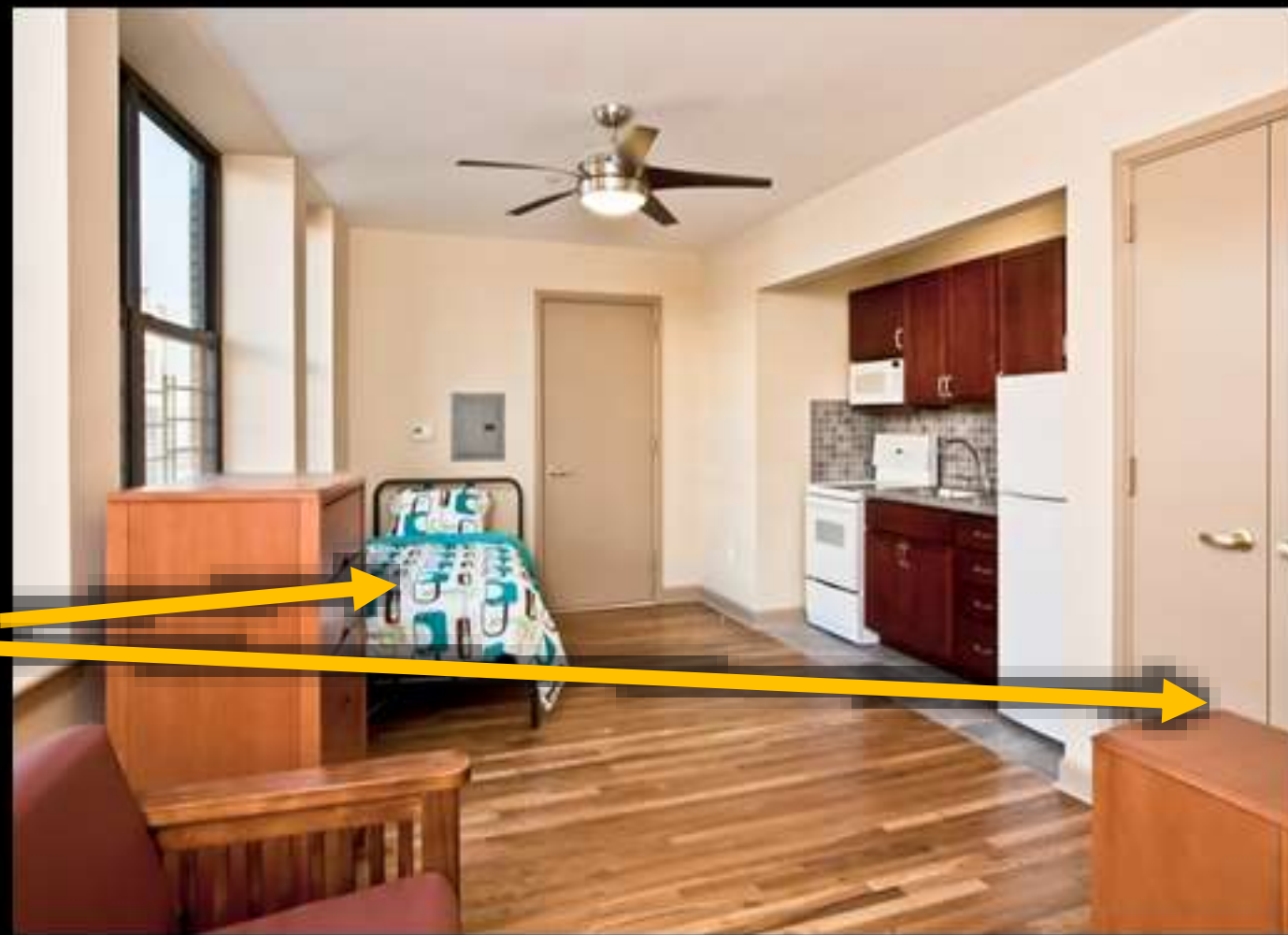
Level 9

What will help Paul to keep his unit at a Level 3 or lower?

- Identifying his motivation.
- Thinking through his decisions.
- Re-evaluating the worst-case scenario when considering an acquisition or discard, based on his new living arrangement and support services.
- Developing new skills to make and maintain organization, comfort, and cleanliness.
- Practicing his new skills with support.

Scenario #1: Moving in to his SRO

Categorizing and Organizing: Example #1



Bedding

On bed, an extra set of linens in closet

What do you own?	Where will you keep them?
Food	Kitchen cabinets, fridge, freezer
Toiletries	Basket with handle back of door with towel
DVD's, VHS, CD's, books	In TV stand or on shelves
Kitchenware	Kitchen cabinets, counter, drawers
Furniture	Where it will be used
Electronics	Chords in drawer, devices set up to use
Important papers	Safe deposit box or hanging files in desk
Clothes	Hanging in closet or folded in drawers
Sentimental items, photos	Displayed
Single stream recyclables	Bin under sink

Paul may benefit from a basic safety checklist so that he doesn't plan to use areas for storage that need to remain open.

- Egresses
- 3 foot paths
- Combustible materials away from heat sources and electrical outlets
- Ability to use his bed, bathroom, and kitchen
- Making sure smoke detectors/CO detectors are working and unobstructed.
- There is no accumulation of spoiled food or refuse.

Scenario #2: 18 months in his SRO



“Would you throw a \$100 bill into the trash?”



Harm reduction approaches to reducing recycling-related hazards:

- Suggest a drop-off schedule that is more frequent to avoid a pile up.
- If unwilling to recycle items before returning home, suggest a certain amount of space in his unit that can be dedicated to this collection.
 - Suggest bringing items to a recycling center before scheduled drop-off time if the designated space is full early.
- Discuss the importance of cleaning any contaminated items that he's bringing inside
 - For example, washing soda residue so it doesn't attract bugs

Harm reduction approaches to reducing furniture-related hazards:

- Ask if he has what he needs or if he's gathering the items for a different purpose.
- Point out that these items are more likely than others to contain bed bugs and how he can examine them before bringing them inside.
- Show him how to position his furniture in a safe manner if he is planning to keep it.

We want to help him make the most of his important possessions so that he doesn't end up losing things in another clean-up. Rather than posing this as a "consequence," frame it as an opportunity to break the cycle.

Scenario #3: Bed bug infestation

Paul is worried that he will have to discard everything.
What can he do to avoid that re-traumatization?

- ***Report his concern (could this be incentivized?)***
- Vacuum, then bag the contents and dispose immediately.
- Gather all clothes in plastic bags, then launder clothes & bedding on high temperature setting. Throw away bags in dumpster.
- Freeze items that won't be damaged (for 4 days.)
- Pull clutter out from under bed and other places where bed bugs hide.



How is bed bug remediation commonly conducted by professionals?

- The unit is heated to 150 degrees for several hours. (Kills 'em now but they may return.)
- Treat unit with a series of pesticides. (Reduces likelihood of immediate re-infestation.)

So those are some fairly common scenarios.
Where did the strategies discussed originate?

The Buried In Treasures Workshop

Education, Empowerment, Peer Support:

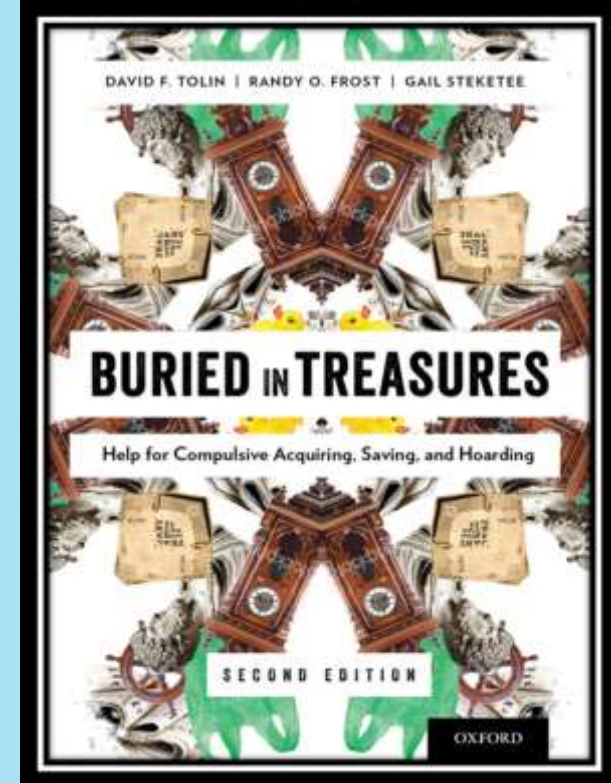
Group members meet others who want to reduce their acquiring and saving.

They learn and share skills that make this goal possible in a judgment-free space.

They challenge their beliefs about attachments to things.

They challenge their beliefs about the need to acquire new things.

Find motivation for change and keep our eyes on the prize!



One final consideration: Is there another tenant who would like to mentor Paul as he gets used to his new living arrangements?

Question time!

Contact Information

Christine Boehler at CUCS: christine.boehler@cucs.org
Website: www.cucs.org

Lee Shuer: lee@mutual-support.com
Becca Belofsky: bec@mutual-support.com
Website: www.mutual-support.com