



WSFC CoC Diversion Policy and Procedures

A. Diversion

1. Purpose

The Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Continuum of Care (WSFC CoC) Diversion Policy and Procedures were created to support community Diversion practices as a strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness. These standards and practices shall govern access and delivery of Diversion assistance.

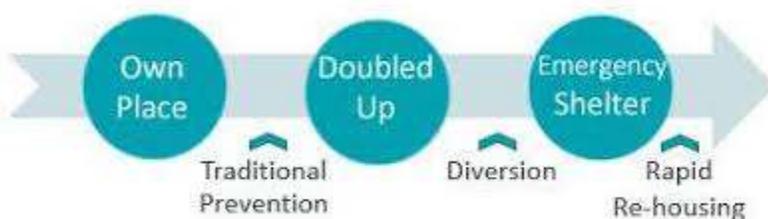
2. Role of Diversion

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 the shelter system.

Diversion provides limited short-term assistance and 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 as defined by the CoC with guidance from HUD. Diversion targets people as they are seeking entry into shelter ("front door" of shelter and the CoC). Rapid re-housing/permanent supportive housing (RRH/PSH) targets people who are already literally homeless.



If Diversion intervention does not result in the household remaining where they are currently housed or finding alternative safe and suitable housing, the household should be offered shelter placement. Diversion efforts may continue after placement to assist the household to quickly exit shelter without further CoC program assistance.

B. Diversion Access and Assistance Sites

1. Access Points

The CoC's Community Intake Center (CIC) requires Diversion assistance or referral be offered through all CIC access points. Staff person(s) providing Diversion assistance should be specifically trained. Diversion cases can be resolved by phone or in person and this contact should allow for engaged problem solving, active listening, provision of limited financial assistance and/or diversion staff support for a brief period of time.

C. Diversion Delivery

1. Diversion Referral

All households actively seeking shelter and those in need of shelter within a 7-day period are eligible for Diversion assessment apart from those coming directly from another shelter stay of 2 weeks or more. If a Diversion Specialist is unavailable at the time of contact, a referral can be made to the Diversion team for follow up. A Diversion Specialist should contact the household within 3 days of referral.

2. Diversion Assessment and Planning Tool

The Diversion assessment tool should be used to guide an open and creative discussion that lends itself to uncovering barriers which could be resolved so the household can 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:

- o Use a transformative mediation style that allows for empowerment and recognition.
 - o Let the family/individual lead the discussion.
 - o Utilize mediation techniques such as brainstorming and rephrasing.
 - o Utilize open-ended questions to move the discussion forward without providing direction or suggestions.
 - o Acknowledge the small steps.
 - o Build upon the work the family has already done to avoid homelessness and the relationships and resources they already have in place.
 - o Work through barriers by connecting the family with resources in their local community.
 - o Acknowledge concerns about doubling up and brainstorm ways to work through those barriers.
 - o Focus on barriers as individual issues that can be resolved.
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D. Diversion Resources

1. Dedicated Diversion Specialists

Staff should be dedicated to Diversion delivery and have strong skills in 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 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 to allow them to stay 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 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 are other examples of financial assistance to provide.

Up to \$750.00 can be spent on a single household. If more funding is needed, special approval through the Diversion team must be obtained. Requests for financial assistance through CDBG Care's Act funding are to be submitted to the United Way of Forsyth County's Diversion Specialist for final authorization and management of funds.

In each case, staff who are assessing the need for diversion assistance will collect information from applicants to ensure there is no duplication of benefits. Duplication of benefits occurs when Federal financial assistance is provided to a household to meet needs resulting from a Federally-declared emergency or disaster, and the household has received or plans to receive financial assistance for the same costs from another source, and the total amount received exceeds the total need for assistance. The provider of Diversion assistance must obtain agreement from any household receiving CDBG financial assistance for Diversion to repay assistance that is determined to be duplicative.

4. Robust Linkages to Community Services and Resources

Diversion staff must have established relationships with community services and supports so a household may quickly connect with the providers that would assist them to remain in housing or secure alternative housing. Diversion staff should provide a warm handoff to the service/agency they are referring the household.

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 the WSFC CoC Performance Measurement based on whether households served by diversion assistance are avoiding homelessness.

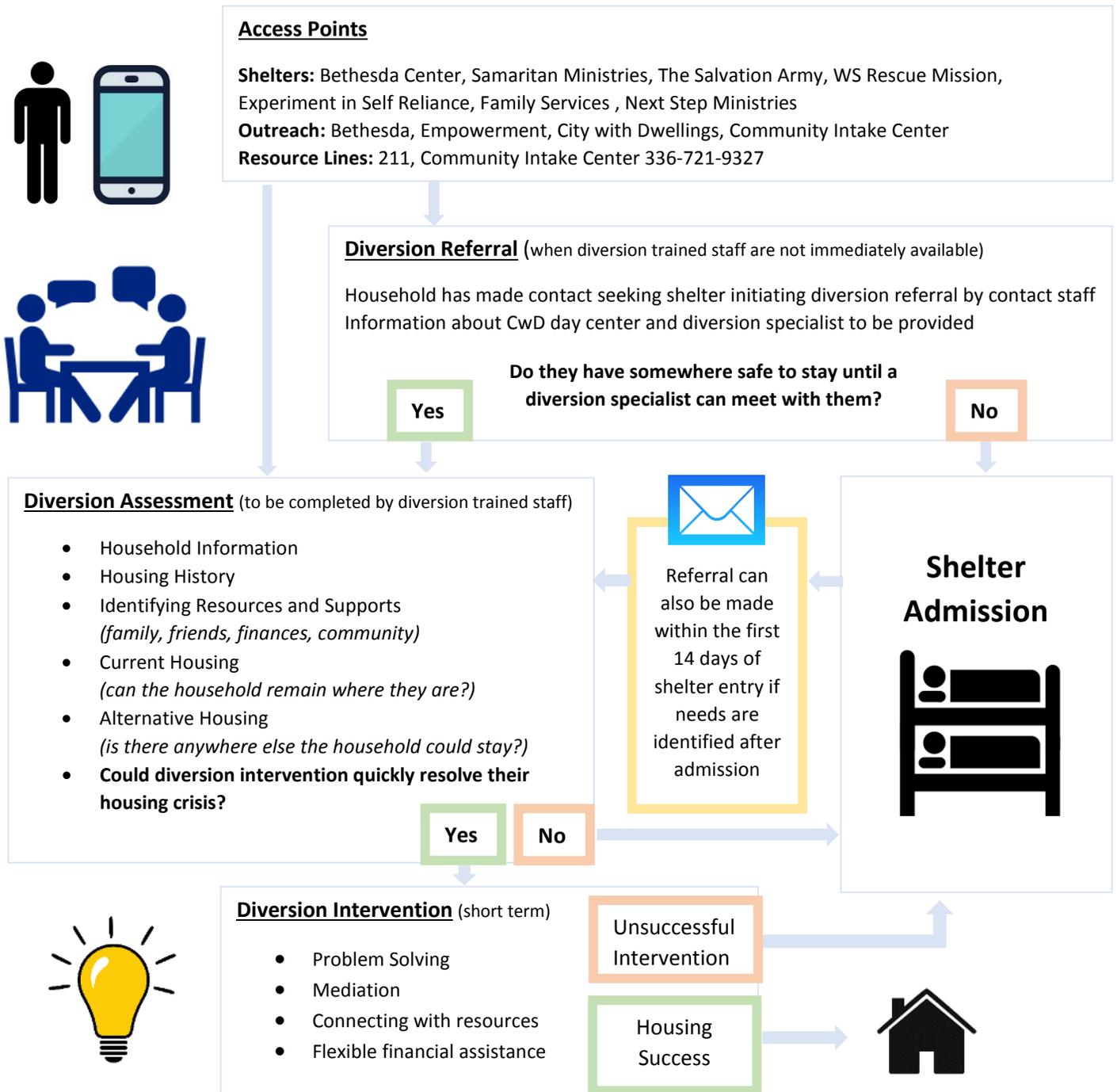
2. HMIS Data Capture

The household's Universal Data Elements and Diversion assistance will be entered into the WSFC CoC Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to capture households provided Diversion assistance. We will also record the outcome of the assistance, analyze households who received the benefit of Diversion, the effectiveness of the Diversion effort and resources necessary to support the strategy.



WSFC CoC Diversion Process

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. Referral to homelessness diversion programs by the Community Intake Center (CIC) and its participating agencies will be prioritized to individuals and families who are **seeking shelter** (need shelter within the next 7 days) or who have been **in shelter for a period of time not exceeding 14 days**, are willing to explore solutions to quickly resolve their episode of homelessness outside of continued shelter provision and assistance from Rapid Rehousing (RRH) or Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) programs.





WSFC CoC Diversion Assessment Tool

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

Client Name:

Date:

Interviewer:

Location:

Step 1: Introduce yourself and the purpose of the appointment

“Hi, my name is _____ and I work for _____. 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 our goal is to brainstorm alternatives to staying in shelter. The hope is to 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?

What was it like for you when things were going better?

Who are your friends, allies and family members?

Describe a time when you have been a support to others?

What resources do you have right now or in the immediate future that could help get you a temporary or permanent place to stay?

Step 4: Moving Forward

Help pick the best option

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|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Returning to live with friends or family</i> | <i>Returning to their own residence</i> | <i>Relocating to a safe, permanent place out of town</i> | <i>Temporary housing while seeking new permanent housing</i> | <i>Shelter Placement</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|

- Is the chosen option safe and appropriate for the client? If not go through these reality testing questions
- 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

| | | |
|------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Mediation</i> | <i>Connection to resources</i> | <i>Financial assistance</i> |
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Action Steps...

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 if needed

Step 7: Outcomes

Document assistance provided and outcomes in HMIS

Characteristics of an Exemplary Diversion Specialist

They should be an extraordinary problem solver who is remarkably resourceful rather than focusing on a lack of resources. Being solution-focused means the individual will work the problem out to find a solution rather than waiting for someone else to find a resource or fix a system that is broken. Good Diversion Specialists are 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 a 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 the household finds themselves in from the problems that led the household to seek service in the first place; otherwise the Diversion Specialist may 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 Diversion 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 in the present to work with the household to prepare a course of action for the future. 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 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 emotions and resources on a personal level do not interfere in the process. Diversion Staff should understand the difference between sympathy and empathy and understand how to employ each appropriately when working professionally with a client.

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 the 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)