

DIVERSION

Best Practice for Preventing Homelessness

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FocusStrategies.net

What is 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

What about Prevention?

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

Reasons to Implement Diversion

- Improves system outcomes by reducing entries into homelessness
- Improves quality of life by helping people avoid the stress of shelter stays
- Conserves and targets resources – shelter beds used only when needed
- Cuts down on shelter wait lists

Who can be diverted?

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

Approach at Coordinated Entry

FROM	TO
What programs are you eligible to enter and who has a bed?	What would resolve your current housing crisis?
Assessment/eligibility	Structured problem solving conversation about household situation and resources
Intake or put on waitlist	Support crisis resolution to avoid shelter entry

Location Options

Diversion can happen:

- By phone (211 Call Center or Designated Providers)
- At physical “front door” of Coordinated Entry
- By *closely linked* diversion practitioner
- At shelter

...or some combination of all

Diversion is Problem Solving

- Successful diversion programs treat the process as an opportunity to explore a household's current housing crisis and be creative about housing options.
- Involves asking about every available resource household might have to stay housed or move directly to other housing
- Also involves frank conversations about conditions in shelter and likely options after shelter

Assistance Offered

- 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

Possible Diversion Funding Sources

- ESG
- TANF
- SSVF
- County/City general funds
- Private funds

Evaluation Criteria

Indicators of diversion performance:

- Length of shelter wait lists and shelter entries
- New entries into homelessness
- % diverted households returning to shelter or homeless system
- *Higher or different needs/barriers among sheltered population*

Diversion Works

Lessons From [Your Way Home Montgomery County](#)



YOUR WAY HOME
MONTGOMERY COUNTY

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 Your Way Home Montgomery County

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ADVANCING A UNIFIED HOUSING CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

Your Way Home's **toll-free Call Center and outreach teams** provide coordinated entry into - or diversion from - our housing crisis response system.

Regional Housing Resource Centers provide rapid re-housing services to help residents find and maintain permanent affordable housing and get connected to services.

Our common agenda is to **improve the housing stability, economic security and health** of people experiencing, or at imminent risk of, homelessness.

We will **grow our collective impact** by constantly evaluating, improving and scaling what works.

Through **progressive engagement**, residents are given the least amount of support they need to resolve their housing crisis. More costly interventions like permanent supportive housing are reserved for those who need them the most.

WHO IS HOMELESS?

On a single night in January 2015, **430** people were experiencing homelessness in Montgomery County.



Your Way Home helped 520 people end their housing crisis in 2014, a 200% increase from 2013.

Your Way Home Funders: County of Montgomery, Pennsylvania, Curaterra Foundation, Genuardi Family Foundation, The Montgomery County Foundation, Inc, North Penn Community Health Foundation, North Penn United Way, Patricia Kind Family Foundation, The Philadelphia Foundation, United Way of Greater Philadelphia & Southern New Jersey

Government Partners: Montgomery County Housing & Community Development (Lead Agency), Community Connections, Montgomery County Departments of: Aging & Adult Services, Behavioral Health/Developmental Disabilities, Child Day Care Services, Children & Youth, Commerce, Veteran Affairs

Community Partners: Advanced Living Communities, Carson Valley Children's Aid, Creative Health Services, Genesis Housing Corporation, Hedwig House, Inter-Faith Housing Alliance, Laurel House, Legal Services of Southeastern PA, Keystone Opportunity Center, Montgomery County Emergency Service, Montgomery County Housing Authority, New Jersey 211, Philanthropy Network Greater Philadelphia, Pottstown Cluster of Religious Communities, Resources for Human Development, Salvation Army of Norristown and Pottstown, Valley Youth House, VNA Community Services

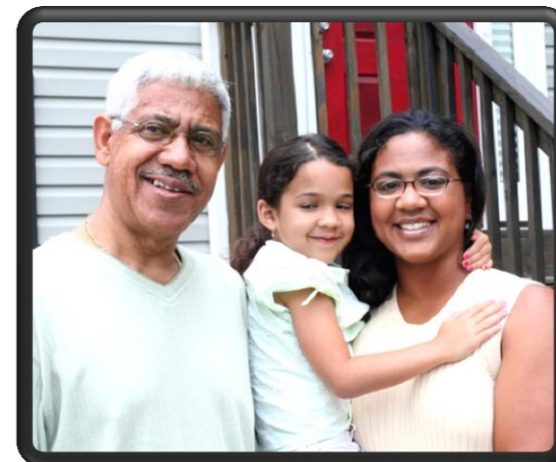
Why Diversion?

- Reduces demand on the emergency shelter system (by delaying entry or preventing shelter stays altogether) in a safe and cost-effective way.
- Prevents families and individuals from enduring the stress and trauma associated with emergency shelter stays.
- Utilizes low-cost solutions like short-term financial assistance, conflict mediation, connection to services/benefits, and/or housing search support.



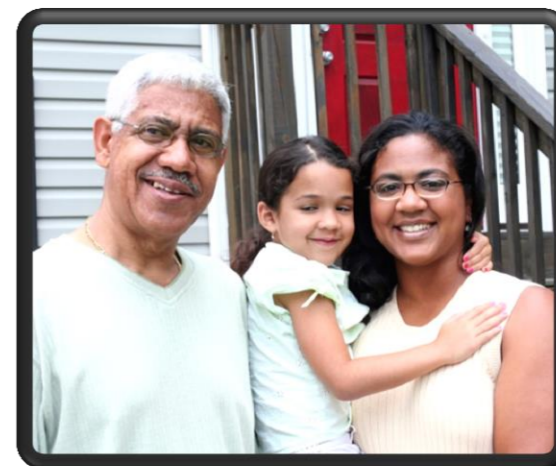
YWH Diversion Pilot

- Diversion screening at Your Way Home Call Center
- Diversion performed by Your Way Home Housing Stability Coaches
- Diversion conducted by phone 85% of the time
- Many people are looking for the **Golden Ticket** but most do not need to leave where they are staying



YWH Diversion Pilot

- Conversation should focus on what the client's housing, employment and financial needs/realities/opportunities (ex. security deposit)
- Coaches may provide tips on making a "doubled up" situation more tolerable (ex. contributing to household supplies)
- Essential that coaches explain the harsh realities of shelter life - and that shelter is not an automatic entry point for Rapid Re-Housing



YWH Diversion Stats

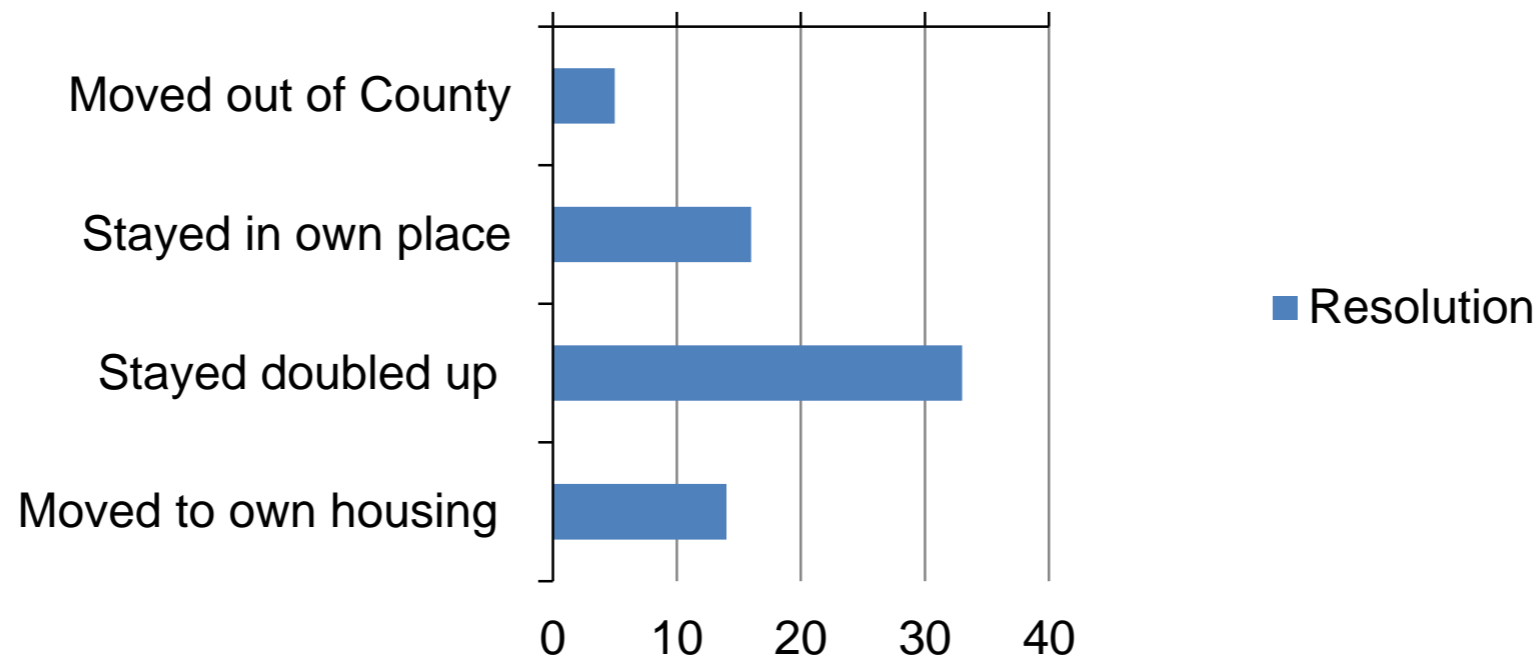
Average diversion client income	\$1,325
Percent of clients with no income	24%
Percent of clients with income over \$700	50%
Percent of clients who moved to own housing	14%
Percent of clients who stayed doubled up	33%
Percent of clients who stayed in own place	16%
Percent of clients who moved out of county	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

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

Resolution for Single Adults*

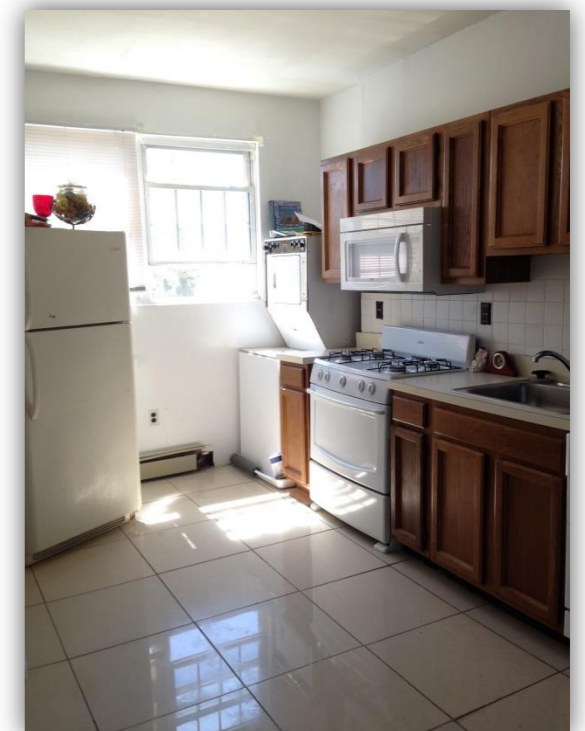


*24% had zero income; 26% had monthly income of \$699 or less; 50% had monthly income of \$700 or more.

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

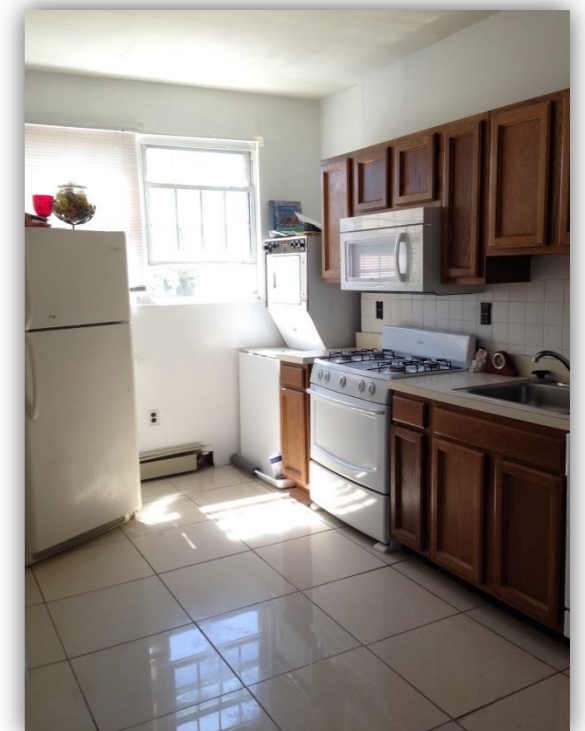
Diversion Lessons Learned

- Diversion is a unique skill for housing stability coaches/case managers.
- Diversion often costs only staff time, but often does not require financial assistance to the client.
- Diversion in practice is easy to learn; changing the mindset of providers and clients is the challenge.
- Diversion is part of a commitment to preserve limited resources for the most vulnerable members of your community.



Diversion Lessons Learned

- Diversion specialists need all the right tools at their finger tips, including flexible dollars (perhaps from the private sector) and connections to resources like food, employment opportunities and apartments for rent.
- If/when diversion works, your community must answer the question of how to scale it up systemwide?



Should Your Community Start a Diversion Program?

- Yes! Why not?
- Diversion is (relatively) simple.
- Diversion saves precious community resources for people who need them the most.
- Diversion can resolve a housing crisis with one phone call.

Questions? Contact Tricia Bradly, Your Way Home Program Manager at pbradly@montcopa.org

Shelter Diversion Southeastern Connecticut



**Marlynn Benker, Social Worker
Mystic Area Shelter & Hospitality**



Family Homelessness Southeastern Connecticut

- Rural area
- Poor transportation
- Economically depressed
- Limited employment – prevalence of part time work
- Lack of affordable & “deeply affordable” housing
- High market rents



Shelter Diversion



- Targeted support for people seeking shelter
- Find alternate housing arrangements and
 - (if necessary) connection to services & resources
 - (if necessary) financial assistance to return to permanent housing
- Coordinated Access Process
 - Initial 211 screening by phone
 - Further screening with case manager – (VI-F-SPDAT)
 - Refer to CAN Diversion case manager

The Diversion Conversation



- **A new approach to case management**
 - Shelter used as a LAST resort
 - Person Centered
 - Housing First
- **Empower the family**
 - “Start where the client is”
 - Assess their need
- **Dialogue based on**
 - Strengths
 - Resources
 - Resilience

The Diversion Conversation



- **Make the plan**
 - Conflict mediation with family/friends/landlord
 - Connection to services and/or benefits
 - Housing search support – overcome tenant barriers
 - Financial assistance

- **Work the plan**
 - Follow up

Annual Average Financial Cost to Divert Families



- Two thirds average cost of Shelter and Re-Housing
- FY 2013 – \$ 1,814
- FY 2014 – \$ 1,763
- FY 2015 – \$1,649

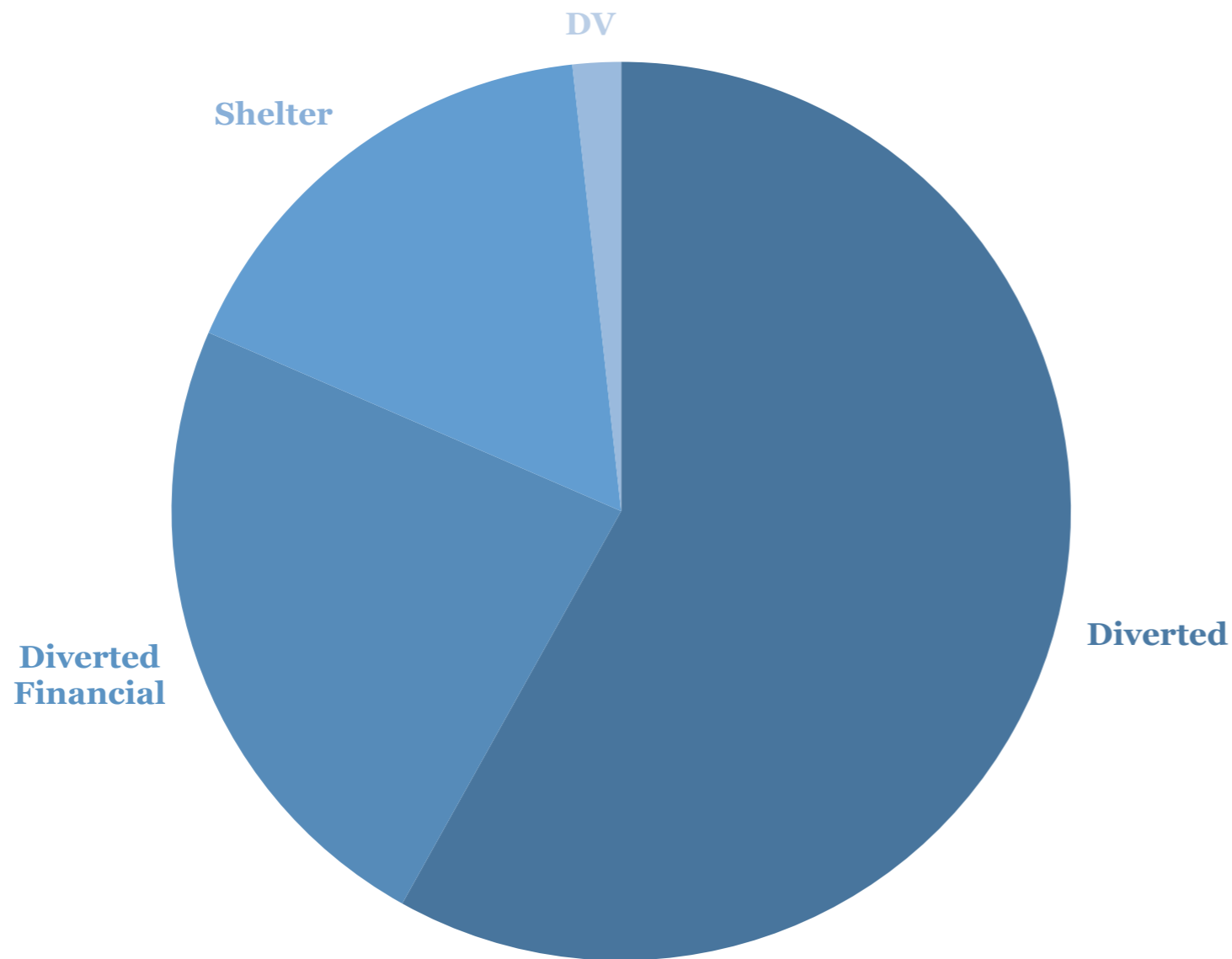
Diversion Over 3 Years



- **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

SECT CAN Family Intake Outcomes FY 2015

OUTCOMES



Screenings	358
Diversion (NFA)	201
Diversion (w/FA)	81
Referred to DV	6
Waitlist	3
Shelter:	
SECT	65
Out of Area	6

Positive Impact



- Family shelter reduced beds from 83 to 53
- 2015 CT PIT count down by 8%

Year	No. of families
2009	52
2010	49
2011	55
2012	60
2013	47
2014	51
2015	40

For More Information

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National Alliance to End Homelessness, Center for
Capacity Building

www.endhomelessness.org/pages/capacity_building