



The Talent Revolution:

Reclaiming the Power of Workforce Development

BUILT FOR ZERO LEARNING SESSION

Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2026 · 10:20-11:45 a.m.

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What you'll leave with

1

Anticipate the shift

Funding and policy changes likely here to stay

2

Build and braid

New partners and funding across education, housing, and business

3

Reframe the pitch

From altruism to mutual benefit, plus what works before and after hire

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Today's flow

- **Welcome and poll the room** · 5 min
- **Panelist spotlights** · 30 min
- **Moderated discussion** · 25 min
- **Audience Q&A** · 20 min
- **Takeaways and next steps** · 5 min

House People Every Day



House People Every Day



Let's poll the room

Raise your hand if you work in...

- A Continuum of Care or homeless services
- Health care
- A business improvement district
- City or county government
- Workforce or employment services



PRESENTERS



Kenya Rawls

Directing Policy Analyst,
Homebase



Bayron Wilson

Co-founder and COO,
Urban Alchemy



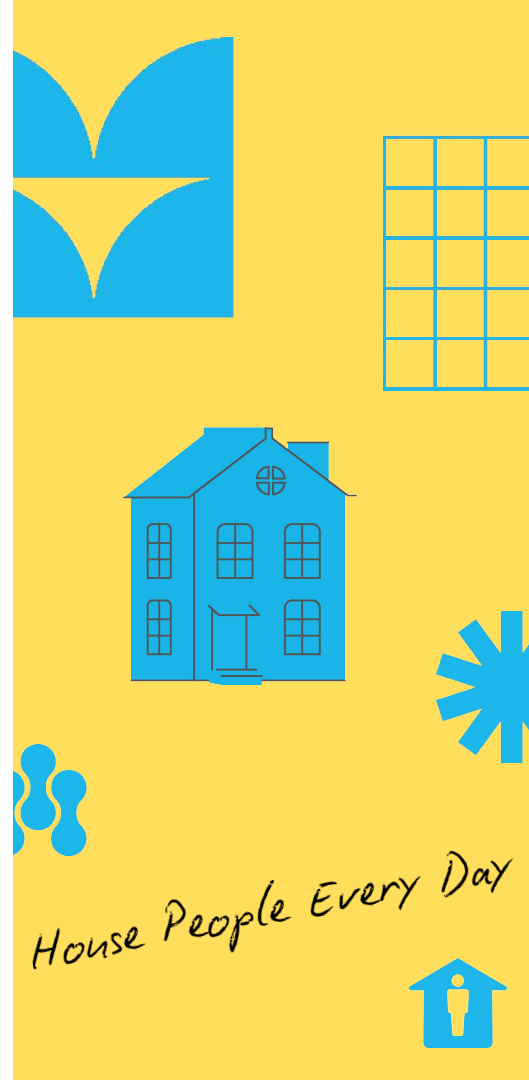
Amelia Nickerson

CEO, First Step Staffing
(joining virtually)



Why this panel, why now

- New state and federal rules tie health care and housing benefits to work
- This isn't a compliance session; it's a chance to lead
- Neighbors with lived expertise are an untapped talent pool
- All three panelists are doing this at scale, across jurisdictions

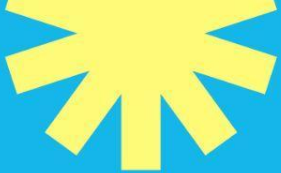
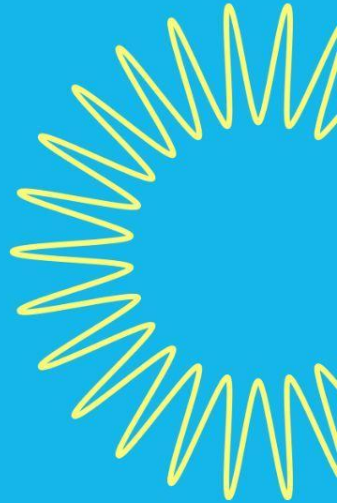


House People Every Day

Panelist spotlights

BACKGROUND AND EXAMPLES · 10 MINUTES EACH





Optimizing Treatment and Work-centered Approaches in Housing



Kenya Rawls
Directing Policy Analyst, Home Base



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Start With the Whole Person....

1

Housing Is the Foundation, But It Isn't the Whole Plan

- *Is the person connected to the treatment or recovery supports they want?*
- *Are their behavioral health needs being addressed?*

2

The goal isn't to make people "ready" for housing, treatment, or work.

- *Are we helping them build stability outside of the housing unit?*
- *Are we creating opportunities for employment and economic mobility?*

3

The goal is to build a system that supports people while they are doing all three.

- *Are the services coordinated, or are people being sent from door to door?*



HMIS Work Readiness Assessment Example

All CoC Housing/Service Agencies

Workforce Service Agencies Only

King Cake

PROFILE HISTORY PROGRAMS SERVICES **ASSESSMENTS** NOTES FILES CONTACT LOCATION REFERRALS

ASSESSMENTS

Work Readiness Assessment

START

WORK READINESS ASSESSMENT

Assessment Date 04/20/2021

CURRENT LIVING SITUATION

Where did you sleep last night? Select

Last permanent zip code?

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

Are you currently working? Select

Would you be interested in vocational training or increasing your income? Select

Do you have income? Select

Does your current income cover your bills and housing expenses without assistance? Select

PDF Sample of a WRA

Mirrors Housing
Que
(HPS/RRH)

Wraparound
Services
Communication

Data sharing
Housing w/
Employment

PROFILE HISTORY PROGRAMS **SERVICES** ASSESSMENTS

SERVICES

JobTrain Outreach Attempt

Client No Show/No Call

Email Sent

In Person/Virtual Meeting

Never Enrolled

Phone Call

Text Message

What do you think were the Top 5 Employment Barriers?



Optimize Treatment, Don't Just Refer to Treatment

A Referral Is Not a Treatment Strategy

We often say:

"They're connected to behavioral health."

But what does "connected" actually mean?

Ask:

- Did the person want the service?
- Could they access it?
- Was the appointment within a reasonable timeframe?
- Did the provider understand their housing situation?
- Does treatment fit their work schedule?
- Are transportation and technology barriers addressed?
- Is the person still engaged after the referral?
- Are housing and employment staff communicating with the person's permission?

**Optimization means: moving from
referral → engagement → coordination →
outcomes**



House People Every Day



The Work Readiness Road to Economic Mobility

Work Readiness Assessment

Housing case manager conducts assessment via HMIS, workforce development staff receives WRA as digital referral, completes intake/employment plan, identifies/removes barriers, connects client to either training or employment.



Follow the ABCs ☐

Getting **A** job, a **B**etter job, and a **C**areer. Creating accountability while removing barriers, including developing a housing stability plan that mirrors the employment plan (low-income apt. apps.).

Leverage “A” to get “B” ☐

This may include a skills upgrade course or short-term training, revamping resume and utilizing employer partnership to secure a living-wage job.



Economic Mobility

Possible training graduation or new skill set to leverage. All major barriers removed, and new income matches new rent requirement.





HOW?

- Creative Supportive Services Funding that lasts for 6 months or more for employment retention.
- Strong Community Partnerships and Resource Connection.

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Employment Service offices are collocated with the approximately 2,300 [American Job Centers](#) nationwide.

Nationwide vocational rehabilitation services are managed at the federal level by the [Rehabilitation Services Administration](#) and delivered locally through individual state agencies via Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Build a Coordinated Stability Plan

One Person. One Plan. Multiple Supports.

Instead of having separate plans:

Housing Plan

Treatment Plan

Employment Plan



- Where are these three plans currently connected in your community?



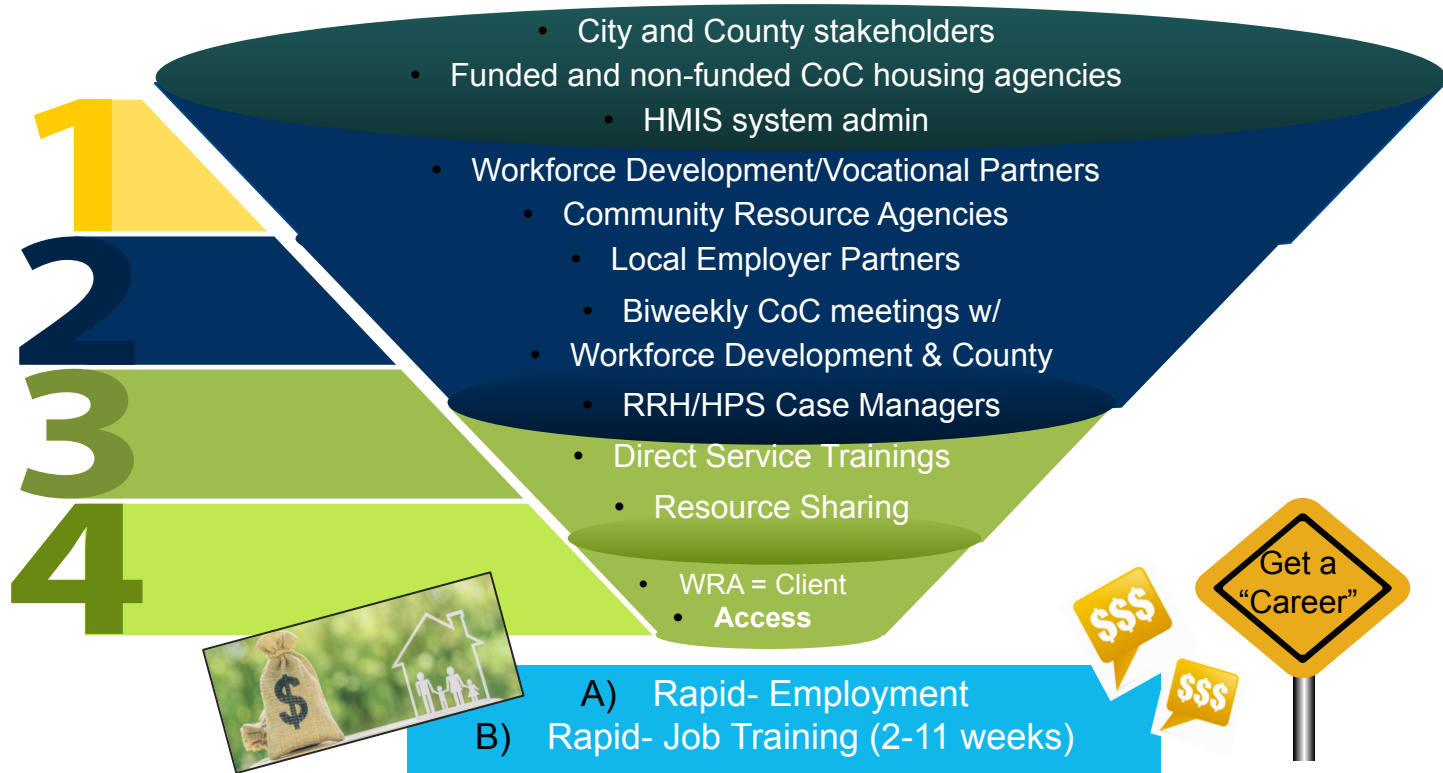
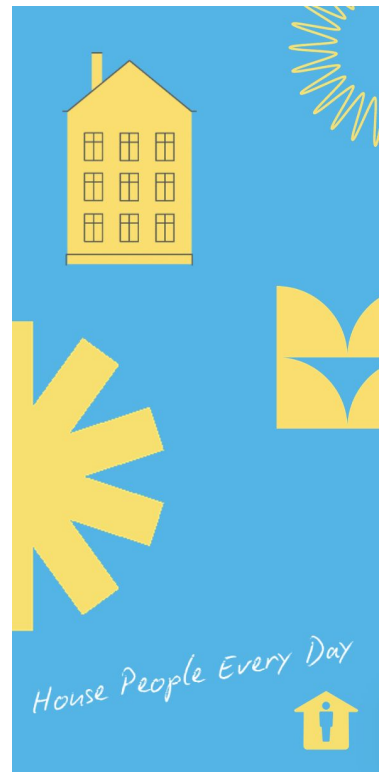
Housing	Treatment	Work
Rent	Behavioral health	Job goal
Housing stability	Recovery support	Training
Lease compliance	Medication support	Transportation
Landlord relationship	Crisis plan	Employer support
Benefits	Care coordination	Advancement

- Where are they completely disconnected?



Employment Pathway Initiative (example)

A CoC communitywide collaboration with a concentrated effort to serve the Homeless Prevention System (HPS) and Rapid-Rehousing (RRH) communities by developing new pathways to living-wage careers and helping more people achieve long-term housing stability, ultimately reducing homelessness at large.



What Does "Work-Centered" Actually Mean?

Work-Centered Does NOT Mean:

- ✗ Everyone needs to work immediately
- ✗ Employment comes before treatment
- ✗ People must be "treatment compliant" before receiving employment services
- ✗ A job is the measure of someone's worth
- ✗ Housing is conditional on employment

Work-Centered **DOES** Mean:

- ✓ Barriers to work are identified and addressed
- ✓ Employment can happen alongside treatment and housing stabilization
- ✓ People have opportunities to pursue meaningful, living-wage employment
- ✓ Employment is discussed as part of the person's goals
- ✓ Work is considered early, not as an afterthought
- ✓ Treatment plans consider the person's employment goals
- ✓ Workforce partners are part of the service network

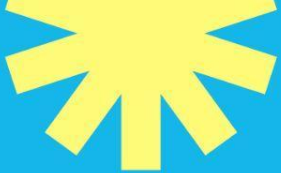
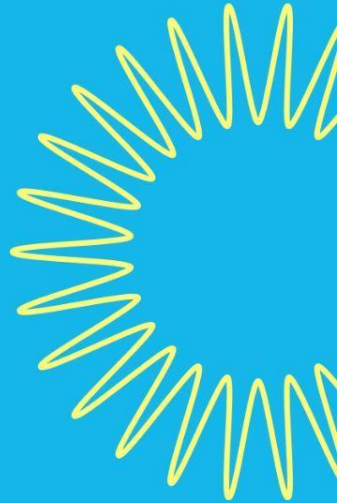
Workforce Development Resources:

- WIOA American Job Centers nationwide:
<https://www.careeronestop.org/LocalHelp/AmericanJobCenters/find-american-job-centers.aspx>
- Nationwide vocational rehabilitation services:
<https://rsa.ed.gov/about/states>
- HMIS Work Readiness Assessment Example:
<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:US:b5350cbd-485b-42c2-9a8d-1fef5aac9464>



Thank you!





Workforce Is the Strategy

Bayron Wilson
Co-Founder and COO, Urban Alchemy



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What I'll cover

1

Why now

Policy and funding are shifting

2

How we do it

Setting people up to succeed

3

The pitch

From charity to talent

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A must-do, not a nice-to-do

- **Policy is moving.** New state and federal frameworks tie work or service requirements to healthcare and housing benefits.
- **Funding is following.** Dollars are shifting toward outcomes that cross employment, health and housing.
- **The opening.** Skip the compliance mindset. Build the talent pipeline employers already need.



House People Every Day



Work is a supportive service

Not a referral at the end of
the housing plan.



When work is the intervention:

- Income, purpose and community from day one
- Growth and retention are the finish line
- Built into housing and health plans



Set people up to succeed, before and after hire

Lived experience is expertise

We hire for what people know about the street, systems and recovery.

Training and coaching

Structured learning from onboarding to leadership, with supervisors who coach, not just monitor.

Accountability with dignity

Clear feedback, fair reviews and the hard conversations everyone deserves.

Flip the script: from charity to talent

Instead of

People we are helping



Say

**Talent your business
needs**

Corporate social
responsibility



Workforce strategy

The cost of a program

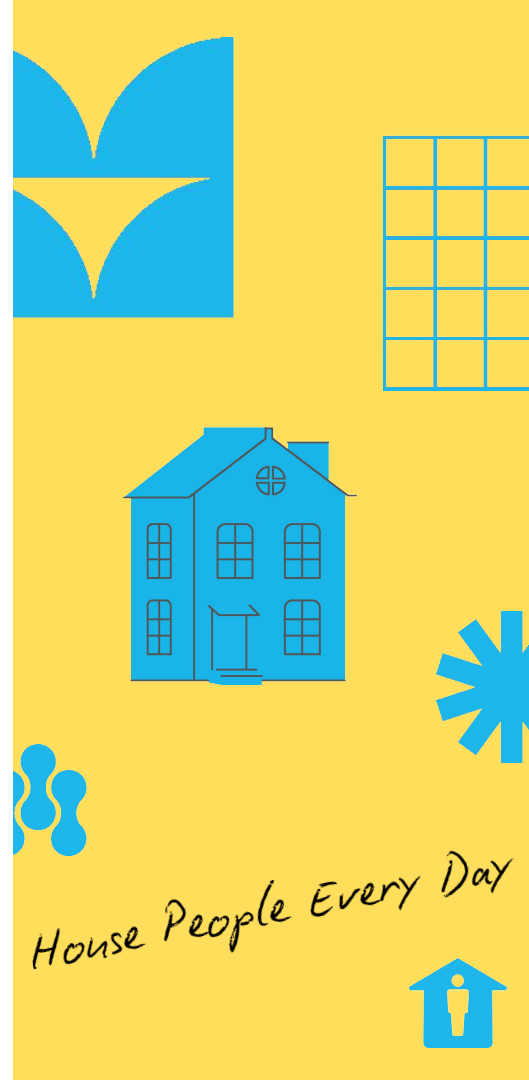


The return on a hire

A second chance



Proven retention



Intersect resources across sectors

- **Education:** credentials, training dollars, career coaching
- **Housing:** the stability that makes work possible, plus employment-linked funding
- **Business:** hiring demand, on-the-job training, wage support

One intertwined pathway

Training → a job → stable housing → a career



Measure what matters beyond placement

Careers

Retention at 90, 180
and 365 days

Wage growth and
advancement

Stability

Still housed a year
after hire

Credentials and
skills earned

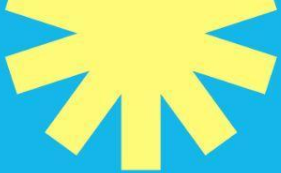
Business and systems

Lower turnover cost,
faster time to fill

Data shared across
employers,
educators and
systems

**One action for tomorrow: pitch value,
not charity**





Staffing for Business. Working for Good.



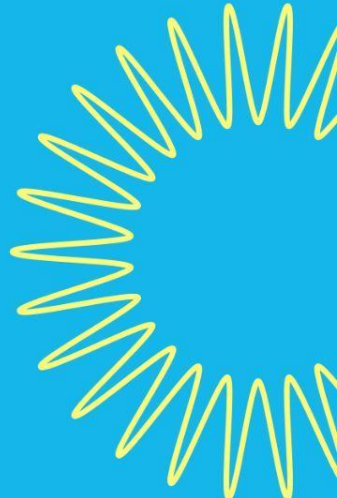
Amelia Nickerson
CEO, First Step Staffing (joining virtually)



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first step STAFFING

STAFFING FOR BUSINESS. WORKING FOR GOOD.

302 Decatur St.
Suite 103
Atlanta, GA 30312



INTRODUCTION

Mission

To provide a pathway to economic stability through employment and retention services.

Vision

We create opportunity and dignity through employment so that everyone in our communities

THRIVE
THRIVE

Teamwork

We all achieve more when we collaborate and work together.

Heart

We are committed to kindness and empathy.

Resilience

We look at challenges as opportunities to learn and grow.

Integrity

We are honest, ethical, and trustworthy.

Vision

We purposely plan for the future.

Empower

We lift each other up and extend respect and responsibility to everyone.

OUR IMPACT

Since 2007-2026

32,000
EMPLOYED
+

8
NATIONAL SOLUTION
STATES

\$300
WAGES PAID
MILLION

300+
RIDES TO WORK
THOUSAND

Los Angeles

12123 Garfield Ave.

South Gate, CA

90280

562.232.0240

San Bernardino

8546 Sierra Ave.

Fontana, CA 92335

909.476.0990

Dallas

3118 Swiss Ave.

Dallas, TX 75204

469.899.3867

Nashville

1161 Murfreesboro Pike.

Suite 320

Nashville, TN 37217

615.602.2220

Atlanta (Headquarters)

302 Decatur St. SE. Ste. 103

Atlanta, GA 30312

404.577.3339

Burlington, VT

Philadelphia

1231 N Broad St.

(Second Floor)

Philadelphia, PA 19122

215.333.3349

Baltimore

1414 N Wolfe St.,

Baltimore, MD 21213

443.596.0236

Orlando

808 W Central Blvd.

Orlando, FL 32805

407.478.1698 Ext. 224

2025 NATIONAL IMPACT

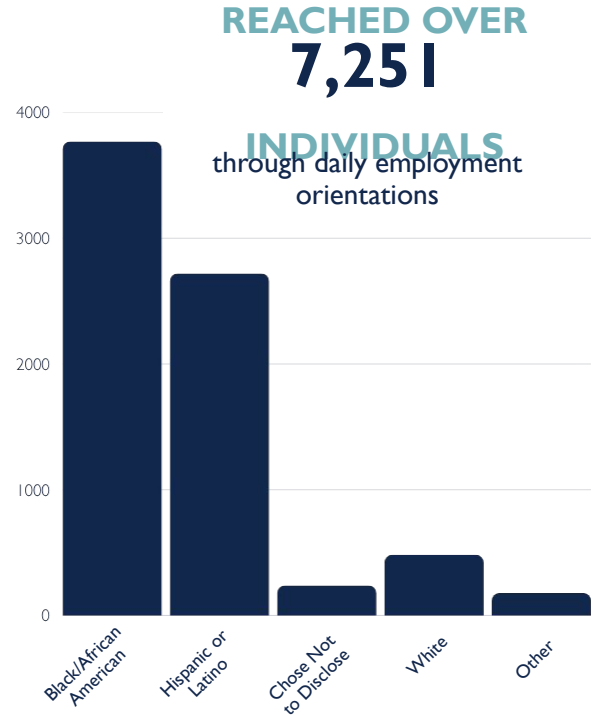
5,186
EXPERIENCING
HOMELESSNESS

1,653
JUSTICE
IMPACTED

7,033
EMPLOYED

80,306+
RIDES TO AND
FROM WORK

\$43.6M
**TOTAL
PAYROLL**



• WHO?

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

- At the risk of experiencing homelessness.
- Justice-system involved.
- Chronic poverty/unemployment

OUR SERVICES

- Rapid Employment
- Transportation
- Retention Services





THANK YOU

CONTACT:

Amelia@firststepstaffing.com

404.276.5794

www.firststepstaffing.com

Moderated discussion

25 MINUTES



What we'll dig into

The moment

Why is this a must-do?

Where's the friction?

Setting people up to succeed

Culture and HR that work

Workforce as a supportive service

The business case

From charity to talent

Metrics beyond placement

Breaking data silos

Your questions

AUDIENCE Q&A · 20 MINUTES



- How could this work in your community?
- Who's the workforce partner missing from your table?
- What's getting in the way?





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One action to take tomorrow

1

Kenya Rawls

[One-line action to confirm]

2

Bayron Wilson

Pitch value, not charity

3

Amelia Nickerson

[One-line action to confirm]

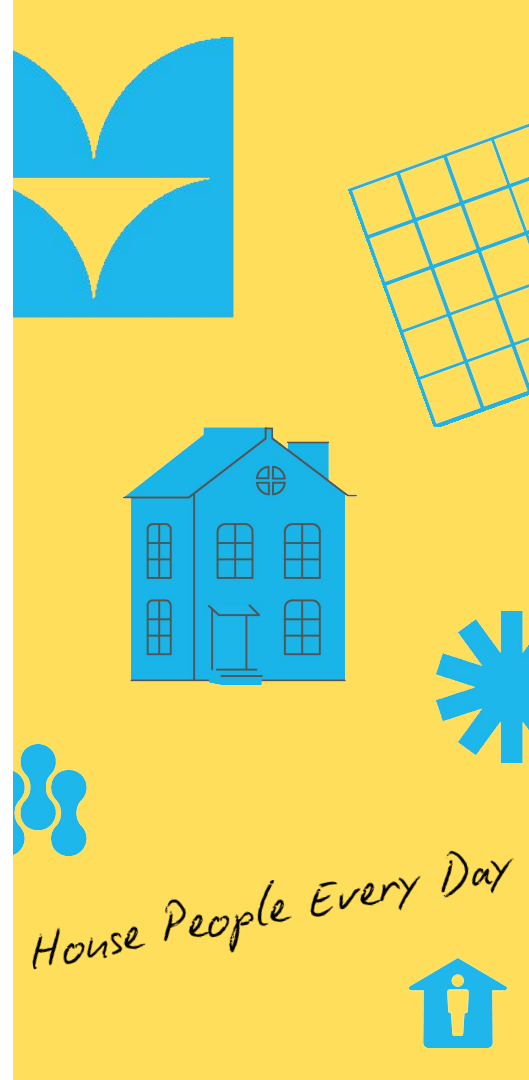


Session Feedback

Please scan the QR code to complete the feedback survey.



<https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/9042138/2026-BFZ-Learning-Session-Workshop-Session-Feedback>



Thank you

