

# What data should we collect?

CAEH Conference 2023

Ali Ryder, MES, RPP

ACRE Consulting



# Ali Ryder, MES, RPP

- **HIFIS Guru**
- Owner of **ACRE Consulting**
- Master's in urban planning (social planning)
- Previous experience with **OrgCode Consulting, Inc.** and **City of Kingston**
- Coach with **Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH)**



[www.acreconsulting.ca](http://www.acreconsulting.ca)  
[ali@acreconsulting.ca](mailto:ali@acreconsulting.ca)

# Two shelters, both alike in dignity

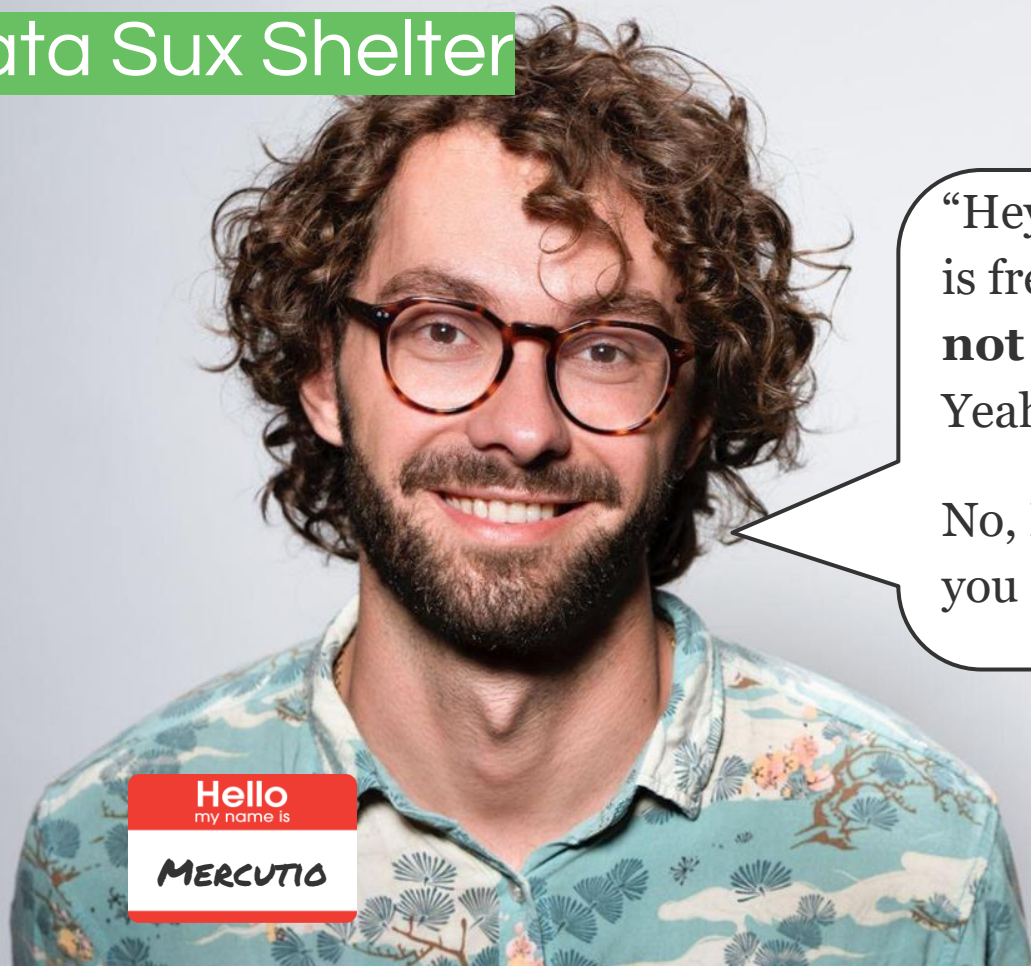
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,

**Data Sux Shelter** (run by the Montague Housing Corporation)

**Data 'R Us Shelter** (operated by Capulet Inc.)

Let's imagine that everything about them is perfectly equal. Staff are just as friendly, bathrooms are just as clean, one is down the street from the other, and they both have the same policies on genders and pets and so on.

# Data Sux Shelter



“Hey, come on in, I think a bed is free. Let me go check - **it’s not like I keep a record of it!** Yeah, it’s all yours, friend.

No, I don’t need your name if you don’t want to share it.”

Hello  
my name is

MERCUTIO

# Data 'R Us Shelter

“Of course we have a bed for you. Please fill out this **8-page intake form**, sign these 3 different consent forms, we’ll take a photo of you for our facial recognition software - don’t smile - and here’s your ID badge.

Just **wait 30 minutes** while I type all of this up, scan your consent forms, and back them up to the cloud.”



Hello  
my name is

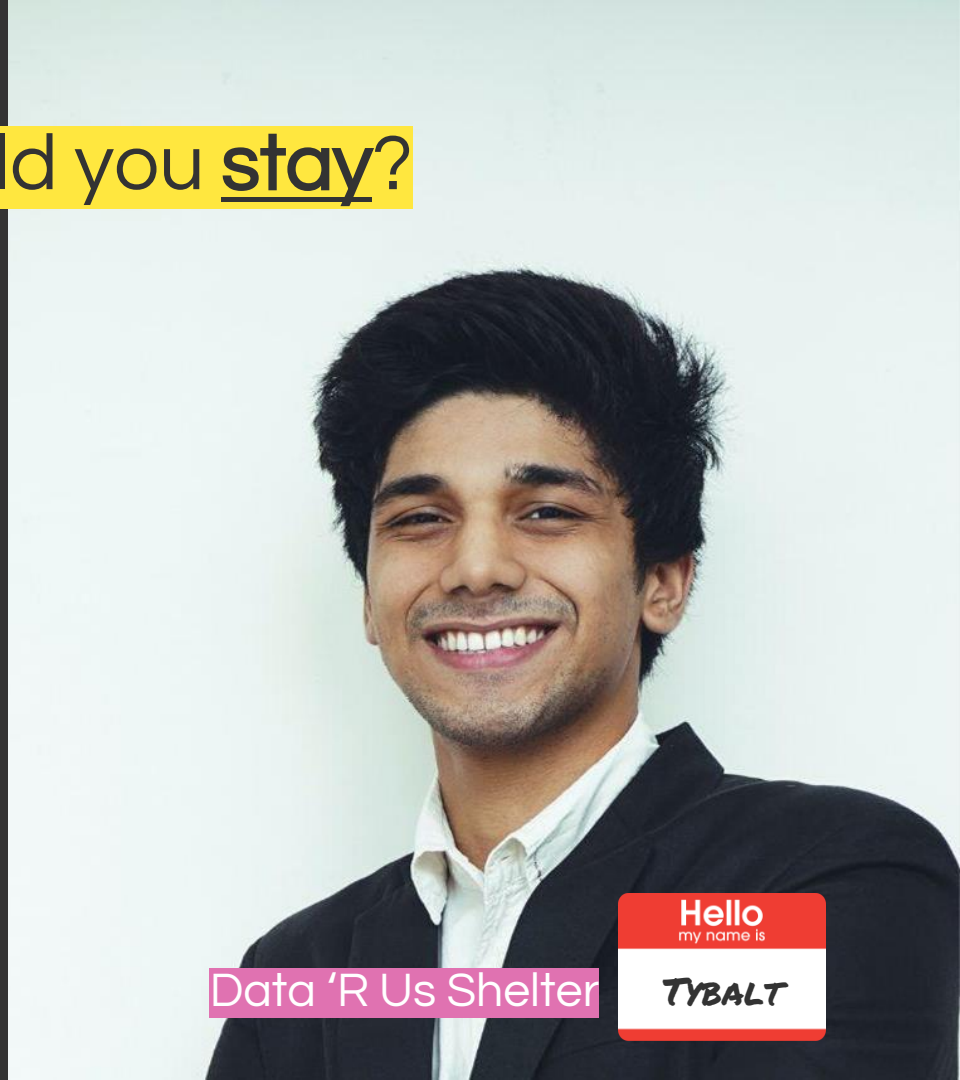
**TYBALT**

Where would you stay?



Hello  
my name is  
**MERCUTIO**

Data Sux Shelter

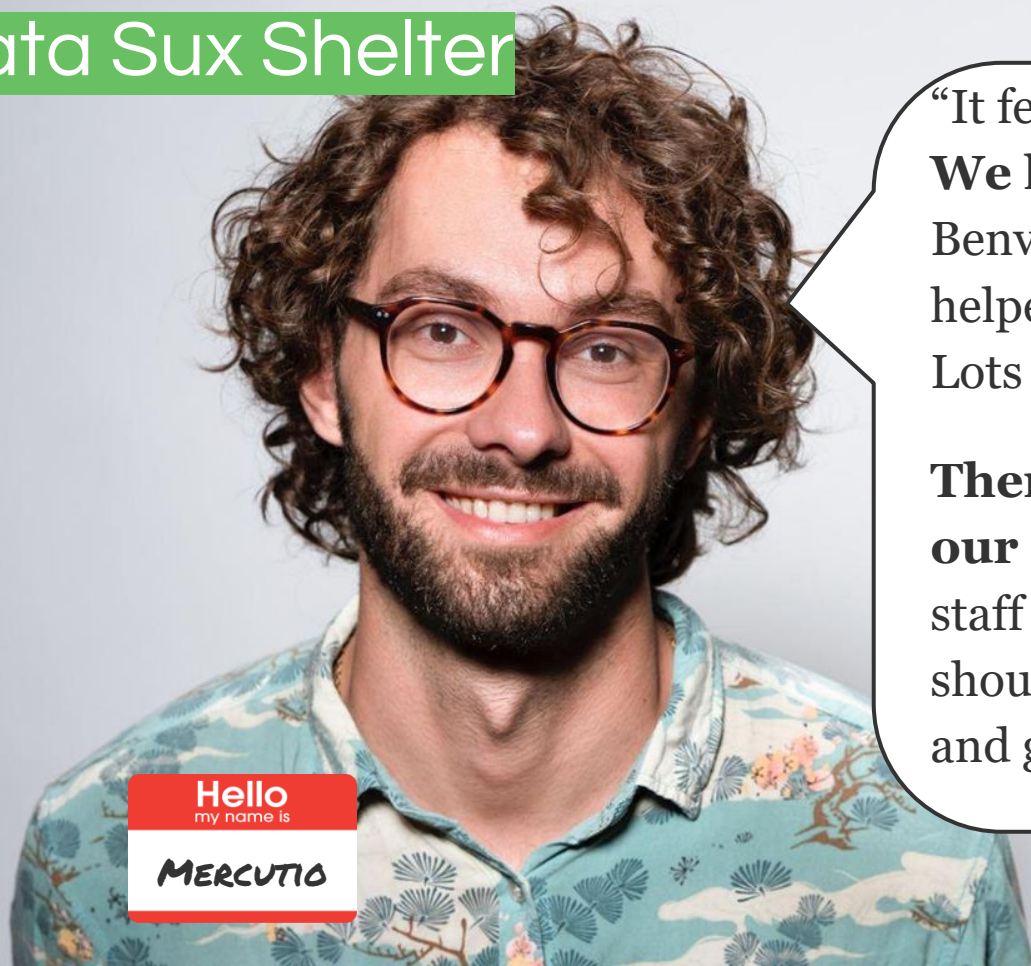


Hello  
my name is  
**TYBALT**

Data 'R Us Shelter



# Data Sux Shelter



“It felt like a super busy year!  
**We helped lots of people**, like Benvolio, he says we really helped him get back on his feet. Lots of people tell us that!

**There’s a really big need for our services for sure.** All our staff are working too hard. You should fund us for another year, and give us more money please.”

Hello  
my name is

MERCUTIO

## Data 'R Us Shelter

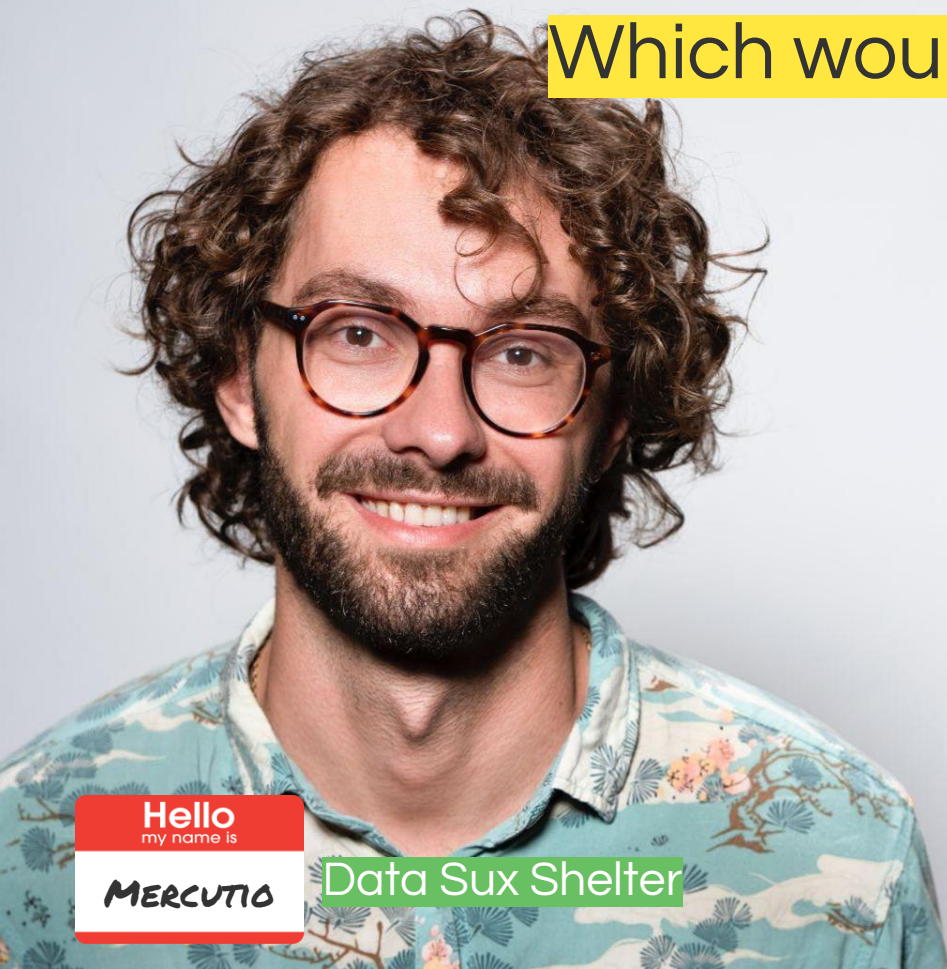
“This year we provided 6,387 shelter bed-nights, which is a **12% increase over last year** and an 18% increase over the previous year. We also housed 153 households, of which **88% are still in housing 6 months later**.

We've also noted a 308% increase in the number of refugees this year, and would like increased funding so we can hire an immigration specialist who can provide translation services.”



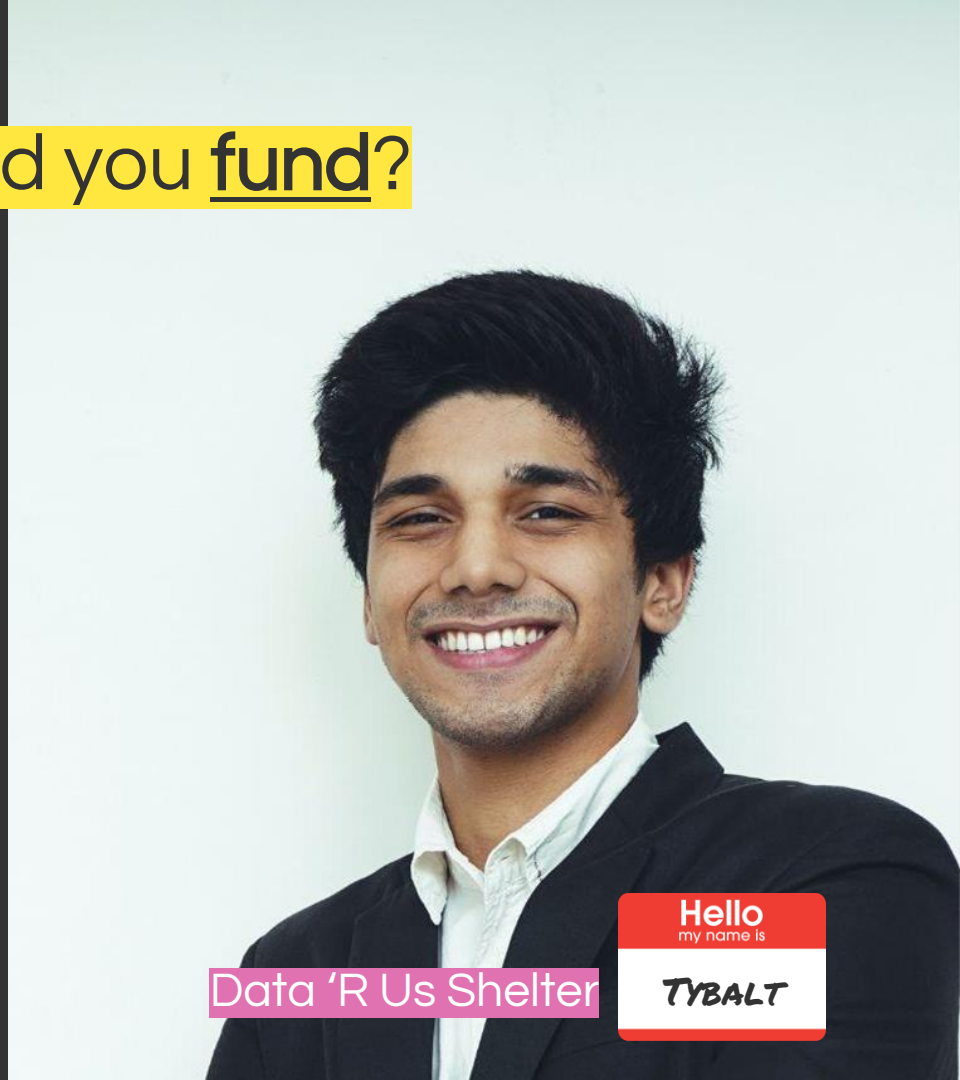


Which would you fund?



Hello  
my name is  
**MERCUTIO**

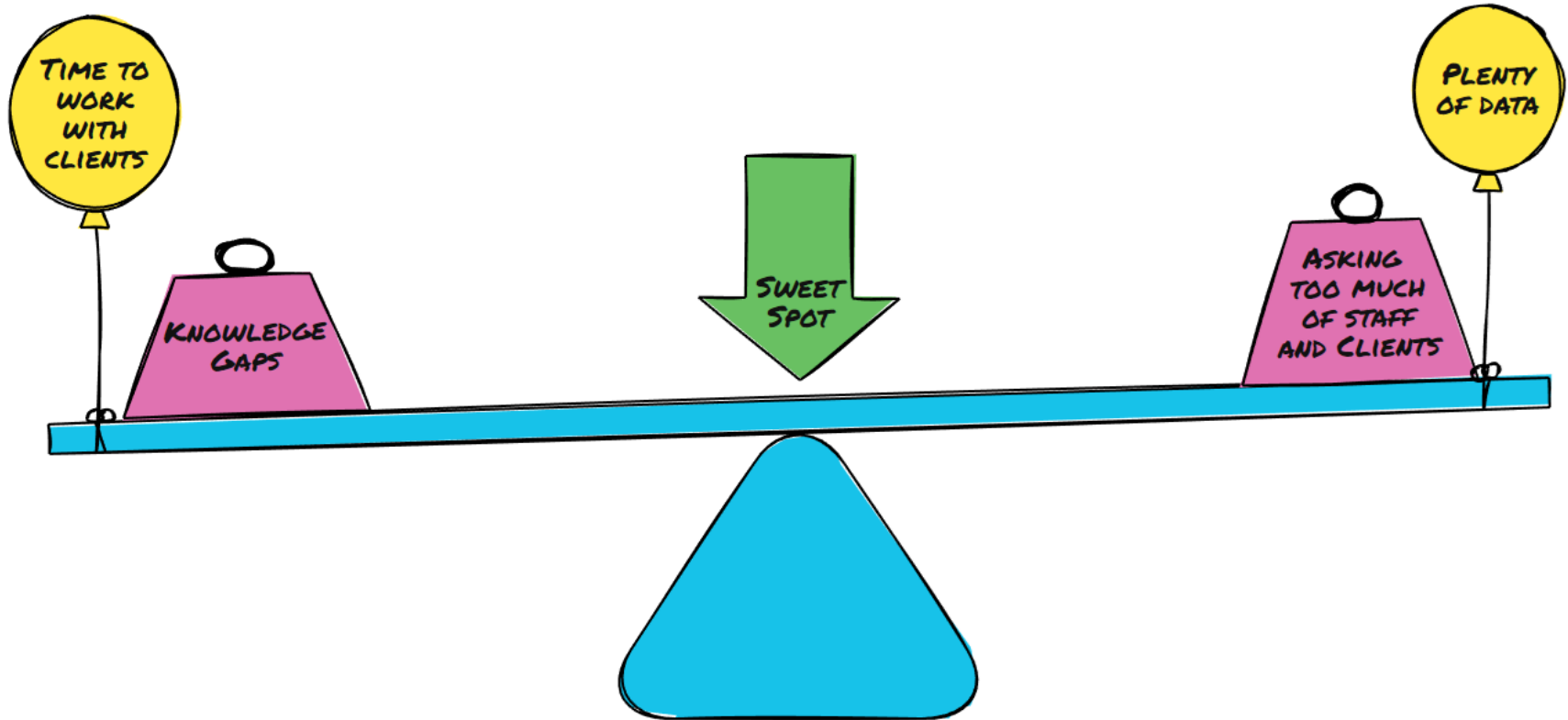
Data Sux Shelter



Hello  
my name is  
**TYBALT**

Data 'R Us Shelter

# It's a balancing act



## But which data to collect?

- Information that is **required by funders**
- Information that will **help staff do their jobs**
- Information that **addresses local priorities**

# Sexual Orientation



## Golden Rules

- 1. Always ask why we are collecting this**
- 2. Respect your staff's time**
- 3. Less is more**
- 4. You really do need to know about the client's history of homelessness**





# How Hamilton is actioning purposeful data collection

Laura Stanford, MPA  
Homelessness Policy &  
Programs, Housing Services  
City of Hamilton

# Learning Objectives



Inspire ways your community data and continuous quality improvement (CQI) projects can include the golden rules



Promote overall benefits of thinking about community data projects in this way

## Background:

Quick facts about  
Hamilton's current  
homeless  
population and  
emergency shelter  
system size

### **Homeless population:**

- Approximately 1800 individuals experiencing homelessness

### **Shelter Bed System:**

- 345 permanent beds (singles) and 20 rooms (families)
- 20 temporary beds (singles) and 52 rooms (families)

# Background: How we got here



**2019**  
**Launched Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS)**

**Programs onboarded between 2019-2023:**

- Drop-In Programs
- Housing Focused Street Outreach Program
- Emergency Shelter Early Intervention Supports
- Emergency Shelters
- Transitional Living Programs
- Rapid Rehousing Programs
- Intensive Case Management Programs
- Permanent Supportive Housing Programs



**2023**  
**Added new roles to the HMIS team**

- Senior Project Manager
- Quality Assurance Specialist
- Performance Reporting & Evaluation Specialist



**2023**  
**Started significant continuous quality improvement (CQI) work and set out to:**

- Prioritize data collection that meets operational, system planning, and funder reporting needs
- Improve transparency of reporting
- Provide refresher training for HIFIS

# Refresher Training

## Respect Staff Time

- Sector-based
- Planning & flexible scheduling
- Focus on data-entry priorities

## Less is More

- Clear data entry guidance (use cases) and priorities
- Quick Reference Resources (What to Ask and When, Where to Check in HIFIS and When)
- Streamline HIFIS design to help staff navigate the system more easily

## Client Housing History

- Focus on importance and utility
- Provide scenarios
- Clear data entry guidance



# Reporting

## Respect Staff Time

- Clear linkages between data collection and reporting
- Purpose-built reports
- Drop-In sessions & ongoing engagement

## Less is More

- Prioritize reports that meet operational, system planning, and funder reporting needs
- Up to date dropdown lists
- Up to date reporting tools for programs not using HIFIS

## Client Housing History

- Detailed client reports that show current housing status
- Summary and detailed client reports for housing placement records

## Overall benefits to thinking about projects in this way

- Challenging us to ask questions about what data we are collecting, how, and why
- Helping us to prioritize
- Golden rules are simple to hold ourselves accountable to



## Contact Information

Laura Stanford

Performance Reporting & Evaluation Specialist

Housing Services Division, City of Hamilton

Ontario, Canada

[Laura.Stanford@hamilton.ca](mailto:Laura.Stanford@hamilton.ca)