

Diversion Away from Homelessness



AFFORDABLE HOUSING CONFERENCE
HOME MATTERS
 IN FLORIDA





Prevention, Diversion, and Rapid Exit: A Framework

August 27, 2019



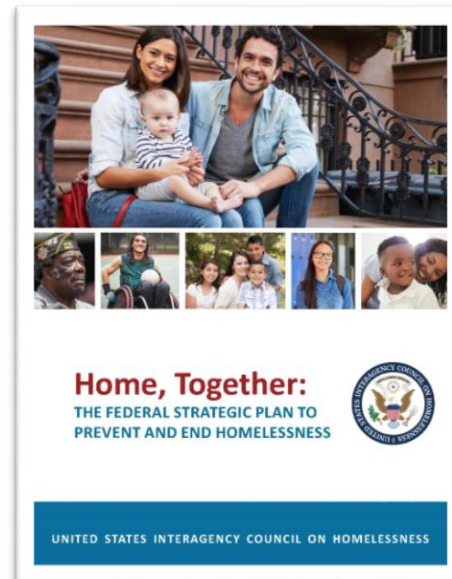
Home, Together: The New Federal Plan

Home.

Because we know that the only true end to homelessness is a safe and stable place to call home.

Together.

Because the solutions are going to take all of us working together, doing our parts, strengthening our communities.





Areas of Increased Focus

- Strengthening **prevention and diversion practices**
- Increasing **affordable housing** opportunities
- Creating solutions for **unsheltered homelessness**
- Tailoring strategies for **rural communities**
- Helping people who exit homelessness to find **career success and economic mobility**
- Learning from the **expertise of people with lived experiences of homelessness**



Objectives

- Provide a framework for distinguishing between homelessness prevention, diversion, and rapid exit.
- Describe how rapid resolution and housing problem-solving fit into that prevention/diversion/rapid-exit schema.
- Raise some questions and issues for consideration.



Navigating the Stream





Homelessness Prevention

Efforts to prevent housing crises from occurring and to prevent people who do experience such crises from experiencing homelessness.



Prevention strategies in *Home, Together*:

- Activities that reduce the prevalence of risk of housing crises within communities
- Activities that reduce the risk of homelessness while households are engaged with or are transitioning from systems
- *Activities that target assistance to prevent housing crises that do occur from escalating further and resulting in homelessness*





Diversion

Efforts to assist people to resolve their immediate housing crisis by accessing alternatives to entering emergency shelter or an unsheltered setting.



Diversion occurs:

- at the point people request emergency services, such as entry into emergency shelter
- through a day center or outreach before a person spends a night unsheltered





Rapid Exit

Efforts to help a household move as quickly as possible back into housing with the support of light services and the smallest amount of financial assistance appropriate.



Rapid exit occurs:

- after a household has entered emergency shelter or spent a night unsheltered





Housing Problem- Solving

Strengths-based, client-centered conversations focused on helping a household identify and access options for resolving their housing crisis.

This resolution is typically accomplished through natural supports and community-based resources.



Housing problem-solving occurs:

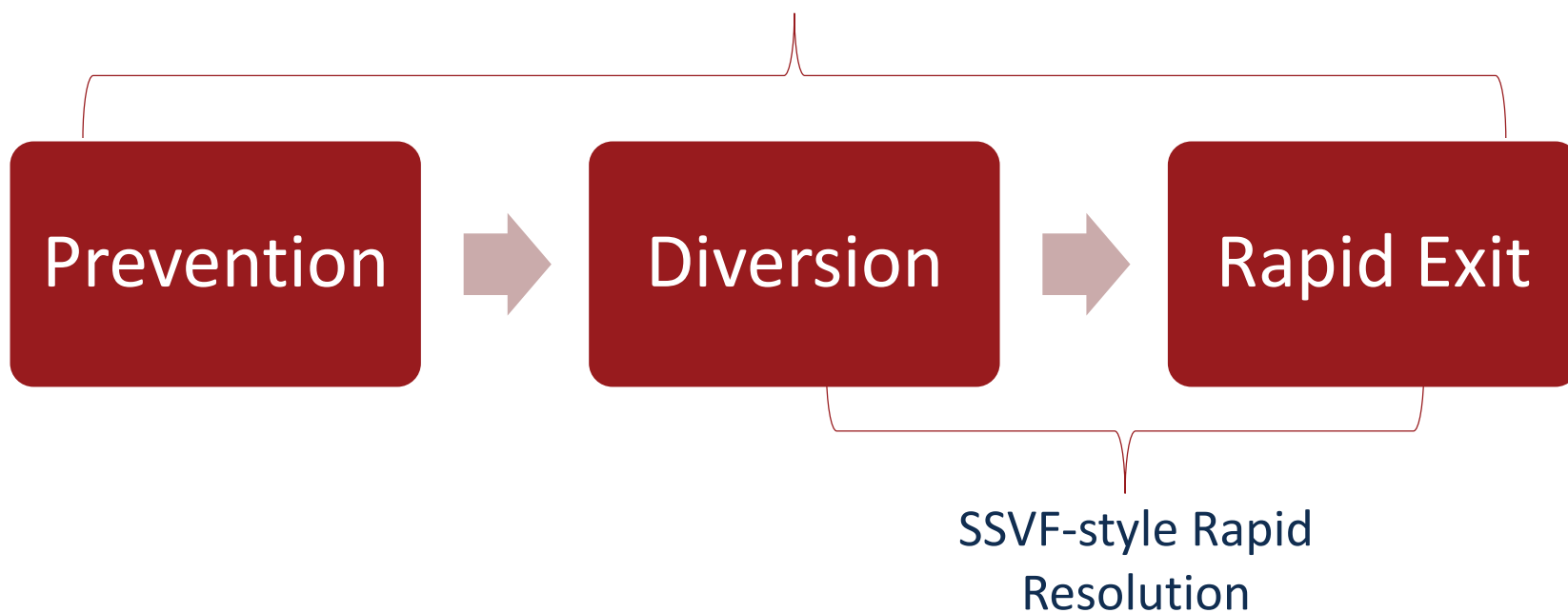
- throughout the prevention, diversion, rapid exit continuum





Navigating the Stream

Housing Problem-Solving Approaches





Recent Federal Publications

From HUD, USICH, and VA (July 2019)



[Prevention, Diversion, and Rapid Exit](#)



[Adopting Housing Problem-Solving in Prevention, Diversion, and Rapid Exit](#)



Why P/D/RE? A Quick Poll

- How many households are on your list(s), awaiting housing options?
- How many housing slots do you have every month?
- What happens to households not prioritized for those housing slots?
- What are other reasons to do diversion system-wide?



Integrating Diversion System-Wide

- Each coordinated entry access point should quickly connect households seeking assistance to a diversion practitioner for a problem-solving conversation.
- Ensure there are no “side doors” to homeless assistance or diversion. All entry points should incorporate a referral to diversion services.
- Diversion assistance must be easily accessible in terms of location, language, cultural competency, transportation, safety, etc.
- Be sure to measure the effectiveness of diversion, then use that data to inform and improve local diversion practice.



Additional Considerations

- Will diversion be a step integrated into coordinated entry or will it be a step before coordinated entry?
- How will you track diversion?
- Will diversion include flexible funds to help divert?
- How will diversion practitioners be trained?
- How can you ensure that diversion conversations are in person whenever possible?
- How can you ensure that diversion takes place through an organic and creative housing problem-solving conversation rather than a script or an assessment?



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Diversion Away from Homelessness



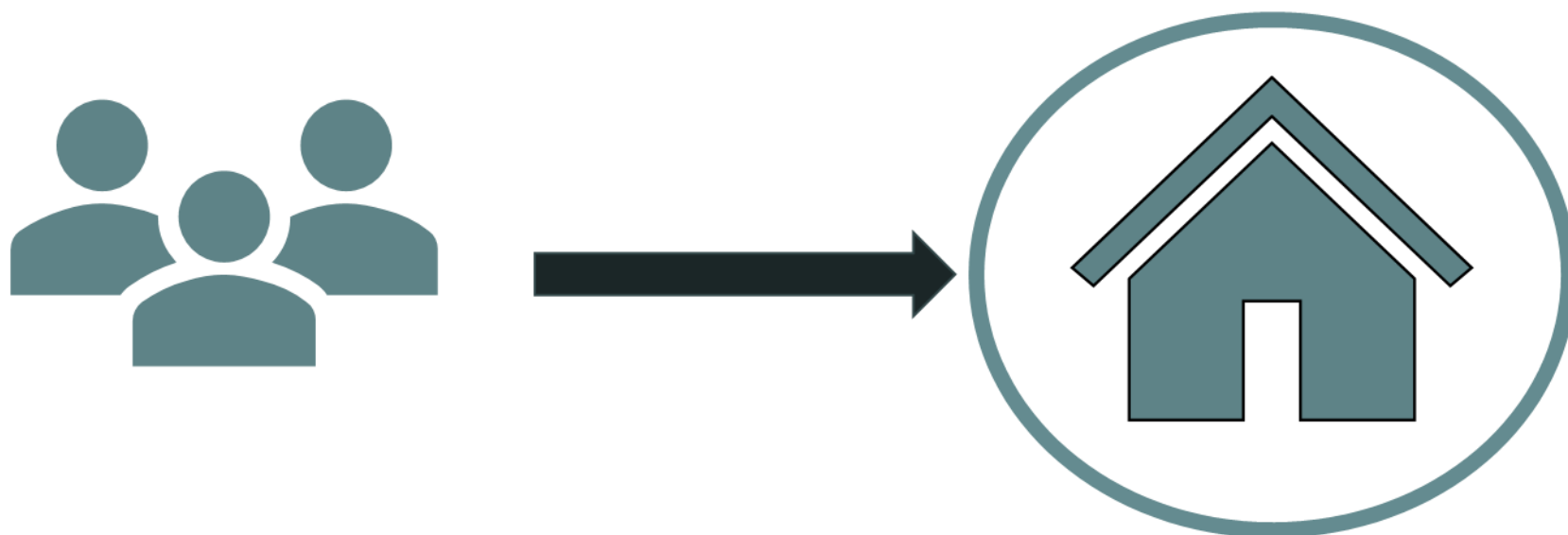
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THE FLORIDA HOUSING COALITION



COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE
HOUSING CRISIS
Response System





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THE FLORIDA HOUSING COALITION



Diversion



**Can I help you identify immediate alternate housing
arrangements?**

OR

**Can I connect you to services and financial assistance that will
return you to your current housing situation?**



Impact of Diversion

More effective and appropriate use of shelter resources.

Reduces strain on homeless assistance system.

Helps people avoid a stressful homeless episode.

People Don't Know

EXPECTATIONS

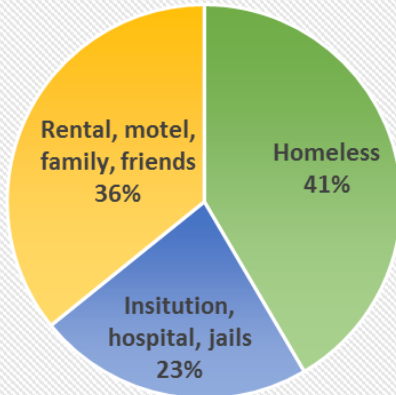
VS.

REALITY

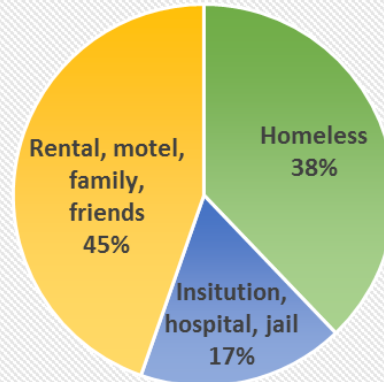
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Residence Prior to Entry



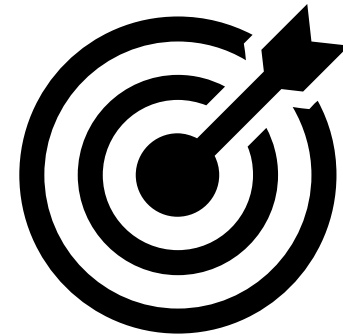
Residence Prior to Entry



Opportunities for Diversion?

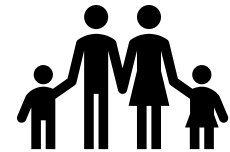
Who's Doing It Well

- Cleveland, OH
- Seattle, WA
- North Carolina
- State of Utah
- Boston, MA
- Montgomery County, PA
- AND Detroit, MI

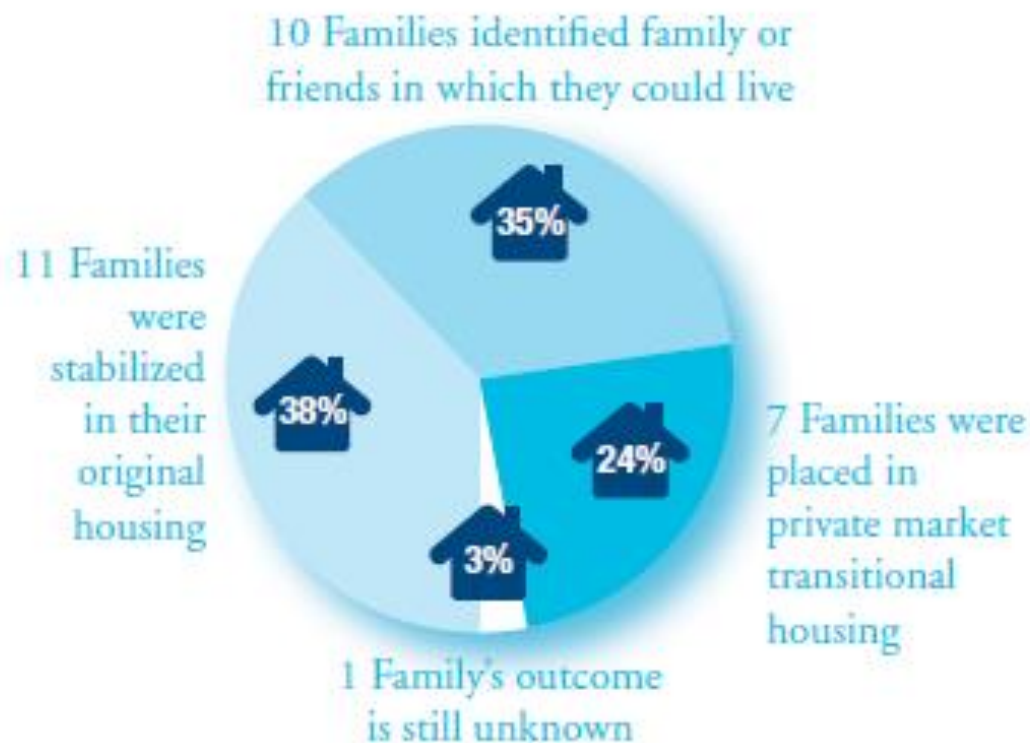


Case Study - Boston

- Goal: Divert families from emergency shelter
- Assessment team
 - Homeless provider staff
 - Former client
- Resource team
 - Mainstream providers
 - Housing experts

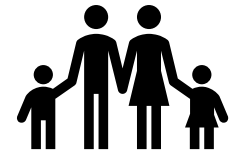


OF THE 29 FAMILIES DIVERTED FROM SHELTER



Case Study - Detroit

- Goal: Divert families from emergency shelter
- 60 Families Assessed
- 24 Successfully Diverted
- 36 Not Diverted
- Average family size 4.26 people





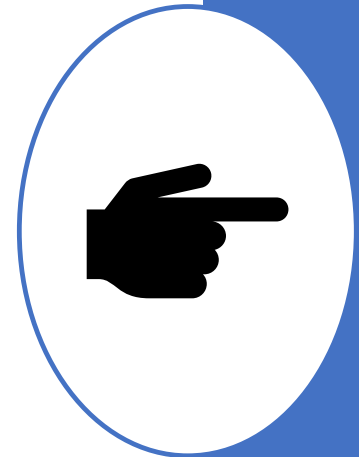
How Do You Do Diversion?

THE FLORIDA HOUSING COALITION



Diversion Services

- Provision of financial, utility, and/or rental assistance
- Short-term case management
- Conflict mediation
- Connection to mainstream resources
- Housing search



Diversion Must Haves

Screening Tool

Provider Cooperation

Flexible Funding

System Entry Point

Resourceful Staff

Screening Tool

- Where did you sleep last night?
- What other housing options do you have for the next few days/weeks?
- What issues exist in your current situation? Can we resolve those?
- Is it possible to stay where you're at?



System Entry Point

- Entry point is the front door of the system
 - Coordinated Entry (Access Points)
 - 211
 - Emergency Shelter



Diversion – “Problem Solving”

FROM	TO
What programs are you eligible to enter? Where is there a vacancy?	What would resolve your current housing crisis?
Assessment/eligibility	Problem solving conversation about household situation and resources
Intake	Crisis resolution to <u>avoid</u> shelter entry

Provider Cooperation

- Front door providers willing to do the assessment
- Housing stabilization providers for those diverted
- Mainstream service providers
 - Clothing
 - Food banks
 - Case management
 - Family services



Flexible Funding

- Pay for motel stays
- Reunite with family members
- Housing Relocation/Stabilization
- ESG
- TANF
- Challenge
- Private funds
- City/County funds



Resourceful Staff

- Experience with landlord mediation, conflict resolution
- Knowledgeable about community agencies
 - Financial assistance
 - Case management
 - Food banks, etc.



If all else fails...

We want people to know, even upon shelter entry, that shelter is not the answer. **Permanent housing is the answer.**

What is your housing plan?

Diversion Example

Couple and two children present at CE

Evicted from apartment several days ago

Child with disability and medical bills piling up –
can't afford rent and medical expenses

Both parents work and have good rental history
– Medical bill costs got in the way of rent



System Design

Are all homeless households being screened for diversion eligibility?

Where is the front door?
What access points should be use?

Could some of the households waiting for services be diverted?

Outcomes

- Are households served by diversion avoiding homelessness?
 - Remember Boston? 86% did not access shelter in the 7 months that followed
- Are fewer households becoming homeless because of the diversion program?

Diversion Outcomes

Go back with friends or family

Return to their own residence

Temporarily diverted while seeking new housing

Relocating out of town



THANK
YOU



Diversion

SUSAN MYERS

CEO

PINELLAS COUNTY HOMELESS LEADERSHIP BOARD

What is Diversion?

- NAEH – Cambridge American Dictionary - diversion" is defined as “the act of causing something or someone to turn in a different direction.”
- Empowering persons facing imminent homelessness to identify safe and appropriate housing options (other than the street/car/shelter) and assisting them in avoiding shelter and entering housing.
- **NOT** a barrier to shelter.
- Focused on empowering persons in crisis to begin regaining control over their situation and lives.
- Helpful for persons already homeless including those sheltered and rapid rehousing clients.
- Diversion should not be thought of as a “program,” but rather as an “approach” to finding those creative alternatives.

OK, But Why Should I Do It?

- Improves system outcomes by reducing entries into homelessness.
- Improves quality of life by helping people avoid the experience of a shelter stay.
- Conserves and targets resources-shelter beds to be used only when needed.
- Cuts down on shelter wait lists.

Is Diversion Replacing Coordinated Entry?

- **NO!** Diversion screening happens when the client or household contacts an access point.
- When households experiencing a housing crisis present at access points for possible entry into emergency shelter or crisis response system, access point providers go through diversion screening to determine if the household can return to housing or identify alternative housing outside the crisis response system.

Is Diversion Screening the Same As Conducting the VI-SPDAT??

- **NO!** This is a prescreening PRIOR to entering the homeless system (within 7 days of homelessness). We do not use a tool or script.
- Coordinated Entry System procedures and the VI-SPDAT assessment are conducted only IF the client is literally homeless.

Three C's of Diversion

Commitment – Communities need to commit to the diversion approach. Even when there is capacity in the shelter system, diversion prevents households from the stress associated with shelter stays. The communities that are seeing significant results from diversion strategies are communities that recognize a majority of households presenting for shelter are not literally homeless, but in many cases staying with family or friends. These communities recognize that such households can be better served by not entering the shelter system.

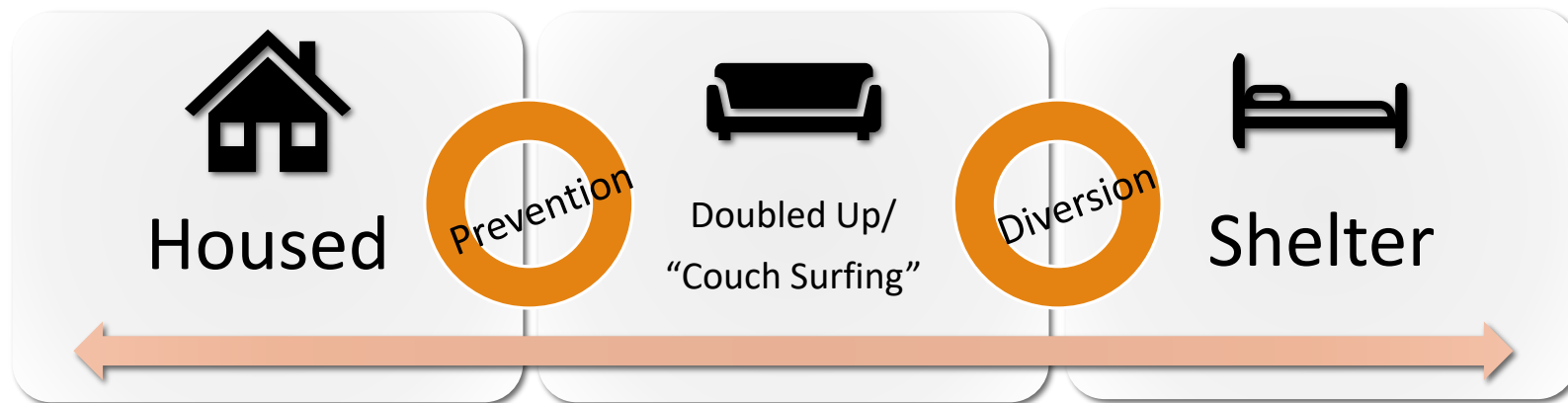
Conversation – Successful diversion uses the first conversation with a household as an opportunity to explore their current housing crisis, not to ask a list of “diversion questions.” A good problem-solving conversation includes exploring any potential resources a household may have to stay where they are currently residing or move to another housing opportunity. In many cases, just having staff engage in a conversation to get to know the household allows for a successful resolution without any financial assistance.

Creativity – There is not a single strategy that makes diversion a success. Staff who engage in diversion conversations with households are creative in their solutions and explore every option to divert households from shelter. This can range from helping someone locate a family member or friend that can help, to acting as a mediator in the current housing situation, to develop a resolution that can allow the household to stay. Shelter Diversion can include: financial assistance to maintain current housing; conflict resolution and mediation to return to housing; or assistance to locate and secure new housing through financial assistance and advocacy.

What Defines a Successful Diversion?

- Client engages with staff using mediation techniques or mainstream resources to assist the household in identifying alternative housing options, including but not limited to returning to their own housing, staying with family/ friends, or relocation to another area.

When and Where can Diversion Happen?



- Diversion happens at the shelter door or through coordinated entry.
- Diversion does not need to be face to face and can happen over the phone.

Cost of Diversion

- Simple face to face or phone conciliation
- Mediation + groceries (\$35)
- Greyhound bus ticket (\$30-\$200)
- Other assistance like utility bills or late fees (\$200)
- Rare but possible: First Month Rent (\$1000+)



National Alliance to End Homelessness: Principles for Homeless Prevention

01

Principle ONE:
Crisis resolution

02

Principle TWO:
Client choice,
respect, and
empowerment

03

Principle THREE:
Provide the minimum
assistance necessary
for the shortest time
possible

04

Principle FOUR:
Maximize
community
resources

05

Principle FIVE:
The right
resources to the
right people at
the right time

Conflict Resolution Approach

- A **strength-based approach** helps clients identify and cultivate strengths, successes and resources they've used in the past to help them with this episode of homelessness.
- Support and trust that **people want to succeed**. Help them identify their own strengths and successes in their life that can help them with this crisis.

How People in Crisis View Others

- In the midst of crisis people tend to be protective, defensive, and not open to others.
- As we help them become empowered, they are more able to listen, consider, and negotiate with others.

Recognition Shifts

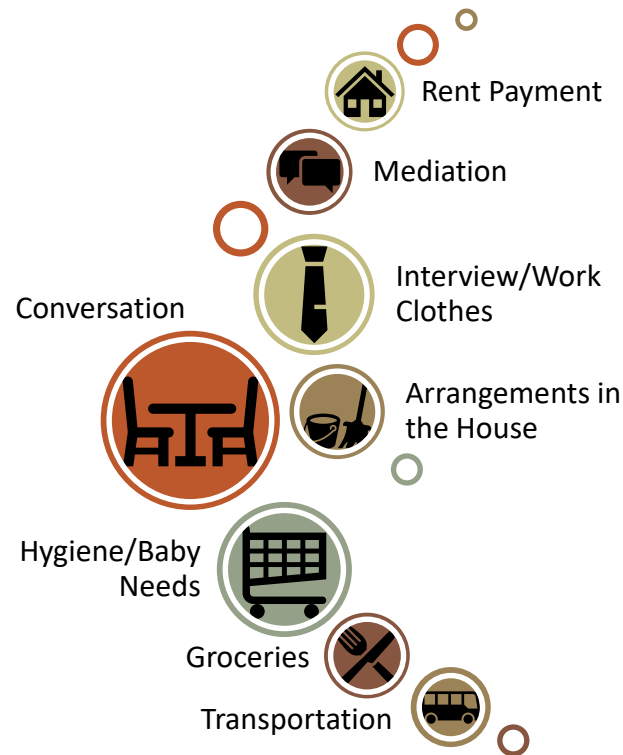
Closed	⇒	Open
Suspicious	⇒	Trusting
Self Absorbed	⇒	Generous
Ignoring	⇒	Listening
Dismissing	⇒	Negotiating

How Can We Help Change The Dynamic?

We start the empowerment process by listening.

- **Empowering** persons facing imminent homelessness to identify safe and appropriate housing options (other than the street/car/shelter) and assisting them in avoiding shelter and returning immediately to housing.
- NOT a barrier to shelter.
- Focused on empowering persons in crisis to begin **regaining control** over their situation and lives.
- Helpful for persons already homeless including those sheltered and rapid rehousing clients.

Diversion Work



- Help them determine if there is a more appropriate place.
- Start with a conversation.
- Offer mediation with various parties.
- May require follow up to ensure follow through.
- Minimal financial assistance may be utilized.

Who can be Diverted?

Most people are self pay motel or staying with friends or family. Many present to a provider:

- When tensions are high.
- When agreements are broken.
- When people have overstayed their welcome.
- When there is a misconception of services.

When considering options:

- What is the safest and least traumatic?
- Don't just look at the immediate future are there long term housing options?



Diversion Steps

01

Introductions

02

Active and
Empathetic
Listening

03

Strength
Exploration

04

Moving
Forward

Things To Consider

Always find out about:

Current housing dynamic
Housing history
Income (current and past)

Are the options:

Safe?
Appropriate for client?
Manageable (doable)?

Outcome One: Live with friends or family

- When? Under what circumstances?
- No better option
- No housing history
- No income history
- How can our client contribute to the household?
- How can our client use this time to further education and/or employment opportunities?

Outcome Two: Return to their own residence

- When? Under what circumstances?
- Walk-Aways (have lease but cannot pay current or back rent)
- Non-DV relationship issues (significant other is in home)
- Previous places they have lived are options (i.e. parents)

Outcome Three: Temporarily diverted as they seek new housing (F&F Temporary)

- When? Under what circumstances?
- Wish to live on their own and have done so before.
- Have ability to be sustainable.
- Help clients consider:
 - A walk through before moving in.
 - Discussing how and when rent is paid.
 - How to communicate with landlord.
 - Community resources.

Outcome Four: Relocating permanently to safe place out of town (TA)

- When? Under what circumstances?
- Safe, appropriate host
- Support systems – family, friends, employment, education – are those support systems elsewhere?
- How?
- Confirm with host (30-day minimum stay)
- What travel and other logistics do we need to work out?

Reality Testing Decisions

- The agreements and decisions need to work for the parties (not for us).
- By starting with what has worked previously, we increase the odds of it working again.
- If you have a concern – do not ignore it – use that as an opportunity to help our client **think through** their options and decisions.

Questions When Reality Testing

- How would this look?
- What is the timeline?
- Have you done something like this before?
- What other options have you considered?
- What resources do you have to carry this out?
- In case this does not work out as well as you would like, would you like to explore a back-up plan?

Current HLB Diversion Funding and Staffing

- FY18/19 – Inaugural Year - \$234,000 – 3 FTE’s and \$48,500 client assistance funding
 - Diversion Specialists are Masters level
 - Private foundation funded a one-year pilot - \$100,000
 - 1 FTE and \$37,000 in client assistance funding
 - Pinellas County provided \$134,000
 - 2 FTE’s and \$11,500 in client assistance funding
- FY 19/20 – \$302,500 – 4 FTE’s and \$38,000 in client assistance funding
 - Pinellas County – 2 FTE’s and \$7,000 in client assistance funding - \$134,000
 - Challenge – 2 FTE’s and \$11,000 in client assistance funding - \$148,500
 - Foundation – anticipating rollover of \$20,000 plus for client assistance funding
 - Also applied for an additional \$50,000 in client assistance funding from the City of St. Petersburg

Closing

- Educate and train community partners – providers and funders.
- Listen first, validate, be empathetic and help people think through options.
- Hire staff with higher levels of education/experience
- Most interventions will not require significant dollars.
- This is an evolving process.