

# Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) Effective Outreach and Engagement Services Series

Addressing Homelessness: Professional Boundaries and Ethics  
When Working with People Who Have SMI/CODs

February 4, 2020

2:00 to 3:15 p.m. ET



**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

# Addressing Homelessness: Professional Boundaries and Ethics When Working with People Who Have SMI/CODs

**Sherri Downing**, Advocates for Human Potential, Inc. (AHP)

**Terri Cooley-Bennett**, LCSW, LSCSW, CCDP-D, TTS, Swope  
Health Services, Kansas City, Missouri

**Kate Rio**, AHP, Moderator

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# Disclaimer

The views, opinions, and content expressed in this presentation and discussion do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) or the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).



**Kate Rio**

*Senior Program Associate*

[krio@ahpnet.com](mailto:krio@ahpnet.com)

# Welcome from SAMHSA



## Tison Thomas

Director, Division of State and  
Community Systems Development

CMHS at SAMHSA

# Agenda for Today

- Welcome and introductions
- Defining professional boundaries in outreach and engagement
- Ethical codes and their importance
- Questions and answers
- Closing

# Learning Objectives



Identify boundary issues  
in outreach practices

Understand ethical implications  
in building relationships  
with clients

# Presenters



Sherri Downing  
Senior Program Manager  
SAMHSA's HHRN Deputy Director  
Advocates for Human Potential, Inc.



Terri Cooley-Bennett, LCSW, LSCSW, CCDP-D, TTS  
Outreach Supervisor  
Swope Health Services  
Kansas City, Missouri

# Defining Professional Boundaries

## *Outreach and Engagement*

# Who are your clients?

**PATH clients must be seriously mentally ill (SMI) or SMI with co-occurring substance use disorders (SUDs) and homeless or at risk of homelessness.**

- States determine the population served within parameters set by the legislation.
- Many states focus on serving those who are most vulnerable and living in unsheltered situations.

# Your Job

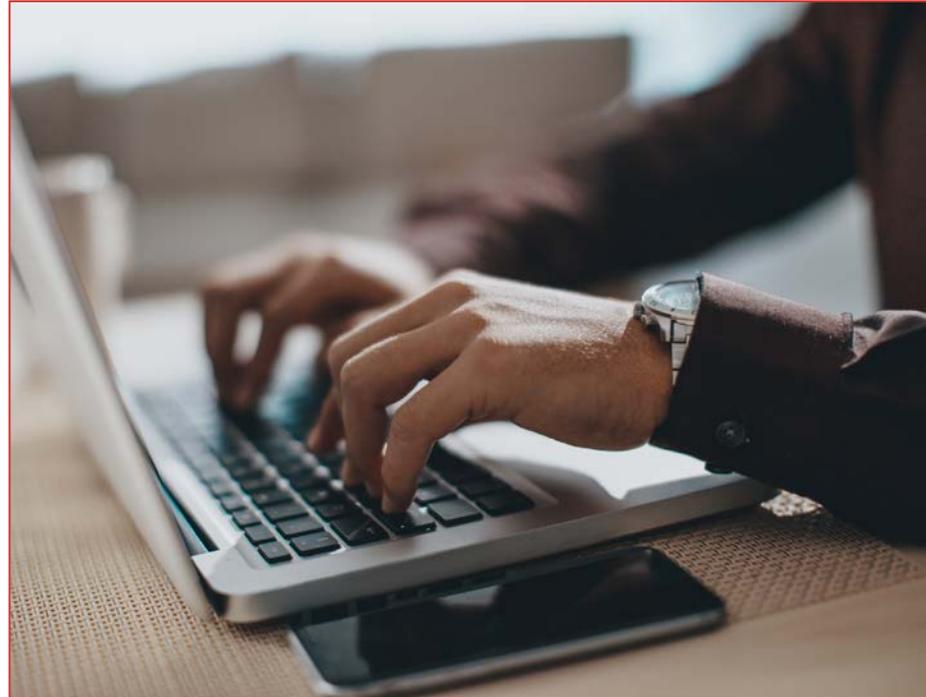
- Outreach, engagement, case management
- You work to build a trusting, therapeutic relationship.
- Activities include frequent and consistent contact, meeting clients where they are, helping people meet their subsistence needs ...
  - *Whatever it takes.*



The client  
drives the bus.

# Boundaries in Office-based Practice

- Relatively easy to set client/  
staff boundaries
- Time limited
- Contact limited to  
appointments during  
work hours
- Clear expectations and roles



# Boundaries for Outreach Workers

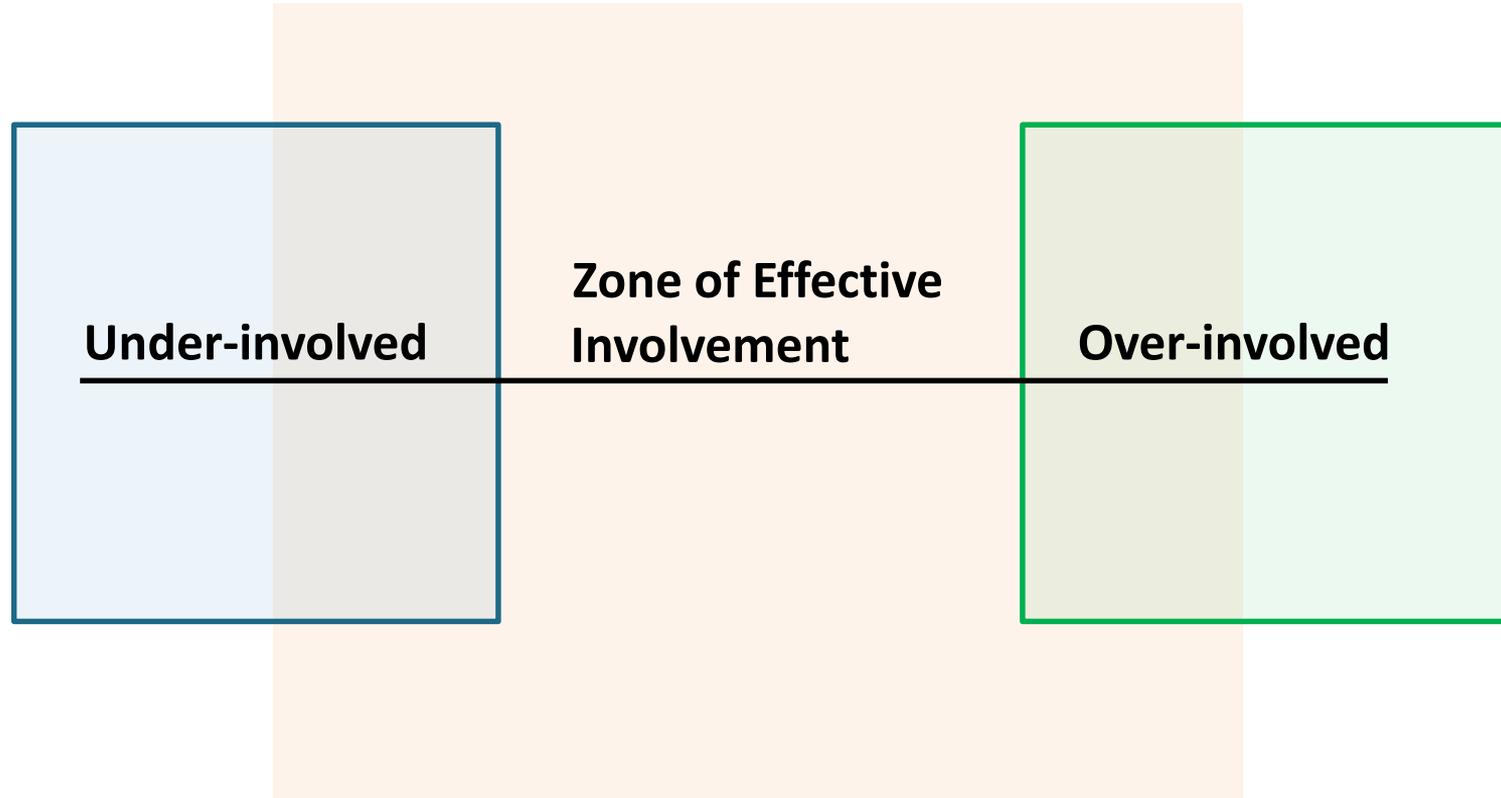
- Work in various community locations
- Engage in a range of activities
- Offer food, beverages, blankets, clothing
- Visit people “at home” (even if that home is outdoors)
- Shifting relationships
- Clients may come to view you as a friend



# Outreach Workers

- See the devastating effects of homelessness
- Work with people who are symptomatic
- Engage with people who feel hopeless, powerless, angry
- Lack direct oversight
- Want to go the extra mile for clients
- Want to make a difference

# The Right Thing...the Right Way



# Professional Boundaries

- Clear limits that allow for safe connections between staff and clients
- Being friendly, not being friends
- Knowing where you end and the client begins
- Develop understanding of the limits and responsibilities of your role as a service provider
- Do not do for your clients what they can do for themselves
- Crises may be natural consequences and that's okay

# Boundaries: Clear Lines



- Don't give or loan money.
- Don't take clients to your home.
- Don't establish a transactional relationship.
- What else?

# Types of Boundaries

- Physical
  - Examples: Inappropriate touching, looking through mail, close-talkers
- Emotional/intellectual
  - Examples: Getting caught in someone else's world to the extent that you feel bruised, wounded, or battered; inappropriate conversations or jokes
- Time
  - Unreasonable expectations
- What else?

# Boundaries: Gray Areas

- Sharing your personal history
- Sharing your home number
- Friending clients on Facebook
- Accepting a gift
- Paying a client to mow your lawn
- Working with a client when you're not on the job
- Working with clients who are no longer PATH-enrolled



# Discussion: Your Boundary Issues



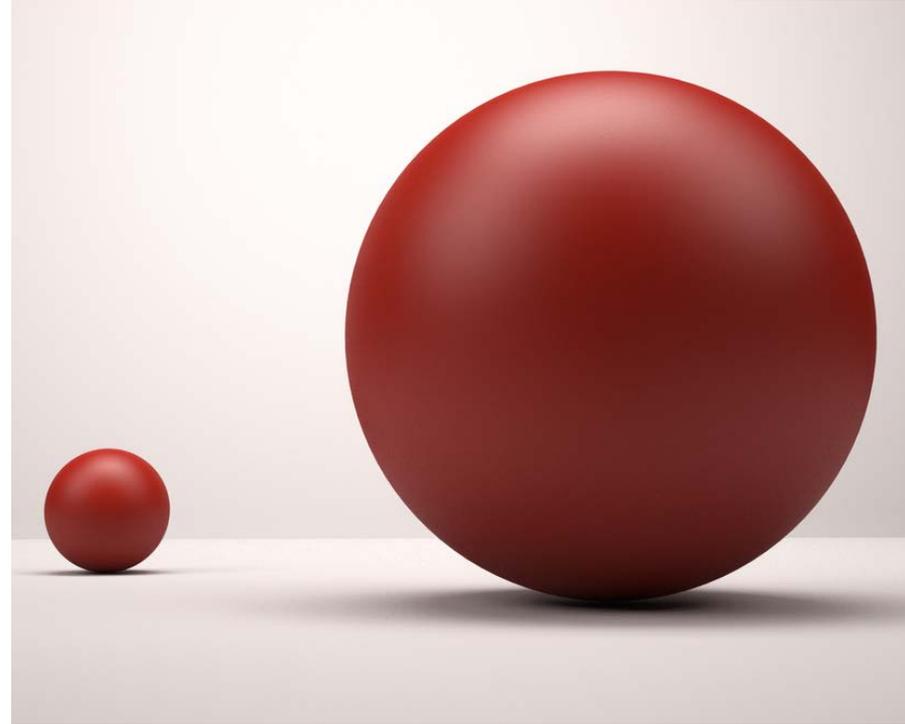
Please type in some of the issues you have had in setting boundaries with a client.

# Power Differentials

Professional boundaries are the spaces between the helping professional's power and the client's vulnerability.

# Power Differentials

- Exploitation is a risk when a relationship is unequal in power.
- Power inequity is always true:
  - Employer/employee
  - Supervisor/supervisee
  - Client/staff
  - Criminals/victims
  - Adults/children
  - Where else?



# Power Differentials

- People experiencing homelessness are particularly vulnerable.
- Hurt people can *hurt* people.
- The power of the helper comes from professional position and access to private knowledge about the client.
- Establishing boundaries helps us control the power differential and allows safe connection.
- The more vulnerable the client, the stricter we must be with boundaries.

# Healthy Boundaries

Help	Providers focus on their responsibilities to the clients they serve
Allow	Providers model healthy behaviors, communication, and professional relationships
Ensure	Physical and emotional safety
Establish	Clear understanding of roles and expectations
Encourage	Promote open, safe communication

# What does it look like?

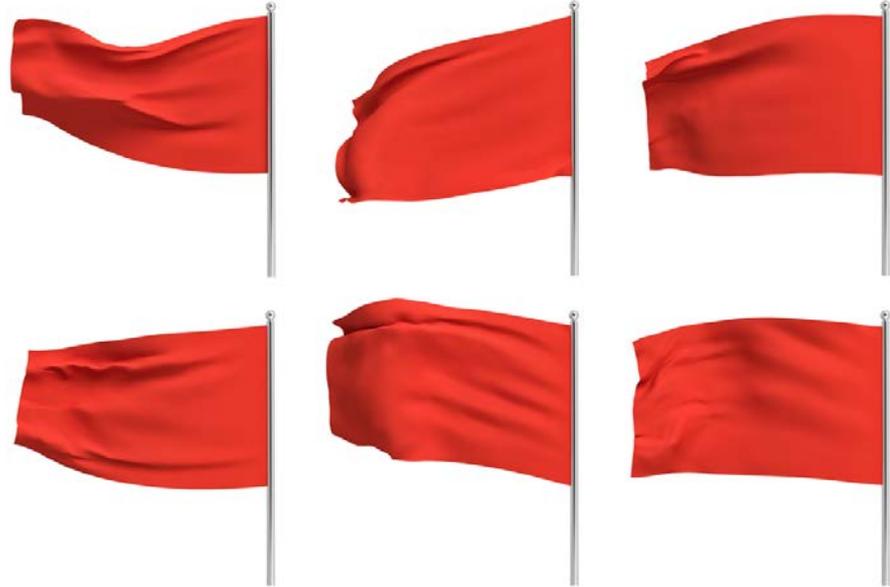
- The relationship is safe for client *and* provider.
- The relationship is supervised, and the worker follows rules. This is transparent from the beginning
- The relationship is consistent but flexible.
- The relationship promotes growth, independence, and self-sufficiency.
- The focus is on the client's needs.
- The relationship is not transactional.

# Professional versus Personal

- Too much self-disclosure shifts the focus from the client to the provider and can confuse understanding of roles and expectations.
- Personal information shared should be relevant and focused on advancing the client's care goals.
- Role confusion can lead to clients feeling betrayed or abandoned. They may then be unwilling to trust other providers.

# Red Flags

- Disproportionate amount of time spent with any one client
- Over-identification or becoming enmeshed with a client
- Putting yourself in the role of hero in the client's life
- What else?



# Informed Consent

- Definition: The act of agreeing to allow something to happen, or to do something, with a full understanding of all the relevant facts, including risks, and available alternatives
- Full knowledge and understanding are necessary factors in whether an individual can give informed consent.
- This type of consent applies to many situations in life, including making decisions about medical care and legal issues, as well as entering contracts.

# Dual Relationships

- A dual relationship occurs when the client and provider have another type of relationship outside their professional relationship
  - Church
  - School
  - Childhood friends

*What must you remember?*



**Self-care**

**Burnout**

# Why Self-care?

- Studies show that ethical misconduct and boundaries violations are more common among those experiencing burn-out.
- Self-care allows you to care for your clients in a sustainable way with greater compassion, effectiveness, and empathy.
- Dimensions of self-care should include physical, social, emotional/mental, creative, spirituality, and mindfulness.

# Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

- As helping professionals, you are trusted with your clients' darkest secrets, heart-wrenching stories, and immensely difficult life situations.
- Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, or physical exhaustion brought on by prolonged or repeated stress.
- Cynicism, depression, and lethargy are characteristic of burnout.



# Professional Boundaries and Ethics for Direct Service Providers Working with People Experiencing Homelessness and SMI or CODs

February 4, 2020  
SAMHSA PATH Webinar



# OBJECTIVES FOR ETHICS PORTION OF PRESENTATION

1. Participants will define and discuss ethics pertaining to serving individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, many of whom have severe and persistent mental illness (SPMIs) or co-occurring disorders (CODs).
2. Potential ethical dilemmas that are most common when working with individuals with homelessness and SMI or CODs will be examined.
3. Strategies will be discussed for managing ethical dilemmas.



# What is an ethical code and why is it important?



All professions have ethical codes. These codes have many similarities.

In addition to a code of ethics, states have licensing regulations that are mandates. These are based on professional codes of ethics.

Paraprofessionals may not be bound by ethical codes but should be aware of ethical considerations.

Although paraprofessionals are not bound by a professional code, many agencies, states, funders, and stakeholders have standards and guidelines that paraprofessionals are required to follow.



“Professional ethics are rules reflecting the values and goals of the profession.”

Source: Houston-Vega, Neuhring, & Daguio. (2007). *Prudent Practice: A Guide For Managing Malpractice Risk*. National Association of Social Workers: Washington, D.C.

## Reasons Why Codes are Important/Examples from Professional Codes



1. From the National Association of Social Workers Ethical Standards (2017): “Some of the standards are enforceable guidelines for professional conduct, and some are aspirational.”
2. From the National Certified Counselors (NCCs) Directives (2016): The NBCC Code “establishes the minimal ethical behaviors and provides an expectation of and assurance for the ethical practice for all who use the professional services of NCCs.” “NCCs recognize that their behavior reflects on the integrity of the profession as a whole, and thus, they avoid actions which can reasonably be expected to damage trust” and “NCC’s are accountable in their actions and adhere to recognized professional standards and practices.”
3. From the American Psychological Association Ethics Code (2017): “This Ethics Code applies only to psychologists' activities that are part of their scientific, educational, or professional roles as psychologists. Areas covered include but are not limited to the clinical, counseling, and school practice of psychology; research; teaching; supervision of trainees; public service; policy development; social intervention; development of assessment instruments; conducting assessments; educational counseling; organizational consulting; forensic activities; program design and evaluation; and administration.”
4. From the Missouri Credentialing Board Code (MCB) of Ethical Practices and Professional Conduct (2018): “All professionals credentialed by MCB are expected to thoroughly familiarize themselves with the Code of Ethical Practice and Professional Conduct.”

# THREE C'S FOR BEING ETHICAL



## 1. Compliant

With regulations, guidelines, and standards

## 2. Cooperative

With agencies, the profession, clients, and colleagues

## 3. Covered

To protect the general public/public welfare, to protect clients, and to protect oneself from litigation



# ETHICAL DILEMMAS, VIOLATIONS, AND RISKS



# ETHICAL DILEMMAS

An ethical dilemma is experienced when professionals cannot adhere to their professional values or when adhering to one ethic requires behaving counter to another.

Source: Proctor, E., Morrow-Howell, N., & Lott, C. (1993). Classification and correlates of ethical dilemmas in hospital social work. *Social Work* 38, 166–177.



# ETHICAL DILEMMAS

“Difficult ethical dilemmas or tensions, often not explicitly addressed in professional codes of ethics, emerge as practitioners attempt to work with ‘vulnerable’ populations such as older women who misuse substances.”

Source: Koenig, & Crisp. (2008). Ethical issues in practice with older women who misuse substances. *Substance Use & Misuse* 43,1045-1061.



# ETHICAL VIOLATIONS

An ethical violation is when there is a definite violation in an ethics code or standard in which there may be legal consequences from a governing board or agency and, at times, may lead to litigation. It is different from a dilemma in which a conflict is experienced in adhering to a professional value.



# ETHICS AND BOUNDARIES



# ETHICS AND BOUNDARIES

“Ethical issues related to professional boundaries are among the most problematic and challenging. Briefly, boundary issues involve circumstances in which social workers encounter actual or potential conflicts between their professional duties and their social, sexual, religious, or business relationships.”

Source: Reamer. (2003). Issues in social work: Managing dual relationships. *Social Work, 48*, 1.



## ETHICS AND BOUNDARIES

“Boundary issues in social work can be placed into five conceptual categories revolving around five central themes pertaining to social workers: (1) intimate relationships, (2) pursuit of personal benefit, (3) emotional and dependency needs, (4) altruistic gestures, and (5) responses to unanticipated circumstances.”

Source: Reamer. (2003). Issues in social work: Managing dual relationships. *Social Work*, 48, 1.



# BOUNDARY ISSUES

- Intimate relationships: sexual relationship, physical contact, services to former lover, intimate gestures
- Personal benefit: monetary gain, goods and services, useful information
- Emotional and dependency needs: extending relationships with clients, promoting client dependence, confusing personal and professional lives, reversing roles with clients
- Altruistic gestures: performing favors, providing nonprofessional services, giving gifts, being extraordinarily available
- Unanticipated circumstances: social and community events, joint affiliations and memberships, mutual acquaintances and friend

Source: Reamer. (2003). Issues in social work: Managing dual relationships. *Social Work*, 48, 1.



# ETHICS AND BOUNDARIES WITH INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

According to SAMHSA, working with persons who are homeless entails many things. It's possible that “you may experience stress or unrealistic expectations when working with this population.”

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2015). *TIP 55 Behavioral Health Services for People Who Are Homeless*. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/TIP-55-Behavioral-Health-Services-for-People-Who-Are-Homeless/SMA15-4734>



# ETHICS AND BOUNDARIES WITH INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Ethical Considerations (This partial list pertains specifically to boundary issues.)

1. Clients in dangerous situations (refusing shelter on frigid nights)
2. Having to persuade a client to go to treatment
3. Violating ethical boundaries or agency policy to meet the immediate needs of an individual experiencing homelessness (i.e., giving them personal funds). Feeling guilt or helplessness adds to the temptation to violate the boundary
4. Reluctance to provide service when an individual's priorities conflict with yours
5. Feeling disconnected from individuals who are demanding, needy, miserable, or overwhelmed

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2015). *TIP 55 Behavioral Health Services for People Who Are Homeless*. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/TIP-55-Behavioral-Health-Services-for-People-Who-Are-Homeless/SMA15-4734>



# PREVENTION AND TIPS FOR MANAGING ETHICAL DILEMMAS



## MANAGING ETHICAL DILEMMAS: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What helps you make ethical decisions?
- What resources are available?
- Who can you consult?
- How do you manage conflict in an ethical way?
- Can you be held liable?

YouTube Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5p3OZCGPrA>

# MANAGING ETHICAL DILEMMAS: DECISIONS APPROACH



- D - Determine facts
- E - Ethical considerations: What standards apply?
- C - Consider impact of values
  - I - Impact of self on the decision
- S – Stakeholders: Who are they?
  - I - Incorporate professional literature review
- O - Other considerations
- N - Narration of your decision
- S - Secure and support your decision

Source: Hobdy, D. (2016). *Social media and ethics in clinical social work practice* [PowerPoint slides]. <http://common3.proaxs.net/aposw/handouts/handouts19/Wed-Intensive3-Hobdy.pdf>



## MANAGING ETHICAL DILEMMAS

“In some cases, an apology may be in order when things go wrong with patient care—and sometimes it can help defuse the tensions that arise when a bad outcome happens.”

Source: Sanfilippo, J., & Smith, S. (2015). Vicarious liability. Second of 2 parts: When a colleague is out of line. *OBJ Management* 27, 1, 29-31. [https://mdedge-files-live.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/files/s3fs-public/issues/articles/OBGM\\_0115\\_WhatsVerdict.pdf](https://mdedge-files-live.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/files/s3fs-public/issues/articles/OBGM_0115_WhatsVerdict.pdf)



## MANAGING ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Concluding reminder from SAMHSA regarding professional and ethical responsibilities:

“Adhere to established professional codes of ethics that define the professional context within which the counselor works to maintain professional standards and safeguard the client.”

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). *TAP 21 Addiction Counseling Competencies: The Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes of Professional Practice*. Rockville, MD. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/TAP-21-Addiction-Counseling-Competencies/SMA15-4171>



**For more information, contact:**

**Terri Cooley-Bennett, LCSW, LSCSW, CCDP-D, TTS**

Outreach Supervisor at Swope Health Services, NASW-MO Chapter Board Member and Professional Workshop Presenter, trained with the National NASW Office of Ethics and Professional Review, Ethics Presenter for Missouri Credentialing Board

[tcooley-bennett@swopehealth.org](mailto:tcooley-bennett@swopehealth.org)

# HHRN Contact Information

- **Sherri Downing, HHRN Deputy Director**  
[Sdowning@ahpnet.com](mailto:Sdowning@ahpnet.com)
  
- **Kate Rio, Moderator**  
[KRio@ahpnet.com](mailto:KRio@ahpnet.com)

# Thank You

- Thank you for attending the “Addressing Homelessness: Professional Boundaries and Ethics When Working with People Who Have SMI/CODs” webinar.
- Today’s presentation was recorded and will be made available for future reference.
- Please contact us with any questions or concerns.

# Effective Outreach and Engagement Services Series

- Addressing Homelessness: Permanent Supportive Housing/Housing First for People Who Have SMI/CODs - February 11, 2020
- Addressing Homelessness: Harm Reduction and Recovery for People with SMI/CODs - February 25, 2020
- Addressing Homelessness: Promoting Self-Care, Wellness, and Treatment Adherence among People with SMI/CODs - March 10, 2020
- Addressing Homelessness: Crisis Intervention Strategies for People with SMI/CODs - March 24, 2020
- All webinars will take place from 2:00 to 3:15 p.m. ET.

# SAMHSA's Mission

SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727) • 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)

# Continuing Education Hours

## Session evaluation and CEH certificate:

<https://www.surveymoz.com/s3/5420580/February-4-2019-Addressing-Homelessness-Professional-Boundaries-and-Ethics-When-Working-with-People-Who-Have-SMI-CODs>

All registered attendees will also receive an email containing this link after the event.

- Each person seeking CEHs must fill out the evaluation and provide contact information.
- You will be able to print your certificate immediately after completing the form.