Metro Denver Community Learning Collaborative Diversion

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Agenda
1. Welcome, Context, and Introductions
2. Presentation on Diversion
3. Diversion Work Underway in Metro Denver
4. Small Group Activity: Client Examples
5. Next Steps for Systemwide Diversion
6. Wrap-Up

Project Overview and Timeline

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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
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<tr>
<td>Project Start Up</td>
<td>July 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-Person Learning Collaborative Meetings</td>
<td>Sept. 2017 - Oct. 2017</td>
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<td>Key Stakeholder Interviews</td>
<td>Sept. 2017 - Oct. 2017</td>
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<td>Stakeholder Input Report</td>
<td>Fall 2017 - Fall 2017</td>
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<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>Fall 2017 - Fall 2017</td>
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We believe the HEARTH Act and Opening Doors lead the way to finally ending homelessness.

ABOUT FOCUS STRATEGIES

Ending Homelessness

*The HEARTH Act establishes:*
“...a Federal goal of ensuring that individuals and families who become homeless return to permanent housing within 30 days.”

*Opening Doors, As Amended in 2015:*
“systematic response ...that ensures homelessness is ...a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.”

Principles of a Housing Crisis Response System

- Housing-focused
- Person-centered
- Data-informed
- Effective use of resources
Focus Strategies/MDHI Learning Collaborative: Diversion and Problem-Solving

A System to End Homelessness

Ending homelessness means building systems that:
• Divert people from entering homelessness
• Quickly engages and provides a suitable intervention for every households’ homelessness
• Have short lengths of stay in programs
• Have high rates of permanent housing exits
• Use data to achieve continuous improvement

Homeless Crisis Response System

Performance Data

Analysis of performance data tells us:
• Extent to which homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring
• Where to target efforts to become more effective
• How to prioritize system and program resources
• How to achieve continuous improvement
Introduction To
DIVERSION
(AKA HOUSING PROBLEM-SOLVING)

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What is “Shelter Diversion”?
A strategy that prevents homelessness by helping people experiencing a housing crisis and seeking shelter to preserve their current housing situation or make immediate alternative arrangements without having to enter shelter.

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What is “Diversion” or “Housing Problem Solving”?
A strategy that addresses and prevents homelessness by empowering people to:
• Return immediately to housing;
• Without having to enter shelter or a housing subsidy program; and
• Utilize safe and available permanent and temporary housing options.
What About Prevention?

• Many people experience a housing crisis – far fewer actually become homeless
• Traditional prevention starts further upstream and often screens out those closest to homelessness
• Traditional prevention has not been shown to reduce homelessness

Why Diversion/Problem-Solving?

1) Resiliency and adaptation are powerful!
2) As long as it’s safe, non-shelter keeps people in charge of driving their solutions.
3) Not enough resources for every homeless household.
4) Not everyone will go to a shelter.
5) Shelter, no matter how nice, has negative effects on people.

Reasons to Implement Problem-Solving

... For the client
1. Gives people something in the NOW.
2. YES answer rather than a “no” or “not now” answer.
3. Empowering.
4. Helps people stay out of the system.
Focus Strategies/MDHI Learning Collaborative: Diversion and Problem-Solving

Reasons to Implement Problem-Solving

... For the system
1. Saves shelter for those who truly have no other options.
2. Allows resolution at much lower cost.
3. Adds efficient use of system resources by "right-sizing" the services to the person.
4. Prevention for those seeking shelter that preserves housing.
5. Shifts people from "homeless" to "at-risk of homelessness."

Who Can Be Diverted?

- HMIS data shows that many people who enter shelter or housing programs for people experiencing homelessness are not literally homeless. They may be staying temporarily with family or friends, in motels, or may still have their own housing.
- Even some who are unsheltered can be diverted into an appropriate housing situation without a shelter stay.

Diversion is Problem-Solving

- Successful diversion programs explore a household’s current housing crisis, provide concrete problem-solving advice, and are creative about housing options.
- Explores every available resource to keep the household housed.
- Engages in frank conversations about the realities of shelter living and likely options after shelter.
Desired Problem-Solving Outcomes

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<td>Relocating permanently to safe place out of town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Return to their own residence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Permanently back with friends or family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Temporarily rehoused as they seek new housing</td>
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A Shift in Approach

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<th>TO</th>
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<td>Are you willing to enter shelter?</td>
<td>What can we do to keep you from entering shelter?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What programs are you eligible to enter and who has a bed?</td>
<td>What would resolve your current housing crisis?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment/eligibility</td>
<td>Structured problem-solving conversation about household situation and resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intake or placement on waitlist</td>
<td>Supporting immediate crisis resolution</td>
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Diversion Questions

- Why are you seeking shelter or housing assistance?
- Where are you living?
- Can you stay where you are? Why not? What steps could you take to make it possible to stay?
- Where have you lived before?
- How can you secure this type of housing situation again?
**REALLY** Creative Problem-Solving

- Helps people:
  - Explore a household’s current housing crisis & be creative about housing options
  - Determine if it’s possible to stay anywhere else that’s safe, other than a shelter
  - Discuss every available resource to stay housed or move directly to other housing
  - Have frank conversations about conditions in shelter and likely options after shelter

**Conflict Resolution Approach**

- **Homelessness or potential homelessness is a crisis** – as in conflict, persons in crisis are less able to clearly think through problems and advocate for themselves than they are when not in crisis.
- **First, listen and validate** their experience. Be non-judgmental.
- **Be client-centered.** Don’t assume what people need; help them articulate their needs.

**Necessary Personal Skills**

- Patience while working with over-stressed people.
- Belief it can work for some households; willingness to try it, learn what works and what doesn’t, adjust and refine.
- Healthy curiosity without judgment.
- Asking questions that help the person to identify/own solutions.
- Willingness to explore many options.
- Creativity in discussing areas of interpersonal conflict in living situations & solutions.
- Strengths-based approach.
- Other learned skills and best practices (MI, TIC, HR).
Don’t Forget About Biology

- Fight or flight (Amygdala)
- Prefrontal cortex and executive functioning

And...

What Problem-Solving is not...

≠

1. Case Management
2. RRH
3. Pre-screening or holding spot for other system resources
4. Anti-poverty initiative
5. Knowing the outcomes 100%

Designing a Systemwide Diversion Function: Options to Consider

- Location Options
- Targeting Options
- Assistance Options
Location Options

Diversion can happen at all the places where people go to seek shelter and housing assistance:
- By phone (211 Call Center or coordinated entry call center)
- At physical “front door” of Centralized or Coordinated Intake system
- At shelter door

Targeting Options

There are different ways to target diversion activities:
- Only for families with children
- Only for people who have already lost their housing or are very close to losing it (within 3 days)
- Every household seeking admission to shelter
- Every household connecting with Coordinated Entry
- Only for those who meet certain eligibility criteria

Assistance Options

- Coaching and problem-solving
- 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
- Flexible support (e.g. bus ticket, gas card, gift card)
Community Examples

- Montgomery County, PA
- Pierce County, WA (Tacoma)
- Cleveland, OH

Montgomery County, PA

- Diversion takes place over the phone at CES Call Center
- Both families and single adults are eligible
- No eligibility criteria – they attempt diversion with all households seeking shelter
- Diversion is an activity, rather than a program
- Primarily coaching in shared living skills; problem-solving

Montgomery County (Cont.)

- Most people are assisted to preserve their shared housing situation or find another shared situation
- Financial assistance available, but rarely used
- Example: Mediation with roommates and family members; advice on how to be a good roommate
Pierce County (Tacoma), WA

- Diversion takes place at CES central location, at same-day shelter, outdoors through mobile outreach team
- Initial phone call, then in-person problem-solving appointment
- Diversion attempted with everyone as a first step (families, adults, youth)
- No screening for eligibility

Pierce County, WA

- Focus on problem-solving and mediation
- Help with identifying a housing solution – own rental, shared housing, return to family
- Limited financial assistance is available (amount varies, depending on resources)

Cleveland, OH

- Initial call to 211
- If literally homeless and in need of shelter, sent to Centralized Intake, co-located at shelters
- CI worker conducts initial assessment and refers people who can be diverted to Cleveland Mediation Center staff located in the shelter
- Services include mediation, conflict resolution, financial assistance, housing search
Cleveland, OH (cont.)

CMC conflict resolution approach:
• Based on Transformative Mediation Theory
• Homelessness is a crisis – people in crisis are not able to clearly problem-solve and advocate for themselves
• Mission is to listen, validate, build capacity to act
• Client centered – help client mine strengths and resources they have used in the past to help them with their current episode of homelessness

For additional information and resources on diversion...

• National Alliance to End Homelessness:
  • https://endhomelessness.org/resource/shelter-diversion-and-prevention-for-families/
  • https://endhomelessness.org/resource/homelessness-prevention-creating-programs-that-work/
  • https://b.3cdn.net/naeh/b1438c096d53c40b2_e16h6n601.pdf

• Funders Together to End Homelessness:
  • https://d3n8a8pro7vbm.cloudfront.net/funderstogether/pages/271/attachments/original/1389018175/HEARTH-Brief-Targeting-Prevention-Expanding-Diversion.pdf?1389018175

• Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness:
  • http://www.cceh.org/provider-resources/shelter-diversion/

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