

1.04 Implementing a Systemic Diversion Strategy to Reduce Homelessness



2016 NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON

ENDING HOMELESSNESS

and **CAPITOL HILL DAY**

July 26–28, 2016
Washington, DC



National Alliance to
END HOMELESSNESS



1.04 Implementing a Systemic Diversion Strategy to Reduce Homelessness

By assisting individuals and families with identifying alternate housing arrangements and connecting them with support, you can divert them from entering your community's homeless assistance system. During this session, you will learn diversion strategies and how to identify appropriate situations for diversion. This session also will help you develop strategies to fund diversion.

Our Presenters

- Tess Colby
 - Pierce County Community Connections, Tacoma WA
- Caprice Snyder
 - MIFA, Memphis TN
- Kay Moshier McDivitt,
 - National Alliance to End Homelessness, Washington, DC



BEFORE



AFTER

Key Elements of an Effective Crisis Response System that *Ends Homelessness*

Access and Prioritization

- Outreach
- Coordinated Entry
- Diversion

Crisis and Interim Housing

- Immediate and easily accessible available for anyone

Assistance to Return to Housing Quickly

- RRH
- PSH
- Mainstream public housing

Coordinated Entry





Homelessness Diversion

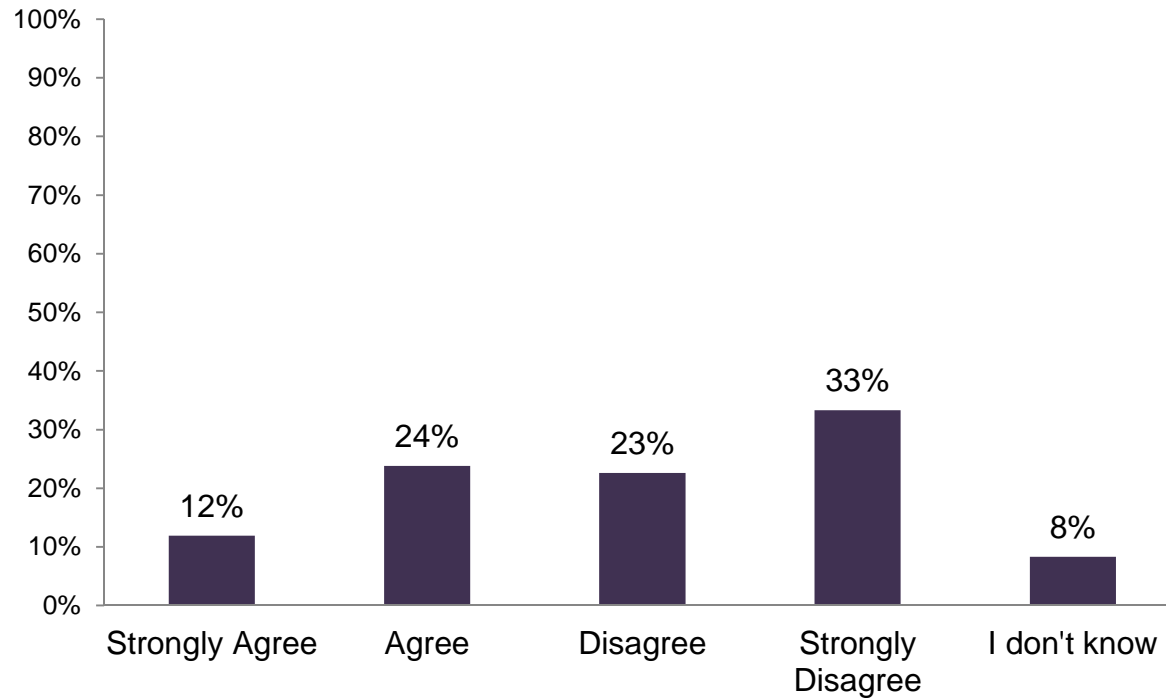
- Diversion prevents homelessness for people seeking shelter by helping them identify immediate alternate housing arrangements and, if necessary, connecting them with services and financial assistance to help them retain or return to housing.
- Diversion is NOT a separate “program” but rather part of the entire system – problem solving and solution focused
- Diversion should always be safe and appropriate for the client.

Diversions and Prevention

Housing Situation	Intervention	Services Provided
At imminent risk of losing housing	Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving • Connections to natural supports
Requesting shelter	Diversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing search • Financial assistance • Case management • Mediation • Connection to mainstream resources
In shelter	Rapid Re-Housing	

Community Consumer Survey

7. When you first became homeless, were you offered assistance to help you stay in your previous housing situation, or with family or friends, to help you avoid entering shelter?



The Three C's of Diversion

- **Commitment**
 - Mainstream and homeless service providers must believe households are better served outside of homelessness system
- **Conversation**
 - Diversion is a problem solving, strength based conversation, not an assessment tool with a list of questions
- **Creativity**
 - Help clients think of creative solutions and explore every option

Keys to Successful Diversion

- ✓ Coordinated entry process and shelter front door
- ✓ Resourceful staff trained in mediation
- ✓ Strength based and problem solving
- ✓ Recognizes client choice and safety
- ✓ Linkages to mainstream services and natural supports
- ✓ Flexible dollars



dreamstime.com

Community Examples

Southeastern Connecticut

- Reduced family shelter beds from 83 to 53
- In 2015 diverted 79% of families seeking shelter
- Average cost is \$1,649

Montgomery County, PA

- 85% of cases handed in under an hour
- In 2015 diverted 64% of clients seeking shelter
- Average cost is \$1,325
- Where did they go?
 - 35% stayed doubled up
 - 15% stayed in their housing
 - 12% moved to alternative housing

Pierce County WA
Memphis TN
Examples of Making Diversion
Work

Problem Solving: An Effective Response to Homelessness

National Conference on Ending Homelessness
July 26, 2016

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Pierce County
Community Connections

www.piercecountywa.org/cc

Pierce County, WA COC



- Population = 813,000
 - City of Tacoma = 208,000
- Median Income = \$72,300
- 13.1% below poverty level
- Market Rent 2br = \$1,100
- Vacancy rate = 3.3%
- COC has about 3,050 permanent and temporary beds
- \$12 million in 2016
 - COC - \$3.5 million
 - ESG - \$230,000
 - WA State - \$3.3 million
 - Local - \$4.7 million
- PIT (2016): 1,762 persons
 - Increase in unsheltered and chronic
- Coordinated Entry Calls: about 3,800 households



Pierce County
Community Connections

Slide 14

RAG1

Rae Anne Giron, 1/21/2016

Evolution of “Diversion” in Pierce County

- Why we decided to Divert families from Coordinated Entry Wait List
- What we learned from our Pilot
- What our problem solving conversation looks like
- Why our Crisis response System starts with problem solving



It All Started with Coordinated Entry v 1.0

- Data!
 - Who's coming to us for assistance
 - Serving only Literally Homeless
 - Who's getting referred to housing
 - Mainly families with relatively low barriers
 - Who's not (and WHY!)
 - Mainly single adults and families with very high barriers
 - How long it's all taking
 - Many months... or until we lose contact

Monthly:
250 Assessments



Monthly:
50 Vacancies

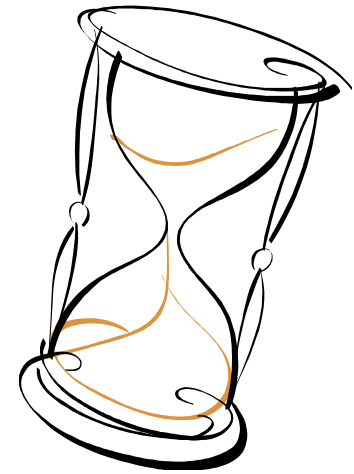


Wait List!



Coordinated Entry Wait List

- We lost contact with about 1/3 of the people on the placement roster.
- Around 20% found housing on their own
- Only 20% were entering our system
- Remainder stayed on wait list... for a long time
 - Some – highest barriers - never got a referral
- There must be a better way!



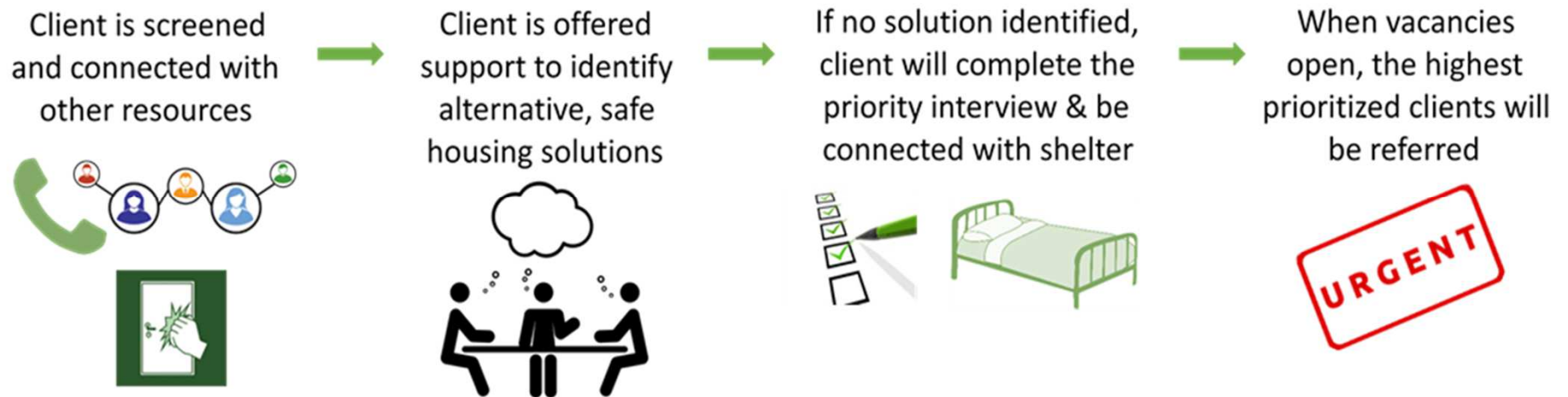
Now What?!?

- Dilemma
 - Implemented Coordinated Entry without Right Sizing System... Yikes!
- Response
 - Reallocate investments away from Transitional Housing and to Rapid rehousing (Workshop 5.02 on Thursday!)
 - Divert households from placement on Wait List
 - Piloted “Diversion” for families – 2014/2015
 - Engaged our Center for Dispute Resolution to Train
 - Learning Collaborative
 - Data Dashboards
 - 70% Take-Up rate
 - Over 250 families resolved homeless crisis
 - 7% return rate



And Still, What Now??

- Coordinated Entry v 2.0
 - Prioritization based on Vulnerability and Housing Barriers
 - Priority Pools based on Projected Vacancies – Transparency!
 - **First Step for All: Crisis Resolution Conversation**



Pierce County
Community Connections

Problem Solving Approach

- Dispute Resolution model –
 - Listen to client story; summarize along the way so resolution comes from client
 - Ask powerful, non-judgmental questions
 - Reality test options – be creative but realistic
 - Move to solutions
- No right or wrong way. No script. This is about building trust and CONNECTING.
- Quickly Re-establish Rental or Shared Housing Situations, Relocation, or Doubled-up
- System Right Sizing: Those who can self-resolve will & more intense resources are saved for those who need a deeper level of assistance



Outcomes To Date

- Over 400 families successfully diverted since October 2014 (out of 1,100 offered problem solving conversation)
 - Re-establish permanent housing
 - 75% Re-Establish Rental
 - 13% Doubled Up
 - 7% in Shared Housing
 - 4% Relocated
 - 5% Return Rate (since Oct 2014)
- 8 Households without Children successfully diverted since January 2016 (out of 174 offered problem solving conversations)
 - Still learning!



Lessons Learned

- Flexibility of Funding Sources – unusual expenses (car repair, child care, buying groceries for a roommate, etc.)
 - Local Revenues
 - Private Funds
 - Could use SSVF or ESG (we don't)
- Financial Assistance Not the Only Tool
 - \$\$s Help with Diversion
 - Reliance on \$\$s Impairs Creativity
 - \$\$s Finite - Creativity is Infinite
- Individualized Approach – Tailored to and Driven By Each Household



In Closing...

- **COMMITMENT** to systemic embrace of problem solving
 - Front door of Coordinated Entry
 - Woven throughout our approach to crisis resolution
- Every **CONVERSATION** with clients is focused on crisis resolution
 - Helping clients to re-discover natural supports and resources – prevention!
- **CREATIVITY** is key to successful conversations
 - Every conversation is driven by the client – so it's unique and the solutions are unique
 - No list of prescribed questions or assessment to determine who is “eligible”
 - It's not a program – it's a way to engage clients in problem solving
- **Try it! It Works!!**



How Diversion is Working in Memphis, Tennessee

Caprice Snyder

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Agenda

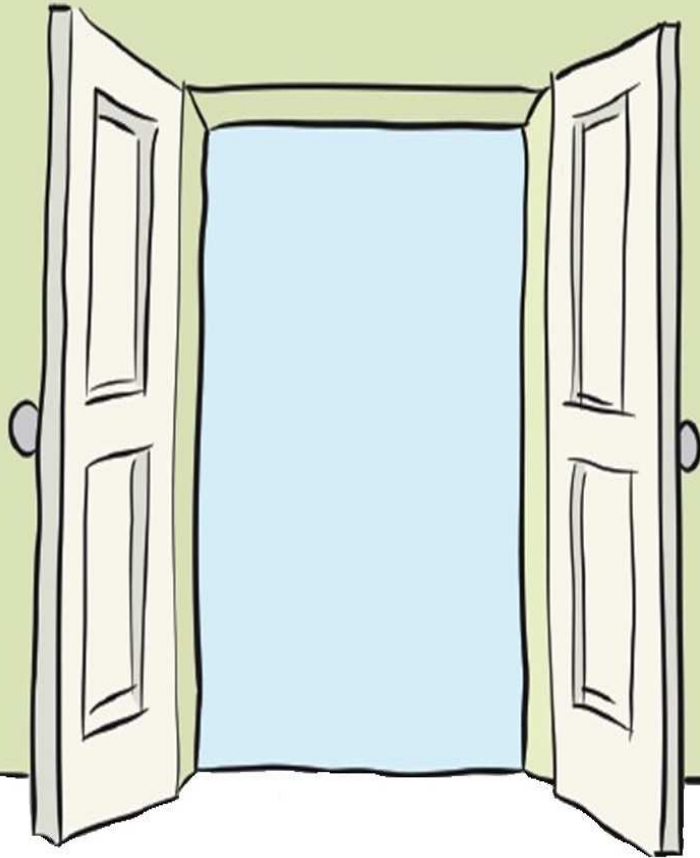
- MIFA and Memphis
- Central Intake (Coordinated Entry) for Families with Children
- Hotline
- Emergency Shelter Placement
- Lessons Learned
- Funding

MIFA and Memphis

- MIFA was founded in 1968
- Programs for seniors and families in crisis
- Serve 50,000 individuals annually
- Few chronically homeless families, sufficient low-cost housing
- Substandard housing, blight, 29% poverty rate
- 38126 poorest in Memphis, poverty rate 60%



Central Intake (Coordinated Entry) for Families with Children



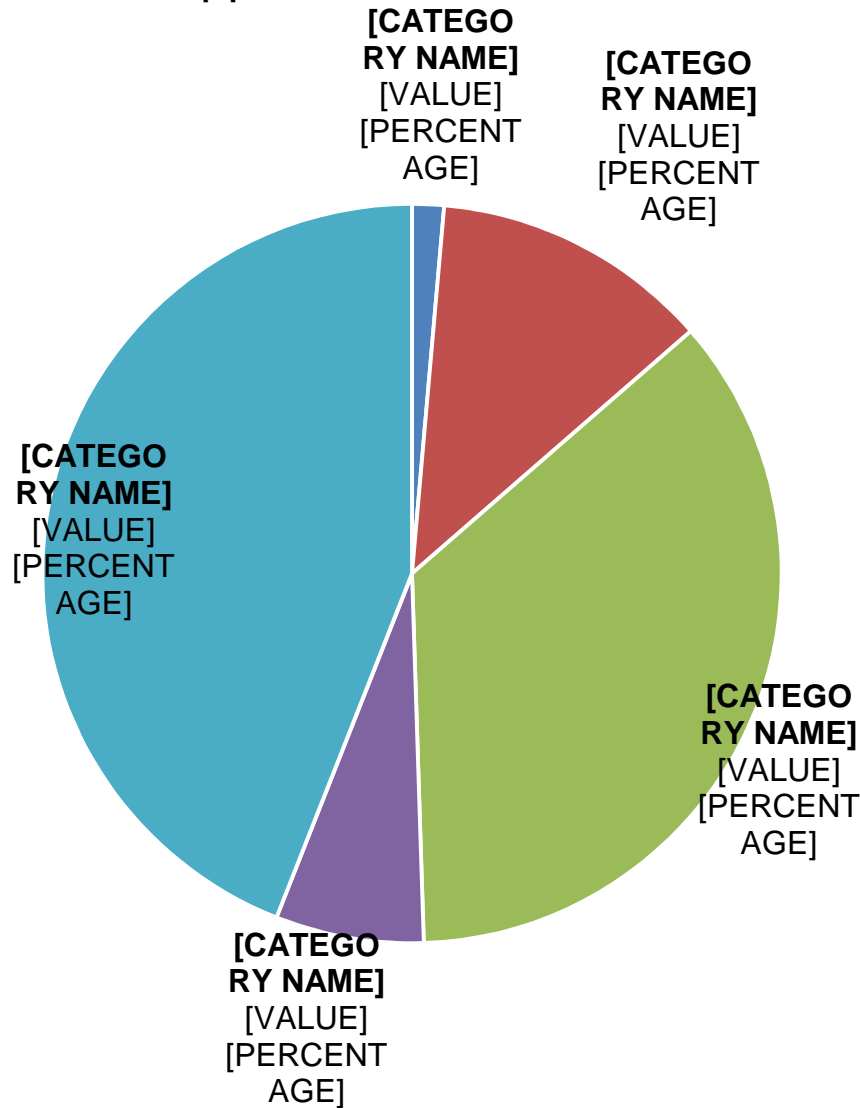
- **Prevention** – families at risk of homelessness
- **Diversion** – families applying for shelter
- **Rapid Rehousing** – families who are homeless
- **CoactionNet**, community database

Simple application form and screening process

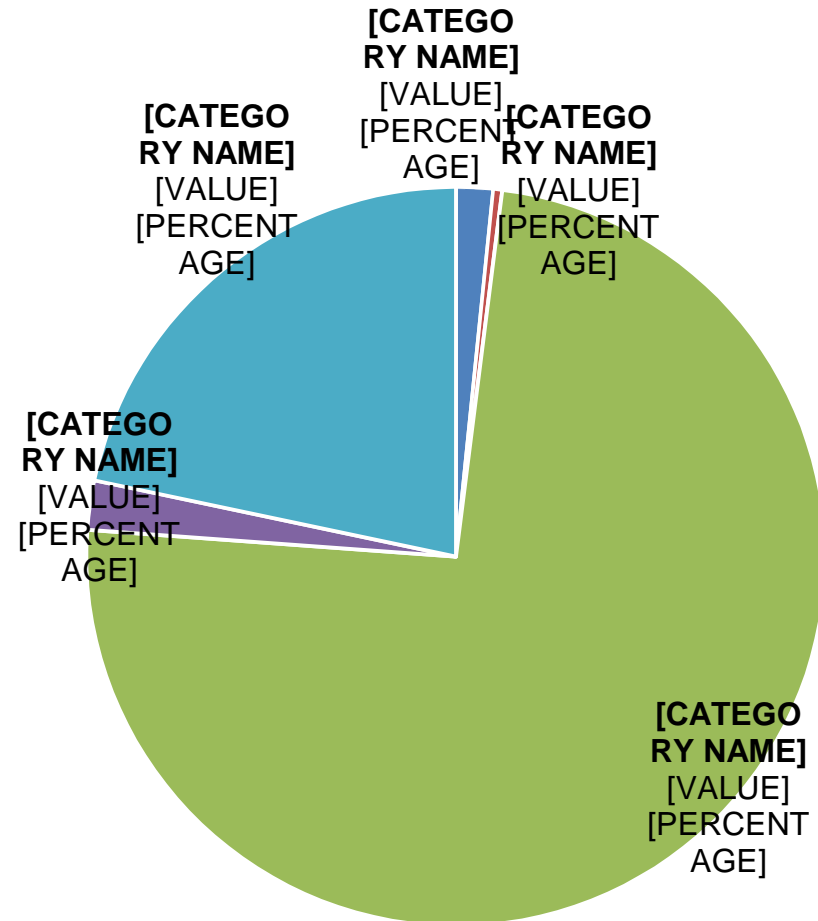
One-stop shop; triage

Central Intake

Applied for Assistance



Received Assistance



Hotline for Homeless Families with Children

- First, establish safety
- Ask about resources
- Try mediating with family, friends—offer incentives
- Be honest about shelter conditions
- Be prepared with resources
- Refer to Emergency Shelter Placement or place in shelter if afterhours

Hotline Outcomes

- Received 4,014 calls since September 2015
- 342 (8.5%) reported being unsheltered
- 61 (3%) had to be sheltered afterhours
- 58% stayed with family/friends or in own place
- 610 referred to Emergency Shelter Placement; 148 (25%) followed through

Emergency Shelter Placement

- Everyone is assessed for diversion
- More in-depth screening than hotline
- May return if mediation fails; 14% came back
- Divert even if there are empty shelter beds
- Established need-based priorities for shelter beds

Emergency Shelter Placement

- 2,133 walked into Central Intake for shelter
- 330 (16%) were referred to shelter
- 66 (20%) did not show up/refused shelter

Lessons Learned

- Shelters reluctant to give outreach to coordinated entry
- Shelters must refuse residents through “side door”
- If shelters do not understand diversion:
 - Confusion for those seeking help
 - Frustration if diversion results in empty beds
- Empty bed is an “easy fix”

Funding

- CDBG, small City grant for Hotline and Emergency Shelter Placement
- Use existing Emergency Services funds to help host families
- Food voucher often enough
- Miscellaneous funds for out-of-town bus fare

What Diversion Is

- A way of doing business with every family
- A conversation to help families find options to shelter
- Helping families understand what shelter is/isn't
- A strengths-based way of helping families be responsible for their outcomes
- A way to reduce the trauma of shelter
- A way to save shelter beds for those most in need

What Diversion Is Not

- Denying services to those in need
- To be used only after you run out of shelter beds
- An option that requires extra funding
- Always easy...it takes work

How Diversion is Working in Memphis, Tennessee

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1. What is the biggest misunderstanding about diversion, and how have you addressed that in your community?
2. What has been the biggest challenge in using a system wide diversion strategy, and how have you met that challenge?
3. What has been your biggest “aha” moment when implementing the diversion philosophy into your crisis response system?

