

***BEST PRACTICES IN HOUSING
PROBLEM SOLVING/DIVERSION
PT.3***

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8/27/24

What We Do

Policy and Programs

- Carries out the vital work of educating policymakers and the field about key strategies and policies for ending and preventing homelessness.
- Keeps federal policymakers and legislators informed of the needs of people experiencing homelessness and the programs serving them.
- Leads advocacy efforts on a grassroots level.

Capacity Building

- Supports efforts to end homelessness by offering training and technical assistance tailored to communities' unique needs.
- Helps design and implement crisis systems, improve systems' performance, and utilize data to end homelessness, particularly with an equity lens.
- Provides online courses, trainings, and webinars to inform the field of best practices to end homelessness.

Homelessness Research Institute

- Analyzes data to identify homelessness trends on national, local, and Continuum of Care levels.
- Publishes research that ensures policymakers, practitioners, the media, and the public have the best information about trends and emerging solutions to the problem.
- Uses an equity lens to identify disparities in homelessness data.

Lived Experience Innovation + Strategic Communications

National Alliance to End Homelessness Statements for Participation

The Alliance works to ensure that diverse voices are included as facilitators, attendees, and guests in our training forums. All voices are welcome.

The organization has a zero-tolerance policy for any form of discrimination or abusive behavior. The Alliance is committed to ensuring that all its events are safe and respectful for all participants.

Participants acknowledge that any form of discrimination, violence, or abusive behavior may result in removal from an office hour or forum depending on the situation.

If any discrimination is witnessed or experienced during the training, or if you feel unsafe, please notify any member of the Alliance staff.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness strives to create a diverse, inclusive, accepting, and safe space for everyone.

Housekeeping



BEST PRACTICES IN HOUSING PROBLEM SOLVING/DIVERSION: Objectives

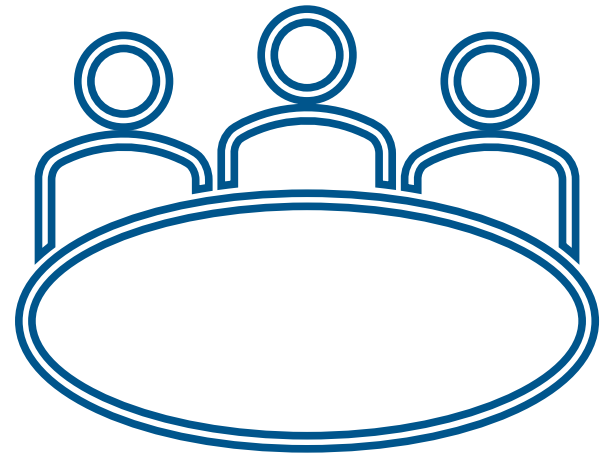
Define	Define “Housing Problem Solving” and “diversion” as a system intervention including guiding principles
Understand	Understand the best practices in diversion/housing problem solving
Gain	Gain an understanding of the important role of diversion and coordinated entry
Identify	Identify steps to get started
Clarify	Clarify important measures of successful diversion



**“Good, better, best. Never let
it rest. Until your good is
better and your better is best.”
—Tim Duncan**

Welcome....In Breakout

- Your name, organization, roles, and identities
- Are you sad about the end of summer or excited for fall why or why not?
- What is one thing we talked about last week that resonated with you?



PART 2. REVIEW



Guiding Principles of Problem Solving



Crisis
Resolution



Client
Choice



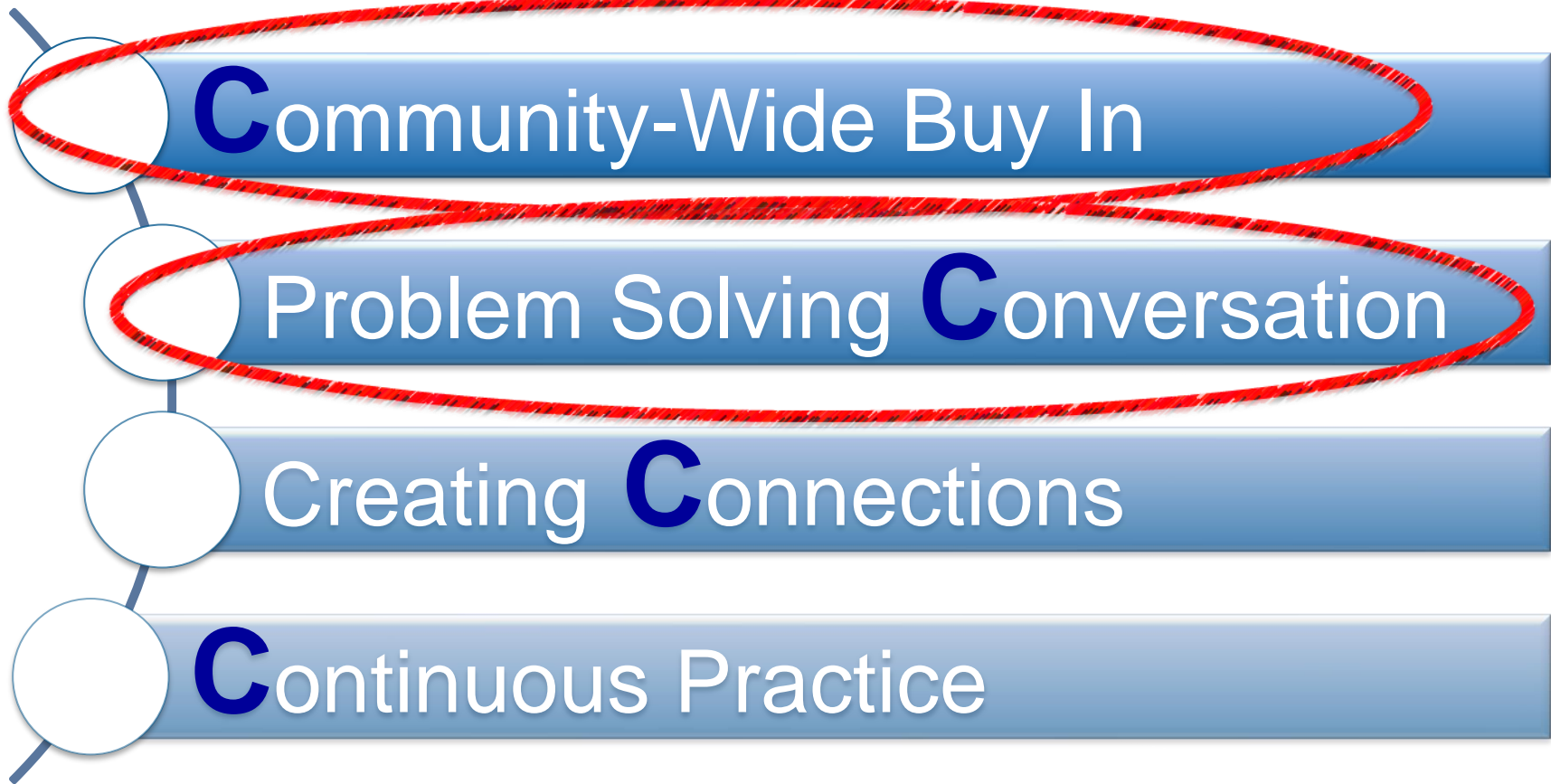
Progressive
Engagement



Maximizing
Resources



Effective Problem-Solving Practice: Four Fundamentals “Cs”



Community-Wide Buy In

The Collective Impact Approach:

1. Common Agenda
2. Shared Measurement System
3. Mutually Reinforcing Activities
4. Continuous Communication
5. Backbone Organization



Source: Collaboration for Impact

Problem-Solving Conversation

6 Steps for Conducting an Effective Problem-Solving Conversation

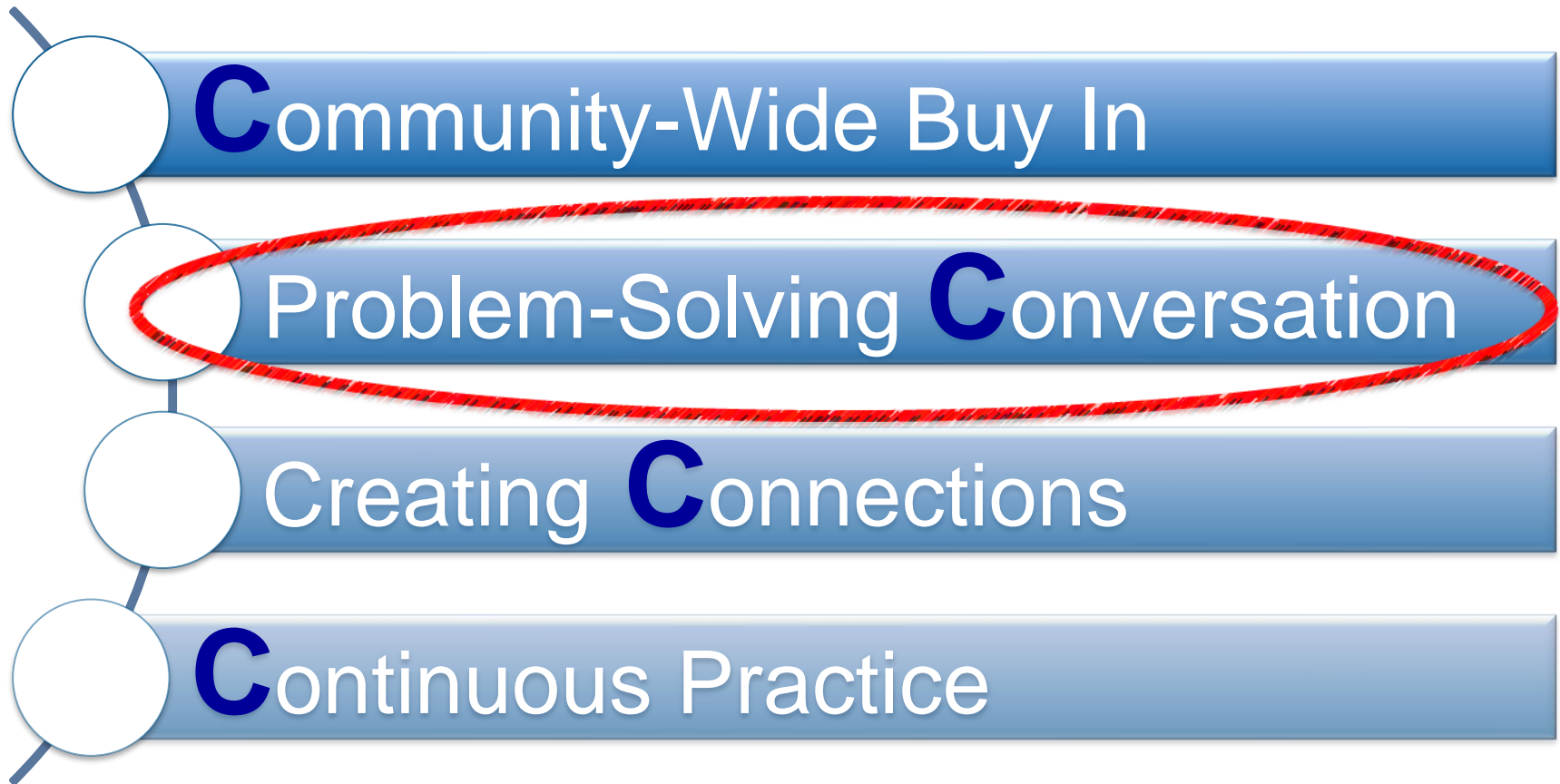
1. Introduce Yourself & Purpose of the Meeting
2. Active Listening
3. Strengths & Supports Exploration
4. Moving Forward
5. Creating Connections
6. Summarize & Follow-Up

The infographic features a large orange number '6' followed by the text 'STEPS for conducting an effective PROBLEM SOLVING CONVERSATION'. Below this, a light blue box contains the text: 'Diversion is a problem solving, strength based conversation. It is grounded in a conflict resolution approach, is empowering, and client centered.' A large orange number '1' is positioned above a dotted line. Below the dotted line, the text reads 'INTRODUCE YOURSELF & PURPOSE OF MEETING' followed by a sample sentence: '"Hi, my name is Jane and I work for the HRS. I want to speak with you today about how...''

Pt.2 Questions



Effective Diversion Practice: Four Fundamentals “Cs”



Problem-Solving Conversation: Step 2

Helpful Hints

- Who is your emergency contact?
- What did your last permanent housing situation look like?
- Where do you shower?
- Where do you store your things?
- Who watches your kids when you need a sitter?
- In the past, has anyone watched your pet while you were away?
- Who do you typically confide in when you have something you want to talk about?
- Who do you spend time with on the weekends?
- How do you get around daily? Does anyone give you a ride?

In the Chat Box -
What other open-ended questions can you ask?



Problem-Solving Conversation: Step 3



STRENGTHS AND SUPPORTS EXPLORATION

REALITY TEST THE OPTIONS

Focus on the person's strengths, capabilities, and autonomy. Validate what they have accomplished. Allow the conversation to be open and fluid. There is no list of questions; explore housing and employment history, income possibilities, and potential support networks.

- Emphasize their survival techniques
- Listen for how the person perceives their self-worth
- Listen for the downward spiral



Problem-Solving Conversation: Step 4

MOVING FORWARD

REALITY TEST THE OPTIONS

List and discuss possible options. Reality test the options to keep the conversation on track and set attainable goals.



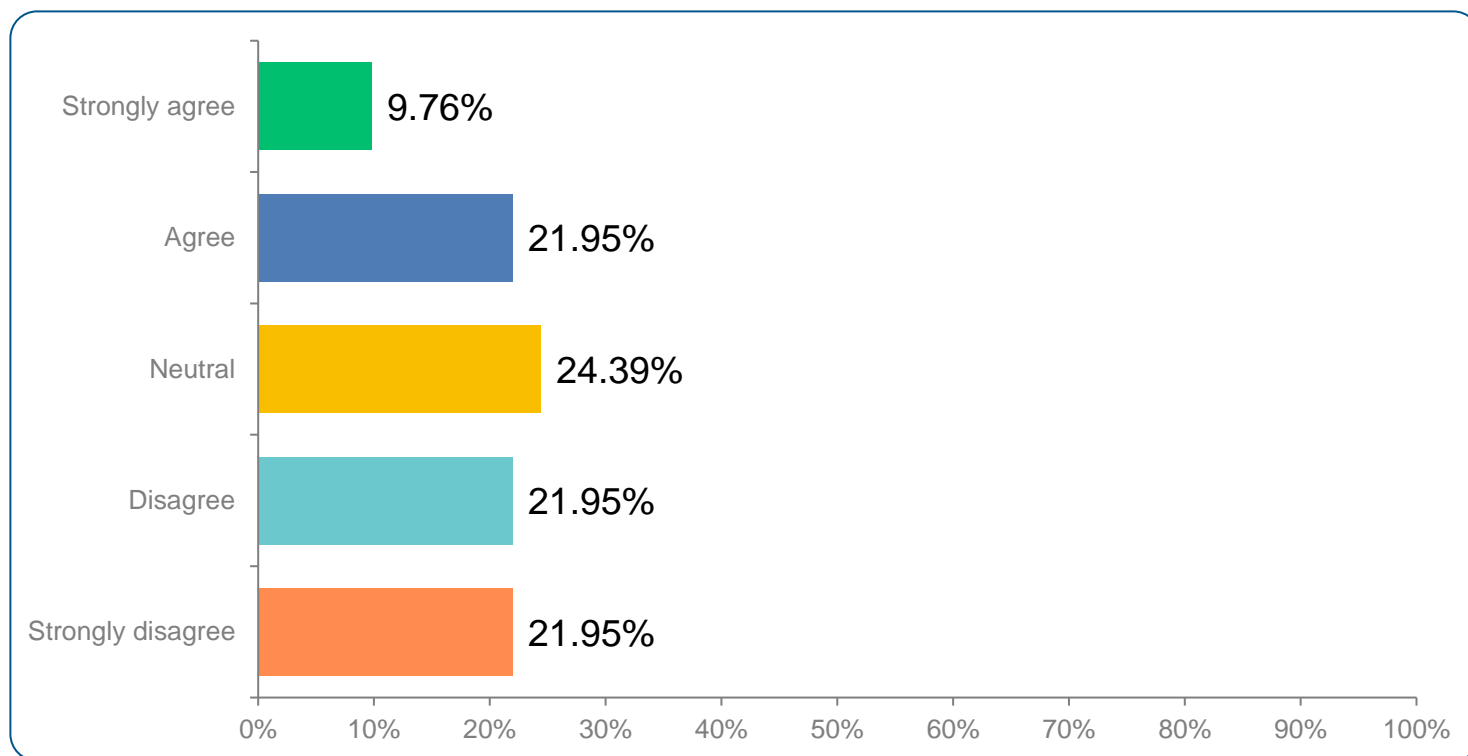
- List and discuss possible options
- Reality Test the options
 - Keep person on track
 - Help set attainable goals
 - Requires empathy, support, and a directive approach



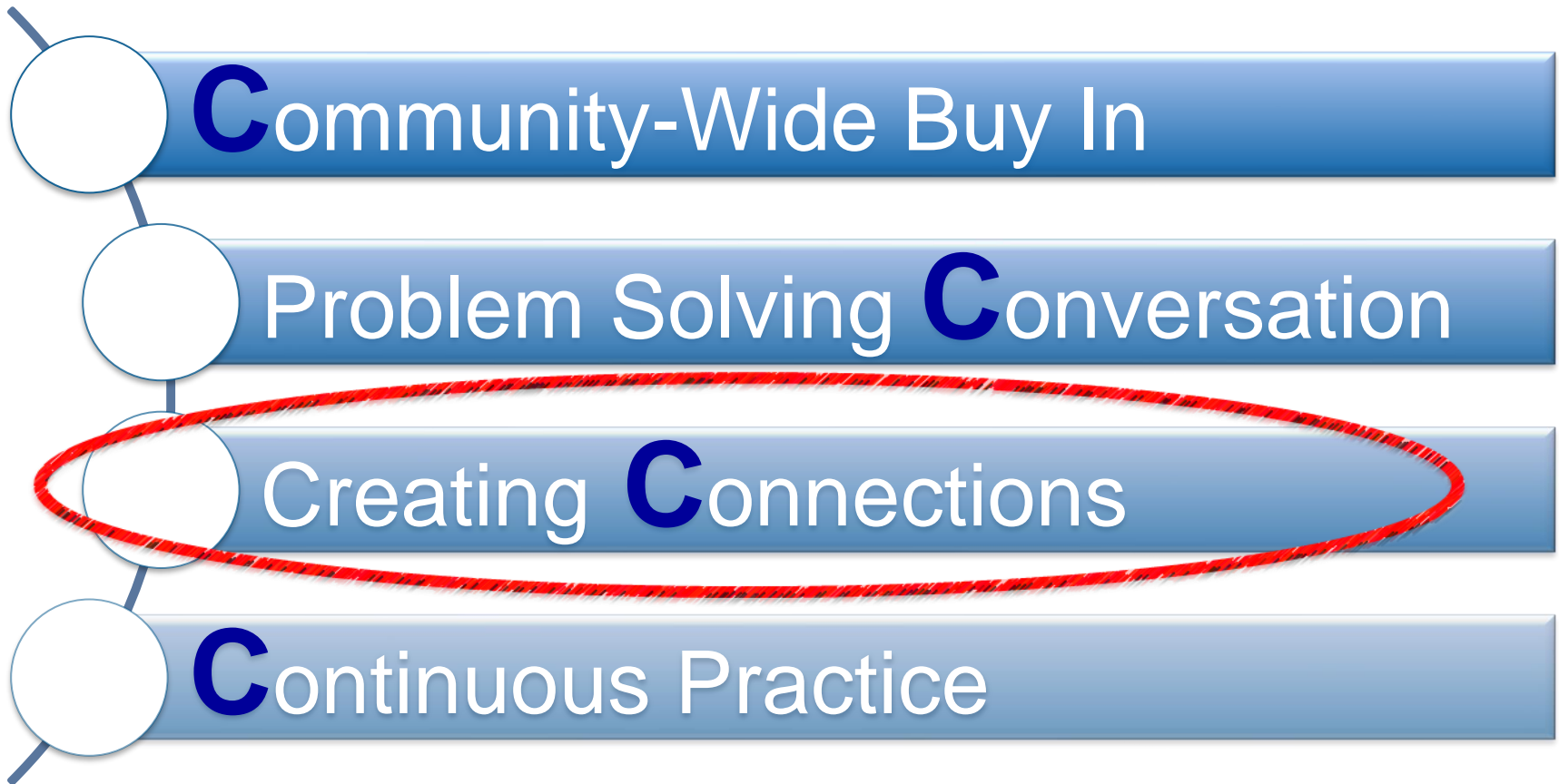
Activity: Identify the strengths

A 47-yr old female comes in/calls asking for help. She stated that she was having problems with being on the streets. She stated that she stayed at various shelters that LGBTQ friendly community and was in process of transitioning to female. She asked you if there were places that were friendly to her gender identity and stated that she has been turned down repeatedly from shelters due to her gender identity. She disclosed that her mother was religious and had asked her to leave the home at the age of 16. She stated that she was jumping shelters constantly and attempted to hold employment while doing so. She lost her job a year ago and aged out of the TAY shelters. She expressed she was feeling discriminated upon due to her choices. She reported that she has been working as an escort to make money for motels and feels like she is being self-destructive. She said at 27 years old she tries to stay away from drugs, however, sometimes wishes she didn't exist. She continues to report that she feels like she has been homeless too long and is discouraged with service providers due to not receiving help when she was in the TAY shelter.

While experiencing homelessness I felt seen and respected by community members in Austin/Travis County.

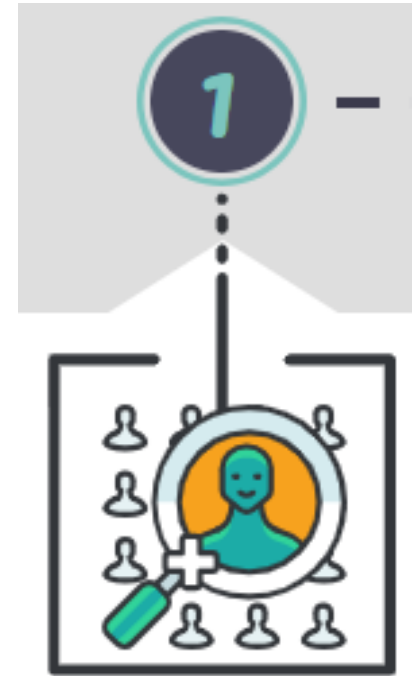


Effective Diversion Practice: Four Fundamentals “Cs”



Creating **C**onnections: The Warm Handoff

1. Identify Connections
2. Make the Connection
3. Explain Connection Purpose
4. Share the Background
5. Identify Necessary Documents & Resources
6. Summarize the Connection
7. Schedule Follow-Up



Creating **C**onnections

- Homeless response system **cannot** do it all
- Having choices/options **is empowering** to a household seeking solutions
- Family, friends, and community partners **are critical** for effective implementation of diversion strategies
- Warm Handoffs – **A MUST**

Ani_ka via iStock



Creating Connections

Breakout Rooms: Develop a list of all potential community connections: BE SPECIFIC

- Connections Critical to Housing Problem Solving Strategies
 - Group 1 Identifying Personal Supports
 - Group 2 Faith Community
 - Group 3 Mainstream benefit programs
 - Group 4 Employment
 - Group 5 Legal Services
 - Transportation
 - Private business
 - Health and wellness
 - Food security
 - Other

Continuous Practice

Ongoing Diversion Strategies

- Problem-solving Conversation need to happen **more than** once, twice, etc. – until housing alternative is identified
- Problem Solving Conversations are **NOT** a “one time service”
- Use a **progressive engagement** approach and consider:
 - Increased engagement of problem-solving conversation and connection to supports
- Determine how to access deeper housing resources and assist with access



Continuous Practice

- Enter each problem-solving conversation as if it's the first
- Realize you are better equipped and have more context for this subsequent conversation
 - For example: “Staying with Mom these last few times doesn’t seem to be working out. Would you like to explore other options?”
- Implement the same strategies with new context
- Trust the problem-solving conversation to determine when shelter is appropriate



Continuous Practice

- When to know when shelter is appropriate:
 - Explore, with open-ended questions, whether the person believes they have exhausted all their options
 - Listen for: when trying to identify a safe and appropriate option is causing stress, trauma, and conflict within the person's life
 - Remember, having choices is empowering and the choice best for someone may be shelter



TIPS TO TAKE AWAY



Hone The Skills, Not A Tool

Question

“We have someone who wants to fund a diversion program... He would like to find a **good diversion screening tool** and I am wondering your thoughts on this and if you have anything you could recommend?”

Answer

“I suggest that the screening tool is in fact the relaxed, client-centered, strength-based, empathetic conversation we have with the client. In other words unfortunately no short-cut screening tool.”

~ Ed Boyte (former staff
Cleveland Mediation Center)

Communication Styles



Professional Development & Ongoing Training for Staff:

- Housing First
- Harm Reduction
- Racial Equity & Homelessness
- Cultural Competencies
Humility/Responsiveness
- Conflict Resolution
- Problem Solving
- Mediation
- Negotiation
- Communication Skills
- Military Cultural Competency
- Military Trauma Informed Care
- Safe Talk/Suicide Prevention
- Self Care

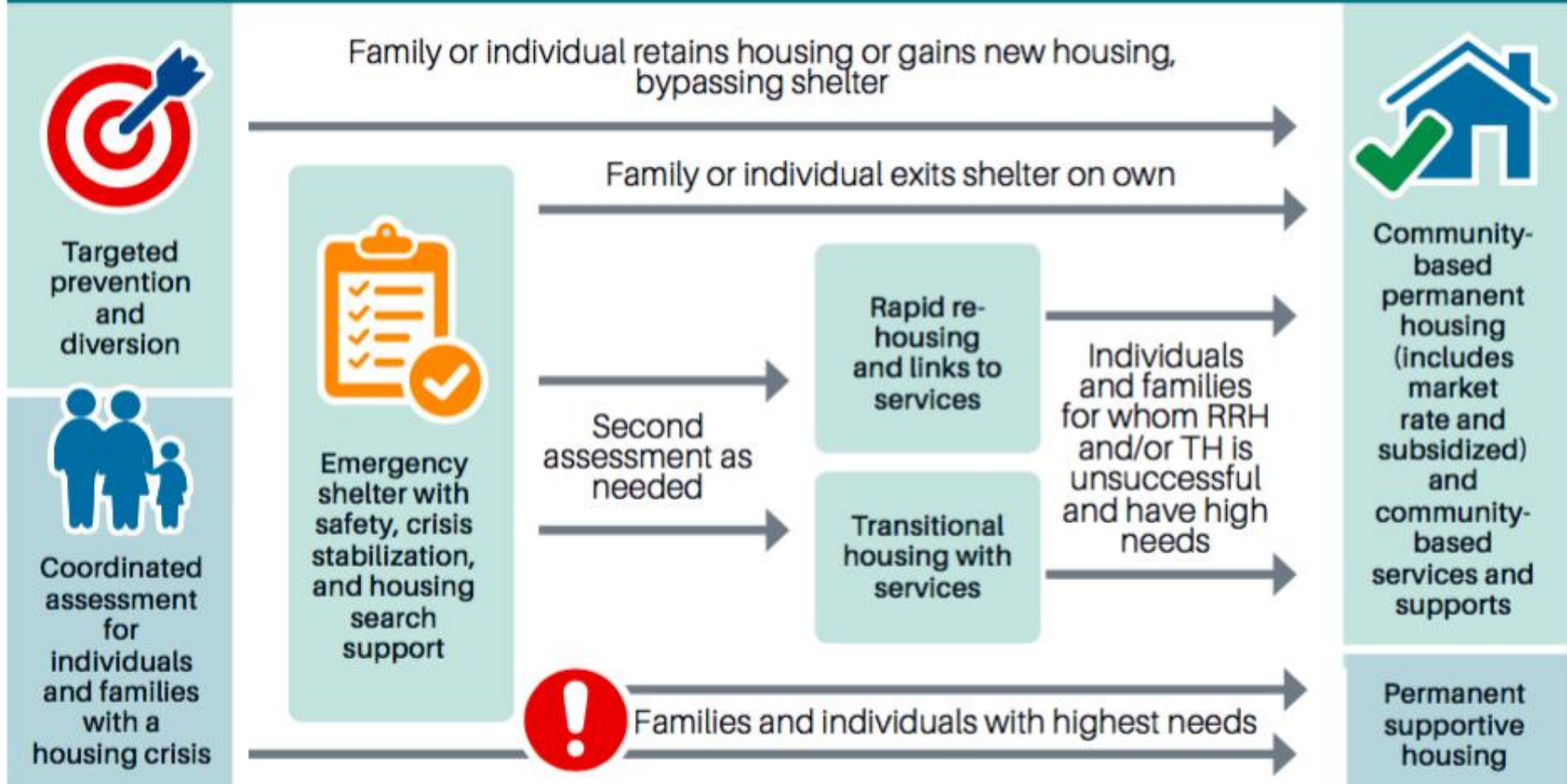
Break time!



HOUSING PROBLEM SOLVING/DIVERSION & COORDINATED ENTRY

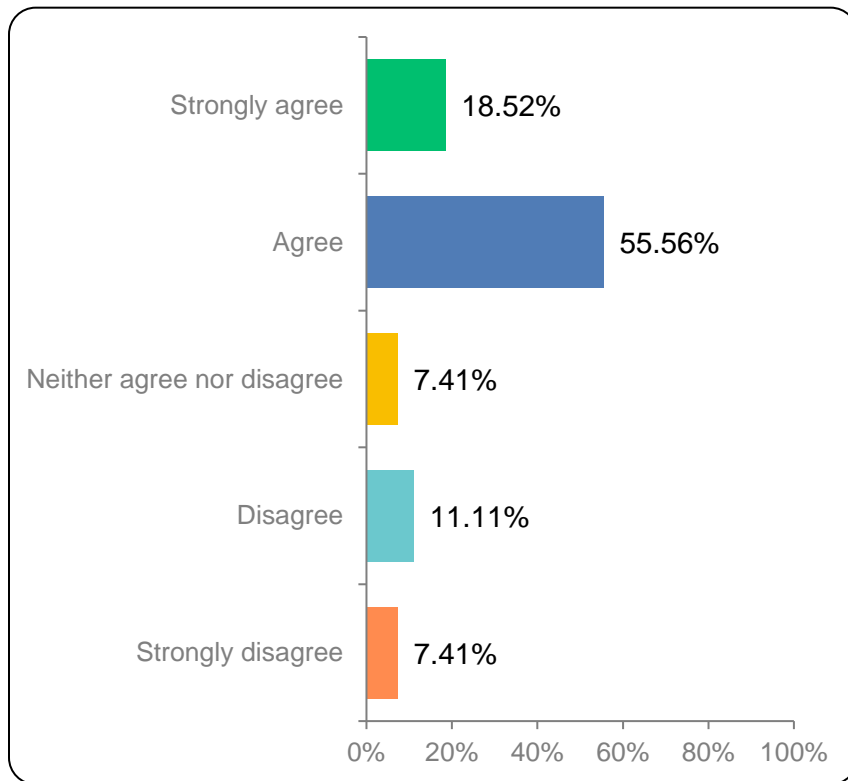


Homeless Response System

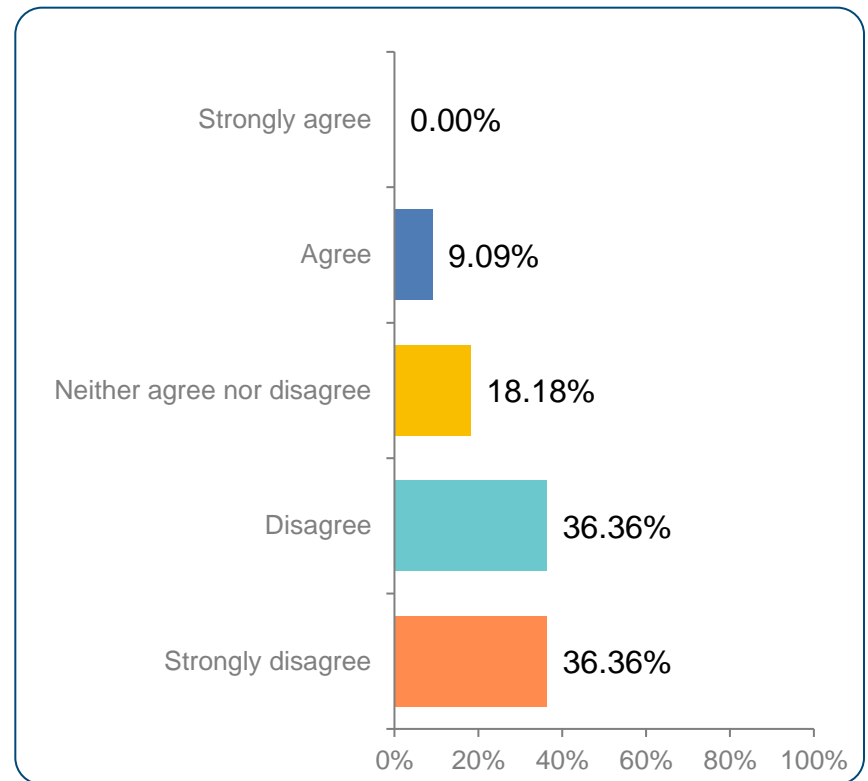


Our community uses a Coordinated Entry system as a central point of entry for anyone with a housing crisis where they can engage in a problem-solving conversation and if needed, be assessed and connected with shelter and other appropriate resources based on their strengths and needs.

Provider

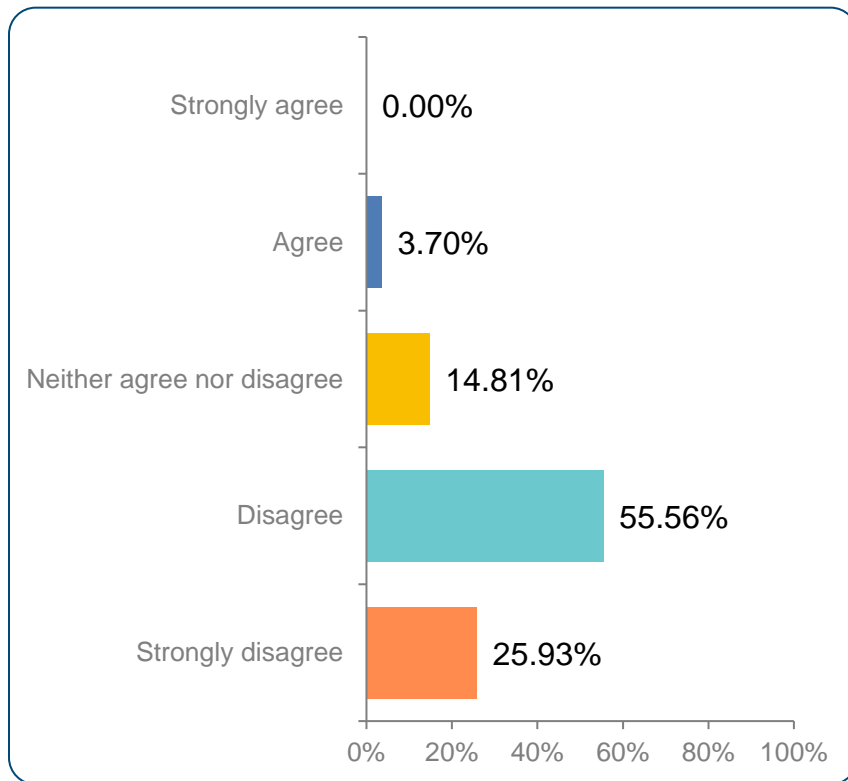


Leadership

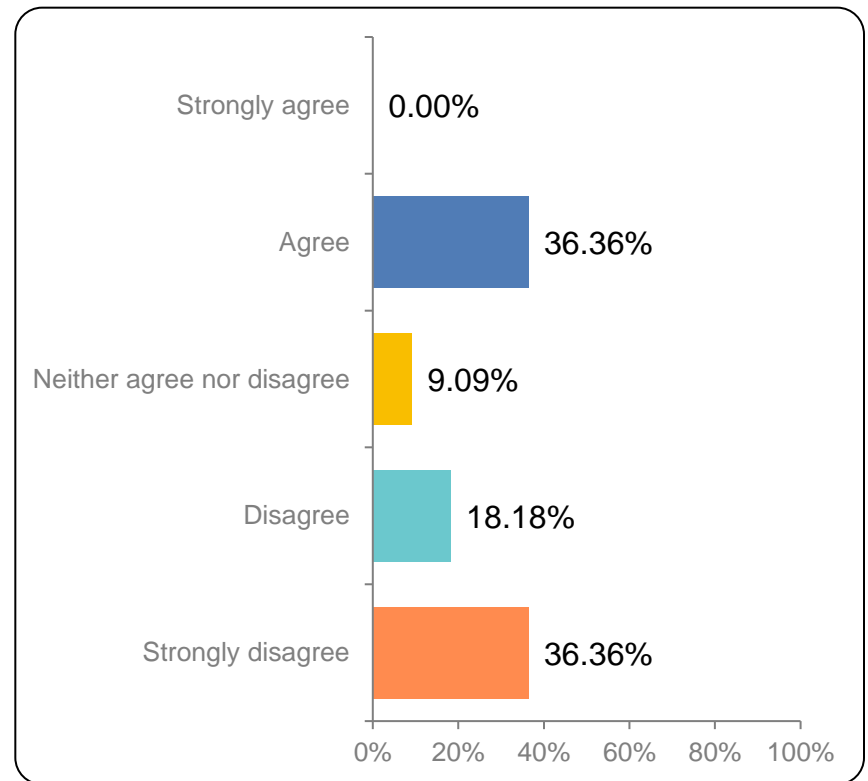


Whenever possible, our community employs strategies that prevent people from losing their housing and diverts them away from needing shelter or other housing assistance.

Provider

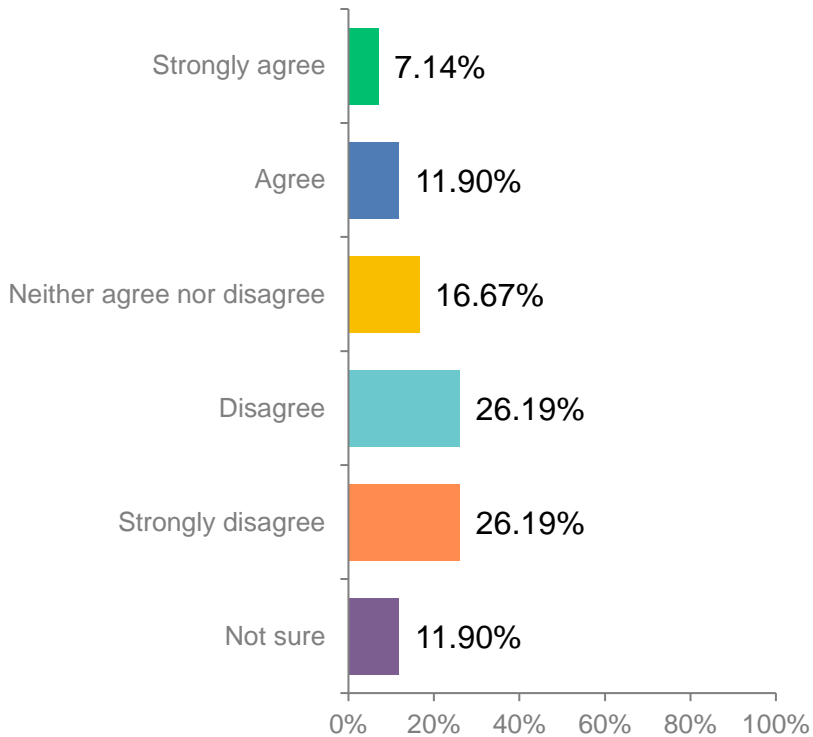


Leadership

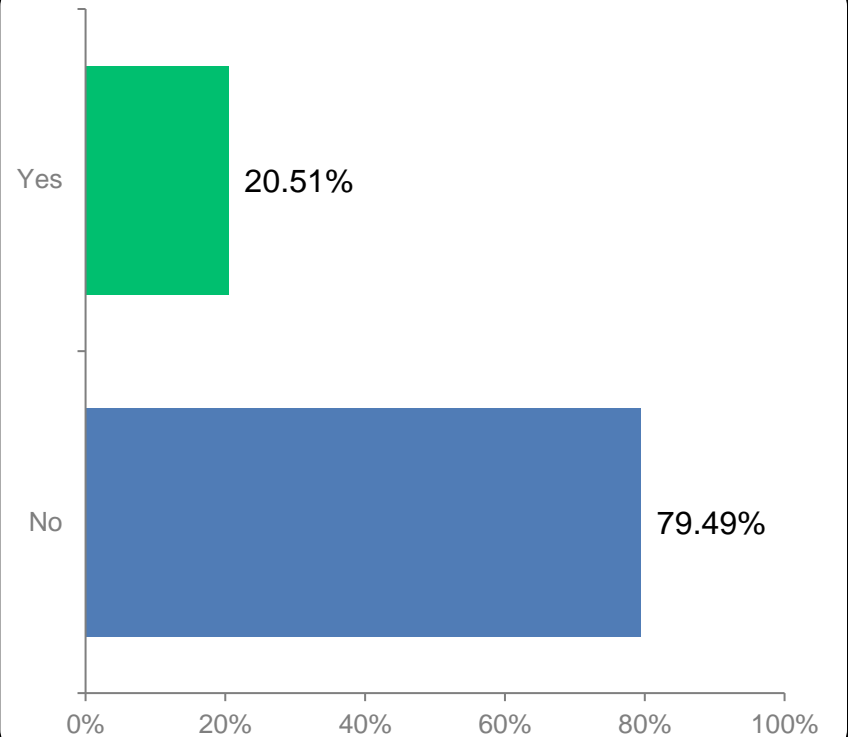


Lived Experience + Expertise

When I first became homeless, I was assisted in developing a plan to find permanent housing within the first month of connecting with services.



Before you became homeless, were you offered support to keep your housing or to find other housing that met your needs?



Role of Coordinated Entry

- Many communities have not yet integrated shelter entry/prioritization together with coordinated entry and diversion strategies
- Shelters are therefore **critical** in implementing diversion strategies as it serves as the “front door” of the homeless response system
- Shelters have an incredible opportunity to engage households and assist in solving their immediate housing crisis **before they become homeless**
- Shelters **are not** denying service when employing diversion strategies. Instead, they are providing a chance to avoid trauma of homelessness and find safe, appropriate alternative
- In employing diversion strategies, shelters ensure resources dedicated to those who will need them most

Coordinated Entry and Shelter Diversion

Old “Front Door System”

New “Front Door System”

Need for Change

Confusion

Anxiety/Loss

Clarity

Restructuring

Integration

New Vision

PROBLEM-SOLVING/DIVERSION STRATEGIES

Data Collection and Analysis



Why data?



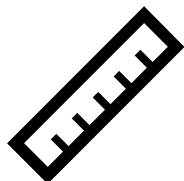
Tells a story



Informs decision-making



Helps to set, track, and monitor goals



Measures Impact

DATA



SORTED



ARRANGED



PRESENTED VISUALLY



EXPLAINED WITH A STORY



Diversion: Desired System Outcomes

- Why do you collect data?
- What happens with the data you collect?
- What does it tell you?
- Does the data you collect tell you what you need to know to improve performance?
- How often do you look at it?
- Do you use it to make design, policy and staffing decisions?

Successful Outcomes

**Permanently Back with
Friends or Family**

**Return to Own
Residence**

**Temporarily Diverted
While Seeking New
Housing**

**Permanent Relocation To Safe
Place Out of Town**

Desired Outcomes and Shared Measures

- Decrease number of first time homeless
- Decrease number of people entering shelter
- Decrease number of people on shelter waiting list
- Increase all exit destinations from shelter
- Percentage of people diverted from homeless response system
- Increase exits to permanent housing
- Increase lengths of shelter stays

Evaluating Performance

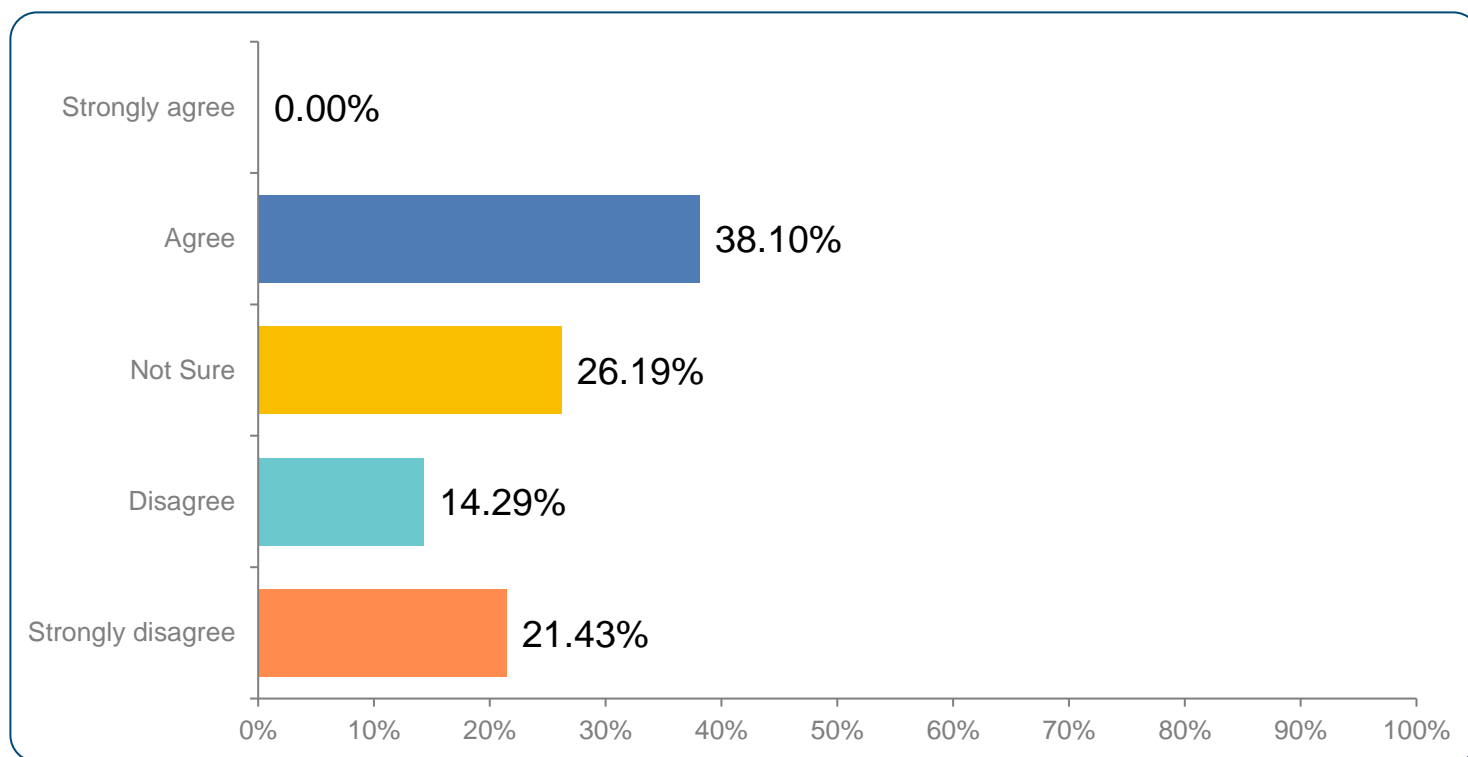
MUST HAVES

1. Decrease in the number of first time homeless
2. Decrease number of people entering shelter
3. Decrease number of people on shelter waiting list
4. Percentage of persons diverted from the homeless response system
5. Percent of positive exits from shelter
6. Decrease in LOS in shelter from entry to PH exits

HIGHLY ENCOURAGED

- Decrease in Prior Residence to shelter categories
- Type of diversion service provided
- Destination or resolution
- Changes in need and barriers to sheltered population
- Percentage of people who were diverted that return to shelter/system (TBD: timeframe to track)
- Pair Qualitative with Quantitative
- Disaggregate data to understand who is being diverted

My race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability did not influence the way I was treated by service providers in my community while being homeless.



DIVERSION: MAKING THE SHIFT



Advancing the Role of **Diversion/HPS** in
Reducing Homelessness

Philosophical Shift

Operational Shift

Practice Shift

Shift Happens!

Safe and Appropriate Diversion Philosophy Shift

- Housing First orientation that..
 - Everyone is ready for housing now
 - People experiencing homelessness don't experience it in a vacuum: they have connections, skills, and resources
- Try problem-solving with every household
 - You can't predict who you will be able to problem-solve with and who you won't
- You aren't helping someone by admitting them into shelter before trying to problem-solve

Safe and Appropriate Problem Solving/Diversion Philosophy Shift

**Diversion before, during and
HPS after Intake!**

Shift From	Shift Towards
Are you willing to enter shelter and follow our rules?	Is the place you were staying safe? What can we do to help you remain there? What can we do to help you find a safe place other than shelter?
What programs are you eligible for? Who has a bed?	What would resolve your current housing crisis?
Beginning with eligibility determinations and intake questions	Begin with brainstorming and structured problem-solving conversations about household's situation and resources
Beginning with screening and assessment tools and shelter waitlists	Support crisis resolution to avoid shelter entry through problem solving conversation

Safe and Appropriate Diversion

Operational Shift

- **Re- envision Intake Process**
 - Again, problem solving and diversion before intake
 - What does intake process consist of?
 - Keep in mind Housing First
- **Space & time**
 - Private space conducive to a conversation
 - Flexible, not rushed timing is optimal
- **Staffing**
 - Incorporate diversion culture, “right fit”
 - Training in mediation skills
 - Job descriptions and structure
 - People with Lived Experience



Safe and Appropriate Diversion

Practice Shift

- Use strength-based conversations
 - Strength's assessment vs. needs assessment
- Support people by communicating the belief that they can maintain or find housing outside of the homeless response system
- Focus all interactions on supporting guests to access and sustain permanent housing situations quickly prior to entering the system
- Build partnerships to connect individuals to community based services
- Try HPS/Diversion with every household
- Reality test the plan
- Strengthen network of trained HPS providers

Role of Shelter in Safe and Appropriate Diversion

Practical Shift

What community partners should be trained in problem-solving?

Activity

1. Where is Housing Problem Solving happening now?
2. How much time is dedicated to each conversation?
3. How do we hire for positions that do diversion?
4. How do we maintain the skillset for ongoing success?

How well do you know Diversion/Housing Problem Solving- Jeopardy Edition

Housing Problem Solving	Approaches	Strategies	Diversion
100	100	100	100
200	200	200	200
300	300	300	300
400	400	400	400
500	500	500	500

M
E
N
U

Break time!



LET'S TRY THIS!!!

Problem Solving Conversation



Activity- Housing Problem Solving Conversation

How would you introduce yourself?

How would you frame the conversation?

What questions would you ask to get the conversation going?

What questions would you ask to explore strengths and resources?

Activity: Problem-Solving Conversation Role Play

Why Role Play?

- Allows you to apply knowledge and skills in situations that simulate what you will encounter in real life
- Able to transfer what your learning to improving performance by:
 - Practicing in a safe, non-threatening environment where it's ok to make mistakes
 - Work in small groups and observe facilitators demonstrate task/skill
 - Receive targeted feedback and support after each role play; this achieves a higher level of proficiency and attains performance expectations

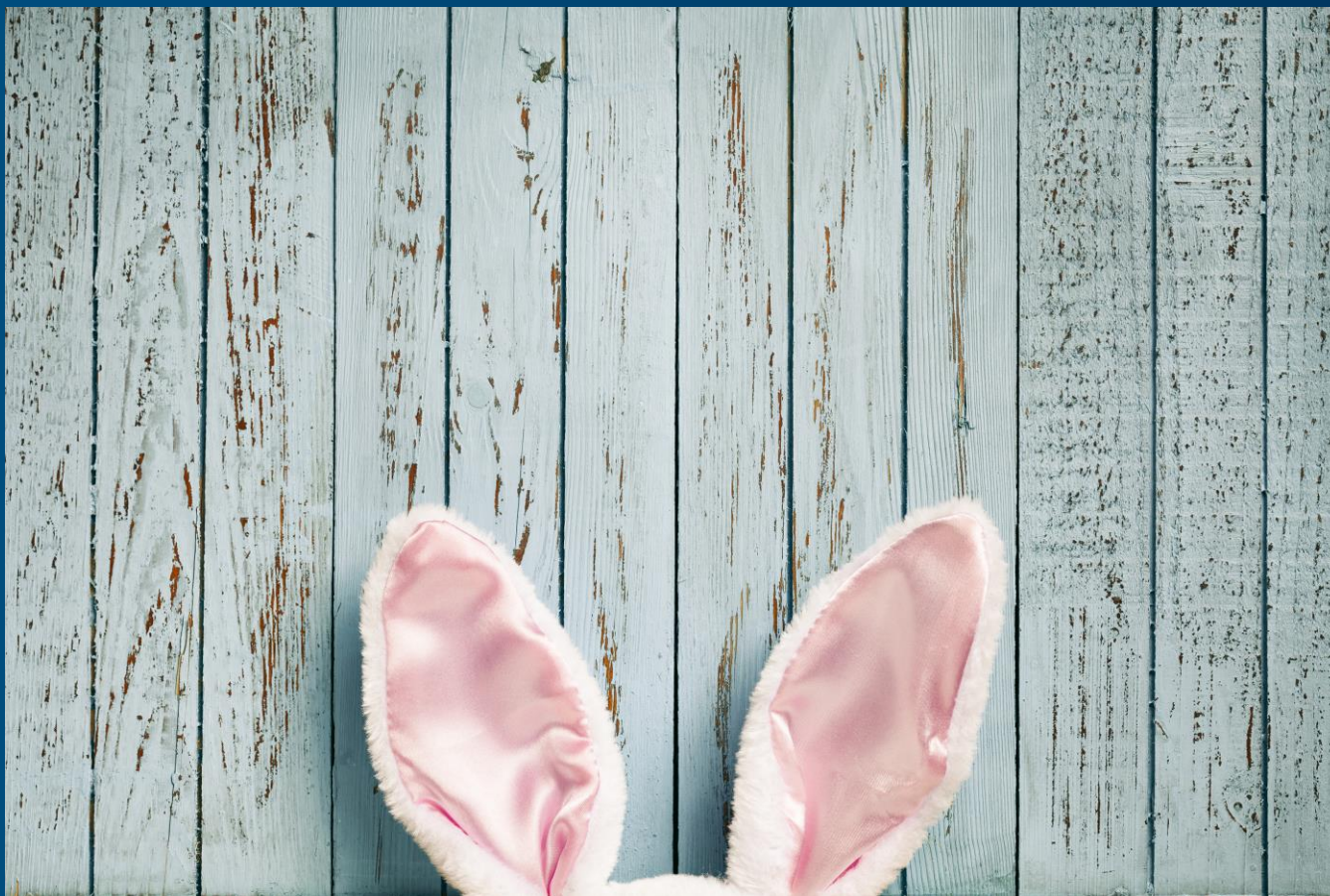
Source: fhi360, Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit for HIV Prevention Trials

Activity: Problem-Solving Conversation Role Play

- Decide in your group who will play the two characters and who will observe (take notes)
- Read the background materials:
 - General instructions for each role
 - Scenario instructions for your character
 - Guidelines for giving and receiving feedback
- Conduct the role play
- Give each other feedback
- Debrief with large group
- How do I message diversion/problem solving when in the initial contact?
- How will I use the elements of problem solving in a conversation?
 - Client resiliency
 - Active Listening
 - Mediation
 - Solutions
- What connections and warm handoffs can I offer? What will that look like?

Engagement Toolkit for HIV Prevention Trials

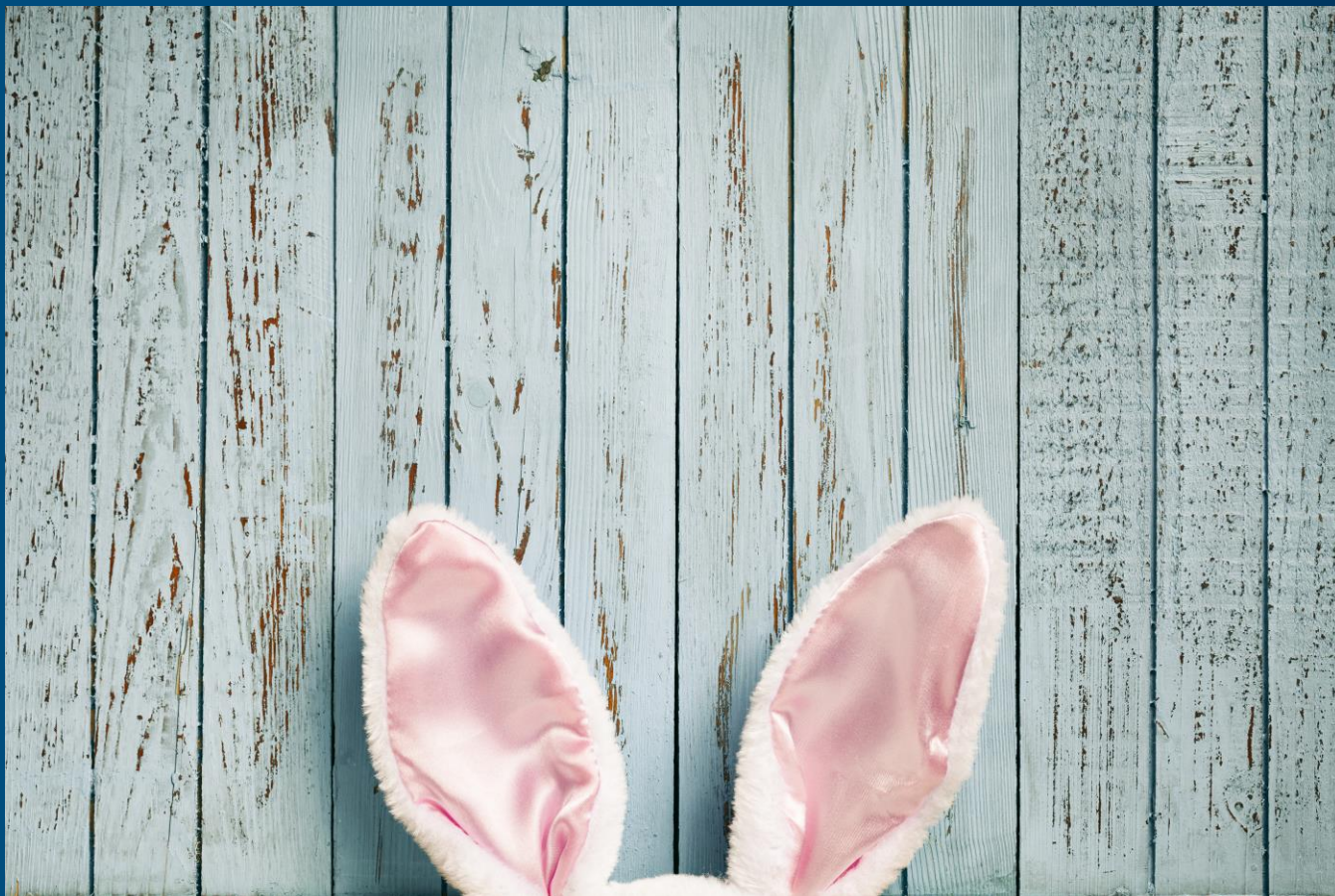
Scenarios



Scenarios

- 1. Susan** (43 yrs old) has been in shelter for 3 weeks and decided to live in a hotel for the past 2 days. She now needs shelter again. She has a \$1,500 tax return expected to come any day now. She has enough money to pay for one more night in the hotel, but she is concerned if she doesn't get her tax money, she will have no money for gas after paying for a hotel tonight. Once she gets her tax return, she plans to drive to Maryland to live with her niece. (Group 1)
- 2. Brett** (24 years old) presents after sleeping in his car for the last three nights with his two-year-old son, Freddie. He had a partner, Sally, but she left him and Freddie three months ago. A year ago, Sally and him (21 & 24 yrs old) had been rapidly rehoused through a SSVF agency in the Balance of State. He meets with the CE access point on Monday and states he is open to driving to San Antonio, to stay with his parents but have no money for gas for his car. (Group 3)
- 3. Alice** (56 yrs old). Alice has been in and out of the homeless service system all over Texas, living in Fort Worth and El Paso, and is now in Austin, Tx. She is not interested in rehousing but wants a shelter bed for a while as a form of respite. She reports having severe addiction issues (heroin) and is only interested in living in a shelter that will tolerate her habit. (Group 4)
- 4. Jack** (21 years old), has been couch surfing for the past year to avoid living in an abusive family situation, where his mother's boyfriend has threatened to kill her if she ever tried to contact his mother again. He is tired of bouncing around and not having a place to stay. He wants safe and affordable housing. He has no income and two open warrants for shoplifting and using false identification. He has an aunt in Florida but has not been in contact with her for years and fears that if he contacts the aunt, the mother's boyfriend may retaliate. (Group 2)

Debrief



Debrief Role Play: Person seeking shelter

- Did the Diversion/Outreach Staff person adequately address your reason for seeking shelter/experiencing homelessness? Resolve other issues/concerns raised during the meeting?
- Were you able to understand and use the information the Diversion/Outreach Staff person provided?
- Were you comfortable answering and asking questions?
- After being a person who seeks shelter/ experiencing homelessness what changes would you make when you roleplay the Diversion/Outreach Staff person?

Debrief Role Play: Diversion Specialist

- How did it feel to integrate new skills such as active listening, paraphrasing, asking open-ended, strengths-based question into your interaction with the person seeking shelter?
- What worked well? What still feels awkward and requires more practice?
- What did you think about the pacing/length of the interaction?
- Did the person seeking shelter/experiencing homelessness raise issues or questions that you did not know how to answer or didn't know how to follow-up on?

WRAP UP



Recap



Goal of the Homeless Response system is to house people as quickly as possible and **divert** people from imminent homelessness whenever possible



Diversion is a problem-solving strategy that helps people identify and access alternatives to homelessness and resolve their immediate housing crisis.



Problem-solving is a person-centered, short-term housing intervention that seeks to assist households in maintaining their current housing or identifying an immediate and safe housing alternative within their own social network.



Implementing diversion and problem solving across the system:

- Reduces inflow into the system
- Improves system performance outcomes
- Targets more intensive homelessness interventions and resource for those with higher needs

Recap



The four “C’s” of diversion are Community-wide buy-in, Problem-Solving Conversations, Connections and Continuous.



The six steps of problem solving include identify the purpose, active listening, strength and support exploration, moving forward, creative connections, and a summary and follow-up.



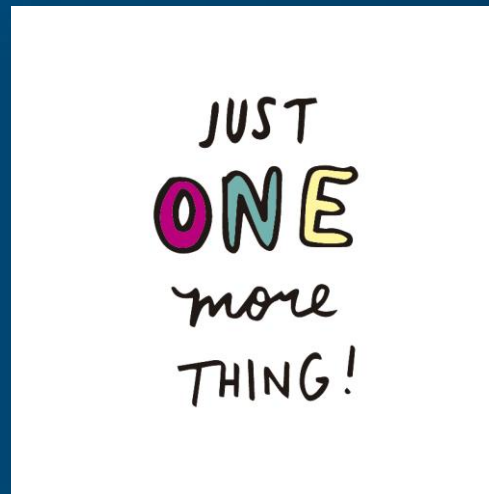
The problem-solving conversation is a shift from assessment and eligibility to focusing on understanding a person’s strengths and needs, exploring solutions, and working to resolve the crisis. It takes practice, practice practice!



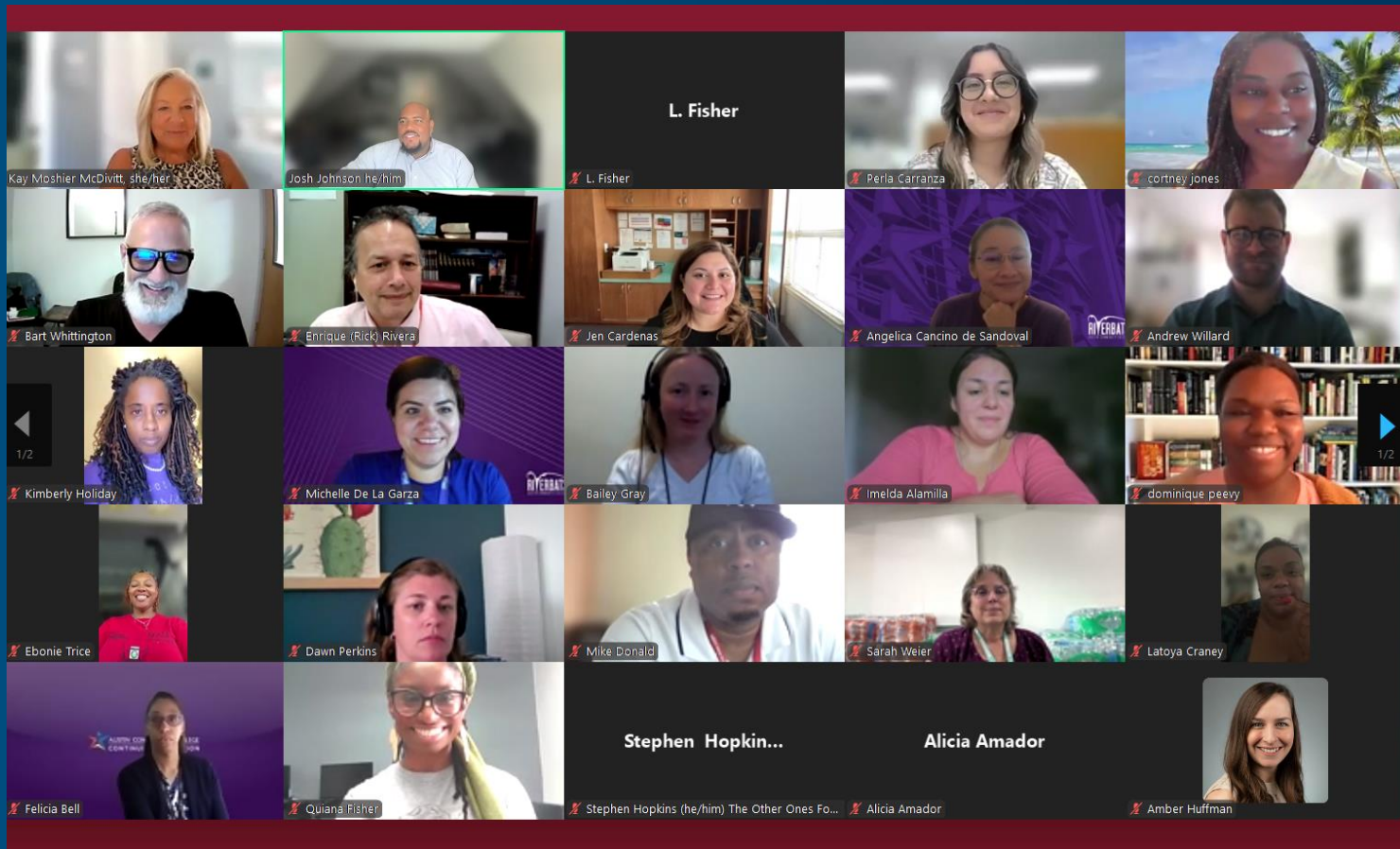
Effective Housing Problem Solving/diversion impact first time homelessness, and decreases inflow into the homeless system

Next Steps

- What is one commitment you will make moving forward around HPS/Diversion?



Thank You



What diversion/problem solving questions are you left with?



Contact

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Anything We Missed?

