



Cleveland
Mediation
Center

Diversions

A Conflict Resolution Approach to Keeping People Housed

Cleveland Mediation Center

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Table of Contents

Agenda	1
About Cleveland Mediation Center	2
Applying the Empowerment Theory of Conflict to Crisis.....	2
Conflict Resolution Approach	3
When and Where Diversion Can Happen	4
Diversion Is.....	4
National Alliance to End Homelessness: Principles for Good Homeless Prevention.....	5
What Causes Homelessness?.....	5
Referrals, Coordinated Assessment, and Diversion Questions.....	6
Coordinated Assessment Analogy	7
Funding Diversion	8
Diversion Work.....	8
Staffing Diversion	9
Job Posting Example.....	10
Impact of Conflict and Crisis	12
Impact of Crisis on Self Worth	12
How People in Crisis View Others	13
Reversing the Downward Spiral.....	13
How Can We Help Change the Dynamic?	14
Listening.....	15
Listening Skill Building.....	15
Keys to Success	16
Cleveland Mediation Center Diversion Numbers	17
Diversion Steps.....	18
Things to Consider	20
Diversion Outcomes.....	21
Troubleshooting.....	24
Reality Testing.....	25
Think Housing First.....	25
Closing.....	26
Glossary.....	27

Agenda

Day One

- About Cleveland Mediation Center
- Conflict Resolution
- Introductions and Training Expectations
- Role of Diversion in Ending Homelessness
- Prevention Principles - National Alliance to End Homelessness
- Break
- Coordinated Assessment and Diversion
- Lunch
- Diversion Demonstration
- Reversing the Downward Spiral
- Break
- Listening -- Non-Judgmental and Empathic
- Practice

Day Two

- Diversion Steps
- Break
- Diversion Outcomes
- Four Types of Diversions
- Diversion Introductions with Observations
- Practice
- Lunch
- Practice
- Questions

About Cleveland Mediation Center

Cleveland Mediation Center (CMC) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization founded in 1981.

CMC promotes just and peaceful community in Northeast Ohio by honoring all people, building their capacity to act, and facilitating opportunities for them to engage in conflict constructively.

Applying the Empowerment Theory of Conflict to Crisis

In 2009, CMC presented to the Ohio state-wide Domestic Violence Conference on work they did with the Domestic Violence Center's staff and residents of its shelter.

Mediators listened to staff and heard from residents in an effort to ease tensions.

CMC discovered something – the specific traits of empowerment* in people experiencing conflict applies to people experiencing crisis - in this case the crisis of domestic abuse as well as homelessness.

*Additional Reading: *The Promise of Mediation*, Folgers and Bush, Jossey-Bass, 2005.



Conflict Resolution Approach

- **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.
- **Client-centered**. Don't assume what people need; help them articulate their needs.
- A **strength-based approach** helps clients identify and mine strengths, successes and resources they've used in the past to help them with this episode of homelessness.
- Support and trust that **people want to succeed**. Help them identify their own strengths and successes in their life that can help them with this crisis.

When and Where Diversion Can Happen



Prevention can be any time before shelter stay.

Diversion is a prevention activity - moving prevention right to the shelter door.

Diversion can happen in person, on the phone, or a combination of both.

Diversion Is...

- **Empowering** persons facing imminent homelessness to identify safe and appropriate housing options (other than the street/car/shelter), and assisting them in avoiding shelter and returning immediately to housing.
- NOT a barrier to shelter.
- Focus is on empowering persons in crisis to begin **regaining control** over their situation and lives.
- These approaches and techniques may also be very helpful for persons already homeless, i.e. rapid rehousing clients.

National Alliance to End Homelessness: Principles for Good Homeless Prevention


- Principle **One**: Crisis resolution
- Principle **Two**: Client choice, respect, and empowerment
- Principle **Three**: Provide the minimum assistance necessary for the shortest time possible
- Principle **Four**: Maximize community resources
- Principle **Five**: The right resources to the right people at the right time

What Causes Homelessness?

_____ + X = Homelessness

X = _____

Wealthier areas include many people who face domestic abuse, drug or alcohol addiction and/or mental health issues, but **we rarely see people from means in shelter or on the streets.**



Does society - or sometimes even providers - only focus on the first part of the equation, essentially placing responsibility and blame on the person facing homelessness?

Referrals, Coordinated Assessment, and Diversion Questions

How will those facing homelessness know where to go?

Where will referrals come from?

Will all clients need shelter tonight – or will some not quite be at that point?

When, where, and with who will diversion conversations happen?

Options used in other communities:

- 211 refer those facing **imminent** homelessness to Coordinated Assessment for Diversion, and if necessary, shelter.
- 211 is Coordinated Assessment and conducts diversions over the phone.
- Diversion is conducted at multiple locations – **no wrong door approach.**

Coordinated Assessment Analogy

Think of Coordinated Assessment as the emergency room of homeless services.

1. Patient (client) comes for emergency service.
2. Patient is triaged (Coordinated Assessment).
3. Multi-disciplinary approach to treating and releasing.
4. ER's and hospitals in general operate from a treat and release as soon as possible approach.

Other than cost/insurance coverage, why is there such a focus on quickly releasing back home?

Why is this also true for shelters?

Funding Diversion

Diversion assistance can be:

- Simple over the phone conciliation (no assistance funds)
- Mediation + small amount of food (\$35)
- Greyhound bus ticket (\$30-\$500)
- Other assistance like utility bills or back fees (\$200)
- First Month Rent + Deposit (\$1000+)

Diversion assistance is less expensive than:

- Rapid Rehousing (\$5000 +)
- Shelter stay (Shelter bed is \$8600 more than Sec 8 subsidy)*
- Street homelessness (\$2414 more in hospitalization vs. housed person)

*www.endhomelessness.org/pages/cost

Diversion Work

- Help people determine if it's possible for them to stay anywhere else that's safe, other than a shelter.
- Financial assistance is used for food, local and Greyhound bus tickets, grocery and gas station gift cards, or utility assistance that can be used to help people stay with friends or family.
- Federal ESG funds for back rent or first month's rent and deposit.

- Most people have been **doubled up** – staying **temporarily** with friends or family. When these situations become unmanageable, people come to the shelter.
- Some may need their own housing, and if they believe they can afford to maintain their own place, they are offered assistance.
- Look for:
 1. Safe options
 2. Long term housing options

Staffing Diversion

Consider Logistics

- Where and when will diversion staff meet with clients?
- Is there a space for a conversation (not just an intake)?

Hiring the right staff is key

- Expect well-qualified people to apply and not be quite the right fit.
- In the second round of job interviews, applicants interview staff as if staff were clients.
- Look for rapport and empathy – does the candidate have the ability to empower the client? If so, we can teach the specific skills.

Job Posting Example

Women's Shelter Diversion Advocate Job Posting

Cleveland Mediation Center seeks energetic, non-judgmental candidates to join our Shelter Diversion team – we use conflict resolution strategies to divert clients seeking shelter. We seek to empower persons to chart their own path back to housing, and then assist them in helping them implement their plan.

Diversion staff helps newly homeless persons

1. Identify and implement strategies that will prevent them from having to actually enter shelter
2. Secure permanent housing (if the immediate alternative to shelter isn't permanent.)

CMC uses an empowerment approach based on conflict theory. We seeks to bolster persons' own ability to think for themselves, weigh and consider options, advocate for their own needs and ultimately act on their own behalf. Similar to people in conflict, persons in crisis (like homelessness) often experience diminished confidence, clarity and lessened ability to access resources.

Consistent with the conflict resolution philosophy of *empowerment* CMC is *client-centered* and uses a *housing first* philosophy.

This position, as well as the others on the team, will have a schedule rotation that includes weekends, days, nights and holidays.

This is a full-time position, with a competitive salary, health insurance, vacation and retirement.

CMC strongly encourages persons from diverse backgrounds to apply, including persons fluent in Spanish and ASL.

Qualifications

Commitment and ability to engage in an empathetic, non-judgmental way with people in stressful situations -- to establish rapport in order to help them resolve their immediate housing crisis. Needs to be cultural competent across all populations.

Ability to work effectively in emergency situations.

Be versed in and have a commitment to use conflict resolution and mediation skills. Basic mediation training preferred.

Strong organizational skills in order to efficiently organize records, track data, and provide written reports.

Undergraduate degree preferred. Appropriate life experiences and the skills in #7 also considered.

Able to work independently and with partners from other agencies.

Ability to communicate clearly and effectively in writing and email, MS Word and MS Excel.

To apply

Cover letter and resume via email as an MS Word or PDF attachment to...

Impact of Conflict and Crisis

Conflict and crisis impedes the ability to:

- Be hopeful and confident
- Clarify Goals
- Effectively advocate for oneself – take back control of their lives
- Have positive interactions with other people

How do we help clients become calm and clear so they can better engage with family members, employers, landlords, and staff?

Impact of Crisis on Self Worth

Experiencing conflict and crisis makes people shut down, and become defensive/closed off.

Our job is to help people shift gradually to the right -- **empowered** – side.

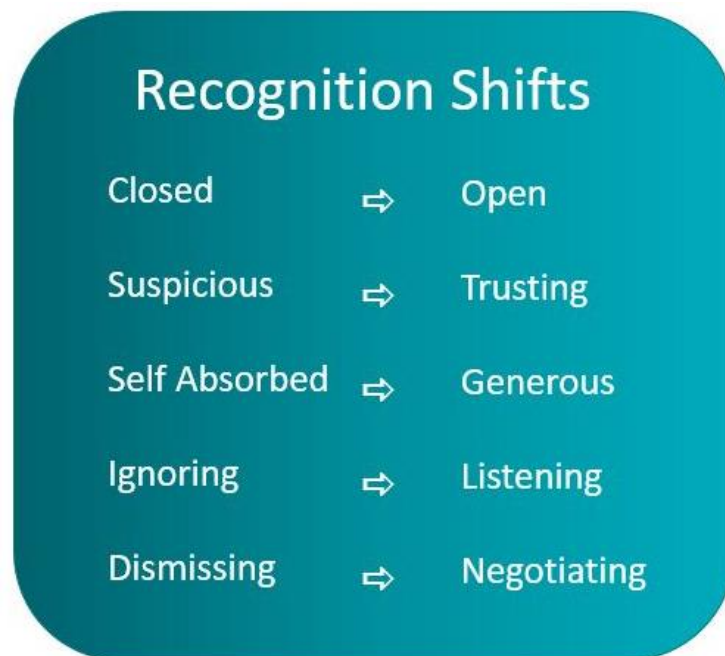
Empowerment Shifts

Weak	⇒	Powerful
Unsure	⇒	Confidant
Hopeless	⇒	Optimistic
Unclear	⇒	Organized
Frustrated	⇒	At Ease

How People in Crisis View Others

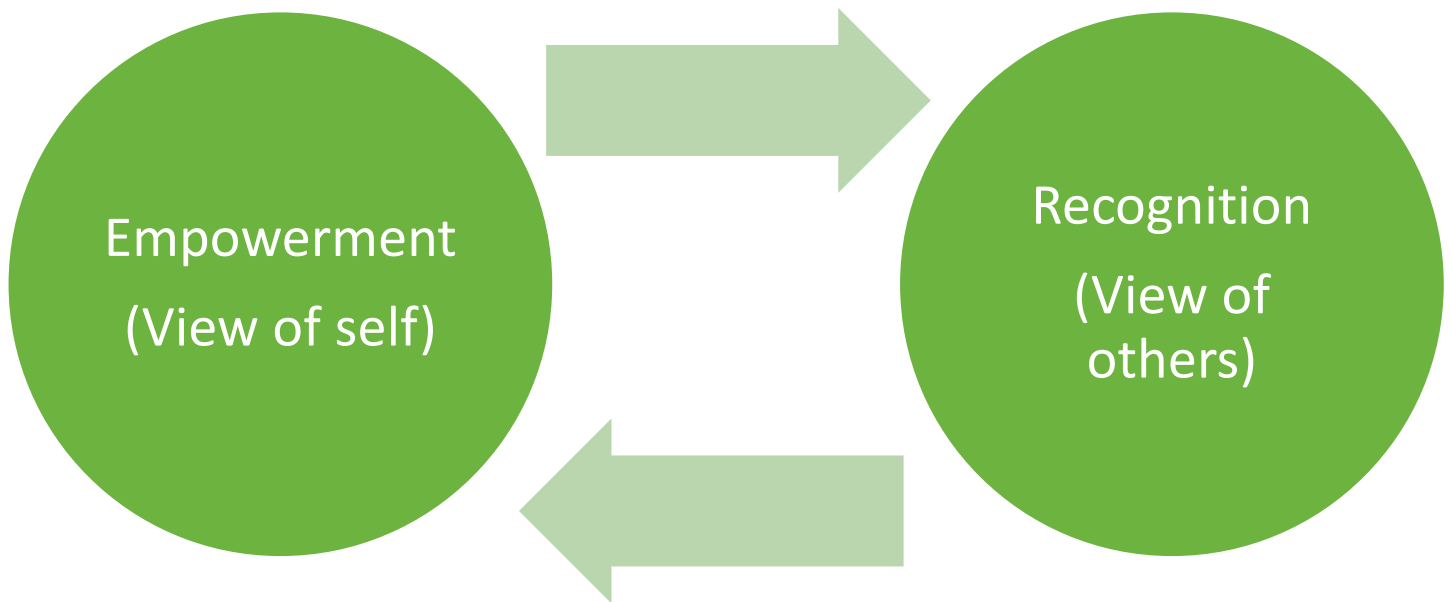
In the midst of crisis people tend to be protective, defensive, and not open to others.

As we help them become empowered, they are more able to listen, consider, and negotiate with others.



Reversing the Downward Spiral

First helping people feel empowered about themselves allows them to open up and engage in a more productive way with others (staff, family, landlords, employers, etc.).



How Can We Help Change the Dynamic?

Diversion Is...

- **Empowering** persons facing imminent homelessness to identify safe and appropriate housing options (other than the street/car/shelter), and assisting them in avoiding shelter and returning immediately to housing.
- NOT a barrier to shelter.
- Focus is on empowering persons in crisis to begin **regaining control** over their situation and lives.

We start the empowerment process by _____.

Listening

- Why do it? What might listening accomplish?
- What is hard or easy about this?
- What is active listening?
- What is empathetic listening?

Empathy is the intimate comprehension of another person's thoughts and feelings without adding our own judgment or expectations.

National Alliance on Mental Illness

Listening Skill Building

What helps you prepare, get centered to listen?

- Physical Preparedness:
 - R - Relaxed
 - O - Open
 - L - Leaning towards the speaker
 - E - Eye Contact
 - S - Squared toward speaker
- Note Taking

Acknowledge by:

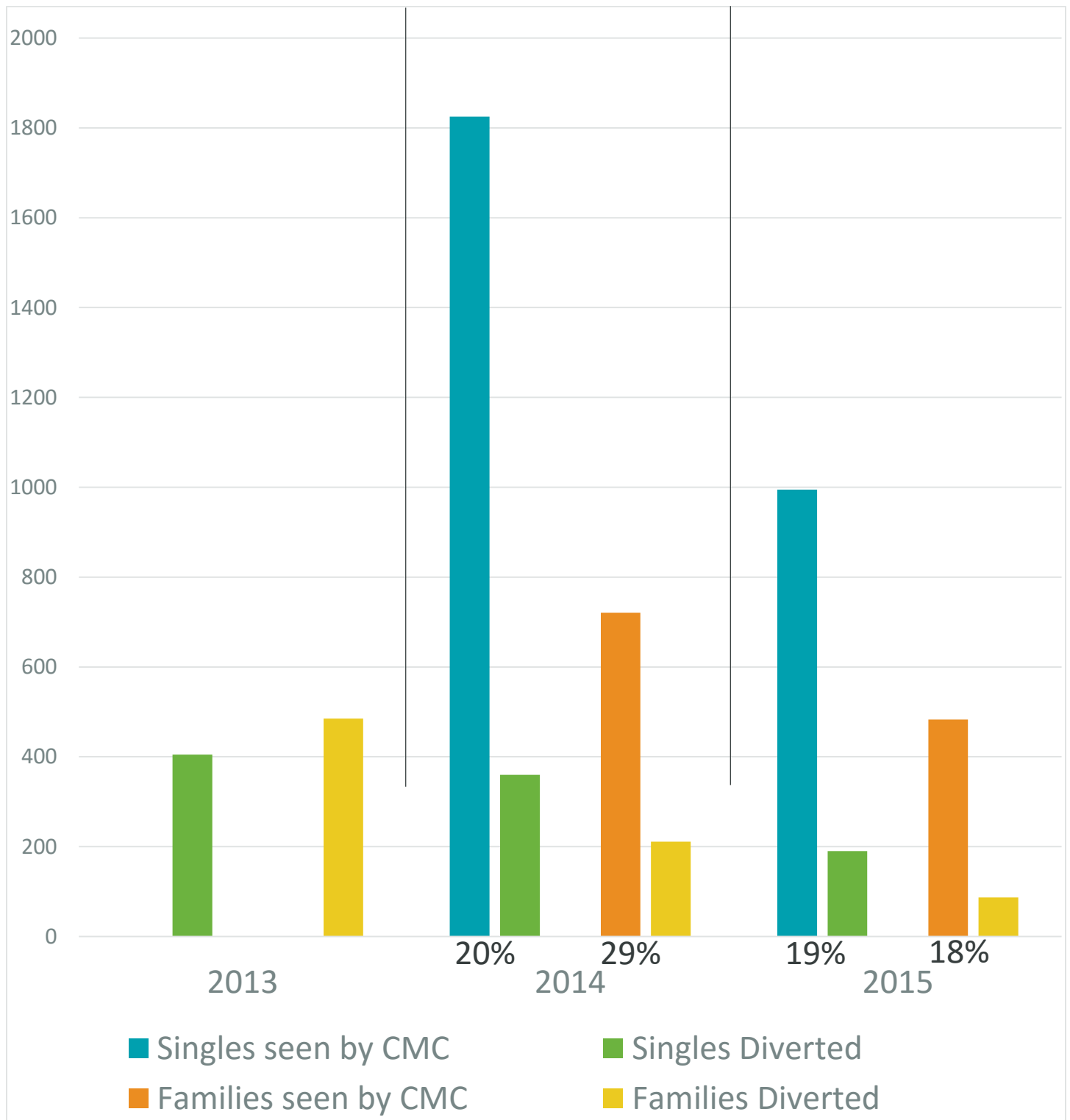
- Paraphrasing
- Open-ended questions help the speaker illuminate what they are saying.
Examples: Can you tell me more about...? Has this happened before?
- Helpful, non-judgmental questions include: What has worked well for you in past similar experiences? What options are you thinking of? How do you best make decisions?
 - This is not to pry information, but to give them a chance to say more if they would like.
 - This is not to ask about motives (“Why did you do it this way”) – “Why” questions can make people defensive and can even escalate the conflict.

Keys to Success

- Hiring the right staff – Emphasize candidates’ beliefs and attitudes, and have them demonstrate their skills during the interview process with staff providing crucial feedback.
- Evidence-based tracking via HMIS (Service Point) helps demonstrate effectiveness.
- Funding - Flexible dollars for bus tickets, food cards and ESG or other funds for rental assistance.

Cleveland’s goal is to to divert 20-25% of clients entering shelter.

Cleveland Mediation Center Diversion Numbers



Diversion Steps

1. Introductions
2. Active and Empathetic Listening
3. Strength Exploration
4. Moving forward

Step One: Introductions

Briefly introduce yourself.

- Name, organization, role
- Describe the conversation
- Hear their experience

How can we help them return to housing?

Step Two: Active Listening

- Body Language
- Paraphrasing
- Empathy

Keep this listening step separate from problem-solving.

Step Three: Strength Exploration

Explore past strengths – this step has two purposes:

1. Help them identify times **when they have been of help or support to others.**
2. Begin to identify networks and support persons that may be able to help them with income or housing

What were things like for them when things were going better?

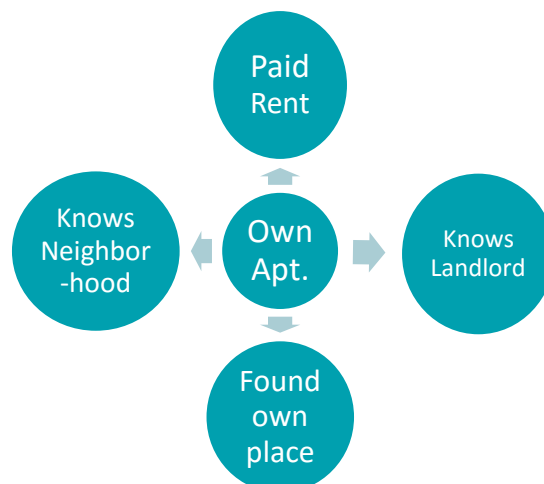
Who are their allies, friends, and family members?

Who have they helped?

Our clients may feel dependent – we can help them remember times of **interdependence.**

Strengths and Resource Exploration

Using a client's previous apartment as an example of: **successes** (paid rent), **relationships** (knows landlord) and **networks** (knows neighborhood).



Step Four: Moving Forward

After we have listened, then explored past strengths, what **housing options** do they want to pursue?

1. Going back to live with friends and family.
2. Returning to their own residence.
3. Temporarily diverted as they seek new housing.
4. Relocating to a safe, permanent place out-of-town.

What other needs has the client identified?

Things to Consider

Always find out about:

1. Housing History
2. Income
 - Current
 - Past

Are options:

1. Safe?
2. Appropriate for client?

Diversion Outcomes

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

Outcome One: Permanently back with friends or family

When? Under what circumstances?

- No better option
- No housing history
- No income history

How can our client contribute to the household?

How can our client use this time to further education and/or employment opportunities?

When is a doubled up situation safe and appropriate?

Outcome Two: Return to their own residence

When? Under what circumstances?

- Walk-Aways (have lease but cannot pay current or back rent)
- Non-DV relationship issues (significant other is in home)
- Previous places they have lived are options (i.e. parents)

Outcome Three: Temporarily diverted as they seek new housing

When? Under what circumstances?

- Wish to live on their own and have done so before
- Current or past income

Help clients consider:

- A walk through before moving in
- Discussing how and when rent is paid
- How to discuss repairs with landlord
- Fallback plans if they have a change in income

The following form can help clients think through these things.

Welcome To Your New Home

As you are preparing, moving into and beginning your lease, we wanted to give you a checklist of things that may help you enjoy your new place to its fullest.

Date: _____

Tenant name, address and phone: _____

Before moving in:

- Landlord's Name _____ Phone _____
- Building super's Name _____ Phone _____
- How to report repair issues? Timeframe for repairs?
- How to report emergencies to the LL? Timeframe for response?
- Conduct a walk-thru with a checklist with the landlord. Write down *anything* that isn't perfect or clean and keep a copy, so when you move out, these items won't be held against you for the security deposit.
- Due date for rent _____. Late fees kick in on _____.
- Where to pay rent _____. Amount \$ _____.
- Form of payments accepted.
- Other utilities? _____.
- HEAP or PIP?
- Ask the landlord the best way to handle disagreements with neighbors – those in their building as well as with others.

If you find yourself struggling financially:

- Pay your rent **first**, if possible.
- Don't over-promise to your landlord or anyone else you owe money to – many will understand if you have to be late, but don't commit to an amount or date unless you are 100% certain you can pay. (No one minds an earlier or larger payment).
- **Call 211** for info on help with food, utilities, clothing etc.
- **Call CMC** – we can help you think through your options, places you can call for help, offer to mediate any conflicts.

Outcome Four: Relocating permanently to a safe place out of town

When? Under what circumstances?

- Safe, appropriate host
- Support systems – family, friends, employment, education

How?

- Confirm with host (30 day minimum)
- What travel and other logistics do we need to work out?

Are the client's support systems elsewhere?

Troubleshooting

What's the reason for them being stuck?

Can we help them address their concerns?

- Listen
- Validate
- Empathy

Buyer's Remorse? What happens if they do not get diverted?

Reality Testing

- Agreements and decisions need to work for the parties (not for us).
- By starting with what has worked previously, we increase the odds of it working again.
- If you have a concern – do not ignore it – use that as an opportunity to help our client **think through** their options and decisions.

Questions when reality testing:

- How would this look?
- What is the timeline?
- Have you done something like this before?
- What other options have you considered?
- What resources do you have to carry this out?
- In case this does not work out as well as you would like, would you like to explore a back-up plan?

Think Housing First

- Persons that are home-LESS need a home. Not necessarily anything else.
- Our experience is that it is best to be aggressive in who we house (i.e. may not have firm employment, but has history of paying own rent).

- Demographically, many housed people look the same as those entering shelter – income, education, AOD, family size, so let's return them to housing, where they can chart their own next steps.
- Our experience is that those we can't divert – or didn't take a chance on – languish in shelter, often experience conflict and stress.

Closing

- Remember to **listen first**, understand, validate. Be empathetic.
- Leave no stone unturned in helping people think of safe places they can live or stay other than the street or shelter.
- Help people think through options – help them clarify their choices and the steps needed to carry out their plan.

If a client is **difficult**:

- Remember that homelessness is a crisis and people are usually not at their best when under this stress.
- Help them realize strengths and resources they have forgotten.
- Visualize sitting next to them, supporting them in how they choose to address the problem.

Glossary

Housing First – (replaces *Housing Readiness*) Approach of quickly getting people in homelessness back into housing (market or subsidized).

- Less expensive for society
- Faster, more humane,
- Allows parties to then address other issues while housed (e.g. education, job training, mental health, drug/alcohol etc.)

Lightest Touch - Choosing the least expensive and least intrusive intervention to get or keep someone housed, e.g. *Diversion* is a lighter touch than *Rapid Rehousing*. *Rapid Rehousing* is cheaper and has less case management than *Permanent Supportive Housing*.

Progressive Engagement - Structuring initial assistance to meet the minimum requirements of persons in a housing crisis. Budgeting additional funds for those who then need more in order to stay housed.

Rapid Re-housing (RRH) – An example of Housing First. HUD-funded initiative for people who *are* homeless to quickly put them into their own housing. Includes short-term rental assistance and limited case management. Tenant will pay own rent & unit must pass inspection.