

Making a Little Go a Long Way

Understanding Diversion and Progressive Engagement in Systems to End Homelessness

Katharine Gale Consulting

April 26, 2017

Rialto, CA

Workshop Outline

1. Purpose and elements of a coordinated system response to addressing homelessness
2. An introduction to diversion and housing problem solving
3. An introduction to progressive engagement as a system strategy (within and across interventions)
4. Key steps to operationalize progressive engagement and diversion

A Quick Look at the System Overall

What is a System?

- Many parts
- Doing different things
- Working together
- Toward a common goal



Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan

“Transform homeless services
to **crisis response systems**
that prevent homelessness and
rapidly return people who experience
homelessness to stable housing.”

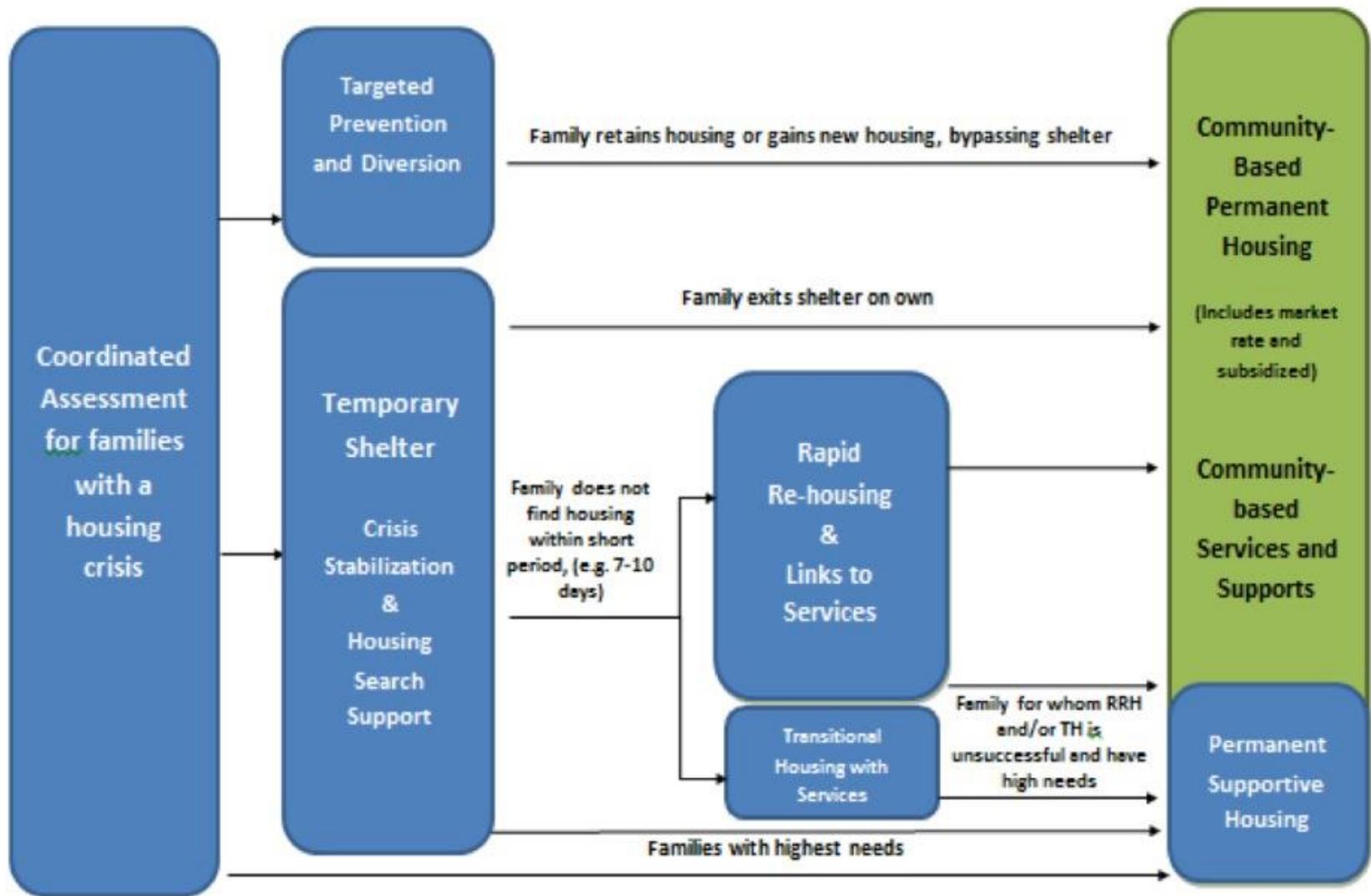


Diagram of Crisis Response System
 From Family Connection, US Interagency Council on Homelessness

How to have an Effective System

In a world of limited resources:

- People should not be encouraged to enter the system if they can avoid it
- People leave the system as soon as possible with the least help possible to resolve the crisis
- People should move through it quickly and not get stuck or be waiting for help

In a word, FLOW!

A word or two about Coordinated Entry...

Coordinated Entry is **NOT** primarily about

- Assessing everyone and giving them a score
- Getting everyone on a list
- Filling open slots or units as they come open

A word or two about Coordinated Entry...

Coordinated Entry **IS** about

- Quickly filling the openings we have with the people who need them *the most* and who historically we skipped; *and*
- Identifying strategies to serve the larger population that cannot immediately be housed with available resources
- Getting rid of waiting!
- Coordinated Entry is about making sure everyone has an EXIT!

What do Diversion and Progressive Engagement have in common?

- Explicitly recognize we don't have a deep resources for everyone
- Try to resolve the crisis as quickly as possible
- Use client's ingenuity and resources as part of solution
- Flexible approaches that meet people where they are
- Two approaches that are demonstrated to increase flow!

Focus on Diversion

Read “Between Homes” ...



Thoughts?

BETWEEN HOMES

DEE ALLEN

About more times
Than I could count
All ten fingers
All ten toes,

I have lived
Between homes.

Existed in that
All too common
Space of homelessness
Indoors.

A friend's apartment,
A friend's company,
Their living room couch
Where I sought rest in the mean-
time,
Their wooden floor
Where my luggage sat,
Their lavatory where I
Cleansed my lean self
From wooly black head to toe
In the shower and
Shaved over their face-bowl,
Their kitchen where I warmed up
Or slapped together vegetarian
Miracles to please my tongue
with.

A temporary arrangement

But time spent upon
A couch I'd visited
Often sure enough beats

The parking lot asphalt
Hard against you back,
The commands of harassing cops
GO! MOVE! KICK ROCKS!
The jail-like atmosphere
Of public shelters,
The shelter curfew
That traps you in at nightfall
And kicks you out at daybreak,
The fear of having your
Luggage stolen in your
Sleep by far needier hands,
The unspoken hate
In another's eyes
Upon seeing you carry
Luggage and sleeping-bag down
This street and that,
The unhoused condition out-
doors
The housed assume
Won't happen to them-----

About more times
Than I could count
All ten fingers
All ten toes,

What is Diversion?

A strategy that addresses and prevents homelessness by helping people seeking assistance to:

- Return immediately to housing,
- Without having to enter temporary shelter or a housing program, and
- Utilizing safe and available permanent and temporary housing options.

What is Homelessness Prevention?

- Assistance aimed to help low-income households resolve a crisis that could otherwise lead to a loss of housing.
- Most common prevention methods include short-term financial assistance, legal assistance, housing case management, or all of these.

Challenges with Prevention

- Every year many people experience a housing crisis -- far fewer actually become homeless
- Traditional prevention often screens out those closest to homelessness
 - Not considered a “good risk”
 - Living situation (e.g. hotel, doubled up) not assisted
- Traditional prevention has not been shown to significantly reduce homelessness

Prevention: Efficiency and Effectiveness

“It is relatively easy to offer prevention activities, but difficult to develop an effective community-wide strategy. Such a prevention strategy needs to offer *effective* prevention activities and do so *efficiently*.”

(Burt et al. 2007, p.xvii, italics in original)

Effectiveness and Efficiency (cont.)

- “Effective activities must be capable of stopping someone from becoming homeless or ending their homelessness quickly.
- An *efficient system* must target well, delivering its effective activities to people who are very likely to become homeless unless they receive help.”

(Burt et al. 2007, p.xvii, italics in original)



Why Diversion?

- Household is showing that they are in a crisis that is leading to homelessness NOW
- Not enough resources for every homeless household
- As long as it's safe, non-shelter keeps people in charge of driving their solutions
- Not everyone will go to a shelter
- Shelter, no matter how nice, has negative effects on people
- Resiliency and adaptation are powerful

Other names for Diversion

- Housing Counseling
- Housing Problem Solving
- Problem Solving

Reasons to Implement Diversion

... For the client

- Gives people something in the NOW.
- YES answer rather than a “no” or “not now” answer.
- Empowering.
- Helps people stay out of the system.

Reasons to Implement Diversion

... For the system

- Saves shelter and housing programs for those who truly have no other options.
- Allows resolution at much lower cost.
- Adds efficient use of system resources by “right-sizing” the services to the person.
- In some cases, preserves relatively more affordable housing situations.

Who can be diverted?

- HMIS data shows many who enter shelter are not literally homeless – they are often staying with family or friends, sometimes in motels, or may still have their own housing.
- HMIS data also shows many people *leave* system for family and friends
- Even some who are literally homeless 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

A Shift in Approach

FROM	TO
Assessment of need and vulnerability	Structured problem solving conversation about household situation and resources
Intake or put on waitlist	Support crisis resolution to avoid system entry
Are you willing to enter shelter?	What can we do to <i>keep you</i> from entering shelter?
What programs are you eligible to enter and who has a bed?	What would resolve your current housing crisis?

But.. is Diversion ethical?

- Not enough beds for all who present in need
- Without diversion many beds going to those who have shelter now, other people remain unsheltered
- A shelter is not housing, can be traumatizing, (Longer stays in shelter associated with greater problems for children.)
- Misperception that shelter gets you something
- It builds on most “normal” response to crisis and keeps support networks in tact

A true story...

Examples of Diversion Questions

- Why are you seeking shelter (or assistance)?
- Where are you living/staying?
- Can you stay safely where you are? What steps might make it possible to stay?
- Where have you lived before?
- How can you secure this type of housing situation again?
- What will you do if we are unable to assist you? What have you done in the past?

Diversion Truths

- There are not enough resources in the system to assist everyone
- Even if you go to a shelter you may not receive additional assistance
- Here is what it is like in shelter....

REALLY Creative Problem-Solving

- 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

And...

What Diversion is not...



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

Assistance Options

- Coaching and problem-solving
- Conflict resolution and mediation with landlords/friends/family
- Connection to mainstream services
- Housing search assistance and stabilization planning
- *Limited* financial assistance

Making a Diversion Plan...

- How do you feel about carrying out this plan?
- I can help you with that by making some phone calls with you or talking with you to your friends/family/landlord. Do you want to do that now?

Where does it happen?

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

Limited Financial Assistance...

- Not every case needs financial assistance
- Use for immediate needs
- Flexible is key

Examples of costs:

- the usual: deposit, utilities, rent
- *the less usual: bus tickets, grocery cards, gas cards
- the *really unusual*: flooring, pest extermination

Community Examples

- Montgomery County, PA
- Pierce County, WA (Tacoma)
- New London, CT

Montgomery County, PA

- Diversion takes place primarily over the phone with Housing Resource Center staff (occasionally in person)
- Both families and single adults are eligible
- No eligibility criteria – they attempt diversion with all households seeking shelter
- Diversion is an activity, not a program
- Primarily coaching and 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
- Currently @60% success rate

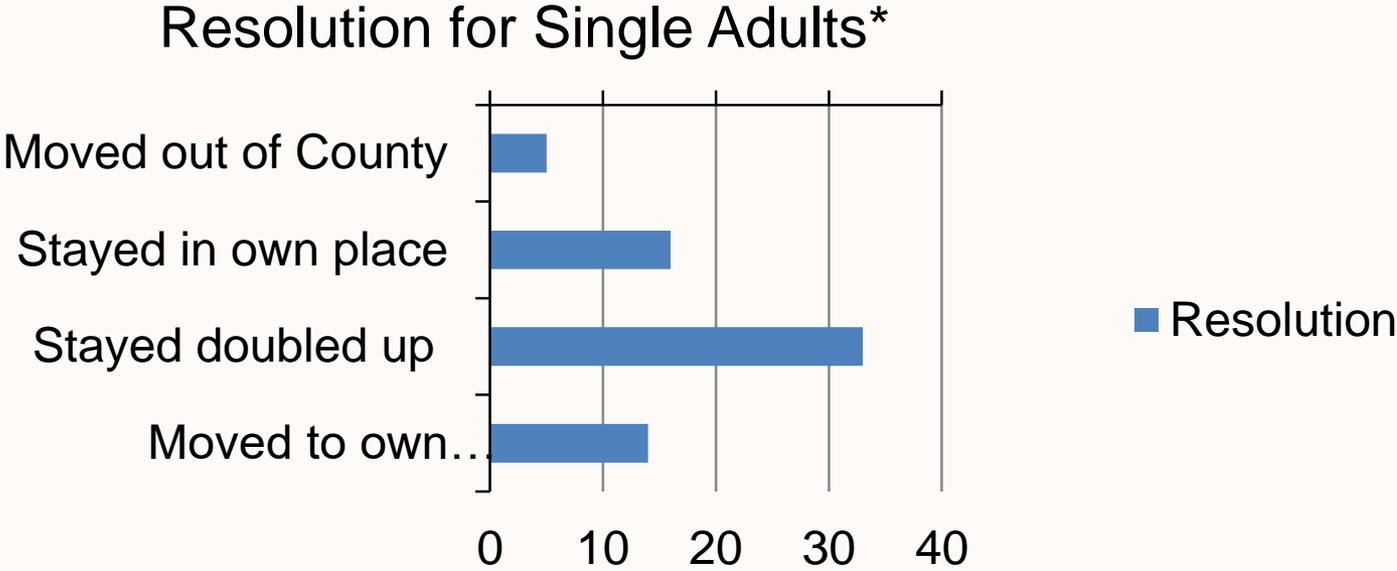
YWH Diversion Stats

Average diversion client income	\$1,325
Percent of clients with no income	24%
Percent of clients with income over \$700	50%
Percent of clients who moved to own housing	14%
Percent of clients who stayed doubled up	33%
Percent of clients who stayed in own place	16%
Percent of clients who moved out of county	5%
Percent of clients diverted over phone	85%
Percent of diversion cases handled in one hour or less	85%

Source: Your Way Home Clarity HMIS Records 1/1/15- 5/31/15

YWH Diversion Results

Between January and June 2015, 217 people avoided shelter through Your Way Home's diversion pilot project, a 64% success rate.



*24% had zero income; 26% had monthly income of \$699 or less; 50% had monthly income of \$700 or more.

Source: Your Way Home Clarity HMIS Records 1/1/15- 5/31/15

New London, CT

- Initial call to 211
- In person assessment; diversion explored with *every* family
- Case manager explores options, clarifies what shelter is and isn't, helps make a plan with family
- Services include mediation, conflict resolution, financial assistance, housing search, relocation

New London, CT

Cost is two-thirds average cost of Shelter and Re-Housing *

- FY 2013 – \$ 1,814
- FY 2014 – \$ 1,763
- FY 2015 – \$ 1,649

* less than half get financial assistance.

New London, CT

- FY 2013 – 50%
 - 332 screenings for shelter: 165 families diverted
- FY 2014 – 49%
 - 366 screenings for shelter: 180 diverted
- FY 2015 – 79%
 - 358 screenings for shelter: 282 diverted
- Family shelters *reduced* their beds from 83 to 53

Pierce County, WA (Tacoma)

- Piloted with Families; Now, Diversion attempted with everyone
- Staff trained in the skills of Diversion—known in Pierce County as “Diversion specialists”—support through focused problem-solving.
- Diversion specialists deliver expertise, encouragement, and a flexible combination of short-term services and one-time financial assistance, if needed

Pierce County, WA

Results

Homeless to Housed in a Hurry

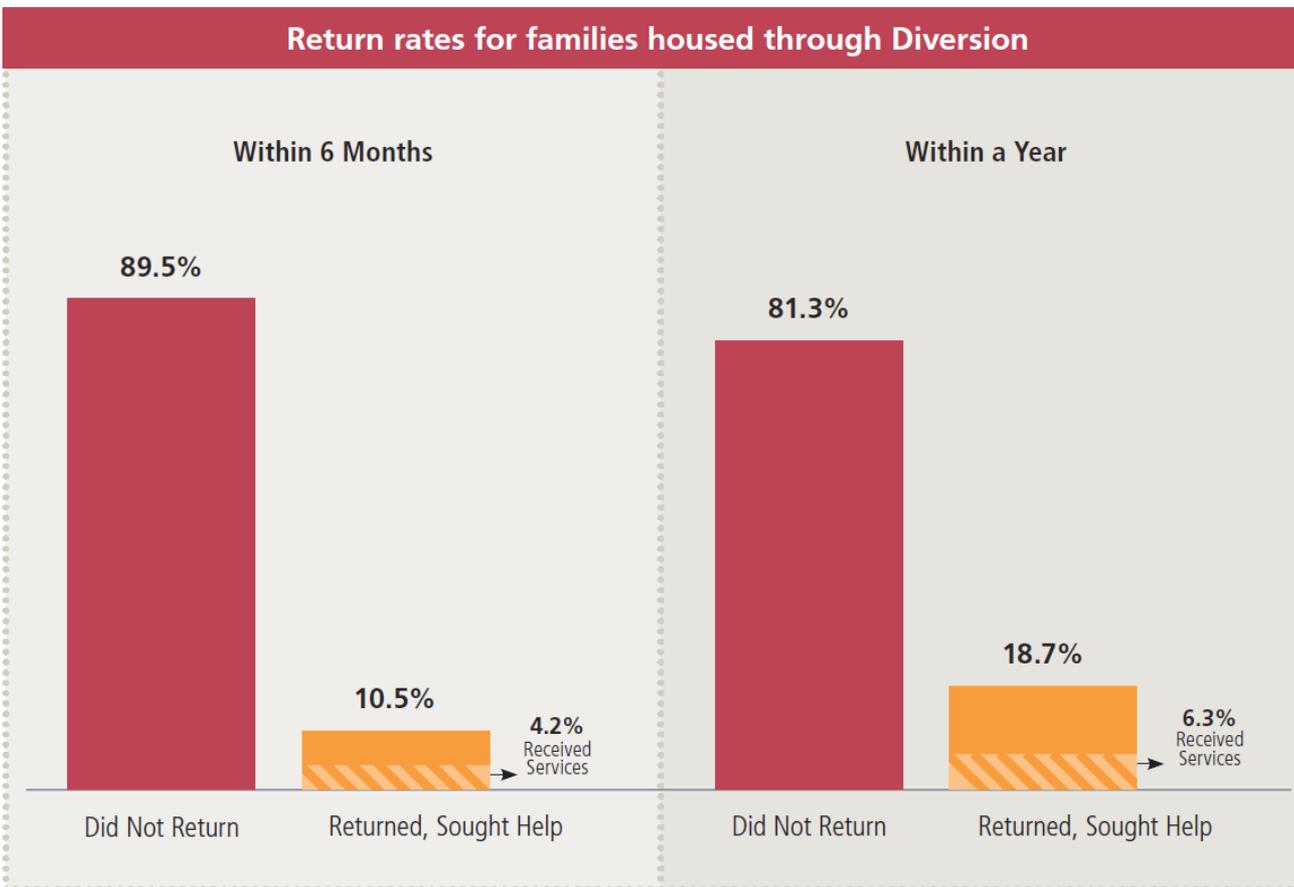
Of the 939 families (households with children) participating in the Pierce County pilot, **more than half were able to obtain safe housing through Diversion**. Among those families, **most secured a place of their own**.



Pierce County, WA

Staying Housed

The *vast majority* of the families that obtained housing through the Diversion pilot *did not return to homelessness within a year*.



Discussion

- What do you like about this approach?
- What concerns you about this approach?
- What would it take to broadly implement diversion here?

Focus on Progressive Engagement

What is Progressive Engagement?

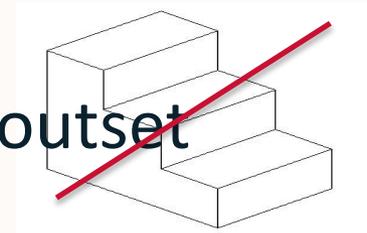
- Approach to helping households end their homelessness as rapidly as possible using the least financial and support resources needed to be successful with each household
- Also sometimes referred to as Progressive Assistance

What is Progressive Engagement?

- Initial offer is a “light-touch” or basic package – typically rapid rehousing
- More supports are offered to those households who struggle to stabilize and cannot maintain housing without assistance
- Approach is flexible and individualized
- Design is informed by what we know about patterns of crisis, change over time, and how people with low-incomes live

What Progressive Engagement is Not

- Not a pre-determined program length or amount for everyone (~~“One Size Fits All”~~)
- Not a pre-determined step down of assistance (~~100%/70%/30%/0~~)
- Not determined time or amounts from outset based on assessment score



~~“He’s a 10 so he gets 12 months”~~

Why Progressive Engagement?

- It's Housing First
- Is based in reality of how crises resolve and circumstances evolve – can't predict everything
- It means people in need don't have to wait as long to be assisted
- It lets us serve more people!

Is PE compatible with Coordinated Entry and Assessment?

- Yes, can be used together...
- BUT, requires some resources are available for people after they try rapid rehousing (need a “backstop”)
- Assessment at time of crisis doesn’t predict future well for many – may use some pre-assessment and some “finding out”
- Use your deep resources at the beginning only when evidence of need is strong and sustained

What about assessment?

- Assessment is critical: Need knowledge of client's relevant history, current plans and desires
- Understand housing barriers to assist, not to refuse assistance
- Develop realistic approach to finding landlords and housing situations
- Ability to link clients to supports in the community

But:

- Assessment up front not always the best way to size the financial assistance or length of time services are offered in rapid re-housing

How do you deliver it?

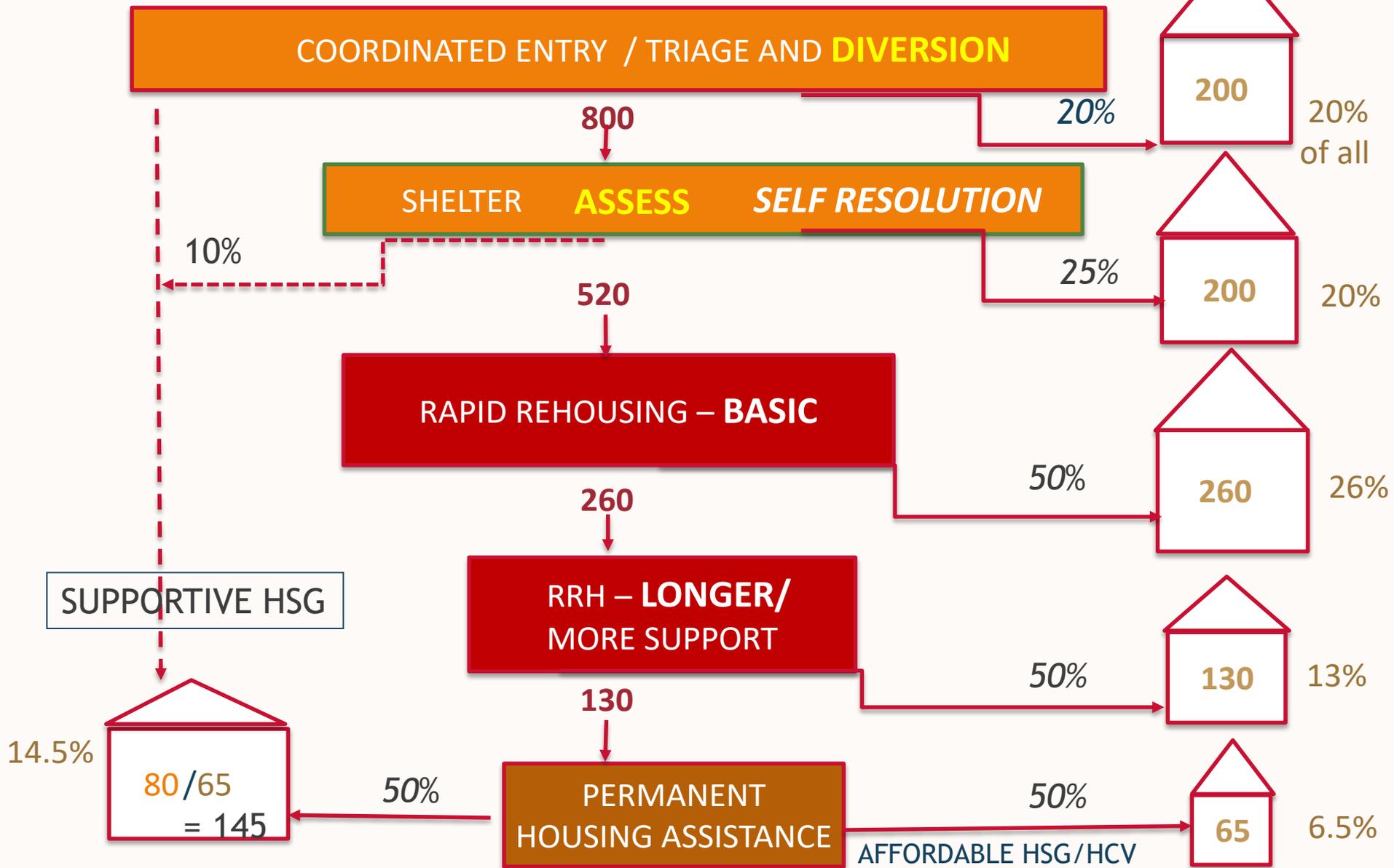
- Clear from the beginning that intended housing support is short but flexible
- Focus on addressing housing entry barriers **first**
- Focus on housing retention barriers that have or are impacting housing retention once housed
- Send message you have confidence in them
- Connect to services they want and need quickly – have to have the connections, especially to employment!

Reassessment

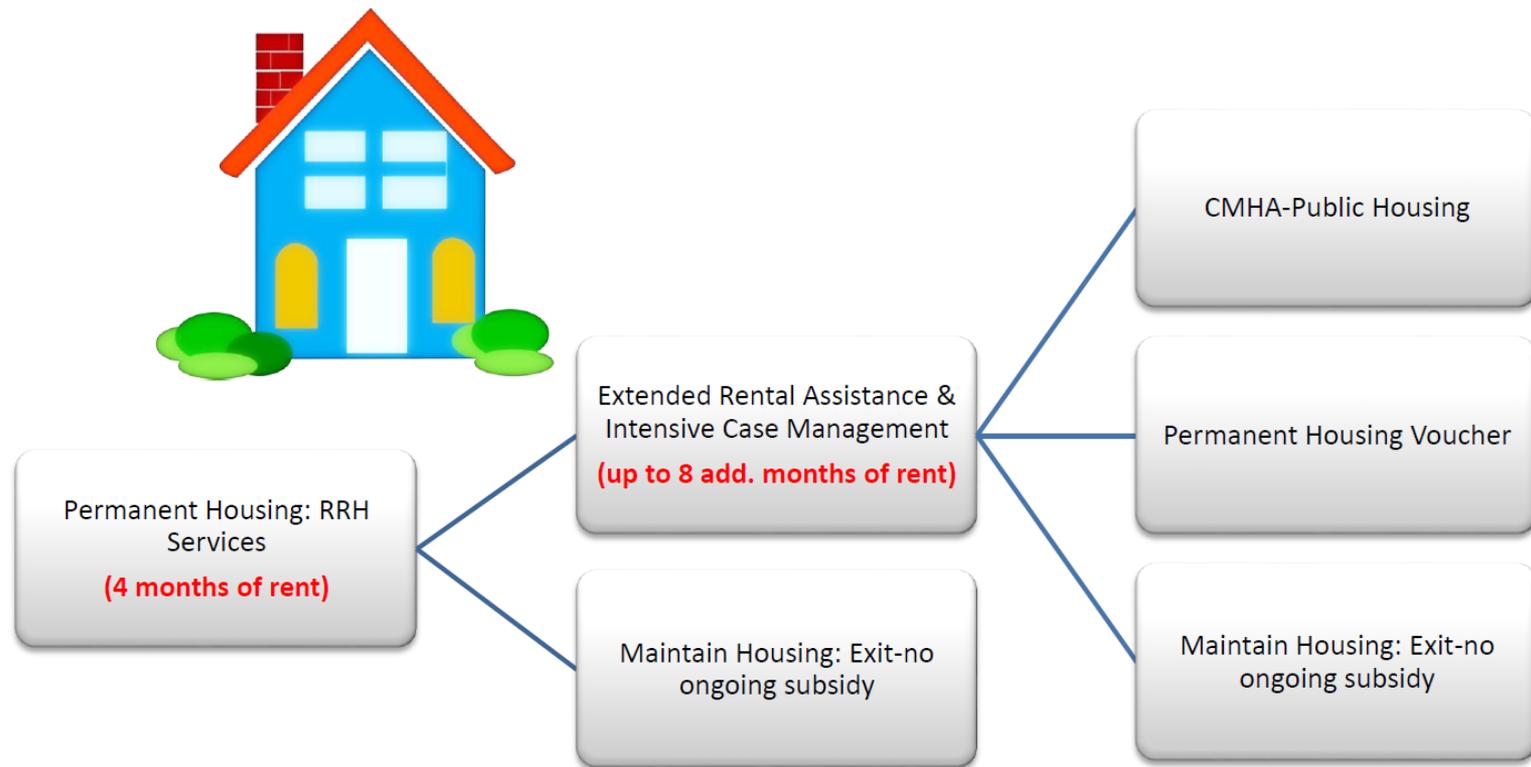
- Use clear *but flexible* criteria for stability assessment –income, lease, connections, choice
- Is there still an active crisis or a new crisis?
- Do other people in similar situations make it?
- Should we stop subsidy but maintain services?
- Should we increase or lower subsidy amount (and why?)
- If really failing and/or higher needs emerging, can we connect to a deeper subsidy or program?

A System Level Picture of Progressive Engagement

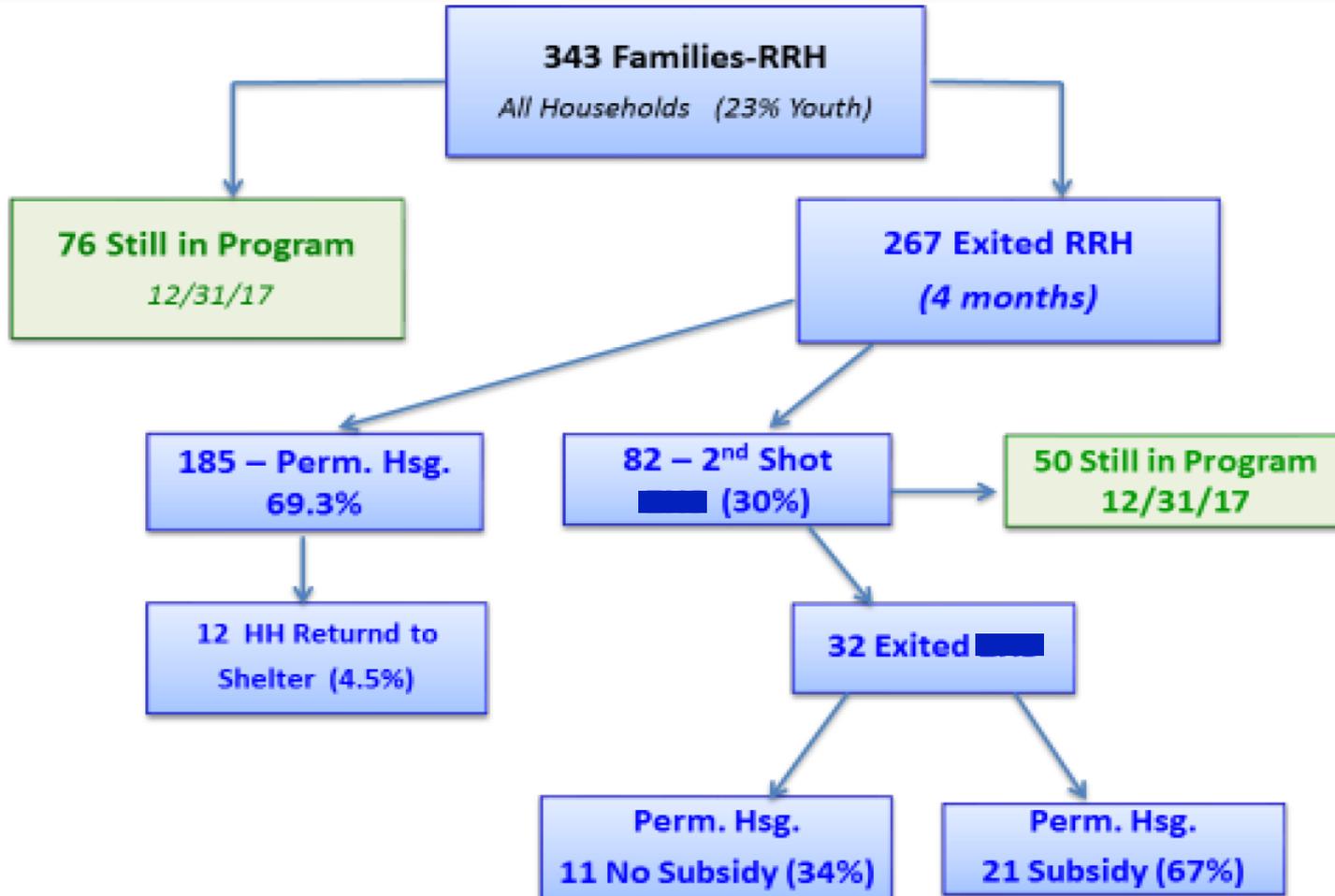
EXAMPLE: 1,000 HOUSEHOLDS ENTER SYSTEM ANNUALLY



Cleveland's Progressive Engagement Model



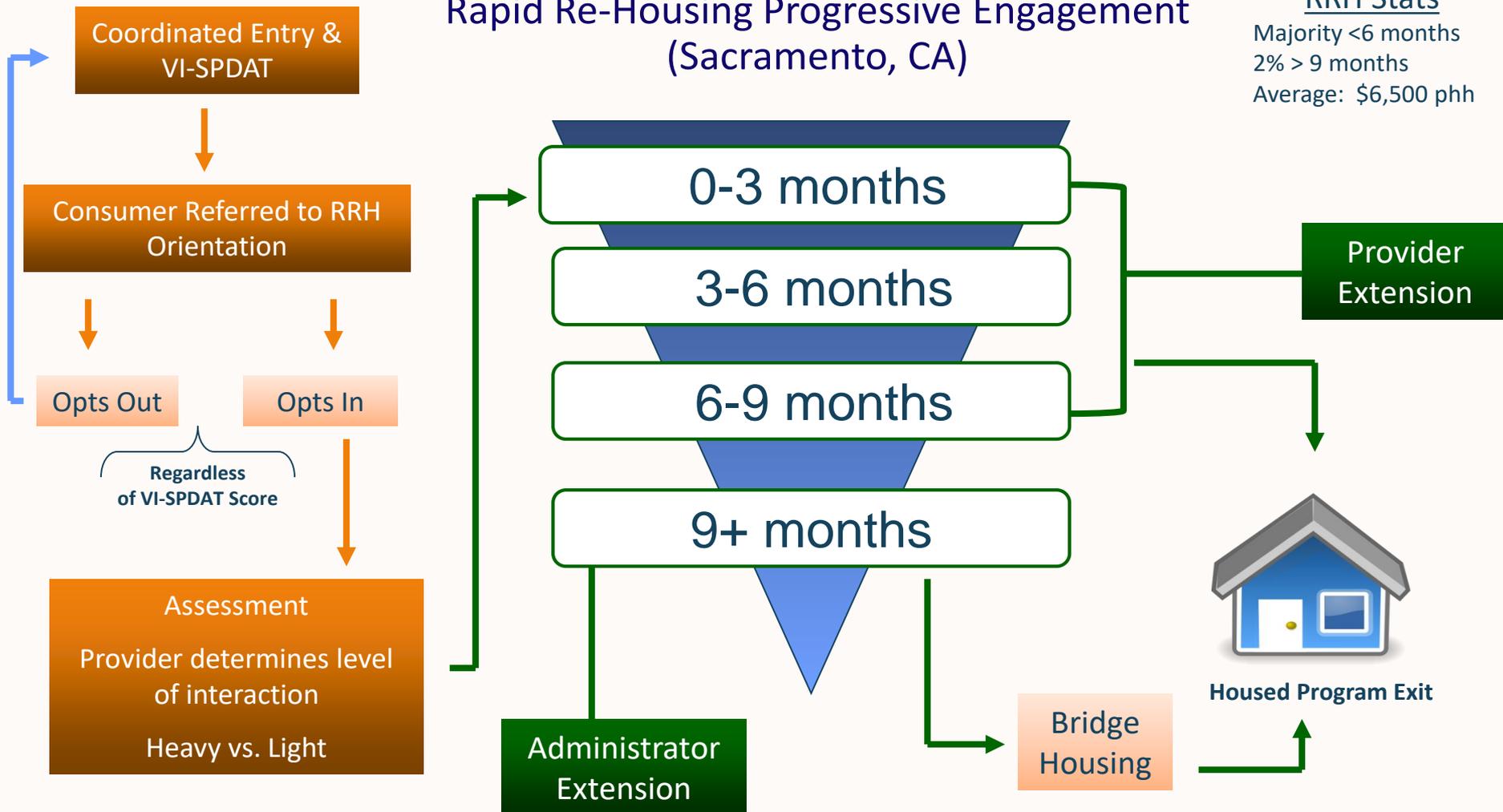
Cleveland Progressive Engagement in 2017



Rapid Re-Housing Progressive Engagement (Sacramento, CA)

RRH Stats

Majority <6 months
2% > 9 months
Average: \$6,500 phh



Literally homeless at program entry. Re-assessed every three months, and if household income is 30% of Area Median Income or higher, the household is exited from the program.

Resource Model from The Road Home, UT

REFERRAL	DEPOSIT ASSISTANCE	SHORT TERM RENTAL ASSISTANCE	TBRA	TRH TRANS HOUSING	COC LEASING	SHELTER PLUS CARE	PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING
200 families	300 families				75 families (typically, a subset of 300 families served)		
40%	60%				25 % of assisted; 15% of all		
No Financial Support	ESG, TANF		City TBRA, County TBRA, WVCTBRA	Sandy Duplex, Sandy Condo, Sandy House, 5100 West, Highwood, Wenco, Riverside	Scattered	County SPC City SPC	Sponsor Based SPC, PBS8, Project Based SPC
Assistance with applications and movement to S8, PH, Mod Rehab, other subsidy through local housing authorities, move out on their own	Includes deposit, prorated rent and first month's rent	Includes deposit, prorated and first month's rent. Ongoing subsidy approved for 3 months.	Rental assistance from County TBRA, WVC TBRA, City TBRA	Traditional Transitional housing managed by The Road Home.	Unit is Master Leased by TRH. Tenant signs Occupancy Agreement	Scattered Site Apartments, Tenant Signs Lease with PM	Frontier Apartments, Permanent Disabled Apartments, Palmer Court. Permanent housing for people with disabilities.
No CM	No CM	Includes light case management geared toward employment and stabilization in housing.	Includes customized supportive services geared toward self-sufficiency in housing.	Tailored supportive services geared toward barrier elimination and obtaining stable housing.	Intensive customized supportive services geared toward self-sufficiency in housing.	Intensive customized supportive services geared toward self-sufficiency in housing.	Intensive customized supportive services geared toward self-sufficiency in housing.

Moving On Initiatives

- Helping people in PSH leave for other permanent housing
- Often connected to Housing Choice Vouchers
- Example:
 - San Francisco has dedicated HCV's from PHA for moving on and private funding for housing search and transition case management
 - In first 6 months moved 60 people out, creating 60 new PSH openings

Discussion

- What do you like about this approach?
- What concerns you about this approach?
- What would it take to broadly implement progressive engagement here?

Operationalizing Diversion and Progressive Engagement

Diversion

- Build in diversion at all access points and at shelters; first thing everyone experiences, only *guaranteed* help system can offer
- Train assessors and/or diversion specialists to hold diversion conversations
- Partner with local entities that can support diversion practice, especially mediation centers and mainstream resources

Diversion

- Identify resources to help with light touch financial assistance when needed, and ensure all access points have them
- Create common standards and measure results!

Progressive Engagement

- Change from hard priority “buckets” in coordinated entry to a more flexible approach - trying out RRH with more people
- Keeping some deeper resources “in your back pocket”
- Create a Moving On Initiative

Progressive Engagement

- Train Rapid Rehousing programs to use a progressive engagement approach within RRH
- Establish methods for moving to deeper assistance – who decides and with what info?
- Use your data to tell you about sizing the resources you need - try, evaluate, adjust.

Next Steps

- What is one thing as a system you could do to operationalize Diversion?
- What is one thing as a system you could do to operationalize Progressive Engagement?
- What is one thing YOU will do?

Questions??

For more information

- National Alliance to End Homelessness
www.endhomelessness.org
- United States Interagency Council on Homelessness
www.usich.gov
- Focus Strategies www.focusstrategies.net
- Contact us: katharine@focusstrategies.net