

An Introduction to Diversions

Guidance & thoughts

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**CANADIAN SHELTER
TRANSFORMATION NETWORK**

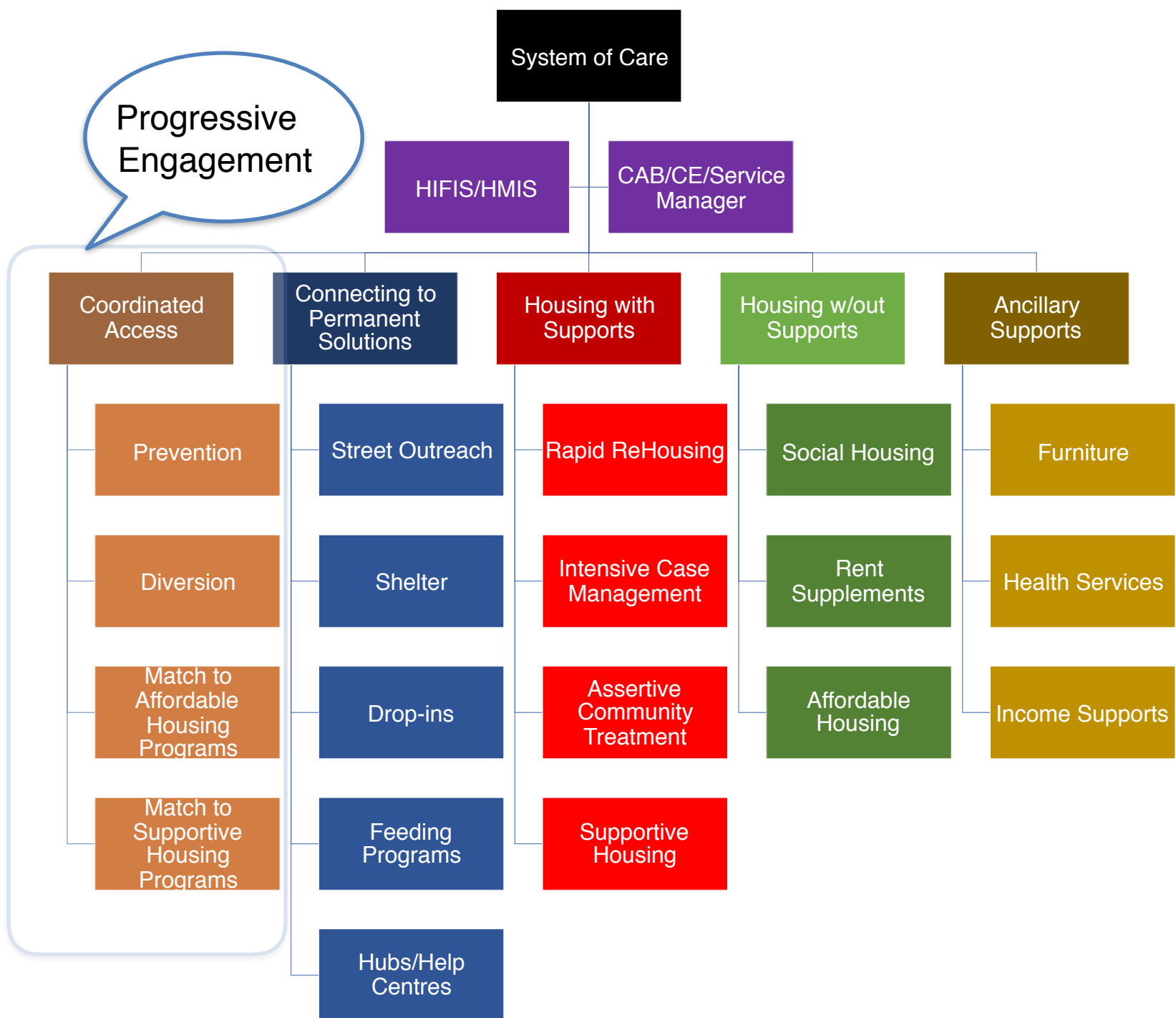


Canadian Alliance to
End Homelessness

Hmmm...

- Why do most people - even those that are economically poor with problematic rental histories and a number of life issues - never become homeless?
- What can we learn from people that do not become homeless to apply to those that are about to become or have just become homeless?







PRINCIPLES THAT INFORM DIVERSION



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

- 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.



**VISUALLY CONSIDER
FOUR IMAGES IN DIVERSION**



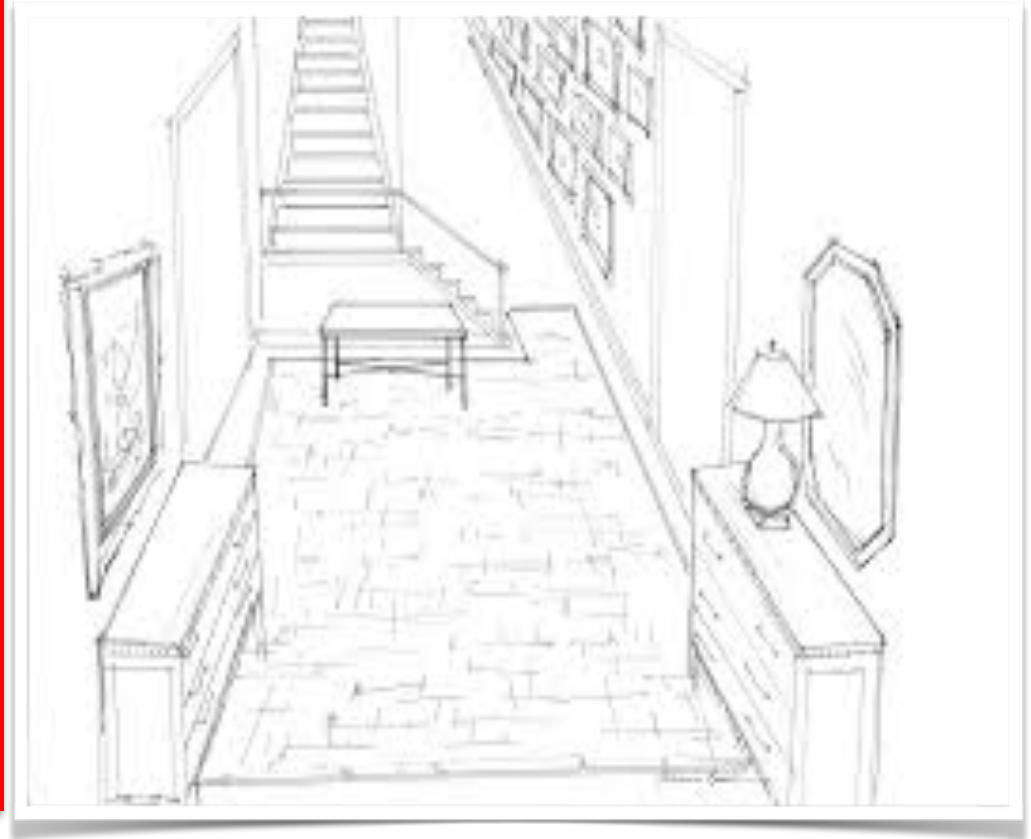
Front Door

- What is your “front door”?
- Who answers the door?
- Is everyone allowed in or do you screen first?



Foyer

- Safe place while waiting to see what is next.
- Figuring out next steps without committing to any of those steps.
- Not free reign to all resources.



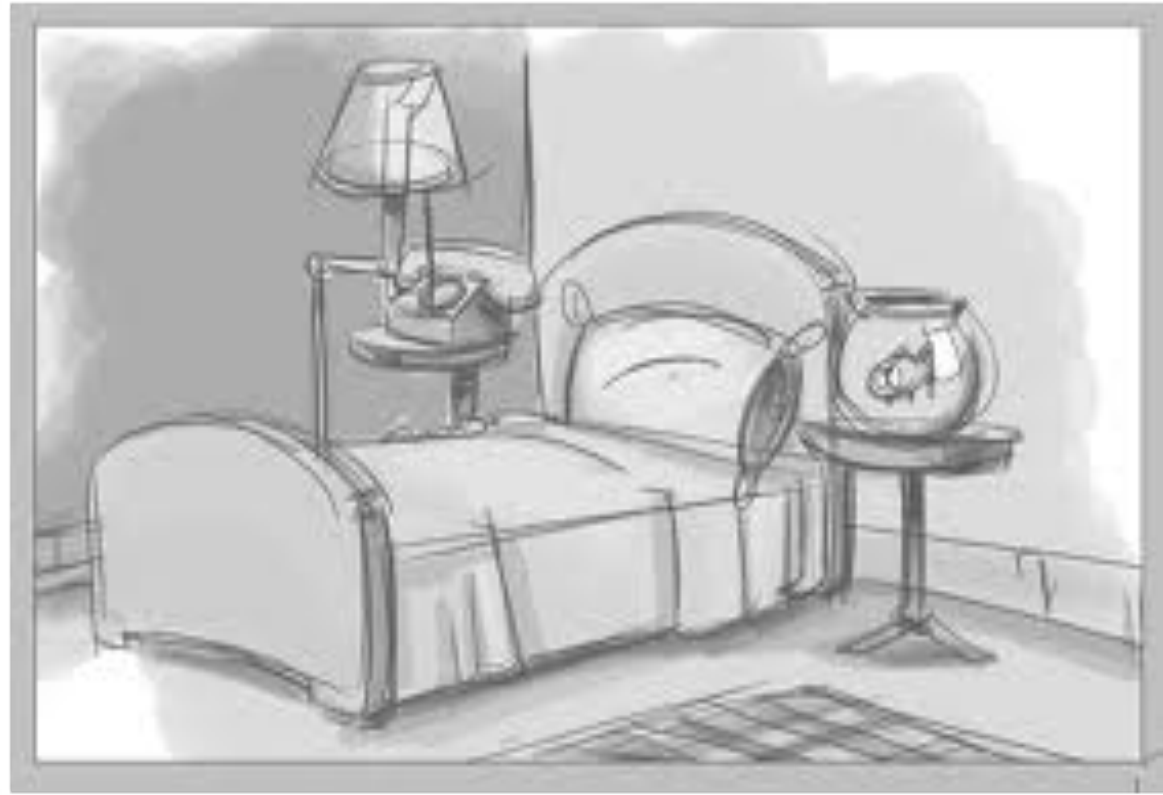
Staircase

- What service pathways are they eligible for?
- Which one has space?
- Which one is recommended?



Bedroom

- Which housing solution makes the most sense?
- How much support is going to be beneficial?
- Ensuring the person gets to it.



Diversion: A High Level Overview



D eepen the conversation
I nquire about the problem
V erify your understanding
E nsure you use empathy
R easonably examine alternatives
S elect the most appropriate alternative
I mplement the alternative
O utline next steps
N ote-take to record the result



Prevention vs Diversion

- Prevention = sustaining an existing safe, appropriate tenancy
- Diversion = locating safe, appropriate alternatives to shelter once a person/family has become homeless



Safe & Appropriate Alternatives

- Safe - diversion efforts never knowingly put people into unsafe situations
- Appropriate - diversion efforts never knowingly put people into inappropriate situations



When to Practice Diversion

- At time of first seeking shelter services... or as soon thereafter as possible.
- Not always practical to attempt diversion at some hours of the day.
- Some people are not in a position where they are ready for the diversion conversation. But you can only tell by trying.



The Diversion Mindset

- Diversion starts with a belief on the part of the staff doing diversion that individuals and families:
 - Are able to be diverted
 - Can have safe and appropriate alternatives to shelter
 - Shelter should be reserved only for those that do not have alternatives
 - Are best served through a strength-based framework



Maximizing Resilience

- What does resiliency mean to you?
- What does a strength-based approach look like for problem solving?
- How can you help people focus on what they CAN do when faced with crisis?



Maximizing Resilience

Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.

- American Psychological Association



Maximizing Resilience

- To maximize resilience, one must:
 - Believe people can quickly recover from adversity
 - Believe people have elasticity and can bounce back
 - Believe people can navigate to resources and negotiate engagement with resources



Factors Influencing Resilience

- Relationship factors - who do they know, how strong is the relationship, what resources do the relationships bring to the table
- Community factors - association and connectivity to others with shared beliefs and experiences, what resources that community has to bring to the table, beliefs and practices of the community regarding helping others of that community



Ways to Build Resilience

- Make connection
- Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems
- Establish clear goals
- Take decisive action
- Keep things in perspective
- Foster a hopeful attitude



Realities

- There is a difference between WANT and NEED.
- Not everyone lives alone in independent housing.
- 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.
- We do NOT have an infinite supply of resources, nor do we have more staff and time than we know what to do with.
- ELIGIBILITY DOES NOT EQUAL ENTITLEMENT.
- All of this occurs within heightened emotional context.



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 is Mediation & Problem Solving



Principles of Mediation

- Self Determination.
 - Voluntary.
 - Un-coerced.
- Impartial.
 - No personal or vested interest in outcome.
 - Person-centered



Principles of Mediation

- Competence.
 - Mediator knows the program, the possibilities and limitations.
- Confidentiality.
 - No personal information shared outside of the data collection requirements.
- Quality.
 - Best possible service aligned to standards.



Moving the Conversation Forward

- Do not enter into an argument of who is right and wrong.
- Focus on common ground.
- Make sure both sides - facts and emotions - are understood and validated.
- Steer the conversation towards “what is next?” more than “what happened?”.



Solving the Problem

- The person/family is not the problem.
The problem is the problem.
- Work the problem.
- Respect emotional toll.



Solving the Problem

- When safe and appropriate to reconcile with family or friends they were staying with, or others they may stay with, appeal to them as a strategic partner.
- Inspire the strategic partner to help come up with solutions.
- Redirect name-calling, barriers, tangential issues.
- If there are win-win situations that emerge, leverage them.



Steps to Problem Solving

1. Identify the issue(s).
2. Understand everyone's interest(s).
3. List the possible solutions (options)
4. Evaluate the options.
5. Select an option or options.
6. Document the agreement(s).
7. Agree on contingencies, monitoring, and evaluation.



When Generating Alternatives...

- Look for solutions that will solve the primary problem without causing other problems (or as few other problems as possible).
- Make sure all parties involved accept the solution
- Make sure implementation is likely going to occur
- Make sure implementation is aligned to the time, resources and staffing you have available



In Solving Problems

- Maximize the resiliency of the person/family.
Don't solve problems they can solve on their own.
- Focus on strengths.
- Ask probing questions rather than providing advice.
- Realize it can be iterative.
- Use flexible resources.



Setting the Stage: Your Role



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



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.



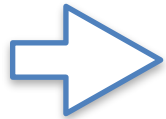
Three Different Scenarios to Consider

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.



Scenario One: First Time Ever Seeking Shelter/Services





Explanation of diversion process



Consents to proceed with diversion

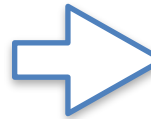


Does not consent

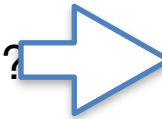


Clarify details of circumstance or event.

Why are you seeking service today?



What else have you already tried?



Document existing efforts

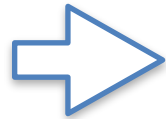


What else have you thought of trying but have not tried yet?



Explore each idea. If necessary and appropriate, help put ideas into action (access to phone, mediating with a family member or landlord, role playing, etc).

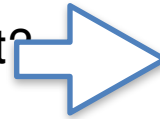




Where did you stay last night?



Unfit for human habitation.
End diversion efforts.



In own home or apartment. Is
prevention appropriate?



With family or friends.



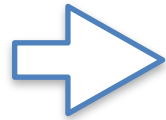
Who are these people in relation to you?

How long have you known them?

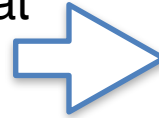
Is it safe there?

What would it take to go back there for 3-7 days while you work on other plans?





What have you not told me that would be important to know in order to help you?



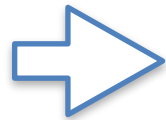
Unsafe situation.
End diversion efforts.

Exploitation.
End diversion efforts.

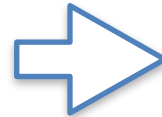


Gather, clarify and document additional information provided.





Could you go back to staying
with those family members/
friends if we...



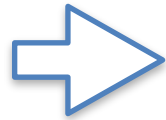
Provided mediation.



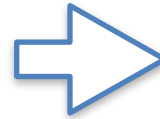
Provided resources.

Asked.





If you cannot go back there,
where else could you go?



Other family.



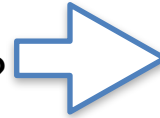
Other friends.

Other.





Why are you finding it difficult
to secure housing on your own?



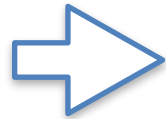
Abuse/exploitation.



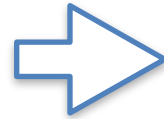
Finances.

Other complicating/complex
issues.





What resources do you have
that can contribute to
problem-solving?



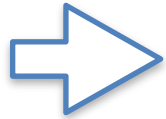
Financial.



Inter-personal.

None.





If admitted to shelter there is still an expectation that you are working on getting housed. What is your plan for housing at this point in time?



Have a plan



Need to create a plan



Process Point One

- Call in or arrive in person?
- How will people in need know this information?
- What happens if a person/family shows up at the wrong place?
- What policies and procedures will you put in place for people fleeing domestic violence or very young unaccompanied minors?



Diversion Step One

- Screen for safety.
- Have the conversation about what diversion is.
- Should be same everywhere.
- **SAMPLE:** *“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 emergency accommodation 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.”*
- What do you want your script to be?



Diversion Step Two


QUESTION	LOOK FOR:	BECAUSE...
Why are you seeking service today?	Reason(s) and context.	1. Can result in other questions being answered without being asked. 2. Inappropriate reasons for seeking service can be resolved without going further.
What else have you tried to do before seeking service?	Attempts made, likely with friends, family or other community resources, especially mainstream resources.	People should be empowered wherever possible to resolve their own issues, when it is safe to do so.
What else have you thought about trying, but haven't tried yet?	Ideas that have been considered but not acted upon.	It may be appropriate to encourage the person to try these things before admitting to a service.



- Possible Actions:*
- 1. Proceed to Step Three.*
 - 2. Divert away to attempt other activities.*
 - 3. Divert away because inappropriate for service.*

Diversion Step Three

Where did you stay last night?

ANSWER	LOOK FOR:	BECAUSE...
Outdoors/ any place not fit for human habitation.	Anything other than one's own apartment or that of a friend/family member.	You can skip to Step Six.
Own apartment/ home.	Main/primary reason for leaving.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If fleeing violence, would be suitable for DV resources. 2. If facing eviction/voluntarily vacated, intervention may be possible. 3. If has been evicted, other courses of action may be considered.
Friends/family 	Main/primary reason for leaving. Then ask: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If fleeing violence, would be suitable for DV resources. 2. If there is a history of them staying there, it may be possible to extend the stay if it is safe to do so. 3. Brief interventions may extend stay. 4. With a bit more time (e.g., 3-7 days) it moves things out of immediate crisis mode.

Diversion Step Four

- Are there additional reasons why you can't stay there any longer?
- Is there anything I haven't asked you about that would be important for me to be aware of as we try to figure out the best situation for you moving forward?



Diversion Step Five

- 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?



Diversion Step Six

- 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? Co-workers?
- What would it take for you to be able to stay there temporarily?



Diversion Step Seven

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?

- a. For example, do you or does anyone in your family have special needs or a medical condition? How does this affect your housing situation?
- b. Do you owe money for rent or utilities?
- c. Are you new to the area?
- d. Are you in an unsafe or unstable relationship?



Diversion Step Eight

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

- a. For example, are you getting any help from other family members or friends?
- b. Do you have income?
 - i. What are the sources?
- c. Are you involved with any other services right now?



Diversion Step Nine

If admitted to service 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 a service?

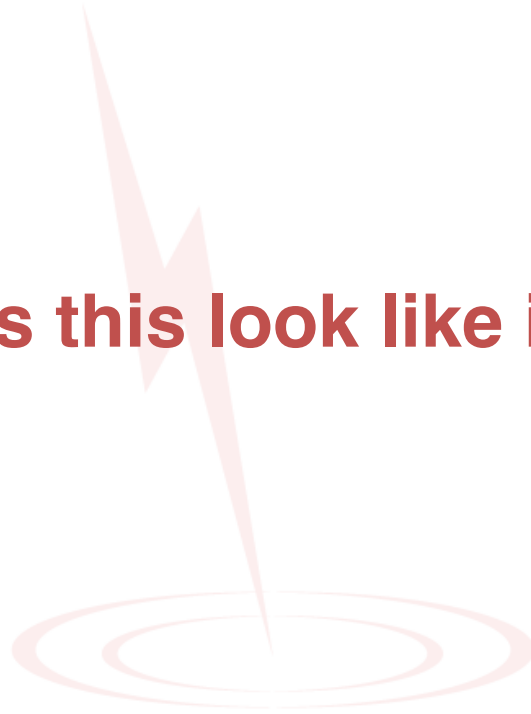


What Goes Wrong?

- Entitlement.
- Inconsistency.
- Assessment used too early.
- Failure to follow through on housing.
- Lack of flexible resources, or inability to activate them rapidly.



What does this look like in action?



Last name: _____

First name: _____

Contact number or email address if possible: _____

Assessor: _____

Date: _____

Are you in a safe place to answer questions?

*If **no**, proceed with safety planning such as:*

- Can I ask where you are?*
- Is the unsafe person in the room right now?*
- If yes, can you go somewhere safe like a neighbour, friend or public space?*
- If no, do you need to get to somewhere safe right now? (Offer taxi to bring to shelter if necessary)*
- Do you need me to contact police for you?*

*If **yes**, proceed with script below:*

I want to better understand your housing situation right now and work with you to figure out a solution that may not require you needing to access the homeless shelter. The ideal situation is that there is somewhere else you can stay that is safe while you figure out your permanent housing needs without coming into shelter. I am going to need to ask you some questions. This process takes about 10 minutes.



1. *Why are you seeking shelter today?*

- Relationship breakdown
- Domestic violence
- Problems with the landlord (but no threat of eviction)
- At risk of eviction
- Foreclosure on rental property
- Living in a household that has been condemned
- Utilities disconnected or threat of disconnect
- Newcomer to the community
- Other _____

{INVESTIGATE REASON. CONSIDER MEDIATION AND IMMEDIATE PROBLEM SOLVING.}



2. *What else have you tried before contacting us?*

- *Mediation*
- *Problem solving with landlord*
- *Problem solving with family or friends*
- *Problem solving with a non-profit, government agency or faith group*
- *Cash advance*
- *Repayment plan*
- *Splitting up family members to various households*
- *Staying with friends or family*
- *Staying at motel (self pay)*
- *Nothing*
- *Other* _____

{UNDERSTAND WHAT HAS WORKED OR NOT WORKED THUS FAR. UNDERSTAND IF ANOTHER ENTITY HAS PROBLEM SOLVING IN ACTION AND STATUS OF ACTION.}



3. *What else have you thought about trying to be housed or solve your current housing problem?*

- *Mediation*
- *Problem solving with landlord*
- *Problem solving with family or friends*
- *Problem solving with a non-profit, government agency or faith group*
- *Cash advance*
- *Repayment plan*
- *Splitting up family members to various households*
- *Staying with friends or family*
- *Staying at motel (self pay)*
- *Nothing*
- *Other* _____

{ENCOURAGE HOUSEHOLD TO PURSUE SAFE AND APPROPRIATE ALTERNATIVES. PROVIDE ACCESS TO PHONE OR COMPUTER AS NECESSARY. BE PREPARED TO INTERVENE AND MEDIATE WITH OTHER ENTITIES. BE PREPARED TO USE FLEXIBLE FUNDING OR GIFT CARDS IN PROBLEM SOLVING.}



4. *Where did you stay last night?*

- *With a friend/family member or other doubled up situation*
- *In a motel*
 - *Self pay*
 - *Funded by another entity*
- *In your own home (apartment or house)*
- *24 hour restaurant, coffee shop or business*
- *In a place unfit for human habitation*
- *Other* _____

{IF STAYED IN A 24 HOUR RESTAURANT OR A PLACE UNFIT FOR HUMAN HABITATION OR ANOTHER UNSAFE SITUATION, PROCEED TO QUESTION 6.}

5. *Do you think you could continue to stay there for another 3-7 days if you were able to receive some help?*
- a. *IF YES: Is it safe to stay there?*
 - b. *IF NO OR DON'T KNOW:*
 - i. *Is it safe to stay there?*
 - ii. *What would you need to make this option work for at least 3-7 days?*
 - *Financial assistance*
 - *Grocery voucher*
 - *Gas card*
 - *Bus tickets*
 - *Assistance with utilities*
 - *Conflict resolution*
 - *Landlord mediation*
 - *Community referrals*
 - *Other*_____

{IF UNSAFE PROCEED TO QUESTION 6. OTHERWISE PROBE FOR WHAT IT WOULD TAKE TO FIX THE CURRENT SITUATION TO BE ABLE TO STAY IN THE CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION.}



6. *Do you have anyone else you could stay with for 3-7 days if you were able to receive some help?*
- a. *IF YES: Is it safe to stay there?*
 - b. *IF NO OR DON'T KNOW:*
 - i. *Is it safe to stay there?*
 - ii. *What would you need to make this option work for at least 3-7 days?*
 - *Financial assistance*
 - *Grocery voucher*
 - *Gas card*
 - *Bus tickets*
 - *Assistance with utilities*
 - *Conflict resolution*
 - *Landlord mediation*
 - *Community referrals*
 - *Other* _____

{PROBE FOR WHAT IT WOULD TAKE TO HAVE THEM STAY ELSEWHERE SO LONG AS IT IS SAFE. DO NOT PROCEED TO QUESTION 7 UNLESS ALL OPTIONS HAVE BEEN EXHAUSTED.}



7. *Why are you struggling to find stable, safe and appropriate housing?*

- *Affordability*
- *Don't know where to look*
- *Household instability*
- *Size of household*
- *Poor credit*
- *Past evictions*
- *Registered sex offender*
- *New to the community*
- *Other* _____

{EXPLAIN REALITIES OF CURRENT HOUSING MARKET AND THE STRATEGIES OTHER LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS ARE USING TO FIND AND SECURE HOUSING. OFFER APARTMENT LISTINGS AND ACCESS TO PHONE IF NECESSARY.}

8. *What is your current source(s) and amount of income?*

- *Employment* \$ _____
- *Inheritance* \$ _____
- *Pension* \$ _____
- *General welfare* \$ _____
- *Disability* \$ _____
- *Working under the table* \$ _____
- *Other* \$ _____

{OUTLINE ANY SPECIAL PROGRAMS THAT MAY EXIST FOR LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS TO ACCESS HOUSING, AS NECESSARY. EXPLAIN HOW OTHER HOUSEHOLDS ON LOW-INCOME ARE ABLE TO FIND AND SECURE HOUSING. OFFER APARTMENT LISTINGS OF DWELLINGS WITHIN PRICE RANGE. DO A REALITY CHECK. OFFER ACCESS TO PHONE IF NECESSARY.}



9. *If there is space in shelter and you are accepted into the shelter, there is an expectation that you will work on finding housing immediately and getting out of shelter as rapidly as possible. What is your plan at this point to ensure your shelter stay is short and that you move into housing quickly?*

{ENSURE THERE IS A HOUSING PLAN IN PLACE PRIOR TO SHELTER ENTRY. COMMUNICATE ENTRY TO SHELTER STAFF FOR FOLLOW-UP. DO NOT ALLOW SHELTER ENTRY WITHOUT EVEN A RUDIMENTARY HOUSING PLAN.}



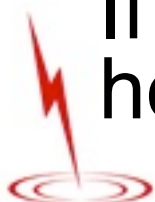
Scenario Two: Episodic/Return to Service



Same As Scenario One With Exceptions

You need to establish parameters for intervening quicker with shelter rather than diversion attempts, such as:

- Number of returns within predefined period of time.
- Cumulative total of days served.
- Fewer days in emergency accommodation prior to housing triage.

 If staying with family/friends between homeless episodes, explore deeply.

Scenario Three:
Long-term Service User or
Not Connected to Services &
Long-term Homeless



- Begins with housing triage.
- Offer of emergency accommodation possible, but not a requirement, especially if they are barred or have rejected this option repeatedly.



Upping your game in the first two weeks after shelter entry for first time shelter users



What's the Deal with Two Weeks?

- People likely to resolve their own homelessness are most likely to accomplish this in the first two weeks.
- Do not sign up for programs or assign to a case manager.
- Plan on having an intensive meeting (which can be a group meeting) with every first time shelter user the morning after their first night to talk about housing search.
- Have deliberate conversations with each person, every day in their first two weeks.



Focus on Tasks

- Income supports
- Identification
- Listings of places for rent
- Friends/family
- Filling out applications
- Examine roommate/shared housing options



Other Helpful Tips

- Separation is worthy of consideration.
- State your intentions and expectations regarding housing in writing.
- Ensure daytime is structured to allow for maximum apartment search.
- Be very clear that you want their length of stay to be as short as possible, and that it is not repeated in the future.



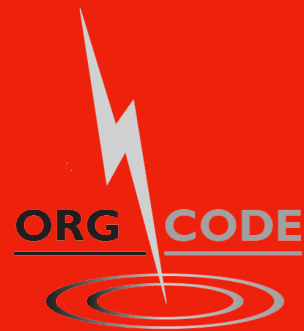
Passive Engagement

Prepare as many materials as you can to assist with finding housing:

- Daily listings (classifieds, Craigslist, etc.)
- Location of income supports office
- “5 Ways to Impress a Landlord”
- “3 Things to Remember When Filling Out a Housing Application”
- “So You Are Thinking of Connecting with Your Family So You Have a Place to Live”



Questions?





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