



Summary of Diversion Practices Examined in Other Communities

Hennepin County Diversion

Hennepin County is a “right to shelter” community in which local legislation mandates that all families without safe, fixed, night-time housing are accommodated in emergency shelter. The County is on the hook to fund all shelter for eligible families so they’ve strengthened their eligibility screening to ensure that shelter is offered only to families experiencing literal homelessness or at imminent threat of literal homeless. Hennepin doesn’t follow a prescribed diversion script; the goal of diversion and crisis resolution guides the conversation. A team of County workers are trained in diversion techniques, strategies, approaches and conduct a lengthy interview (up to 2 hours) with every family seeking assistance. The County workers have immediate access via electronic records (through the County-administered income assistance and public benefits program (TANF)) to verify the following eligibility criteria:

- Residency in Hennepin County for at least the immediate 30 –days preceding shelter entry,
- Presence of one TANF-eligible adult and one dependent child in every household,
- Lack of sanctions or loss of benefits due to child abuse, sexual predatory status, fraud, etc.

About 16 staff are part of the County team trained in diversion. They offer diversion services as a walk-in service at the downtown County welfare office. After hours diversion screenings are available by phone up to 11:30. After 11:3 families are provided the number for the police department or told to come back to the County welfare office the next morning at 8:00 am.

The County is absolutely invested in diversion and sees reunification or placement with a family or friend as a successful housing outcome. County services (TANF, food assistance, case management) are offered and provided to families who have been diverted.

Family shelter, although a right, is not free. The County charges shelter families for a portion of the daily shelter costs. The costs are directly deducted from the TANF benefit. County is able to do this since they also administer TANF. Families are told that shelter stays will result in a TANF deduction of \$30 per day up to half the amount of the families total monthly benefit. If families have no income they pay nothing.

The Hennepin shelter system is not seen by homeless families (or other mainstream systems) as a gateway to further housing assistance. In other words, sheltered families are not guaranteed any housing assistance beyond emergency shelter. Not all families receive RRH. Hennepin has very little TH and it doesn’t really function as part of the CoC. PSH resources are limited only to families with a disability. Only about half of the remaining families (non-TH and non-PSH) are offered RRH. When families are told this up front during diversion screening – that they have to pay for shelter and only about 50% will get RRH – many “self-resolve” as a result. Paying for shelter and lack of a housing subsidy or placement supports serves as a disincentive for families to enter shelter. Hennepin County reports that between 50% and 80% of all families who request shelter actually enroll.

Hennepin County funds a relatively rich system of supports and services for needy families. State and local funds are more than double the CoC PRN amount for Hennepin. Families are still connected to TANF, food assistance, employment programs, health screenings and benefits, and very minimal housing placement supports even if they do not access shelter. The minimal housing supports include lists of landlords who might rent to them, church-based programs that offer material assistance to set up new

households, and County-funded emergency financial assistance for housing, employment, and transportation needs. The County-funded emergency assistance is just barely enough for first month's rent but wouldn't cover deposit, utilities, move in costs, or ongoing rent.

Hennepin tracks in HMIS the families who were diverted. They report that about half (50%) will come back within 6 months but they don't have good numbers on the rate at which returns result in shelter admission versus additional diversion.

Los Angeles 211 and Diversion Approach

Los Angeles incorporated 211 into their coordinated entry approach for families starting in 2011. The role has evolved substantially since initially developed. 211's focus and orientation is to screen people into service, amass as much assistance as possible, and refer to as many services as possible. LAHSA has tried to get LA County 211 to amend their call protocol and quality assurance planning to implement a diversion approach. This hasn't gone well. Diversion from services is seen by 211 as counter to their core mission. LAHSA suggested that shelter diversion is actually inconsistent with 211's information and referral approach. As a result, the 211-coordinated intake approach and roles in LA have evolved. 211 completes initial screening call to determine that housing crisis is primary issue impacting family. If housing crisis is primary, 211 refers family to one of 8 family system intake hubs in LA (Family Solution Centers or FSC). These FSCs then administer the diversion protocol (attached to email transmittal of this summary) rather than 211.

1. Does LA 211 have a specialized homeless unit, dealing with calls related to family homelessness? **No.**
2. Does 211 employ a specialized, targeted script/protocol to manage calls related to family homelessness? **Yes, the script is fixed and doesn't not allow for an organic, natural conversation with the family.**
3. How does 211 partner with the FSC (family shelter hubs)? **All callers are asked if they need shelter. If family answers 'yes', they're referred immediately to FSC. No attempt to divert at this stage.**
4. When does diversion occur? What does it look like? **Families referred to a FSC (either in person or by phone) are asked if they have any resources or connections that might be employed instead of shelter. The diversion is administered by a trained clinician and occurs as an organic, solution-oriented conversation. No fixed protocol. Diversion is outcome focused rather than script focused.**

Data (over course of a 12-month period):

26,627 calls to 211 for crisis assistance regarding housing

20,583 screened and determined that homelessness or imminent homelessness is primary need (77%)

9,767 families follow through on FSC referral and receive a diversion interview at FSC

6,570 diverted – also includes families who don't follow through, self-resolve at this stage

3,197 families enrolled in emergency shelter

Interesting takeaways...

- ✓ FSC taking over diversion responsibilities from 211 because 211 wasn't very good at it.
- ✓ FSC performance plan (contracted outcomes) requires that FSC resolve housing crisis for X% of families. A diversion is equal to a housing crisis resolution. FSC staff are incentivized to divert.

- ✓ If FSC diverts family, family is still eligible to receive housing assistance (case management, housing relocation, some nominal financial assistance). So diversion is not seen by FSC staff as a hollow intervention.
- ✓ HMIS used to track diversion. No available data yet to report on.

Montgomery County, PA: Your Way Home Program (YWH)

Montgomery County is a urban/suburban county sitting adjacent to Philadelphia and has a population of ~800,000. The YWH program is a pilot diversion program started in January 2015. It continues to operate as a pilot as plans for expansion are not determined. Presently, all initial requests for emergency shelter go to 211. People who are in their own housing and are being evicted are not eligible for YWH diversion assistance. People who have more than 3 days to stay in their current doubled-up housing situation are referred to YWH for diversion screening and added to a “diversion list”. Those with 3 days or less are referred to shelter intake and most end up on a shelter waiting list. No diversion is attempted with these, in spite of YWH desire to do so to move diversion closer to point of actual housing loss and shelter front door. YWH hopes to shift to focus on those on shelter wait list starting in January 2016 and will then discontinue the diversion list and providing diversion support for those with more than 3 days to stay in housing.

The YWH program is part of Montgomery County’s Housing Resource Centers (HRCs) which provide rapid re-housing assistance for people who are homeless. Diversion and RRH assistance are provided by the same 8-9 staff as both the skills sets and services for both types of interventions are seen as identical.

In the first five months of 2015, the YWH program diverted 64% of callers. Most stayed in their current housing. Though YWH has access to a \$100k financial assistance fund, YWH reports that relatively few callers required financial assistance to successfully divert (approximately \$10k out of \$100k fund spent between January-November 2015). This fund includes an equal amount of public and private funding, with the private funding able to support a wider range of financial assistance needs. Financial assistance has been used for move-in costs, daycare, and occasionally a hotel voucher.

YWH staff have been trained by the Cleveland Mediation Center on phone mediation for those in diversion cue (3 days or more left in housing). YWH staff focus on problem-solve remotely with client, often working on how to be a good house guest and reduce frustrations and stress with host. YWH can also provide light at end of tunnel for households facing minor hurdles to securing their housing and avoiding homelessness. For example, if a client is looking for a job, YWH can offer help with move-in costs. However, while such assistance is available it is infrequently needed. YWH staff also spend time explaining that shelter isn’t an ideal situation to live in and the community seeks to prioritize limited shelter capacity for people on street. Montgomery County is not a right to shelter community and clients assisted by YWH tend to appreciate the need to prioritize shelter beds.

YWH staff ask pointed questions during the diversion screen, such as “Who would be upset to know you don’t have a safe place to stay”. Depending on the situation, YWH staff might then might ask to call the host family or friend or a prospective one. However, they are also careful not to ask to speak with another family member or friend if the situation isn’t dire or would appear intrusive. Many see the Montgomery County shelter system as a “golden ticket” to rapid re-housing assistance. Therefore, staff explain that, should shelter be needed, shelter is a difficult place to stay and RRH assistance is not automatic.

January-May 2015 Statistics

Number successfully diverted	217 (64% of callers)
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%

Cleveland Central Intake and Cleveland Mediation Center

The Cleveland Mediation Center (CMS) provides diversion services as an integrated, co-located service with Frontline’s central intake for men and central intake for women and families. CMS employs 2.5 FTEs at each CI location (5 FTE total). All referrals to CI come through 211. Only people who are deemed to be in need of shelter bed that night or who are otherwise already unsheltered are referred to CI. All persons seeking shelter must present in person to CI for screening. Requiring people to present in person is believed to have a deterrent effect on unnecessary, as some do not follow-through on 211 linkage. CI is open 7 days a week, but has some limited hours during the evenings and weekends.

CI uses a barrier assessment that examines rental history, legal issues, financial resources, etc., and then helps each client create a housing plan. If ultimately the client is admitted to shelter because they cannot be diverted, the housing plan follows them. The assessment and planning conducted by CI takes approximately 40 minutes on average.

Once CI assessment and housing plan is created, all clients are then immediately engaged (in-person) by CMS diversion staff. CMS ensures staff are appropriately skilled and takes great care in hiring staff who are able to conduct effective interviews.

Among those seen by CMS, almost all are in double up housing situations. Among families, about 30% are successfully diverted – meaning successful permanent housing outcome, not just ‘not admitted’. CMS staff make it clear that they don’t take it lightly that people think they need shelter. They view their service as a form of crisis intervention.

Almost all get some form of assistance – but this could be just a gift card for food or gas. They also have funds to assist with bus tickets, move-in costs, back utility payments, and rent through county HHS levy,

which has been a stable source of funding. They have also used ESG funding for some financial assistance. If people have history of having their own place and have income, CMS is able to access TANF for first month's rent and deposit. This TANF assistance is administered by the Office of Homeless Services. However, TANF funded emergency assistance is tighter now than in past. About 25% of those diverted get financial assistance from TANF. Because TANF assistance is limited to first month's rent and deposit, CMS uses this as a strategy to quickly engage families in having a plan to pay rent immediately. CMS indicates that the vast majority of families are able to pick up rental costs after this short intervention.

Very often CMS staff work to keep people in their present doubled-up situation as they help them secure a new unit. This is viewed as very much like RRH assistance. At the same time, CMS says diversion is not treated like a normal "program." CMS uses a solution-focused, strengths-based approach to help clients affirm that they want their own housing and support them in achieving that. Referrals are based on what a client identifies. Ultimately, CMS staff want to ensure diversion "sticks" and that people are "permanently diverted."

CMS believes that diversion works best when meeting in person. Often assistance provided is not really mediation, but rather just problem-solving, helping people deal with little/no income, and the fact that they've tapped out family resources. In order to get people to begin to explore what resources might be available, CMS believes it's essential to establish rapport and not imply to person that they're trying to game the system. CMS practices are guided by empowerment theory used in conflict resolution and in the domestic violence field. Staff help clients think about if they have options and how/what decisions they can make. "What has helped you not be homeless?" Staff try to see which of those skills can help to get back into housing right away.

Approximately 20-25% of those diverted have stable place out of town and receive some form of assistance to get there. This may involve providing a bus ticket. Very few ("1 or 2") have come back to CI after receiving relocation assistance. However, CMS is really careful that it's a permanent placement. At minimum housing must be available for 30 days or the person will end up in a permanent housing situation and CMS staff have confidence where they're going will stick.

Another ~25% are able to find an apartment with very little case management and some financial assistance. The remaining ~50% are tough cases with high barriers. For example, mom w/kids staying with grandma. Grandma provides food, transportation and childcare. CMS staff may call and try to make sure mom has other support to meet those needs so grandma is only asked to host. However, only about half of all CMS cases require this direct mediation and help to negotiate to continue to stay. Sometimes CMS helps clients find another host in interim.

To help diversions stick, CMS staff talk with clients about what priorities they have and how they can maybe pay cash (first) for rent. They avoid budgeting or assuming that clients haven't been able to budget their limited resources. Rather, the focus is on simply prioritizing housing costs.