

# Diversion

A Client-Centered Empowerment  
Approach to Reducing Episodes of  
Homelessness



## Presenters:

**Mary Ann Haley**

Deputy Director of The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness

**Sarah Fox**

Director of Community Impact

# Introductions:

- Name, Organization, Role/Title
- What do you hope to gain from the training today?
- One thing you love about your work

# Outline of Training

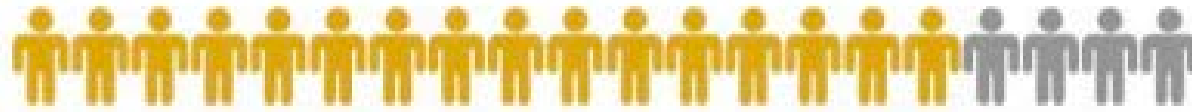
## Background and Philosophy

- Introduction
- Housing First
- What is Diversion?
- Coordinated Entry
- Empowerment

## Putting Diversion into Practice

- Four Diversion Steps
  - 1. Setting the Stage**
  - 2. Active Listening**
  - 3. Strengths Exploration**
  - 4. Moving Forward: Outcomes**

# New London, CT – 2015 Case Study



80%

## Diverted from Homelessness

- In 2015, 88% of families who were diverted did not return to seek shelter in CT
- The average cost of shelter diversion was a third of the cost of sheltering and re-housing a family.

# Conflict Resolution Approach

- **Homelessness is a crisis** – as in **conflict**, persons in **crisis** are less able to clearly think through problems and advocate for themselves than they are when **not in crisis**.
- First **listen** and **validate** their experience.  
Be non-judgmental.
- **Client-centered**. Don't assume what people need; help them articulate their needs.

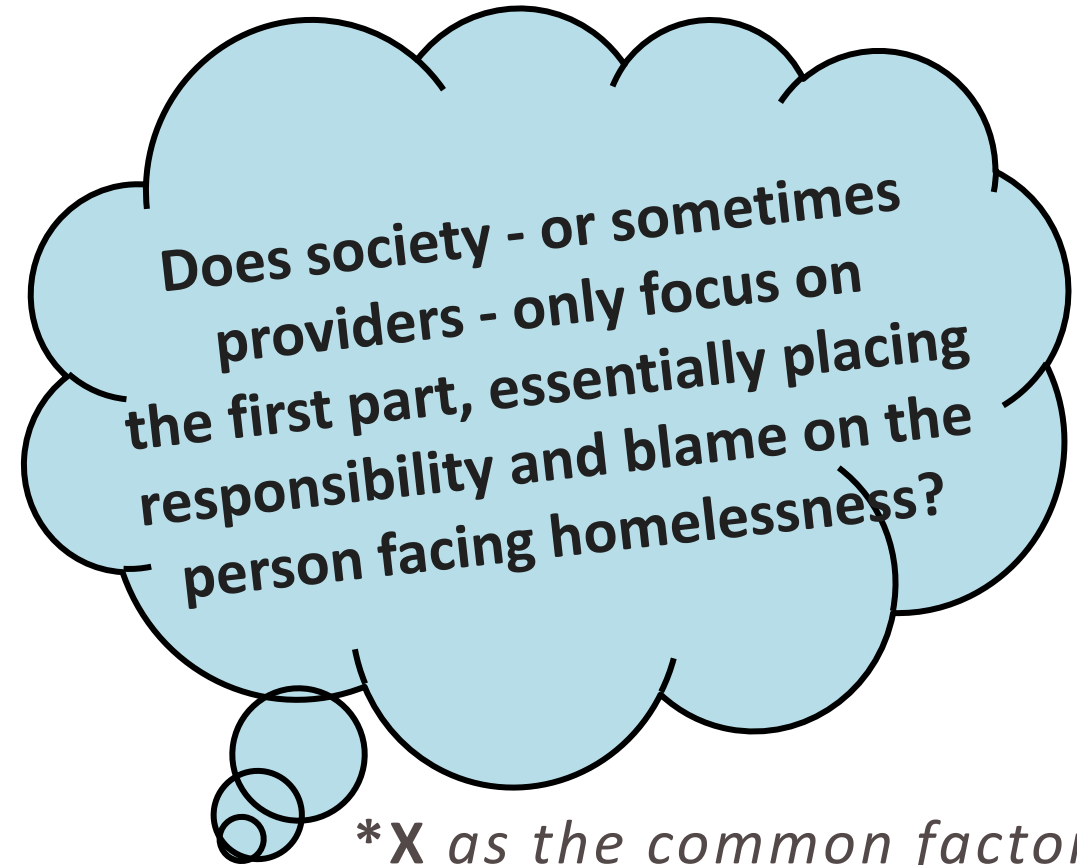
# Conflict Resolution Approach

- A **strength-based approach** helps clients identify and mine strengths, successes and resources they've used in the past to help them with this episode of homelessness.
- Support and trust that **people want to succeed.** Help them identify their own strengths and successes in their life that can help them with this crisis.

# What Causes Homelessness?

\_\_\_\_\_ + **X** = Homelessness  
**X**= \_\_\_\_\_

Wealthier areas include many people who face domestic abuse, drug or alcohol addiction and/or mental health issues, but **we rarely see people from means in shelter or on the streets.**



*\*X as the common factor.  
The blank as the variable factors*





# HOUSING FIRST

Housing First Philosophy  
Equation on Homelessness  
Housing First in Action

# What is Housing First?

Housing First is a philosophy shift from the traditional “housing ready” approach

***Everyone is ready for housing***, regardless of the complexity or severity of their needs.

Housing First is not a “program,” it is a system-wide orientation & response

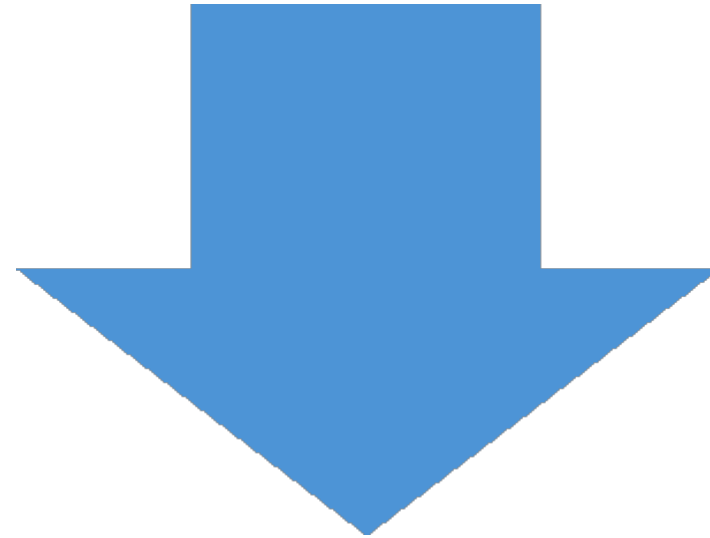
# Housing First Principles

- **Homelessness is foremost a housing problem** and should be treated as such
- **Permanent housing is a right** to which we are all entitled and people should be returned to housed as quickly as possible
- Contributing factors to homelessness can best be **addressed once they are housed.**

*“ I tell my staff*  
*‘If you’re not talking about*  
**Housing,**  
*You’re having the **wrong conversation”***

- Deronda Metz,  
Salvation Army, Charlotte, NC

# “How Can I Help You?”



# “How Can I Help You Get **Housed?**”

- Iain De Jong, OrgCode Consulting  
“How To Be An **Awesome Shelter**”

# Think Housing First

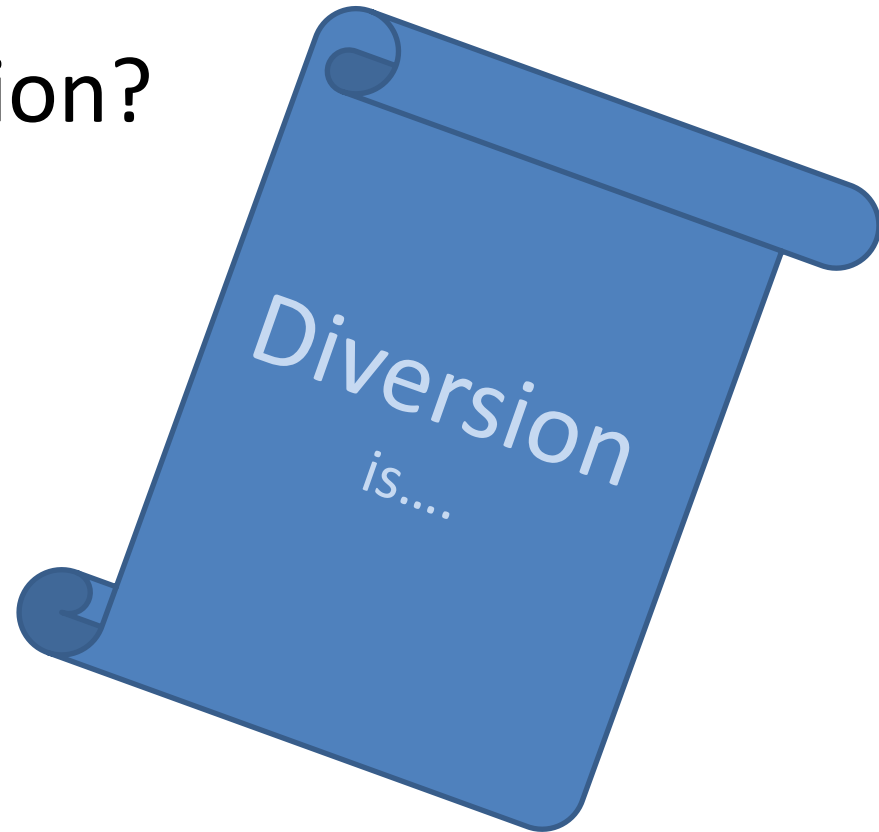
- Persons that are homeless need a home.  
Not necessarily anything else.
- **Be Bold** in who you house  
*don't be afraid to house without income or other barriers.*
- Housed people look demographically the same as those entering shelter
- Shelters are not homes.  
*People languish in shelter, often experience conflict and stress.*

# WHAT IS DIVERSION?

What is Diversion?  
When does Diversion take place?  
Who do you Divert?

# Thinking about Diversion:

How do you describe diversion?





# Diversion Is...

**Empowering** people facing **imminent homelessness** to identify *safe and appropriate* housing options & assisting and supporting them to *avoiding shelter and returning immediately to housing.*

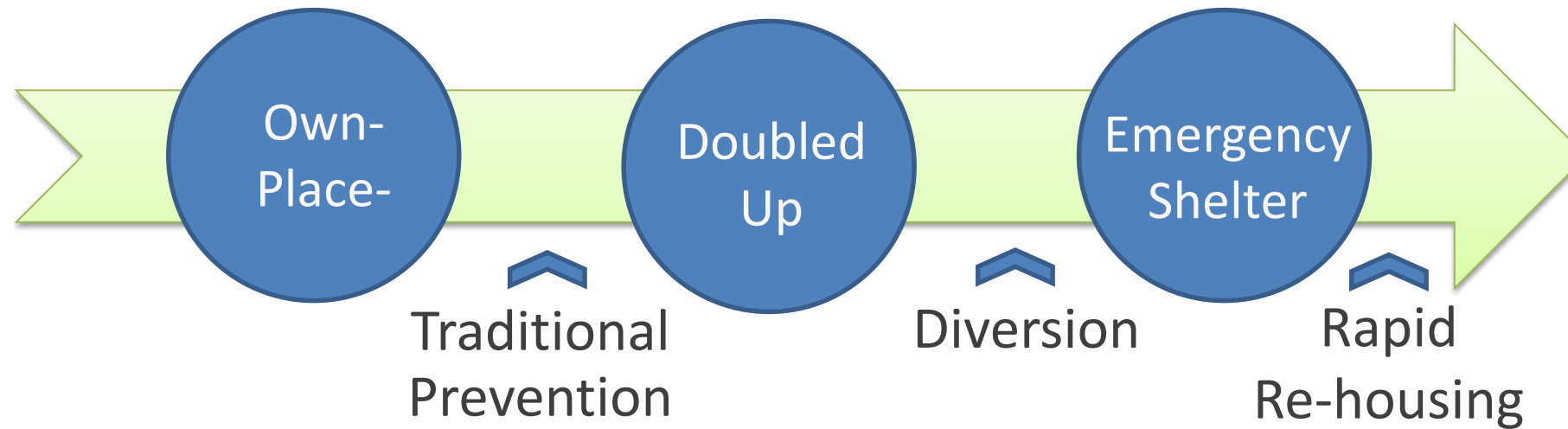
**Diversion is NOT a barrier to shelter.**

# Diversion Is...

Focused on empowering persons in crisis to begin **regaining control** over their situation and lives.

These approaches and techniques may also be very helpful for persons already homeless,  
*i.e. rapid rehousing clients.*

# When & Where Diversion Happens



Prevention can be any time before shelter stay.

**Diversion is a prevention activity** - moving prevention right to the shelter door.

Diversion can happen in person, on the phone, or a combination of both.

# Diversion Work

- Help people determine if it's possible for them to stay anywhere else that's safe, other than a shelter.
- Financial assistance is used for food, local and Greyhound bus tickets, grocery and gas station gift cards, or utility assistance that can be used to help people stay with friends or family.
- Federal ESG funds for back rent or first month's rent and deposit.

# Operationalizing your Definition

- DIVERSION IS... 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.
- Includes exception

# Group Exercise:

## Brainstorm - Benefits of Diversion

1. What are some benefits of diversion?
1. What skills do you think are most important for diversion?

# Making Diversion Part of your Coordinated Entry System

# Coordinated Entry Analogy

Think of Coordinated Entry as the emergency room of homeless services.

1. Patient (client) comes for emergency service.
2. Patient is triaged (Coordinated Entry/Assessment).
3. Multi-disciplinary approach to treating and releasing.
4. ER's and hospitals in general operate from a treat & release as soon as possible approach.

Other than cost/insurance coverage, why is there such a focus on quickly releasing back home? Why is this also true for shelters?

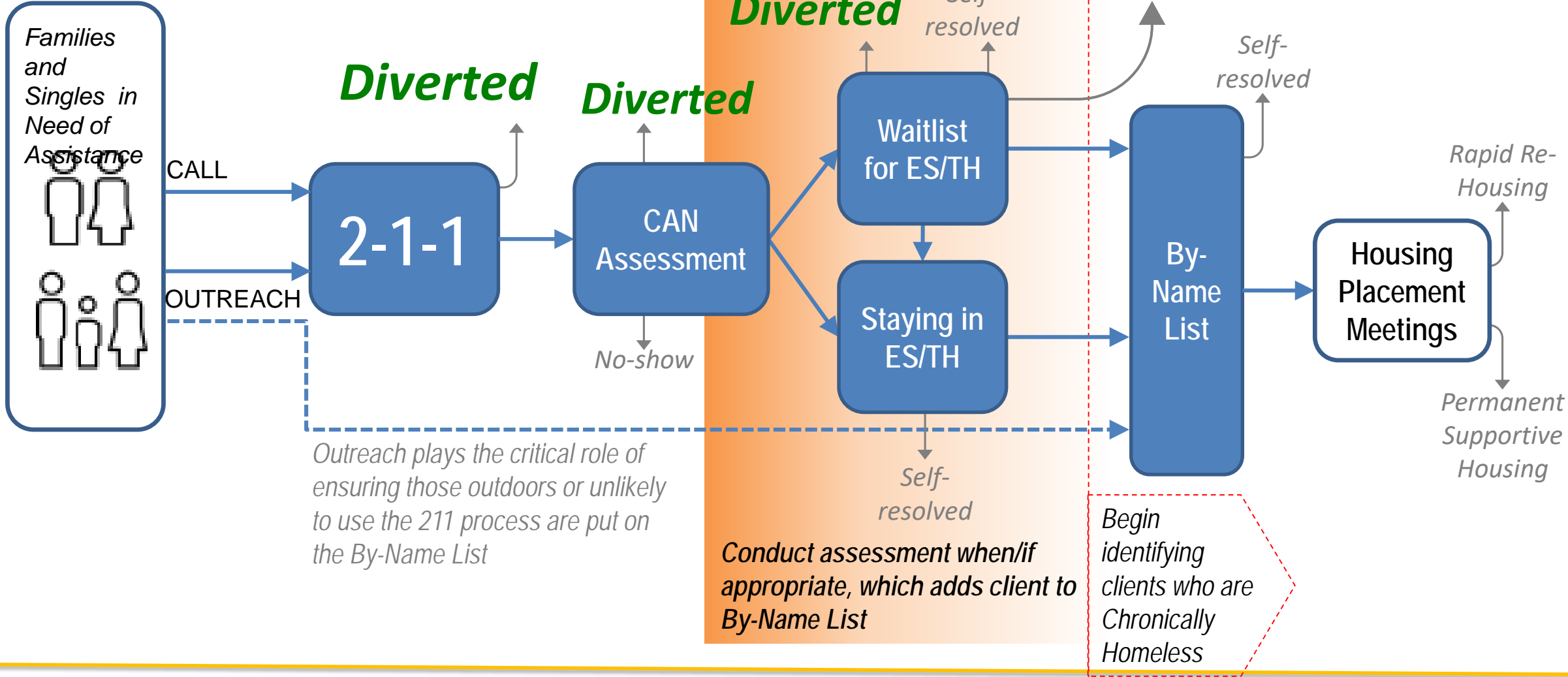


# Refining our Systems for Diversion

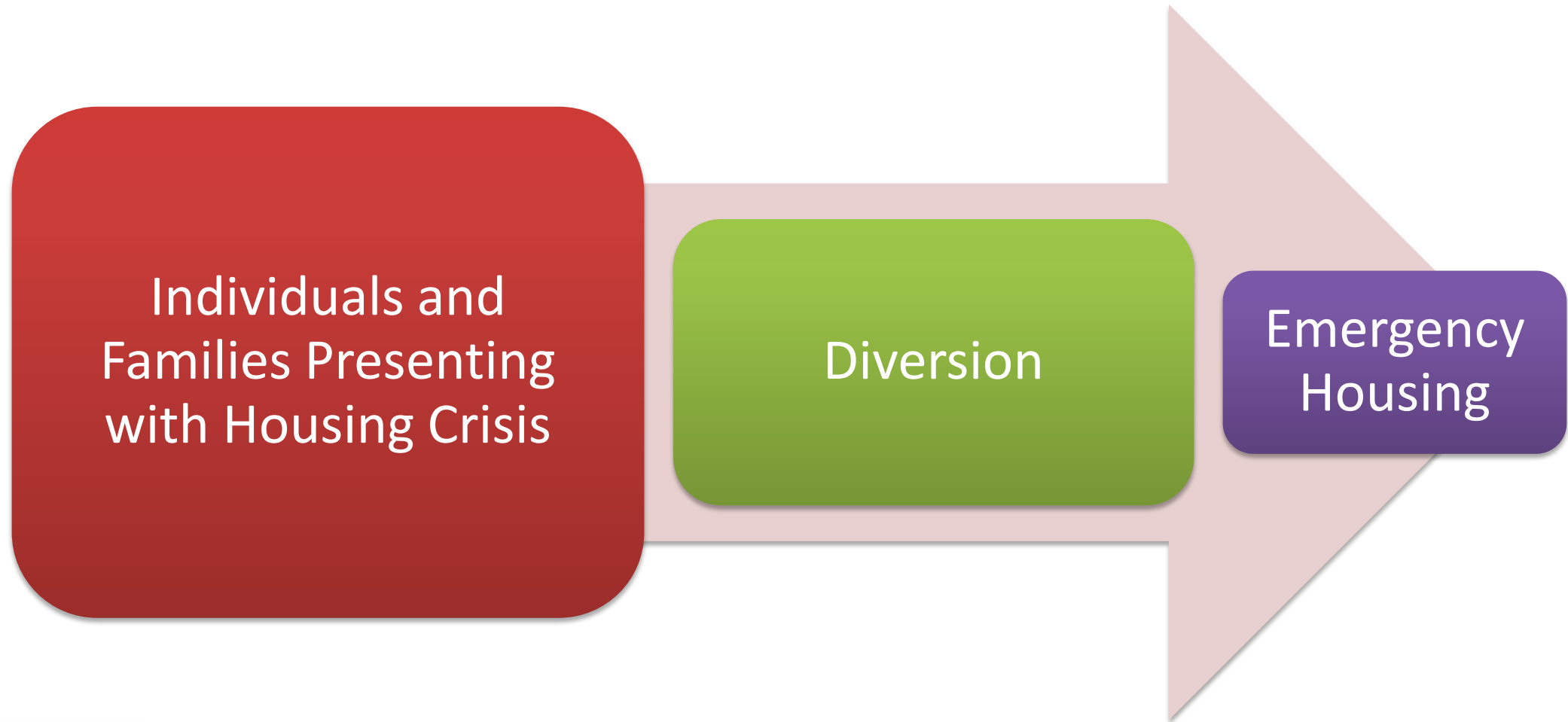


- Philosophical Shift
- Resource Preservation
- Coordinated Entry  
Appointments
- Providers
- Diversion Centers
- Educating state partners
- Resources pages
- Cheat Sheets
- Tracking

# CAN System Overview



# Coordinated Entry & Diversion



# Diversion Work

- Many people have been **doubled up** – staying **temporarily** with friends or family. When these situations become unmanageable, people come to the shelter.
- Some may need their own housing, and if they believe they can afford to maintain their own place, they are offered assistance.
- Look for:
  1. Safe options
  2. Long term housing options

# EMPOWERMENT

Paradoxical Theory of Change  
Validation

# Applying the Empowerment Theory of Conflict to Crisis



In 2009, CMC presented to the Ohio state-wide Domestic Violence Conference on work they did with the Domestic Violence Center's staff and residents of its shelter. Mediators listened to staff and heard from residents in an effort to ease tensions.

CMC discovered something – the specific traits of empowerment\* in people experiencing conflict applies to people experiencing crisis - in this case the crisis of domestic abuse as well as homelessness.



# Impact of Conflict and Crisis

Conflict and crisis impedes the ability to:

- Be hopeful and confident
- Clarify goals
- Effectively advocate for oneself -- take back control of their lives
- Have positive interactions with other people

How do we help clients become calm and clear so they can better engage with family members, employers, landlords, and staff?

# Impact of Crisis on Self Worth

Experiencing conflict and crisis makes people shut down, and become defensive/closed off.

Our job is to help people shift gradually to the right -- **empowered** – side.

## Empowerment Shifts

Weak ⇒ Powerful

Unsure ⇒ Confidant

Hopeless ⇒ Optimistic

Unclear ⇒ Organized

Frustrated ⇒ At Ease



# How People in Crisis View Others

In the midst of crisis people tend to be protective, defensive, and not open to others.

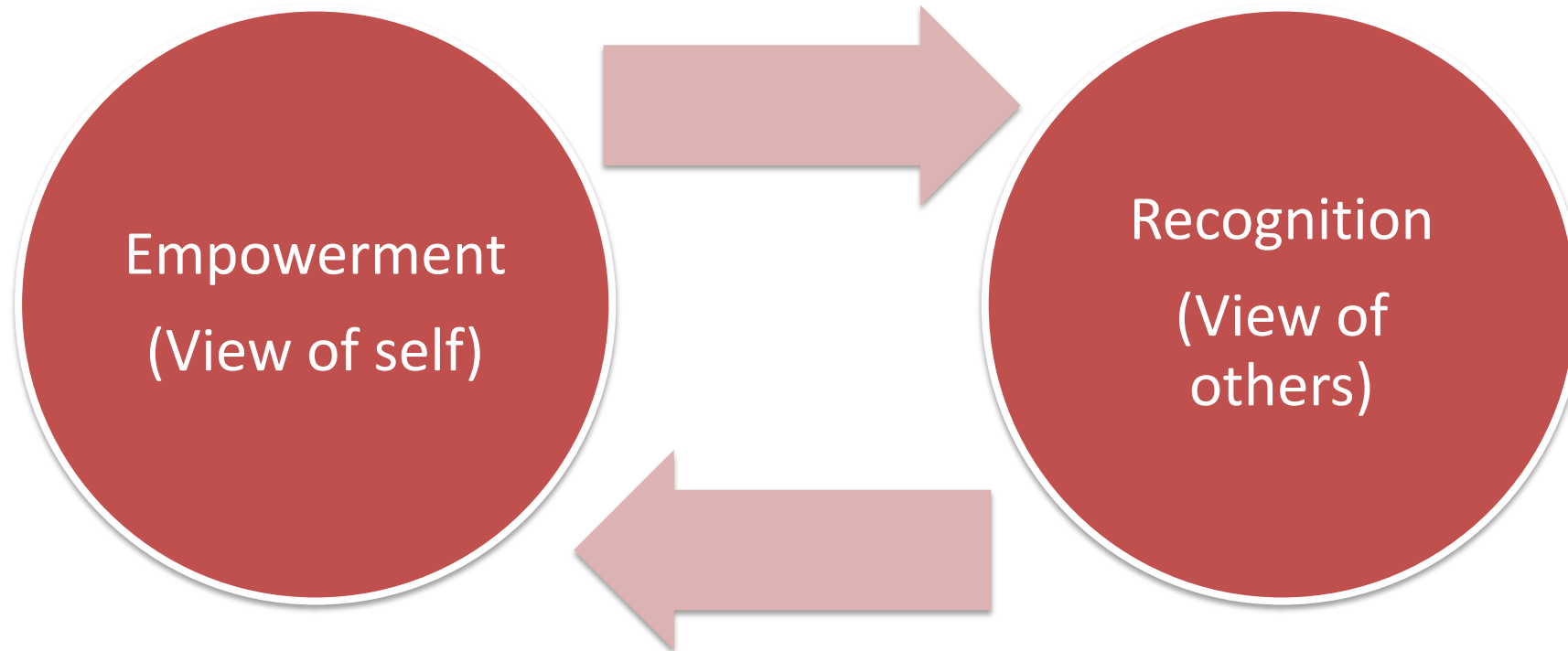
As we help them become empowered, they are more able to listen, consider, and negotiate with others.

## Recognition Shifts

Closed	⇒	Open
Suspicious	⇒	Trusting
Self Absorbed	⇒	Generous
Ignoring	⇒	Listening
Dismissing	⇒	Negotiating

# Reversing the Downward Spiral

First helping people feel empowered about themselves allows them to open up and engage in a more productive way with others (staff, family, landlords, employers, etc.).



# Four Diversion Steps

1. Setting the Stage
2. Active and Empathetic Listening
3. Strength Exploration
4. Moving forward

# **STEP ONE: SETTING THE STAGE**

# Getting Yourself Ready

- Time
- Space
- Mindfulness
- Prepared
- Non-verbal messages conveyed
- Improving/Learning

# What you Might Need:



## Keep it Simple

- Notepad and pen
- Diversion Guideline Sheet
- A place for sitting with privacy

# Introductions & Managing Expectations

- Describe your role as assisting them to find safe alternatives to shelter
- Clarify this is not a barrier to shelter
- Describe shelter reality

# Focus on Changing the Dynamic



## Diversion Is...

- **Empowering** persons facing imminent homelessness to identify safe and appropriate housing options (other than the street/car/shelter), and assisting them in avoiding shelter and returning immediately to housing.
- NOT a barrier to shelter.
- Focus is on empowering persons in crisis to begin **regaining control** over their situation and lives.

We start the empowerment process by \_\_\_\_\_.



# **STEP TWO: ACTIVE AND EMPATHETIC LISTENING**

# Listening

- Why do it? What might listening accomplish?
- What is hard or easy about this?
- What is active listening?
- What is empathetic listening?

## **National Alliance on Mental Illness:**

*Empathy* is the intimate comprehension of another person's thoughts and feelings without adding our own judgment or expectations.

# Listening Skill Building

**What helps you prepare, get centered to listen?**

❖ Physical Preparedness:

**R** - Relaxed

**O** - Open

**L** - Leaning towards the speaker

**E** - Eye Contact

**S** - Squared toward speaker

❖ Note Taking

# Listening Skill Building (cont.)

*Acknowledge by:*

- **Paraphrasing**
- **Open-ended questions** help the speaker illuminate what they are saying.  
Examples: Can you tell me more about... ? Has this happened before?
- Helpful, **non-judgmental questions** include: What has worked well for you in past similar experiences? What options are you thinking of? How do you best make decisions?
  - Do not pry** information, but to give them a chance to say more if they would like.
  - Do not to ask “Why”** or about motives (“Why did you do it this way”) – “Why” questions can make people defensive and can even escalate the conflict.

# Partner Exercise: Getting Clearer

Pair off with another person.

- Each person think for a moment about something that is on your mind – a decision you need to make, a problem, or something you are trying to figure out.  
*(while you do not have to get too personal, put yourself in your client's position and consider sharing something a little personal.)*
- The purpose is to have someone listen to you, not give you advise, but help **you feel clearer, gain insight, help you think through** or be more confident about your situation.
- Take about 10 minutes each telling your story to the other, and then we switch listener/speaker roles.
- **Listeners: Do not offer opinions or give advice.**

# Reality Testing Decisions

- The agreements and decisions need to work for the parties (not for us).
- By starting with what has worked previously, we increase the odds of it working again.
- If you have a concern – do not ignore it – use that as an opportunity to help our client **think through** their options and decisions.

# Questions when Reality Testing

## Ask the Client:

- How would this look?
- What is the timeline?
- Have you done something like this before?
- What other options have you considered?
- What resources do you have to carry this out?
- In case this does not work out as well as you would like, would you like to explore a back-up plan?

# Recap Step 1: Introductions

Briefly introduce yourself.

- Name, organization, role
- Describe the conversation
- Hear their experience

How can we help  
them return to  
housing?



# Recap Step 2: Active Listening

- Body language
- Paraphrasing
- Empathy

Keep this listening step separate from problem-solving.

# Recap Step 2: Active Listening

- [CMC Diversion Training Video](#)

# **STEP THREE: STRENGTHS EXPLORATION**

# Group Exercise: Using Strength-based Language

## Glass Half-Full

- Form groups of 4-5 people
- Come up with other phrasing for each wording
- Share

# The Glass Half Full

<b><i>The Glass Half Empty...The Glass Half Full</i></b>	
Deficit-based Language	Strengths-based Alternative
Front-line staff/in the trenches	Direct care/support staff providing compassionate care
Substance abuse/abuser	Person with an addiction to substances; substance use interferes with person's life
Suffering from	Working to recover from; experiencing; living with
Acting-out	Person disagrees with staff; prefers to use alternative coping strategies
Unrealistic	Person has high expectations for self and recovery
Denial, unable to accept illness, lack of insight	Person disagrees with diagnosis; does not agree that they have a mental illness pre-contemplative stage of recovery
Resistant/non-compliant	Not open to... Chooses not to...Has own ideas...
Weaknesses	Barriers to change; needs

# The Glass Half Full

Unmotivated	Person is not interested in what the system has to offer; interests and motivating incentives unclear; preferred options not available
Patient (in mental health community)	Individual, consumer, person receiving services
Frequent Flyer	Takes advantage of services and supports as necessary
Dangerous	Specify behavior
Manipulative	Resourceful; really trying to get help
Entitled	Aware of one's rights
Helpless	Unaware of capabilities
Hopeless	Unaware of opportunities
Grandiose	Has high hopes and expectations of self
User of the system	Resourceful; good self-advocate

# Prompts for Identifying Strengths

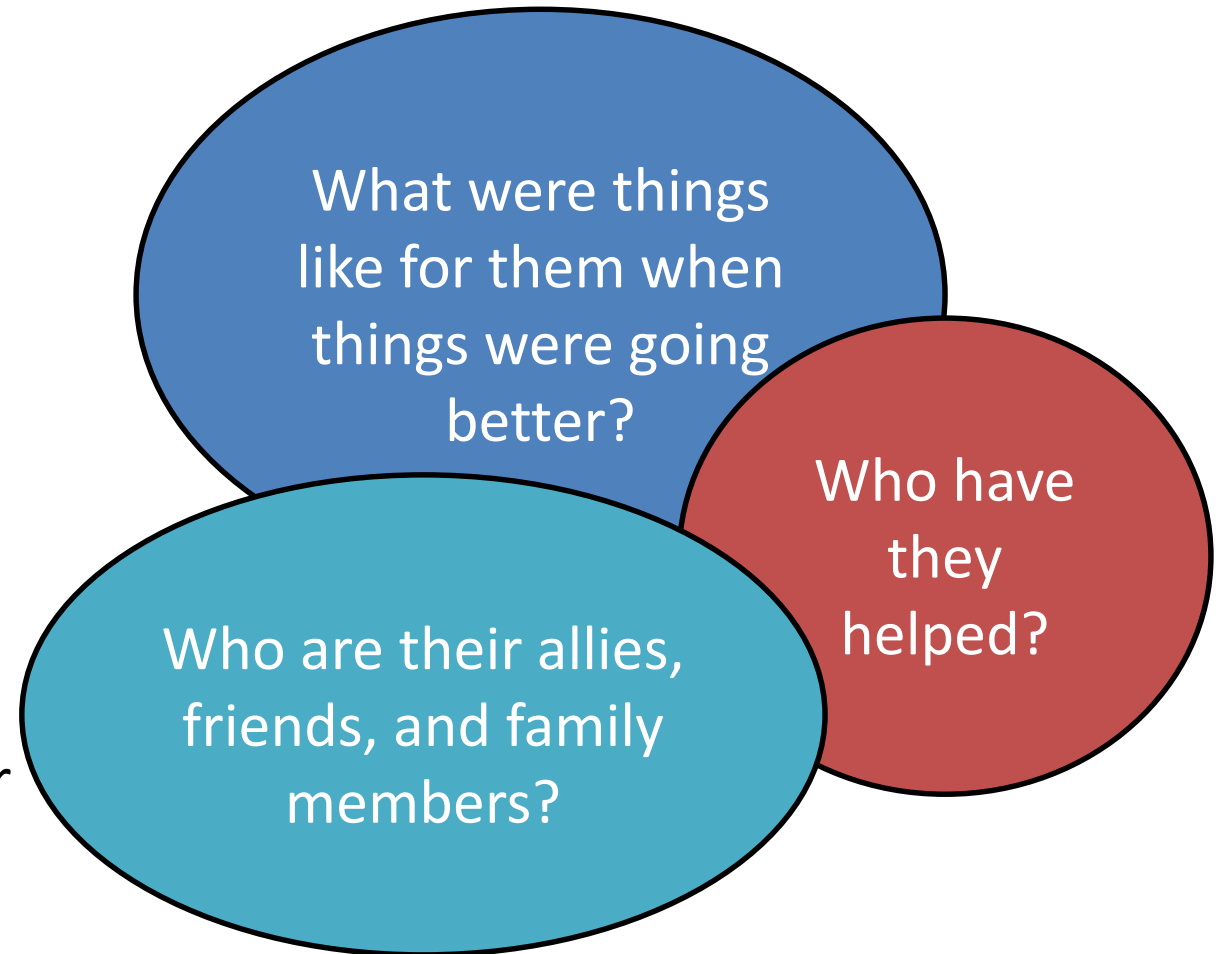
Must be give and take dialogue , not interrogation  
Explore strengths beyond the individual

- What worked well for you? How can you recreate that? What can go right?
- Explore what has worked. Let client lead, but follow-up on employment, housing, relationship, support successes.

# Strengths Exploration

Explore past strengths – this step has two purposes:

1. Help identify times when **they have been of help or support to others.**
2. Begin to identify networks and support persons that may be able to help them with income or housing.



Our clients may feel dependent – we can help them remember times of **interdependence.**



# Group Exercise: Scenario

## Imagine this scenario:

- Your client and two children rented a house for two years.
- Client moved out before eviction and stayed with Mom for almost a year.
- Mom has given the client 3 days to move out – another child and her kids live there.
- Client has high school diploma.
- Client works part time at fast food restaurant.
- Other parent contributes small amount of child support and helps out some with child care.

# Group Exercise: Scenario(cont.)



**Goal** – to uncover strengths, successes, and networks.

Each group will focus on a different aspect of this story.

## Group One

Think of all the aspects (strengths, skills, successes, networks) that went into finding and maintaining client's **own housing.**

## Group Two

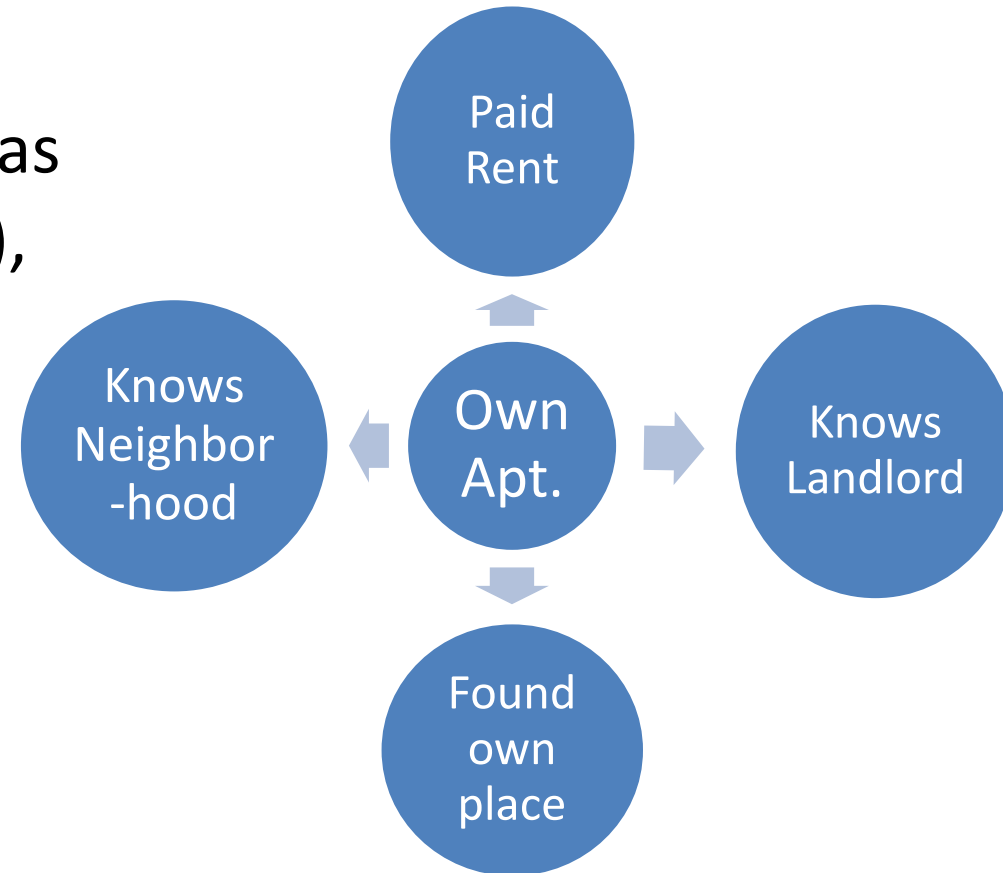
Think of all the aspects (strengths, skills, successes, networks) that went into finding and maintaining client's **job at restaurant.**

## Group Three

While being **doubled up with Mom**, how did client contribute to the household? How was client helped, and how did client help others?

# Strengths & Resource Exploration

Using a client's previous apartment as an example of: **successes** (paid rent), **relationships** (knows landlord) and **networks** (knows neighborhood)



# Ideas for Strengths

- ◆ Motivated to change
- ◆ Has a support system –friends, family
- ◆ Has been employed in the past, has done volunteer work
- ◆ Skills/competencies: vocational, relational, transportation savvy, activities of daily living
- ◆ Intelligent, artistic, musical, good at sports, good with their hands, can fix things, funny
- ◆ Awareness, ability to observe and assess situation

# Ideas for Strengths



- ◆ Advocate for themselves, sought help, able to convey their needs
- ◆ Resourcefulness - Has been able to survive, take care of themselves, medications
- ◆ Spirituality - connected to church, higher power, nature
- ◆ Good physical health
- ◆ Adaptive coping skills, things they were able to handle so far

# **STEP FOUR: MOVING FORWARD: OUTCOMES**

# Moving Forward: 4 Diversion Outcomes

After we have **listened**, then explored past **strengths**, what **housing options** do they want to pursue?:

1. Going back to live with friends and family.
2. Returning to their own residence.
3. Temporarily diverted as they seek new housing.
4. Relocating to a safe, permanent place out-of-town.

What needs has the client identified?

Permanently back  
with friends or  
family

Return to their  
own residence

Temporarily  
diverted as they  
seek new housing

Relocating  
permanently to  
safe place out of  
town

## **Diversion Outcomes**



# Outcome One

Permanently  
back with friends  
or family

When? Under what circumstances?

- No better option
- No housing history
- No income history

- How can our client contribute to the household?
- How can our client use this time to further education and/or employment opportunities?
- **Is a doubled up situation safe & appropriate?**

# Outcome Two

When? Under what circumstances?

- ❖ Walk-Aways  
*(have lease but cannot pay current or back rent)*
- ❖ Non-DV relationship issues  
*(significant other, sibling, friend is in home)*
- ❖ Previous places they have lived are options *(i.e. parents, family home)*

Return to their  
own residence

# Outcome Three

Temporarily  
diverted as they  
seek new housing

When? Under what circumstances?

- Wish to live on their own and have done so before
  - Current or past income

# Outcome Four

## When? Under what circumstances?

- Safe, appropriate host
- Support systems – family, friends, employment, education

## How?

- Confirm with host (30 day minimum)
- What travel and other logistics do we need to work out?

Relocating  
permanently to safe  
place out of town

# Welcome to your New Home!



## Help clients consider:

- A walk through before moving in
- Discussing how and when rent is paid
- How to discuss repairs with landlord
- Fallback plans if they have a change in income



# Troubleshooting

What's the reason for them being stuck?

Can we help them address their concerns?

Buyers Remorse

- Listen
- Validate
- Empathy

What happens if they do not get diverted?

# Diversion not possible? Shelter is needed...

- Diversion conversations can be **first step** to finding a housing permanent solutions – so you have not wasted anytime!
- Be clear with client that this is the beginning of finding a **housing solution**, shelter is not the answer.
- Keep the focus on housing, strengths, empowerment.

# Recap

- Remember to **listen first**, understand, validate. Be empathetic.
- Leave no stone unturned in helping people think of safe places they can live or stay other than the street or shelter.
- Help people think through options – help them clarify their choices and the steps needed to carry out their plan.

## If a client is **difficult**:

- Remember that homelessness is a crisis and people are usually not at their best when under this stress.
- Help them realize strengths and resources they have forgotten.
- Visualize sitting next to them, supporting them in how they choose to address the problem.



# METRICS & DATA

Data behind Diversion  
Measuring Your Outcomes

# How do we know if it works?

- How many clients total?
- What type of clients (families, individuals, youth, etc.)
- How many did you attempt to divert?
- How many were successfully diverted?
- How many did not return to shelter?
- Where is it working and why?

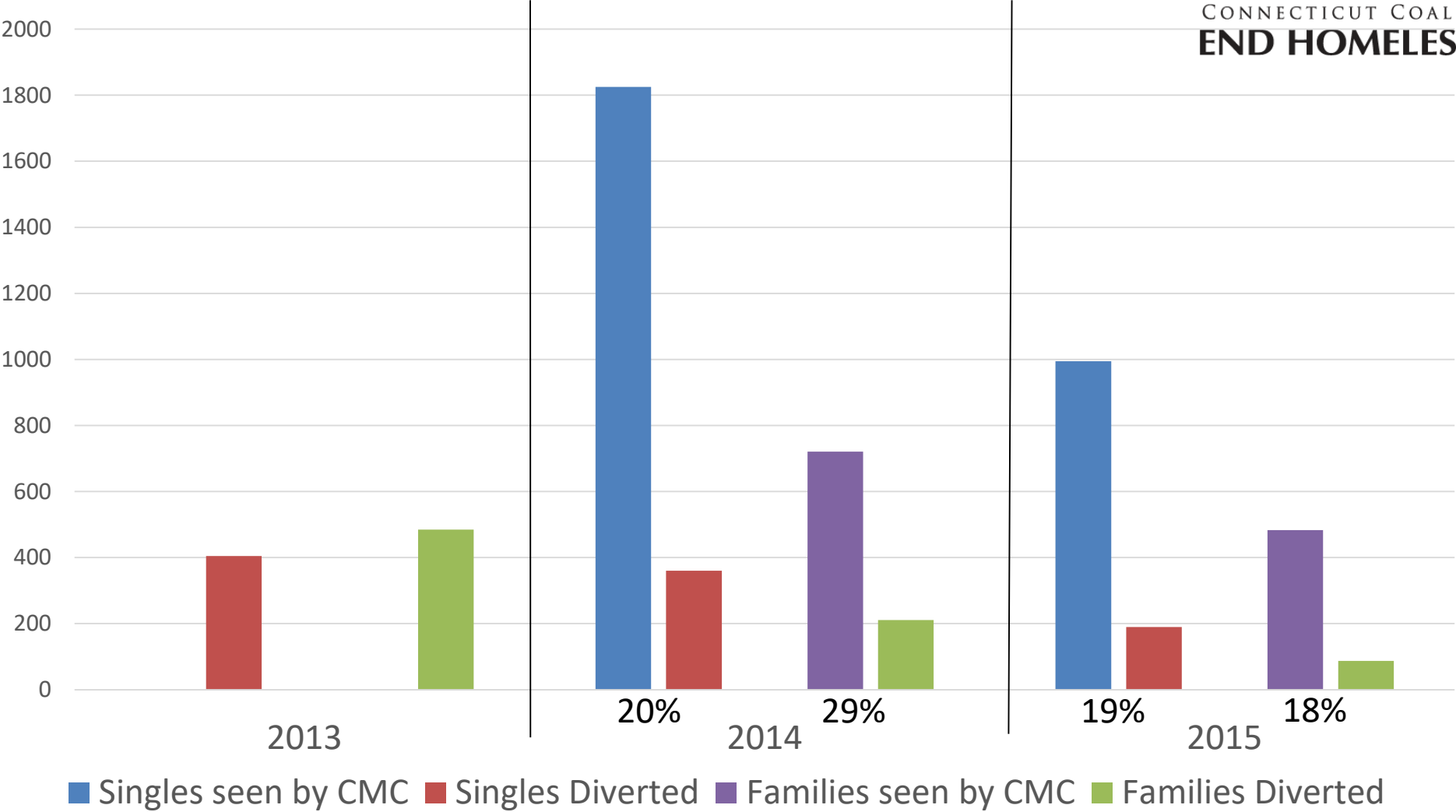
# Four Types of Tracking

1. Keeping your own records
2. Provider data
3. Local/Regional Data
4. System level data

# Keeping your own Records

- How many clients?
- How many diversion attempts were made?
- How many were successful?
- How many remained successful?
- What kinds of things worked?
- Sharing your successes and challenges
- Using your data to inform provider- and systems-level change

# Providers Date

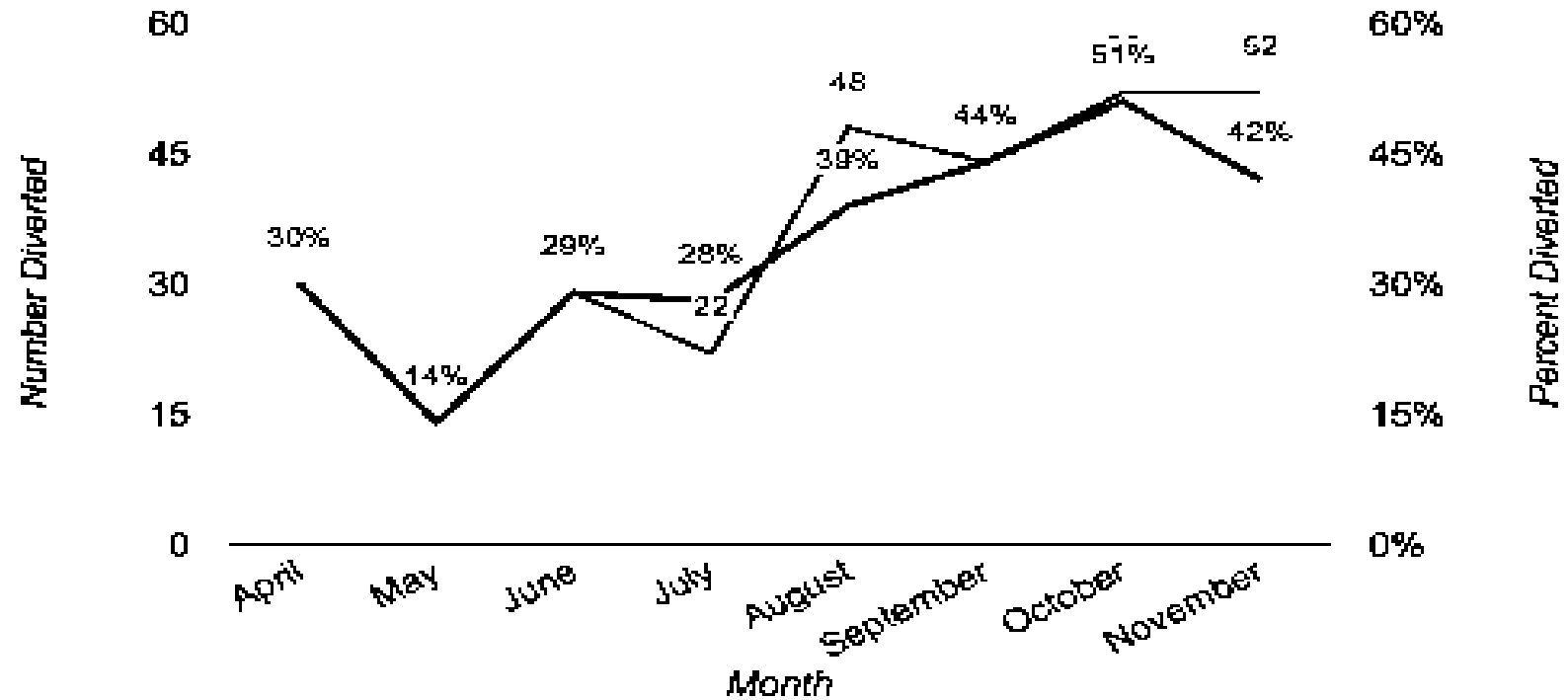


(Courtesy of Cleveland Mediation)

# Regional & Local Data



### Southeast CAN Diversion

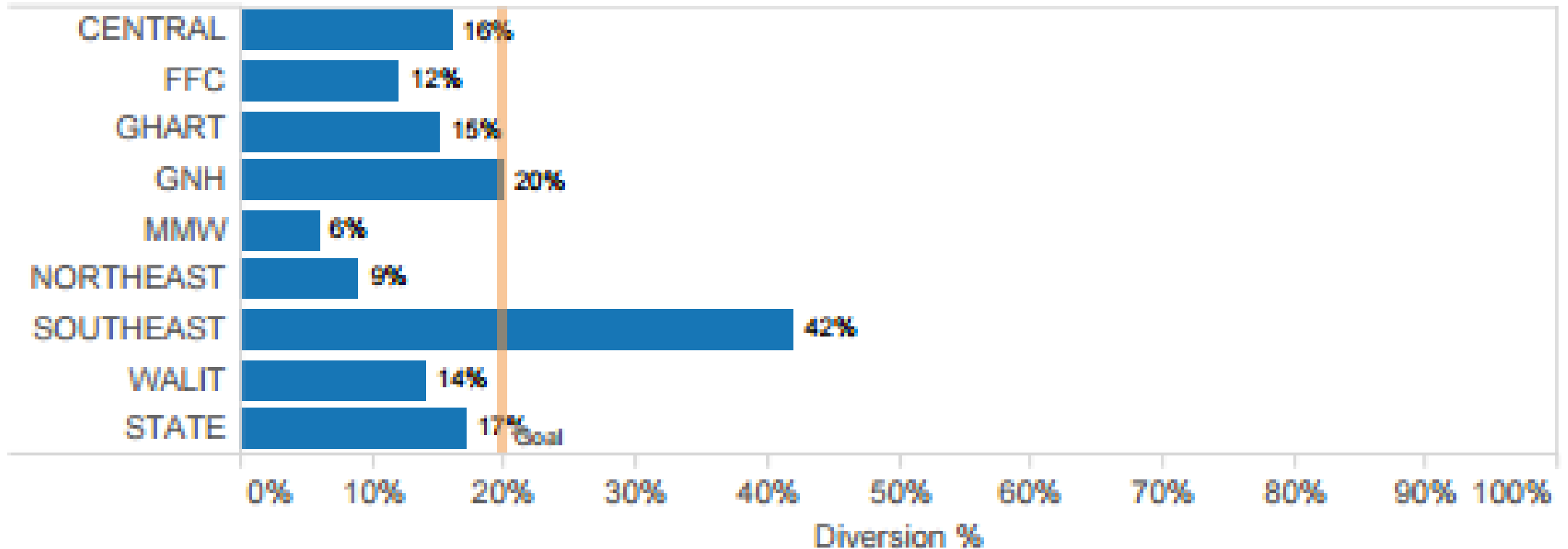


Southeast CAN 2016

# Systems Level Data

## Comparisons by Region

### Diversion Rates



# Coordinated Entry Dashboard



Coordinated Entry Dashboard: <http://cceh.org/data/interactive/can/>

Rapid Rehousing Dashboard: <http://cceh.org/data/interactive/rrh/>

- Data Quality indicators,
- Returns to homelessness



# **COSTS AND FUNDING**

Cost Analysis  
Leveraging Resources  
Methods of Funding

# Diversion Costs



## Diversion assistance can be:

- Simple phone conciliation (no assistance funds)
- Mediation + small amount of food (\$35)
- Greyhound bus ticket (\$30-\$500)
- Other assistance like utility bills or back fees (\$200)
- First Month Rent + Deposit (\$1000+)

## Less expensive than:

- Rapid Rehousing (\$5000 +)
- Shelter stay (Shelter bed is \$8600 more than Sec 8 subsidy)\*
- Street homelessness (\$2414 more in hospitalization vs. housed person)

\*[www.endhomelessness.org/pages/cost](http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/cost)

# Diversion Costs



In New London,

- Only about **1/3 of families** required financial assistance
- Providers funded financial assistance through a combination of state funding and private foundation grants.
- **159 families** (a total of 526 individual adults and children) received an average assistance per household **\$1,750**
- **69%** received security deposit assistance
- **32%** received past-due rent assistance
- **65%** received temporary rent subsidies
- **6%** received help with past-due utility payments
- **5%** received relocation assistance (train/plane/bus tickets to be housed with family members elsewhere).

# Sources for Funding Diversion



## Ideas

- Private donations
- State agencies
- Reallocations of existing budgets
- Fundraisers
- Crowdrise and other online fundraising
- In-kind donations
- Leveraging other organizations
- Corporations

## Your ideas

- Brainstorm

# ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

Understanding Diversion  
Staffing for Diversion Skills  
Investing in Diversion

# Leading Systemic Change



- Engage all stakeholders in homeless service system
- Utilize existing networks and collaborations to shift approach
- Educate Executive Directors, state agencies, community partners in value of diversion
- Launch, revisit, adjust, report – repeat
- Create feedback loops from case managers to system level organizers

# Keys to Success



- **Training**
- **Staff**
- **Tracking**
- **Supervision**
- **Funding**
- **Integration into System (Coordinated Entry)**
- **Celebrate positive outcomes**

# Staffing Diversion



## Consider Logistics

- Where and when will diversion staff meet with clients?
- Is there a space for a conversation (not just an intake)?

## Hiring the right staff is key

- Expect well-qualified people to apply and not be quite the right fit.
- In the second round of job interviews, applicants interview staff as if staff were clients.
- Look for rapport and empathy – does the candidate have the ability to empower the client? If so, we can teach the specific skills.



# Investing in Diversion

- Understanding
- Training of Staff
- Educating Funders, Boards, Program Managers
- Integrating into Programming
- Creating Spaces for Diversion in Communities and Programs
- Supervision
- Time

# Investing in Diversion

- Reallocation of Funding
- Prioritizing as Program
- Integrating into Shelter Work
- Private Funding
- Selling Points
- Rebuilding Families, Communities, Social Supports
- Creating Interdependency

# Thank You!

**Contact:**

**Mary Ann Haley, Ph.D**

**Deputy Director, Connecticut Coalition to End homelessness**

**[mhaley@cceh.org](mailto:mhaley@cceh.org)**