How Progressive Engagement and Diversion Can Help Your Community End Homelessness

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Homelessness
The Truth about Homelessness

There are three “types” of people who are homeless

- About 80% are “transitionally homeless”
- They are homeless once in their lives, usually for about a week
- They are able to quickly find new housing, and they are never homeless again
- *These are the people the emergency shelter system was designed for*
The Truth about Homelessness

• What about the other two types?
  • About 10% are “episodically homeless”
    o These people cycle in and out of homelessness
  • About 10% are “chronically homeless”
    o These people are homeless for over a year, some for much longer
The Truth about Homelessness

• For these 20%, the common response to homelessness is clearly not working

• Or else wouldn’t they be housed by now?

• Instead, we’ve been seeing an increase, not a decrease, in homelessness
Overcoming History

• Resources are achieved through self-advocacy and persistence, or luck, or first come/served

• The best case managers are the ones that work their way around the system, not through the system – and “side doors” abound

• Experience is used (confused?) as a form of assessment

• Disconnects between emergency side of the homeless service delivery system and the solution side of the service delivery system

• There is no coordinated approach for matching the right person/family to the right resource in the right order
These people are all **homeless**
but they are **not a homogeneous** group
They need to all be **assessed** using a **common tool**, which will determine their **acuity** and the best intervention for them.
These folks have *lower acuity*. They should receive the lightest touch possible.
These folks have *moderate acuity*. They should usually receive *time-limited* financial and/or case management supports.
These folk(s) have *higher acuity*. They usually need a **Housing First** intervention and/or **Permanent Supportive Housing**.
1. Equality: is giving people the same thing/s.
2. Equity: is fairness in every situation.
WHY DO HOMELESS AND HOUSING PROGRAMS EXIST?

- Divert people away from the homeless service delivery system
- Provide a rapid response to those that require an intervention through progressive engagement
- Put an end to chronic and episodic homelessness
- Ensure emergency/crisis responses function relative to their original intent (short-term, infrequent)
- Focus on the only know solution to homelessness – housing!
• A *functional* end to homelessness means no person has to remain homeless longer than 30 days prior to moving directly into *permanent* housing.

• Ending homelessness requires:
  - Shelters working as a process, not a destination
  - Diversion is a service with an outcome
  - Housing-focused conversations
  - Access to permanent housing quickly (less than 60 days)
  - By name registry of all people to be served
End Homelessness by:

• *Closing the front door into homelessness* –
  – Diversion & Prevention/Homelessness Proofing
  – Coordinated Entry
  – Discharge Planning
• *Open the Back Door out of Homelessness* –
  – Housing focused Shelters
  – Housing First
  – Housing Development & Location Services
• *Find the Courage to do things differently* Together
  – Solution Focused Innovation
Visual Images of a Coordinated Entry System
System Map and Roles

Outreach, Emergency Shelter, Day Center -> By Name List: HMIS data creates prioritized by-name list -> Referral: Families are matched with vacancies that meet their needs -> Housing programs

You do:
- Diversion
- Prevention
- Basic Needs/Shelter
- F-VI-SPDAT Assessments
- Document Readiness
- Enter/Exit HMIS data

You do:
- Housing Search and Location
- Administer Subsidy
- Housing Stability Supports
- Broker additional services
- Enter/Exit HMIS data
Let’s Begin With A Bathtub

In a metaphorical bathtub where the water represents people experiencing homelessness, our shared commitment to “ending homelessness” looks like draining the tub.

GOAL = LESS WATER IN TUB
INCOMING WATER = INFLOW
DRAINING WATER = OUTFLOW
System Performance Measurement

Things to consider:

In what ways can we decrease the amount -- sheer quantity -- of people into housing?

In what ways can we reduce bureaucracy, connect supply to demand, and move with an urgency that almost scares others -- but in a good way -- to speed up that process?

In what ways can we provide housing first, not housing only, to support people once they move-in? Can that involve housing options with choice, not placement?

In what ways can we prevent, or rapidly divert, people from experiencing homelessness?
Realities

- There is a difference between WANT and NEED.
- Most people that experience homelessness will do so only once in their life, for a short period of time, and will not experience it ever again.
- Meanwhile, there are a smaller percentage of people that experience episodic homelessness or chronic homelessness.
- We do NOT have an infinite supply of resources, nor do we have more staff and time than we know what to do with.
- Acting like a system requires that we have coordinated access and common assessment.
- All of this occurs within heightened emotional context.
Progressive Engagement
What is Progressive Engagement?

Progressive Engagement is an approach to helping households end their homelessness as rapidly as possible, despite barriers, with minimal financial and support resources.

More supports are offered to those households who struggle to stabilize and cannot maintain their housing without assistance.
Is this an outpatient service? Short term stay? Longer term, more involved situation?
If yes, how ill or injured are they compared to everyone else seeking service?
If yes, do they need to be at a hospital?
Are they ill or injured?

The ER knows who each of these 10 people are by-name if they are ill or injured and need to be at a hospital. The rest of the hospital does not know them. And, the ER does not know all the people who are ill or injured in the community but ARE NOT at the hospital.
Brief interventions. No ongoing, long-term or permanent support required. Expected to recover.

Who does what specialties?
Who has space?
What will be the treatment protocol?
Does the patient want it?

Diverted or quickly treated and discharged, the rest of the hospital does need to know these people.
Presents for Shelter
Diversion
Attempted
Shelter Admission if
Diversion Unsuccessful

Minimal Service
(housing encouragement)
for 14 days

Housing Triage
Acuity Determined
1. Housing First/PSH
2. Rapid Re-Housing
3. No Housing Assistance

Prioritization

WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE
THAT RETURN TO SHELTER?
Minimal Service
(housing encouragement)
for 7 days

WHAT ABOUT LONG-TERM SHELTER STAYERS OR PEOPLE LIVING OUTDOORS?

OUTDOORS?

OR PREVIOUSLY TENT Dwellers FOR 14 DAYS

WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE
Progressive Engagement Practice

- Empower people to demonstrate their resilience and solve their own homelessness through the lightest engagement first.

- Give people an opportunity to demonstrate what they know how to do rather than assuming they know how to do nothing.

- Add more supports when people ask or when it is clearly demonstrated that more support is needed.
Progressive Engagement Practice

- Prevention
- Diversion
- Support consumers with Self-Resolving in shelter
- Shelter is a process, not a destination
- At 14 days, increase services and service planning
- Rapid Re-Housing first, for all
- Assess for intensity of housing stability supports that inform service planning
- More intensive services as needed
Prevention & Diversion
GUIDING PHILOSOPHIES

• When people experiencing a housing crisis can be safely diverted from emergency shelter, the cost savings are not merely financial, but prevent experiences of traumatic and often repeated homelessness.

• Even within a Coordinated Entry System, no single tool, service or agency can effectively end the reality of homelessness within a community alone.

• This remains particularly true for people experiencing first-time housing instability and homelessness as they attempt to access services and supports that do not always align with their specific needs and situations.
GUIDING PHILOSOPHIES

• Homeless and housing services are not always easy to figure out, especially if experiencing homelessness for the first time
• Most organizations work hard to be good at their work – but that doesn’t mean that everyone who comes to the door is a good fit
• “Service shopping” is inefficient and ineffective for people in need and for service organizations
• Helping someone get to the right intervention at the right time to end their homelessness is important
• If someone can end their own homelessness they should be empowered to do so before intensive services are provided
• Eligibility does not equal entitlement
Fundamental Beliefs

• Before a community can embark upon diversion as a system, it needs to embrace core beliefs about what it aims to achieve.
  • Do you believe people are generally resilient?
  • Do you believe that homeless services should be used by people that have no safe and appropriate alternatives?
  • Do you believe in consistency of application of processes like diversion?
  • Who do you want to prioritize for shelter?
Core Principles to Any Diversion or Resolution

• Making people become homeless in order to receive services is a bad idea.

• People are generally resilient. They should be empowered to maximize their resilience.

• Progressive engagement is a good idea.

• Safe and appropriate tenancies take many forms.

• Mediation is a worthwhile endeavor when solving a potential housing crisis.
**TERMINOLOGY**

**Prevention** activities occur before an individual/family has legally lost their ability to reside an address. Sustaining an existing safe, appropriate tenancy.

**Diversion** activities occur once an individual/family has legally lost their housing, but prior to shelter entry. Locating safe, appropriate alternatives to shelter once a person/family has become homeless.

**Rapid or Self Resolution** activities occur within the first two weeks of a shelter stay when an individual/family cannot be diverted.
What is Diversion?

• Diversion is about saying “YES” to helping households navigate a safe alternative to shelter that is appropriate to their circumstances through an investment in staff time by dedicated staff that have specific problem-solving skills and access to flexible resources to put the solution into action.

• Diversion is NOT a refusal of service.

• Diversion should NEVER use assessment too far upstream.
What is Diversion?

• Successful diversion programs treat the process as an opportunity to explore a household’s current housing crisis and be creative about housing options.

• Involves asking about every available resource household might have to stay housed or move directly to other housing.

• Also involves frank conversations about conditions in shelter and likely options after shelter.
WHY IMPLEMENT DIVERSION?

• Improves system outcomes by reducing entries into homelessness
• Improves quality of life by helping people avoid the stress of shelter stays
• Conserves and targets resources – shelter beds used only when needed
• Cuts down on shelter wait lists
• Communities across North America are showing successful diversion for 30 – 50% of shelter seekers, upwards of 80% for families…
HOW DOES IT WORK?!

• Conflict resolution and mediation with landlords/friends/family
• Connection to mainstream services
• Housing search assistance
• Housing stabilization planning
• Limited financial, utility, and/or rental assistance
• Follow up services and service connections
**DIVERSION IN CONTEXT**

- **Diversion & Community-Based Stabilization**
- **Rapid Exit:** Supported Self/Rapid Resolution Most People Resolve Shelter Stays Within 2-4 Weeks
  - **Option 1:** Assistance Accessing Mainstream Benefits
- **Financial Assistance, Health Care, Mainstream Treatment, Children’s Services, Etc.**
- **Option 2:** Rapid Re-Housing
  - Case Management, Shallow Subsidy, Connecting to Mainstream Resources, Etc.
- **Option 3:** Housing First/Permanent Supportive Housing
  - Intensive Case Management, Deeper Subsidy, Etc.

Households have not entered homelessness yet; opportunity to keep them OUT of homelessness and the homelessness response system.
Backbone Premises

• Homeless and housing services are not always easy to figure out

• Most organizations work really hard to be exceptionally good at its work - but that doesn’t mean everyone that comes to its door is a good fit.

• “Service shopping” is inefficient and ineffective for people in need and for service organizations.

• Helping an individual or family get to the right intervention at the right time to end their homelessness is important.

• If a person can end their own homelessness they should be empowered to do so before intensive services are provided.

  – Often youth diversion happens within a shelter setting
For Diversion to Work...

• Diversion IS a service. NOT the absence of service.
• Diversion should NEVER use assessment too far upstream.
• NO over-rides for diversion attempt.
• NOT assessing for assessment sake...NOT about creating waiting lists.
• Diversion must mean a safe option has been identified.
Characteristics of a Diversion Specialist

• Solution-focused
• Objective
• Maintains confidentiality
• Willingness to find alternatives
• Integrity of process
• Impartial to all parties that may influence current situation unless legal duty to report
• Professional boundaries
• Embraces self-determination
• Honesty
Coordinating Residential Solutions

- Assertive Community Treatment
- Hospice Care
- Roommates
- Seniors Services
- Cultural Community Resources
- Family Reunification
- Nursing/Long-term Care
- Youth/Child Services
- Faith Community
- Adult Developmental Services
- Market Housing
- DV Resources
Effective Engagement Strategies

• Think before reacting to what is presented.
• Exercise active listening.
• Focus on the problem, not the emotions.
• Accept responsibility for trying to solve the problem, but do not over-promise or be dismissive from the start.
• Use direct communication. What exactly do they need? Why do they need it? What do you need them to do?
• Focus on the future - not the past.
• Ensure fairness.
Different Scenarios to Consider

1. People homeless for the first time.
2. People that keep coming back to homelessness.
3. People stuck in homelessness and/or not using any of the “usual” homeless services.
4. Diversion for youth has to be grounded in safety and choice
   - Often done while in shelter
Where Is Diversion Happening in Your Community?

Via Coordinated Entry?
Via Agency Referral?
At Your Front Door?
As a Rapid Exit Strategy?
9 Steps to Effective Diversion Practice
STEP ONE: Explain the Process

Explanation of the diversion conversation.

“Our goal is to learn more about your specific housing situation right now and what you need so that together we can identify the best possible way to get you a place to stay tonight and to find safe, permanent housing as quickly as possible. That might mean staying in shelter tonight, but we want to avoid that if at all possible. We will work with you to find a more stable alternative if we can.”
STEP TWO: Today’s Urgency and Untested Options

Why are you seeking emergency shelter today?

What are all the other things you tried before you sought shelter today?

What are all the other things you have thought about trying but have not attempted yet in order to avoid needing shelter today?
STEP THREE: Last Night’s Safety

Where did you stay last night?

a. If staying with someone else, what is the relationship between them and you?
b. How long have you been staying there?
c. Where did you stay before that?
d. Would it be safe for you to stay there again for the next 3-7 days?
e. (If a couple and/or household with children under 18) Would your whole household be able to return and stay there safely for the next 3-7 days?
f. If indicate that the place where they stayed is unsafe, ask why it is unsafe.
g. If cannot stay there safely, or if were staying in a place unfit for human habitation, move to Step Six.
STEP FOUR: Story Behind the Story (At Last Night’s Safe Place)

What is the primary/main reason that you had to leave the place where you stayed last night?

Are there additional reasons why you can’t stay there any longer?
STEP FIVE: What Would it Take to Stay (At Last Night’s Safe Place)

Do you think that you/you and your family could stay there again temporarily if we provide you with some help or referrals to find permanent housing or connect with other services?

If no, why not? What would it take to be able to stay there temporarily?
**STEP SIX: New Place to Stay Temporarily**

If no, is there somewhere else where you/you and your family could stay temporarily if we provide you with some help or referrals to find permanent housing and access other supports?

For example, what about other family members? Friends? Coworkers?

What would it take for you to be able to stay there temporarily?
STEP SEVEN: Identifying Barriers and Assistance Required

What is making it hard for you to find permanent housing for you/you and your family - or connect to other resources that could help you do that?

What do you feel are your barriers?

What assistance do you feel you need?
STEP EIGHT: Current Resources

What resources do you have right now that could help you and your family find a place to stay temporarily or find permanent housing?
STEP NINE: Housing Planning

If admitted to shelter there is still an expectation that you will be attempting to secure permanent housing for you (and your family).

What is your plan at this point for securing housing if you are admitted to shelter?
Progressive Engagement in Case Management

- Understand the context of a client’s situation and concurrent oppressions and traumas
- Support client decision making power
- Set realistic expectations and boundaries
Progressive Engagement in Case Management

- Use assessments to guide service planning - some clients may need thorough guidance or support, and some very little at all
- Understand that how someone experiences homelessness is not how they experience housing. The past does not predict the future
Progressive Engagement in Case Management

- Housing stability goes beyond financial assistance
- Housing stability services are critical for success in housing

Tools:
- Critical Time Intervention
  - short-term intervention for people adjusting to a “critical time” of transition in their lives.
- SPDAT or other assessment to determine acuity and to inform service planning, and when acuity has stabilized
Progressive Engagement in Practice

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Thank you!