Youth Diversion Programs

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Intros

Share out:
• Name
• Pronoun
• Organization
• Your role in YHDP

Icebreaker Question:
• What does your DREAM day look like?
Agenda

- What is diversion and why is important?
- Diversion in the homeless services system
- Target Populations
- Types of Interventions and Services
- Staff Needs
- Eligibility
- Leveraging Partners
- FAQs
What is Diversion?

- **DIVERTS** youth from homeless system by immediately addressing their needs
- Helps youth problem solve their situation **BEFORE** they spend the night at a shelter, motel or on the street.
- Typically happens at the "front door" of homeless services system (e.g., Coordinated Entry access point, shelter, street outreach, school, etc.)
- Staff use problem-solving techniques to identify an immediate housing arrangement that is a safe alternative to shelter or sleeping outside.

**GOAL:** find the youth a short or long-term safe housing option.
Why is Diversion important?

- Reduces number of entries into the homeless services system
- Reduces the risk of a longer periods of homelessness
- Lowers demand for shelter beds, every person diverted makes a shelter bed available for someone who needs it
- Shortens wait lists for housing
- Considerably cheaper intervention than a shelter stay
What is the role of diversion in the system?
Homelessness Prevention vs. Diversion

PREVENTION PROGRAMS

- PREVENT 1) the prevalence of homelessness in communities; 2) homelessness in households engaged in or transferring from systems/programs; 3) housing crises from escalating further
- Occurs BEFORE the household reaches the homeless services system

DIVERSION PROGRAMS

- Occurs when prevention has FAILED
- DIVERTS those who would have otherwise spent the night at the shelter, in a hotel or on the street from entering the system;
- Occurs AFTER the household reaches the homeless services system
- Resolves the person’s housing crisis THAT DAY either temporarily or permanently

For more information:
When?
Should be the **FIRST** strategy used to prevent youth from entering the emergency shelter or continuing to sleep on the street.

Where?
- Diversion is used at the front door of the homeless services system:
  - Emergency Shelter,
  - 2-1-1
  - Schools
  - Drop-in centers
Target Populations

Unaccompanied youth

Pregnant and Parenting Youth

Special populations (e.g., people of color, LGBTQIA+, justice-involved, child-welfare involved youth)

Minors (youth under 18)
Basic Elements of Diversion

- Length of intervention is short
- Client driven
- Financial assistance and supportive services only provided to resolve immediate need
- Should be easy for youth to access
- Staffing may include diversion specialists, shelter/street outreach staff, school liaisons, etc.
What might that look like?
Staff should immediately engage youth in a diversion intervention/conversation and examine the youth’s pre-existing relationships (or “natural supports”) to identify a potential place to sleep.

- A negotiated return to their previous housing
- Short-term, non-shelter accommodation
- Apartments or homes (including shared housing)
- Returns to family
After natural supports are identified.....

1. Assess youth preferences
2. Reach out to preferred natural supports
3. Screen for safety concerns
4. Help to negotiate the terms under which the individual might provide the youth with a place to stay.
Diversion Programs may include:

- Short term rental assistance
- Funding to provide financial support to youth (e.g., utility deposits, security deposits, past due rent or utilities)
- Funding to provide supportive services only
- Supportive services for youth for a period after they are permanently housed (traditionally max allowed 6 months)
What support services can diversion pay for?

- Case Management
- Moving Costs
- Food
- Housing Navigation
- Transportation
- Outreach
- Counseling
- Legal Aid, and more!
Important to Remember

All costs charged to the CoC grant must be:

- Reasonable
- Allowable
- Documented
- Allocable
- Reimbursable
Important to Remember

There is a difference between “eligible costs” and “approved” costs.

Eligible costs: all costs included in the Interim Rule
Approved costs: the costs that are included in a project’s HUD approved budget

A project can only spend CoC funds on approved costs.
What staff needs to provide diversion

- Staff should have the training in skills like mediation, **PROBLEM-SOLVING**, negotiation, conflict resolution, active listening and strengths-based approaches
- Access to flexible financial resources – rent arrears, transportation, utilities, deposits
- Strong understanding of community resources available
- Ability to refer youth to services, as needed
Problem-Solving Technique

- Skill of having a conversation with the youth to explore creative, flexible, safe and cost-effective solutions to quickly resolving their homeless crisis, even just temporarily with limited or no financial support.
- After identifying the housing, staff then works with the youth to take the necessary steps to make this housing option a reality.
- Technique should be integrated throughout the homeless services system
- Problem-solving can potentially work for ANYONE and may require more than one conversation.

For more information: https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/6-Steps-to-Problem-Solving-Conversation-1.pdf
Who is eligible for diversion?

- Youth and families between the ages of 18-24
- Youth living outside, in an emergency shelter or transitional housing (Category 1)
- Youth who must leave their residence within 2 weeks (hotel, friend’s house, home (Category 2))
- Youth that are fleeing domestic violence (Category 4)

Youth must meet the definition of homelessness or at-risk of homelessness.
What partnerships and resources can help stabilize youth?
- Diversion program was focused on system navigation
- Hired multiple system navigators to: directly connect with youth through outreach, identify youth at-risk of homelessness, connect youth to resources
- Assigned system navigators to areas where disproportionate youth were staying
- Hired peer support specialists that were embedded in drop-in centers
Goal of diversion program was to divert youth away from homelessness while providing the supports they needed to stay in their current housing (if safe) long-term.

- Youth were offered up to six months of case management, counseling, food, transportation, utility deposits and referrals to services.
- Program had a "rapid-exit" component that assisted youth entering the shelter for the first time to rapid exit within 15 days. Created a robust referral network.
Q&A and Further Discussion

How are referrals received?

What data and outcomes are we expected to track?