

Diversions Training

Diversions is a strategy that 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 return to permanent housing. Diversions programs can reduce the number of individuals/families becoming homeless, the demand for shelter beds, and the size of program wait lists. The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and the National Alliance to End Homelessness encourage communities to include diversions as an important part of Coordinated Entry efforts, particularly for families.

Distinguishing Diversions from Other Interventions

The services individuals/families are provided with when being diverted are services that caseworkers in most poverty and homeless assistance organizations are already trained and funded to deliver. They include:

- Provision of financial, utility, and/or rental assistance;
- Short-term case management;
- Conflict mediation;
- Connection to mainstream services (services that come from agencies outside of the homeless assistance system, such as welfare agencies) and/or benefits; and
- Housing search.

The main difference between diversions and other permanent housing-focused interventions centers on the point at which intervention occurs, as *Table 1* below shows. Prevention targets people at imminent risk of homelessness, diversions targets people as they are applying for entry into shelter, and rapid re-housing targets people who are already homeless.

Table 1: Prevention, Diversions and Rapid Re-housing

Consumer’s Housing Situation	Intervention Used	Services Provided (In All Interventions)
AT IMMINENT RISK OF LOSING HOUSING (precariously housed and not yet homeless)	PREVENTION	Housing Search, Rental Subsidy, Other Financial Assistance, Utility Assistance, Case Management, Mediation, Connection to Mainstream Resources, Legal Services
REQUESTING SHELTER (at the “front door” or another program/system entry point seeking a place to stay)	DIVERSION	
IN SHELTER (homeless/in the homeless assistance system)	RAPID RE-HOUSING	

ASSESSING FOR DIVERSION ELIGIBILITY

Assessment and service delivery for the interventions referenced in *Table 1* would ideally begin at the system entry point for homeless individuals/families. In systems with a coordinated entry process, the entry point would be the designated access point(s) or “front door(s);” in systems without coordinated entry processes, the system entry point would be whatever program the individual/family comes to first for shelter assistance.

Once individuals/families come to the access point, they should be assessed to determine what housing needs they have. To determine which individuals/families are appropriate for diversion, access point staff will need to ask a few specific questions, such as:

- **Where did you sleep last night?** *If they slept somewhere where they could potentially safely stay again, this might mean they are good candidates for diversion.*
- **What other housing options do you have for the next few days or weeks?** *Even if there is an option outside of shelter that is only available for a very short time, it’s worth exploring if this housing resource can be used.*
- **(If staying in someone else’s housing) What issues exist with you remaining in your current housing situation? Can those issues be resolved with financial assistance, case management, etc.?** *If the issues can be solved with case management, mediation, or financial assistance (or all of the above), diversion is a good option.*
- **(If coming from their own unit) Is it possible/safe to stay in your current housing unit? What resources would you need to do that (financial assistance, case management, mediation, transportation, etc.)?** *If the individual/family could stay in their current housing with some assistance. Systems should focus on a quick prevention-oriented solution that will keep individuals/families in their unit.*

Individuals/Families typically meet with a case manager to start housing stabilization planning immediately after being assessed and deemed appropriate for diversion. Housing planning involves both finding immediate housing and planning for longer term housing stability. If an immediate alternate housing arrangement cannot be made, a shelter stay is likely the most appropriate option.

Some individuals/families may not be good candidates for diversion programs due to a lack of safe and appropriate housing alternatives and require immediate admittance to shelter, e.g. individuals/families fleeing domestic violence. Individual’s/Families’ safety should always be the top consideration when thinking through what intervention fits them best.

Diversion is a prevention activity meant to take place at the shelter door, not once they are staying there. It is not meant to be a barrier to shelter.

Remember that homelessness is a crisis and people are usually not at their best when they are under stress.

Outcomes

During Strength Exploration, consider their current and past Housing History, Income History, and whether every option is safe and appropriate. Whether it is:

Permanently back
with friends or
family

Return to their
own residence

Temporarily
diverted as they
seek new housing

Relocating
permanently to
safe place out of
town

Permanently Back with Family & Friends: When there is no better option, no housing history, no income history consider how to get them permanently back with family and friends. Look for how the client can contribute to the household and how the client can use this time for further education or employment. Consider services that could also be used to help them contribute. Such as if they can provide childcare, or transportation through bus passes, food from food pantries, or other assistance cleaning or cooking around the home. Remember: is the situation **safe** and **appropriate**.

Return to their own Residence: This outcome may come from a “walk-away” client where you can provide assistance with current or back rent to keep them housed, a non-domestic violence relationship that can be resolved or where compromise is possible, or previous places they have lived with parents or other relationships.

Temporarily Diverted as they seek new housing: For someone who wants to live independently and has done so successfully in the past with current or past income history, help them think through a plan of where to stay until that is possible, with diversion support for new independent housing.

Relocating permanently to a safe place out of town: If there is a safe and appropriate host within the client’s support system which will agree to host them for at least 30 days, they can be diverted through assistance with travel and logistics.

Techniques and Approaches

Conflict Resolution Approach:

This approach recognizes that homelessness is a crisis. Just like a person in crisis, a homeless individual is often less able to think through their problems clearly and advocate for themselves than if they were not in crisis.

Empowerment Client-Centered:

Do not assume what people need. Instead, help them articulate their needs. You want to empower them to identify their own safe and appropriate housing options and help them regain control over their lives.

Strength-Based Approach:

Help clients identify the strengths, successes, and resources that they have used in the past to help them now with their episode of homelessness.

Active Listening:

Active Listening is key to diversion and empowerment. Ask open-ended questions, paraphrase to acknowledge what you are being told. Avoid taking notes, as this can make it feel less like a conversation. Avoid judgmental verbal and body language.

Practice:

- R** – *Relaxed*
- O** – *Open*
- L** – *Leaning towards the speaker*
- E** – *Eye Contact*
- S** – *Squared towards the speaker*

Empathy:

The intimate comprehension of another person's thoughts and feelings without adding our own judgement or expectations.

(National Alliance on Mental Illness)

Reality Therapy:

This is when you go over client's ideas and expectations and consider concerns of how realistic those are. These questions should be open-ended and not judgmental.

Non-Judgmental Reality Testing:

- How would that look?
- Have you done something like this before?
- What other options have you considered?
- What resources do you have to carry this out?

ADAPTED FROM [HTTP://ENDHOMELESSNESS.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2011/08/CREATING-A-SUCCESSFUL-DIVERSION-PROGRAM.PDF](http://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/creating-a-successful-diversion-program.pdf) AND [HTTP://CEH.ORG/SHELTER-DIVERSION-TRAINING/](http://ceh.org/shelter-diversion-training/)

Additional Diversion Resources

[What is Diversion?](#)

OrgCode diversion 101 training video.

[Coordinated Entry Toolkit: Core Elements](#)

Toolkit from the National Alliance to End Homelessness for implementing Coordinated Entry.

[Closing the Front Door: Creating a Successful Diversion Program for Homeless Families](#)

This guide from the National Alliance to End Homelessness covers best practices for establishing and administrating an effective diversion program for homeless families and gives a closer look to what diversion can look like for clients.

[The Three C's of Diversion](#)

Guide from National Alliance to End Homelessness on the three common themes of diversion.

[Characteristics of an Exemplary Diversion Specialist](#)

OrgCode Consulting published this guide to the characteristics of an exemplary diversion specialist to highlight the best practices in staffing any diversion program to improve results.

[Sample Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool](#)

An assessment tool sample provided by The National Alliance to End Homelessness based on Minneapolis/Hennepin County, Minnesota's, and Columbus, Ohio's assessment forms.

[Sample Client Support Map](#)

This is a sample template created by the National Alliance to End Homelessness to help clients and support workers create a clear view of their resources in terms of community assistance and resources, friends, families, and their own abilities.

[Shelter Diversion Training](#)

A guide from the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness for Shelter Diversion Training.

[A Guide to Shelter Diversion for Program Directors and Management](#)

This resource focuses on the role of management, executive directors, boards, and funders in making shelter diversion part of their organization's role in preventing and ending homelessness.

[Connecticut CAN Assessment Diversion Outline](#)

This is an example from a community in Connecticut. This is a guide on using Diversion in each and every CAN appointment, from how to introduce yourself and actively listen, to moving forward with your client.

[Connecticut CAN Assessment Worksheet](#)

Example from the Connecticut Coordinated Access Network of their step by step guide to the CAN assessment with tips and reminders on key diversion techniques.

[New London Shelter Diversion Report](#)

This report is a community example of the results of shelter diversion strategies on homeless families in New London County, Connecticut from 2013-2015.