

# Miami-Dade County CoC Diversion Standards and Practice

## A. Diversion

### 1. Adoption of Strategy

The Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust adopts Diversion assistance as a strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness in Miami-Dade. These standards and practice shall govern access and delivery of Diversion assistance.

### 2. Role of Diversion

Diversion is a CoC strategy that diverts households from the shelter system by assisting them to either remain where they have been living or to identify alternate safe and suitable housing arrangements. The housing option may not be ideal and it may only serve as a temporary solution as the household works out a long-term plan. An effective Diversion strategy reduces the number of families becoming homeless and, therefore, the demand for shelter beds and waiting lists. Diversion helps households avoid the stress, disorientation and trauma associated with entering into the shelter system.

Diversion provides light-touch assistance, including limited, extremely flexible financial assistance. Diversion assistance looks for all housing options, whether staying in place or alternative housing, identifies barriers to those housing options and comes up with immediate solutions for overcoming the barriers. The strategy focuses on the household's strengths, not deficits, and exploration of all the possible resources at hand to keep them housed. Diversion recognizes client choice and safety. Each household presents a unique situation to be resolved. Diversion requires active listening, creative problem-solving and mediation skills.

### 3. Difference between Diversion, Prevention and Rapid-Rehousing

Prevention targets people at imminent risk of homelessness and occurs further upstream. Diversion targets people as they are seeking entry into shelter ("front door" of shelter and the CoC). Rapid re-housing/permanent supportive housing targets people who are already homeless.



(<http://cceh.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/My-Version.png>)

If diversion intervention does not result in remaining where housed or alternative safe and suitable housing, the household should be offered shelter placement. Diversion

efforts may still continue after placement to assist the household to quickly exit shelter without further CoC program assistance.

## **B. Diversion Access and Assistance Sites**

### **1. CE Access Points**

Miami-Dade Coordinated Entry (CE) requires that Diversion assistance be screened by, and offered through, CoC CE access points.

### **2. Diversion Assistance Locations**

Most cases should be expected to be resolved by phone. However, diversion assistance shall also be provided at a physical location(s) to allow for face-to-face problem solving, provision of limited financial assistance and/or diversion staff support for a brief period of time.

#### **a. CoC Helpline**

The CoC Helpline will be the front line of diversion assistance. The Helpline must be staffed by trained Diversion Specialists who can successfully divert a significant number of households over the phone. The assessment and diversion process must be one of active listening and engaged problem-solving, opposed to a passive solicitation of information and referral.

#### **b. COE Physical Access Point**

Diversion also shall be offered at a physical location, which can either be a shelter or another CoC CE Access Point. A staff person(s) should be dedicated and specifically trained to provide Diversion assistance.

##### **i. Calming Environment for Face-to-Face Diversion Assistance**

To be effective, diversion engagement must be a calming experience. Physical locations for diversion should promote such experience. For example, office space in which to assist the household should be quiet and private. To ensure a household-centered discussion and empathetic and active engagement, a desk or table should not be between a Diversion Specialist and the household being assisted. Diversion providers should offer a play area/corner within the room, or provide toys and books, for children within the family to allow the household's adult(s) to more calmly focus on resource identification and problem-solving with the Diversion Specialist.

##### **c. Continuation of Diversion Effort Following Shelter Entry**

If safe and suitable housing cannot be found, the household should be offered shelter placement. Diversion-trained staff can continue to work with the household within shelter to quickly exit them without any further CoC program assistance.

## **C. Diversion Delivery**

### **1. Diversion Screening**

Screening for diversion must be conducted when a household seeks access to the CoC to determine if diversion is appropriate and, if so, to initiate creative problem-solving to assist the household to remain where they have been housed or identify other housing options.

As stated above, the Diversion screening and assessment process is one of active listening and engaged problem-solving, opposed to a passive solicitation of information and referral.

Households are to be asked:

- Where did you stay last night?
- Is it possible or safe to stay in your current housing situation/unit?
- Are you fleeing domestic violence?
- Why did you have to leave where you stayed last night?
- What issues exist with you remaining in your current housing situation? What resources would you need to help you stay there again?
- What other housing options do you have for tonight, tomorrow, the next few days or weeks? Are there resources you may need to make this option happen?
- Is there anyone I should contact to help you stay in your current housing or who might be able to give you a place to stay for the next few nights?

### **2. Diversion Assessment and Planning Tool**

If diversion appears appropriate, the Diversion tool should be used to guide an open and creative discussion that lends itself to uncovering issues which could be resolved so that they remain in their current housing or facilitates another housing option. Diversion should focus on household strengths, including resources currently or potentially available to them. The basic diversion tool is attached as Exhibit A.

#### **a. Conversation Practice**

The following basic practices shall guide diversion conversations with households:

- Use a 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 to avoid homelessness and the relationships and resources they already have.
- 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.

**b. Being Realistic**

Diversion Specialists should do a reality-check to ensure that the housing solution is realistic based on the family's experience. Diversion Specialists should work with the family to reality and safety test their solution.

**D. Diversion Resources**

**1. Dedicated Diversion Specialists**

Staff should be dedicated to Diversion delivery and have strong skills in creative problem-solving and mediation. They should be well-versed in and networked with community services and supports. A description of the characteristics and skills of "an exemplary" Diversion Specialist is attached as Exhibit B.

**2. Mediation Assistance**

A tool of diversion is mediating between the household and those with whom they have conflict that is jeopardizing their current or potential housing. Diversion staff can also work through concerns that a friend or relative may have with taking in the household directly with the friend or relative.

**3. Flexible Funding**

Diversion is not a matter of screening for need and providing financial assistance, however financial assistance should be made available and be flexible to help households with their unique circumstances and resolve issues in staying where they are or to make an alternative option viable.

Financial assistance is one tool to overcome barriers preventing them from staying in place or securing alternative housing. For example, roommate conflict may be jeopardizing their housing or friends or relatives are burdened, or fear being burdened, by taking them in or alternative housing is distant from work or lacking accessible public transportation. Financial assistance could be in the form of a grocery store gift card so that the household could buy groceries for a roommate or the friend or relatives with whom they are doubled up or who would otherwise take them in, reasonable car repairs, gas money, transportation for relocation, etc.

#### **4. Robust Linkages to Community Services and Resources**

Diversion staff must have established relationships with community services and supports so that a household may quickly connect with the ones that would assist them to remain in housing or secure alternative housing.

### **E. Performance Measurements and HMIS Data Capture**

#### **1. Performance Measurements**

Diversion's primary outcome is the prevention of homelessness.

A Diversion outcome goal will be incorporated into Miami-Dade CoC Performance Measurement based on whether households served by diversion assistance are avoiding homelessness (i.e. the household assisted does not enter the CoC).

#### **2. HMIS Data Capture**

The household's Universal Data Elements and diversion assistance shall be entered into the Miami-Dade CoC HMIS to capture households provided diversion assistance, the outcome of such assistance, analyze households who benefit from diversion, effectiveness of the diversion effort and resources necessary to support the strategy.

# Miami-Dade CoC Diversion Script

- Where did you stay last night?
- Is it possible or safe to stay in your current housing situation/unit?
- Are you fleeing domestic violence?
- Why did you have to leave where you stayed last night?
- What issues exist with you remaining in your current housing situation? What resources would you need to help you stay there again?
- What other housing options do you have for tonight, tomorrow, the next few days or weeks? Are there resources you may need to make this option happen?
- Is there anyone I should contact to help you stay in your current housing or who might be able to give you a place to stay for the next few nights?

# Miami-Dade CoC Diversion

## Initial Assessment

Client Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

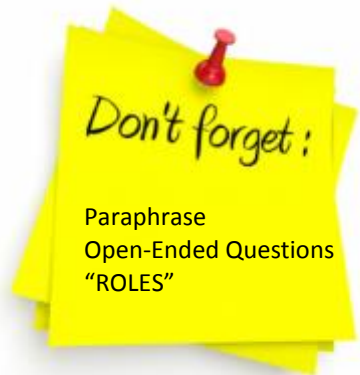
*This is a worksheet to help guide your conversation. Space is provided to take notes. This is not an official form.*

### **Step 1: Introduce yourself and the purpose of the appointment**

“ Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I work for \_\_\_\_\_ which is a part of the \_\_\_\_\_ Coordinated Access Network. The purpose of this meeting is to help you and your family find a safe place to stay. Typically shelters in this area are very full and the goal is that we brainstorm alternatives to staying in shelter. The hope is we can find another safe place for you to stay, other than a shelter OR help you return to where you were staying previously.”

### **Step 2: Active Listening**

**Allow the person to tell their story about their housing crisis**



### **Step 3: Strengths Exploration**

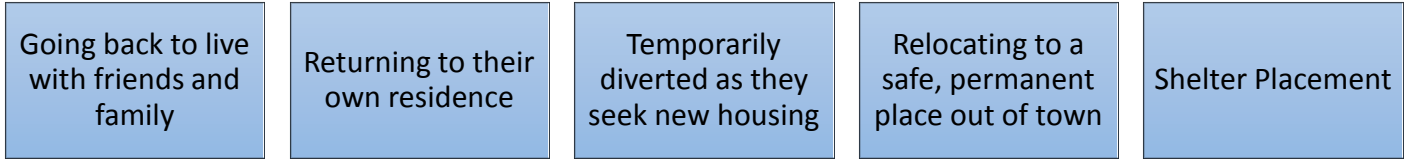
Over the past 6 months, what have you been able to do to avoid seeking emergency shelter?	Identify when you have been a support to others?	What were things like for you when things were going better?	Who are your friends, allies, and family members?
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## Step 4: Moving Forward



*It's their choice!*

Help pick the best option:



### Consider?

- Is this option:
  - Safe?
  - Appropriate for the client?
- If not, use reality testing



### Reality Testing

- “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?”

## Step 5: Getting Help

Help the client call family and friends

Make referrals to other resources

If they cannot be diverted, contact Street Outreach for shelter placement

## Step 6: Complete the paperwork

- HMIS Privacy Notice and Release of Information Forms
- Universal Data Elements and Diversion Assessment directly into HMIS
- Financial Assistance Form



## **Characteristics of an Exemplary Diversion Specialist\***

What are the sort of characteristics to look for when hiring someone for Diversion as the role is somewhat different from other roles that serve people experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of losing housing. Here is a guide.

***They should be an extraordinary problem solver who is remarkably resourceful rather than whining about a lack of resources.***

Being solution-focused means the individual will work the problem to find a solution rather than waiting for someone else to find a resource or fix a system that is broken. Good Diversion Specialists as the Macgyver's of the homeless and housing service delivery system – they find a way to make it work with what they have, even when it is not ideal.

***They need to think before reacting to what is presented.***

A good Diversion Specialist puts themselves on a short delay. The client says something. They take a pause, sometimes counting in their head, before responding. This avoids unnecessary conflict, feelings of interrogation, and the rapid exchange that can interfere with remaining objective.

***They must remain objective and fair.***

A good Diversion Specialist sees forests and trees. They see the needs of the household in front of them while also thinking of all households in similar circumstance. They see the household's needs for resources in the context of all resources available. They are not going to circumvent the process, nor are they going to make exceptions. They build trustworthiness through the transparency of what they do.

***They must focus on the problem/issues, not the emotions.***

A Diversion Specialist should have compassion, but need to separate the sometimes overwhelming emotional context that the household finds themselves in from the problems that led the household to seek service in the first place. Otherwise the Specialist can cater the response to the emotional outburst instead of dealing with the real issue(s).

***They must exercise direct communication and active listening.***

No sugar coating or misleading referrals. They focus on facts rather than opinion or advice. They call it as it is after making sure they have understood the situation as presented.

***They must focus on the future, not the past.***

A good Specialist knows they cannot rewind life to prevent a particular situation or mishap from occurring. As such, they need to see exactly where things are at in the present to work with the household to prepare a course of action for the future. And when the household seems fixated on past events, they work hard to get them to focus not on "what happened" but instead on "what's next?".

***They must have unwavering integrity of process and remain impartial to all parties that may be trying to influence the situation.***

A good Diversion Specialist is supported by the system and established processes as a whole. While others may try to advocate for particular favor for their household, the best Diversion Specialists ensure there are no side doors or special treatment.

***They must have impeccable personal boundaries.***

Whatever is happening in the life of the client, a good Diversion Specialist will know how to separate that professionally from their own life and experience so that emotions and resources on a personal level do not interfere in the process. More than once I have encountered Diversion Staff that feel sympathy instead of empathy in particular situations, only to then watch personal boundaries crumble.

***They must embrace and empower self-determination.***

A good Diversion Specialist works *with* the household seeking assistance. They do not do things *to* the household nor do they do things *for* the household. A good Diversion Specialist knows how to transparently present options for consideration by the household and empowers that household to resolve their own situation to the best of their ability, progressively engaging only when the household has demonstrated an inability to effectively engage with the resources and options provided.

***They must steadfastly distinguish between want and need.***

A good Diversion Specialist uses the lightest touch possible after understanding the true needs of the household. This is critical given the household can, quite honestly, approach services feeling a sense of entitlement, or wanting what their friends have received, or even getting what they were given in a previous encounter with the system. A good Diversion Specialist focuses on needs, not wants.

\*Based on **Characteristics of an Exemplary Diversion Specialist**, OrgCode (September 6, 2016)