

# *Bringing It Home: Ending Homelessness in NC*

Diversion: A Key Component to the Homeless Crisis  
Response System



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The National Alliance to End Homelessness is the leading national voice on the issue of homelessness. The Alliance analyzes policy and develops pragmatic, effective policy solutions. The Alliance works collaboratively with the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to build state and local capacity, leading to stronger programs and policies that help communities achieve their goal of ending homelessness. The Alliance provides data and research to policymakers and elected officials in order to inform policy debates and educate the public and opinion leaders nationwide.

Working with a strong network of innovators, the National Alliance to End Homelessness identifies and evaluates hundreds of policy and program strategies and their impact on homelessness. The Alliance's Center for Capacity Building helps communities replicate and customize the best of those strategies. The Center focuses on strategies that are cost effective, data driven, and can be implemented at a scale that can significantly reduce homelessness.

# Session Objectives

- I. Gain an understanding of the important role diversion serves within a homeless crisis response system
- II. Learn how effective, safe and appropriate diversion activities can reduce entries into homelessness
- III. Understand the nuts and bolts of a comprehensive conversation about diversion options

# POLL

## Who Is In The Room?

- CoC Staff /Board Member/System Planner
- Rapid Re-housing Provider
- Emergency Shelter/Transitional Housing Provider
- Coordinated Entry Staff
- Private or local government funding agency
- Technical Assistance Provider



# POLL

## What is your familiarity with Diversion?

- No knowledge of diversion
- Limited knowledge of diversion
- Familiar with diversion
- Very familiar with diversion



# HOMELESSNESS DIVERSION

## An Overview

# 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.**



# Diversion

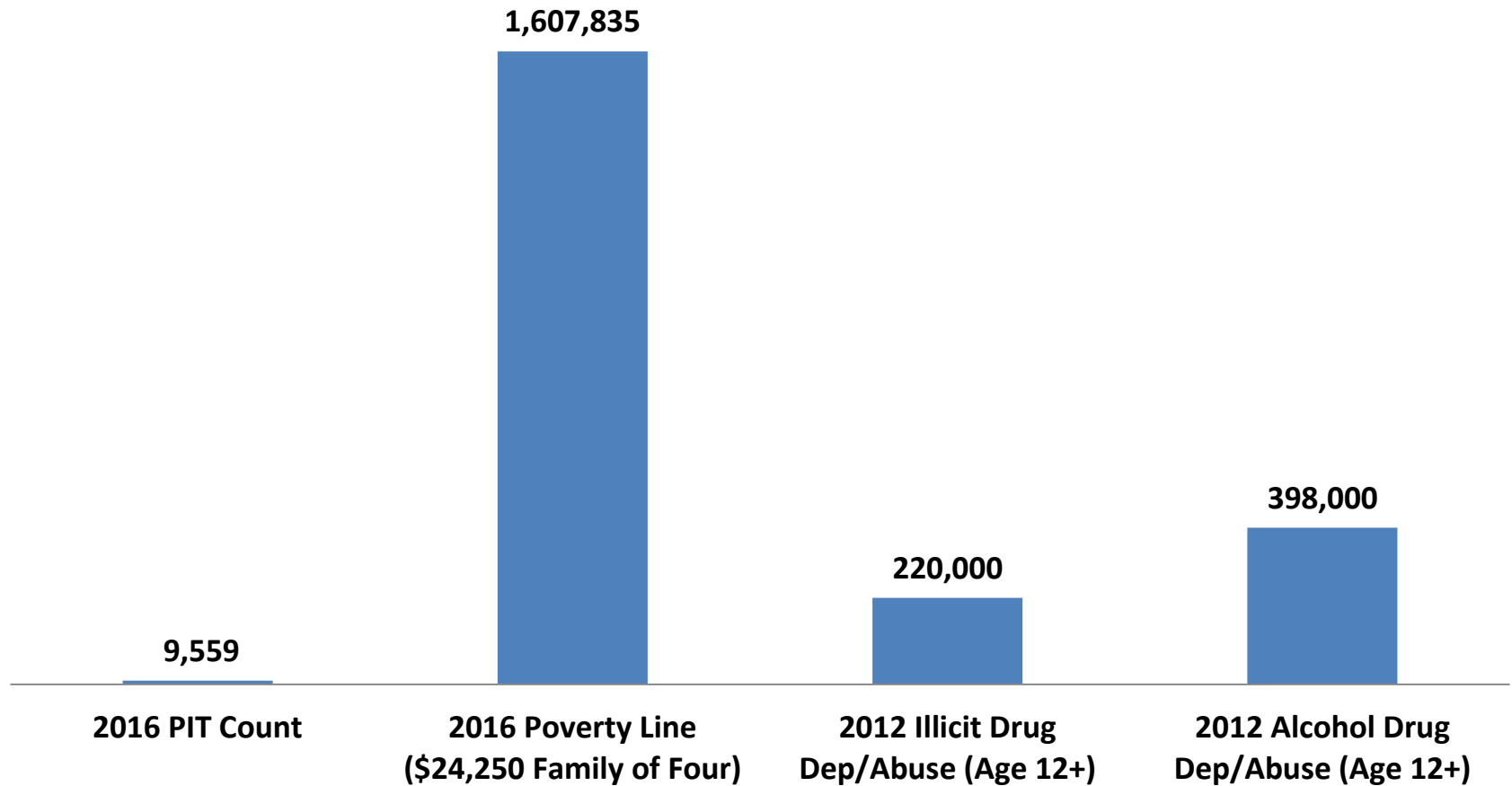
Diversion is NOT a separate “program” but rather a part of the entire crisis response system

Diversion is problem solving and solution focused

Diversion should always be safe and appropriate for the individual/household



# Homelessness, Poverty, Behavioral Health: North Carolina



# Diversion: Reasons to Implement

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

# Diversion: Location Options

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 them all

# Diversion

## 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 Funding Sources

- ESG
- TANF
- SSVF
- County/City General Funds
- Private Funds

# HOMELESSNESS DIVERSION

Shift in Philosophy & Practice

# Diversion: Safe & Appropriate

## Philosophy Shift

- Call for shelter doesn't mean there is no other option
- Belief in a strength based approach – individuals/households are the best resource for problem solving
- Shifting from the idea that the shelter is a household's only resources

## Practice Shift

- Use a strength based assessment vs. a needs based assessment
- Before conducting intake, engage individual/household in a conversations, identifying safe alternatives to shelter
- Assist in connecting to community resources to avoid shelter stay

# Diversion: The Five C's

COMMITMENT

CONVERSATION

CREATIVITY

CONNECTIONS

CONTINUOUS



# Diversion: The Five C's

## COMMITMENT

- To the belief that shelter is not the only option for someone with a housing crisis
- To the belief that households are better served outside the homelessness system
- To the belief that the person experiencing the housing crisis is the best person to solve their problems

# Diversion: The Five C's

## CONVERSATION

- Face-to-face
- With staff person
- Trained in mediation, negotiation, problem solving
- Using a strengths based assessment
- Who assists an individual to explore options through problem solving

# Diversion: The Five C's

## CREATIVITY

- Key facet to problem solving
- Exploring every option
- Example: Connecting household to food pantry/services within the shelter so family can stay with grandma

# Diversion: The Five C's

## CONNECTIONS

- RRH, PSH, Landlords, PHA
- All DV Providers
- Legal Services
- Food Bank
- Faith based organizations
- Affordable Housing Developers
- Veterans Affairs
- Hospitals
- Behavioral Health

# Diversion: The Five C's

## CONTINUOUS

- Ongoing
- No timing out for service
- Understanding that diversion may be necessary for a household multiple times

# HOMELESSNESS DIVERSION

Key Component to an Effective Crisis  
Response System: Coordinated Entry

# Key Elements of an Effective Homeless Crisis Response System that **End Homelessness**

## Access & Prioritization

- Outreach
- Coordinated Entry
- Diversion

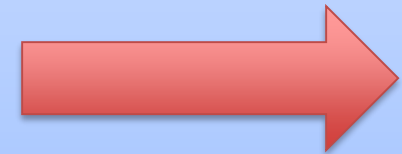
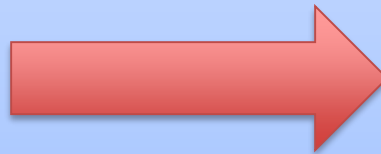


## Crisis & Interim Housing

- Immediate and low-barrier access available for anyone
  - Same day
  - 24/7
  - Not contingent on sobriety, income, criminal records

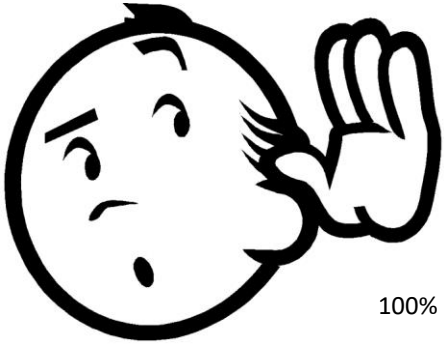
## Assistance to Return to Housing Quickly

- RRH
- PSH
- Mainstream public housing

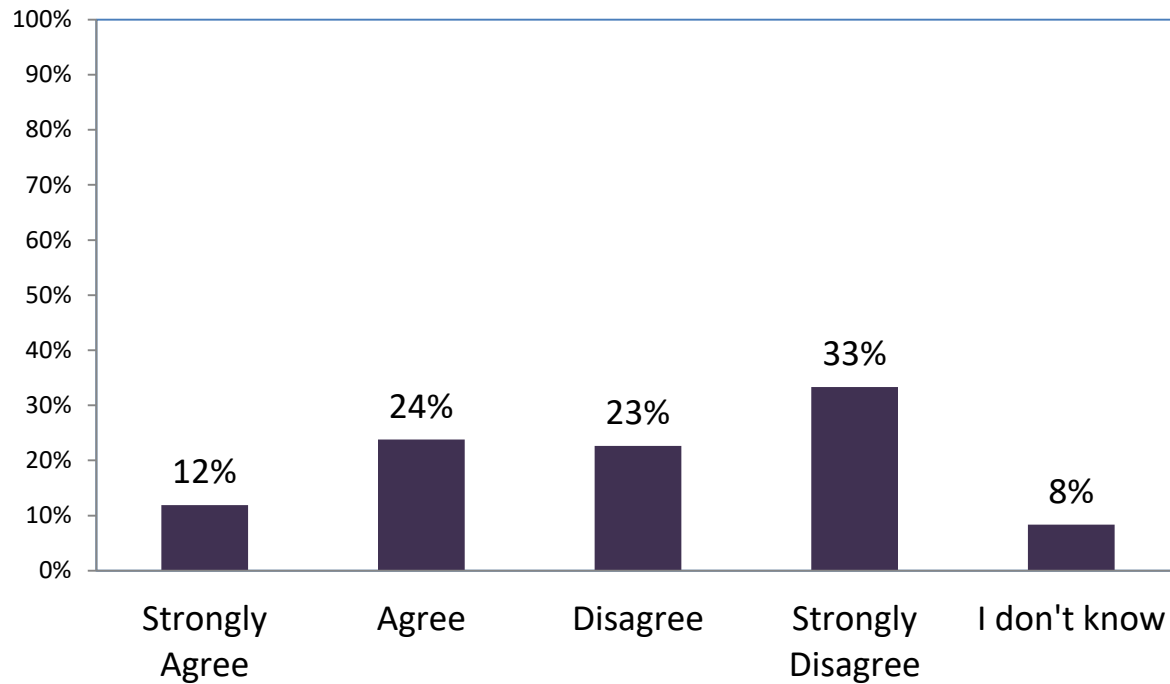




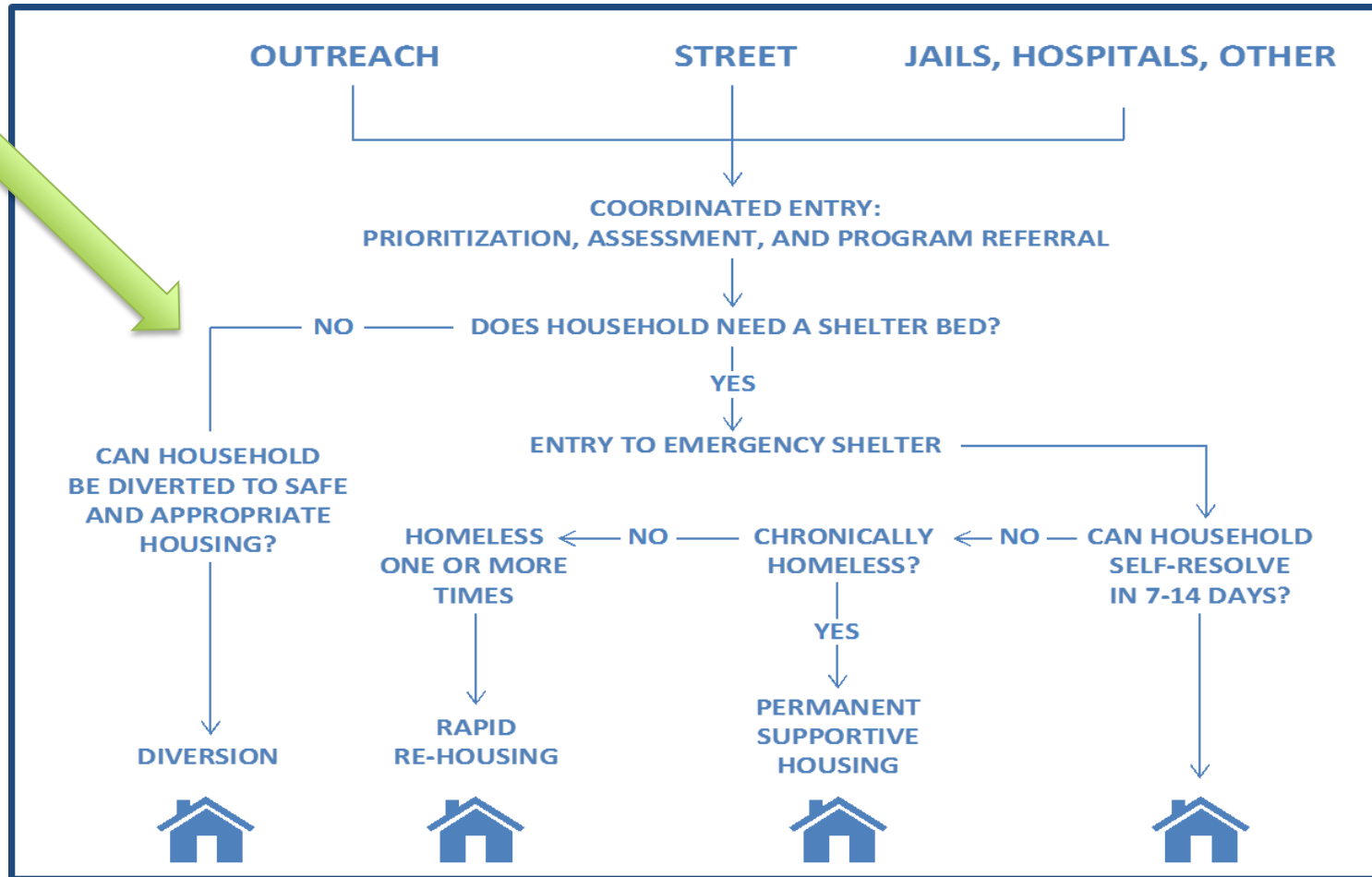
# Community Consumer Survey



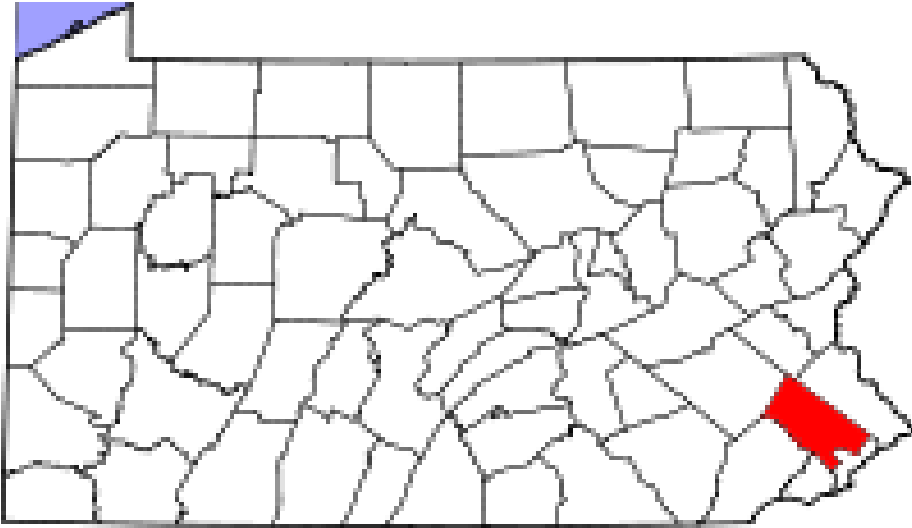
7. When you first became homeless, were you offered assistance to help you stay in your previous housing situation, or with family or friends, to help you avoid entering shelter?



# Homeless Crisis Response System



# Montgomery County, PA



## Suburban County Northwest of Philadelphia

- Population 816,857
- The Fair Market Rents for efficiency (\$830) and 1BR( \$1,003)
- 32% of renters in the geographic area are severely cost burdened – **paying at least 50% of household income towards rent**
- In 2015, 1,570 people experienced homelessness (50%+ families)
- In 2016, 798 residents stayed in emergency shelters
- 2017 Winter Point-in-Time\*
  - 19 unsheltered individuals
  - 270 persons in emergency shelter or transitional housing

\*soft numbers

# A Systemic Housing First Approach to Ending Homelessness



YOUR WAY HOME  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Outreach & Engagement

Coordinated Entry & Assessment

Emergency Response

Help Finding & Maintaining Permanent Housing

Connect to Services that Provide Stability

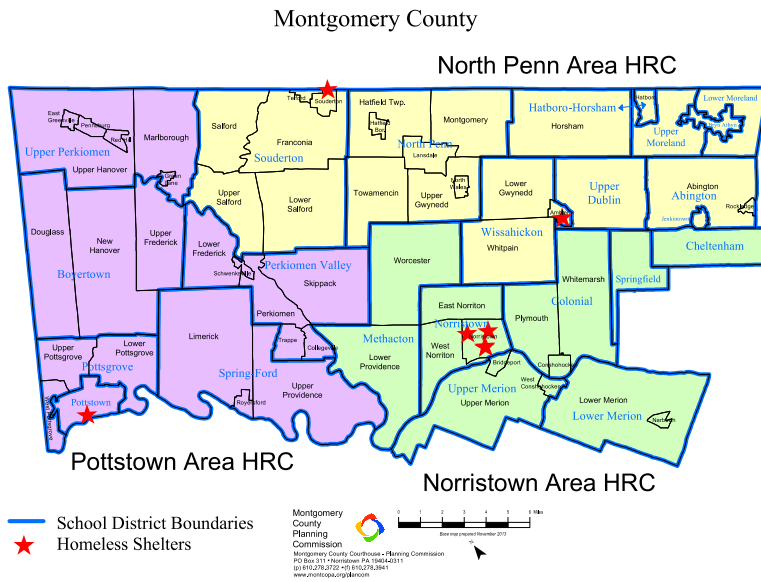


Your Way Home Operations Manual

July 2016

# Diversions Within Coordinated Entry System

- Call Center as a front door policy
- Use of VI-SPDAT as prioritization tool for all YWH Services, including diversion



# Diversion: A Community Effort

## Community Partners

- Permanent Supportive Housing Providers
- Transitional Housing Providers
- Emergency Shelters
- Domestic Violence Providers
- Legal Services of Southeastern Pennsylvania
- Food Banks & Redistribution Centers
- Montgomery County Emergency Services
- Day Centers
- Affordable Housing Developers
- Veterans Multi-Service Center
- VNA Community Services
- Community Mental Health Centers
- Local United Way 211
- Montgomery County Housing Authority
- Local Faith-Based Organizations

## Community Teams & Training

- Hospitals & Homelessness Advisory Team
- 2017 Strategic Objective to cross-train community providers
  - Crisis services
  - Behavioral Health Providers
  - Medical Hospitals
- Collaboration with Office of Children & Youth

# Your Way Home's Impact in 2016

- Reduction of homelessness overall by **34%** since its launch in January 2014
- **26%** of all callers calling into Your Way Home line reported being Unstably Housed
- **72%** of people who received Housing Counseling were diverted from immediately entering shelter (433 persons diverted out of 600 persons attempted)
  - **28%** were not able to be diverted and entered emergency shelter
- Of those successfully diverted from immediately entering shelter, **7%** (31 people) later entered emergency shelter (data available through December 2016)



# Diversions: Families & Youth Considerations

## Families

- 419 persons receiving Housing Counseling (74%) in 2016 were females.
- Collaboration with school district homeless liaisons
- Training in Education & School Law: McKinney-Vento Act
- Role of family shelters knowing diversion well

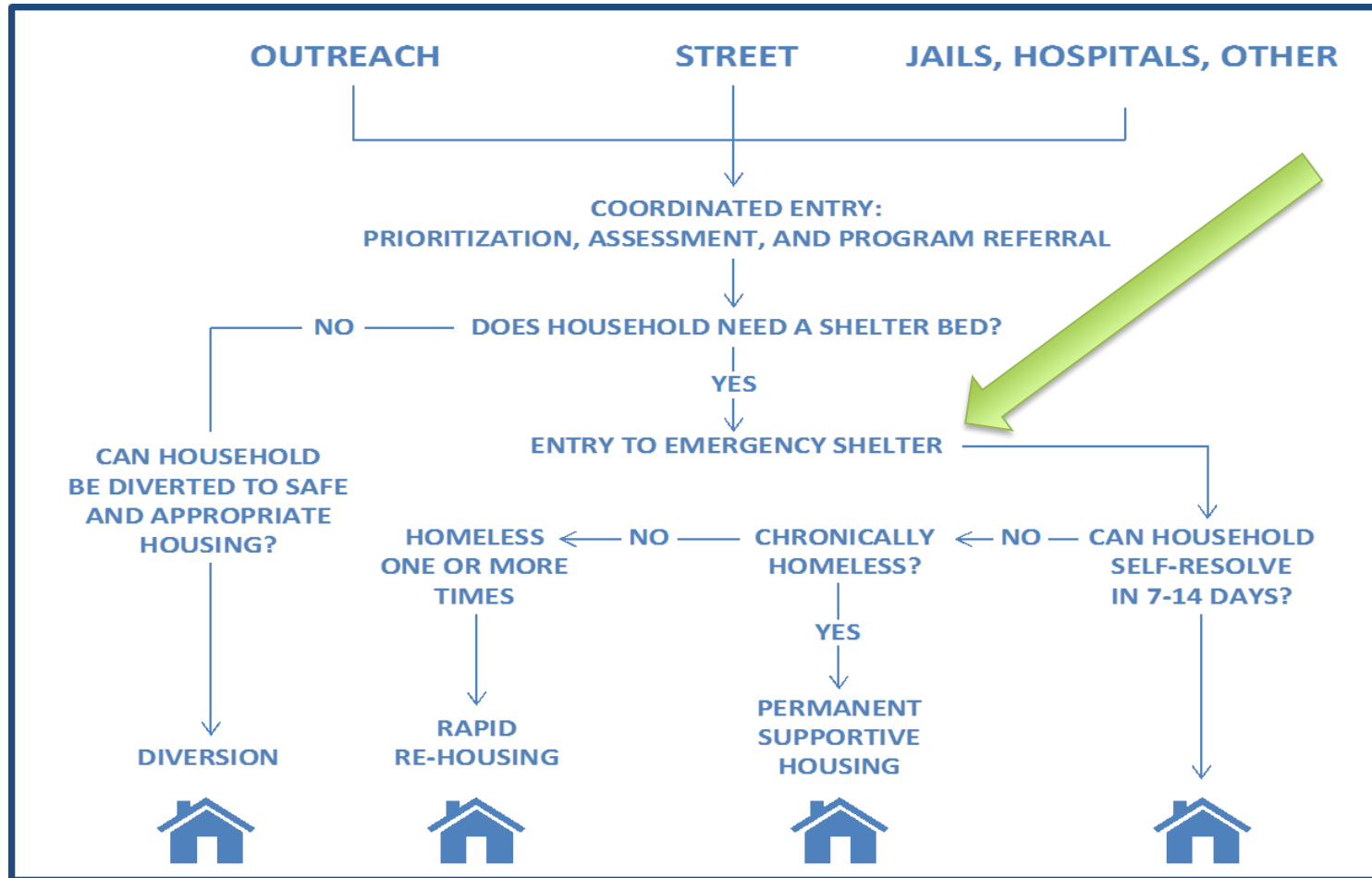
## Youth

- 102 persons receiving Housing Counseling (17%) were youth aged 18-24.
- Importance of education & awareness, along with individualized planning
- Always assess safety of current living environment
- Building Life Skills

# HOMELESSNESS DIVERSION

Key Component to an Effective Crisis Response System: Emergency Shelter & The Diversion Conversation

# Homeless Crisis Response System



# Techniques For A Successful Diversion Conversation

Helping the Household Feel at Ease

Having a Strengths-Based Conversation

Working with Households Fleeing Domestic Violence or Other Unsafe  
Situations

# Helping the Family Feel at Ease

- If children are present, distract them with toys or coloring pages
- Have a conversation and let the family lead the discussion
- Be clear from the start what your role is and is not
- Utilize mediation techniques
- Find ways to connect with the individual and family
- Demonstrate empathy
- Be prepared

# Having a Strengths-Based Conversation

- Using the transformative mediation style allows for empowerment and recognition
  - Let the family/individual lead the discussion
  - Utilize mediation techniques such as brainstorming and rephrasing
  - Utilize open-ended questions to move the discussion forward without providing direction or suggestions
  - Acknowledge the small steps
  - Build upon the work the family has already done and the relationships they already have

# Having a Strengths-Based Conversation Continued

- Work through barriers by connecting the family with resources in their local community
- Acknowledge concerns about doubling up and brainstorm ways to work through those barriers
- Focus on barriers as individual issues that can be resolved



# Working With Families Fleeing Domestic Violence

- Safety for any family/individual is the top priority. The conversation is no longer “*where do you want to go*” but now “*where is the safest place for you to stay*”
- Be familiar with resources in your area that specialize in working with DV survivors and encourage the family/individual to seek help
  - Shelter, legal assistance, mental/emotional support
- Consider the location and connections of the perpetrator

# Utah Community Action Diversion Results

- Launched in November of 2015
- Target population at time of launch = 1<sup>st</sup> time families
- Goal = divert 25% of those assessed to alternative housing
- Assessed 535 families; 237 were successfully diverted (44%)
  - Total of 309 Adults + 465 children = 774 shelter beds
  - 87% of those diverted identified strong social network
  - 71% reported having reliable transportation
  - 71% report having potential income
- 15% Recidivism rate
  - 52% of those who return to shelter return within 30 days

# Questions

# Keys to Successful Diversion

- Coordinated entry process and shelter front door
- Resourceful staff trained in mediation
- Strength based and problem solving
- Recognizes client choice and safety
- Linkages to mainstream services and natural supports
- Flexible dollars

**QUESTIONS?**  
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