

# How Diversion Helps Your Community End Homelessness

**Erin Wixsten**  
**Associate**  
**OrgCode Consulting, Inc.**



# About OrgCode

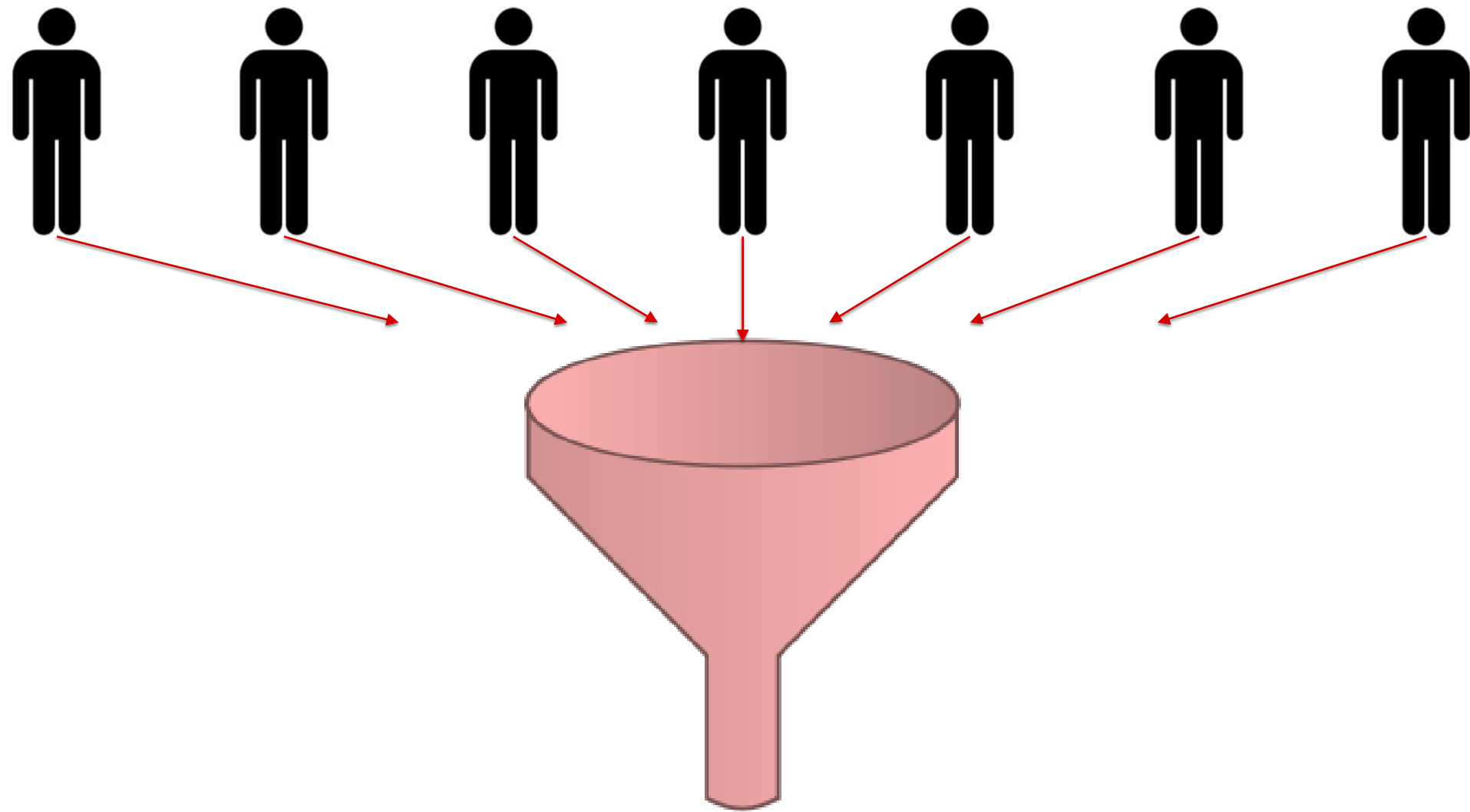
A band of merry misfits hell-bent on ending homelessness, promoting social justice, and living our values.

Work takes us from Hawaii to Rhode Island, Minnesota to Texas - as well as Canada, and Australia. In a typical year we will work with several hundred communities on social change, practice, and policy.

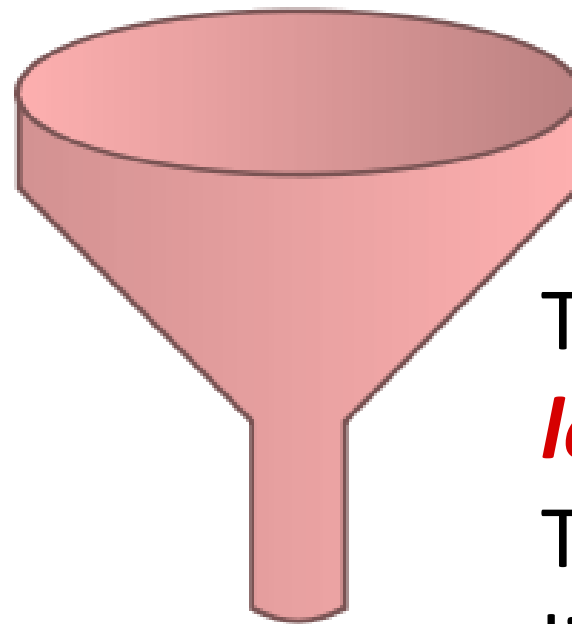
We believe in being catalysts for better social outcomes, using data and evidence, and training that doesn't suck.



These people are all **homeless**  
but they are *not a homogeneous* group



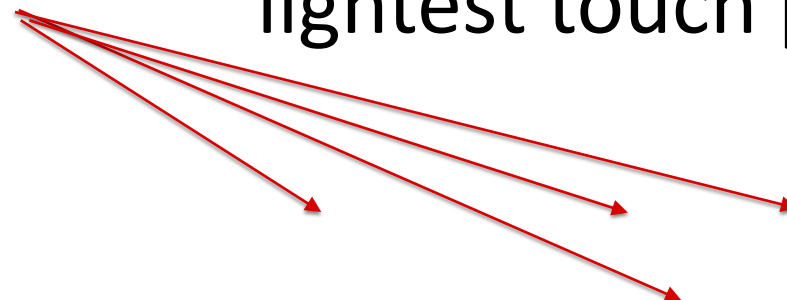
They need to all be *assessed*  
using a **common tool**,  
which will determine their *acuity*  
and the best intervention for them



These folks have

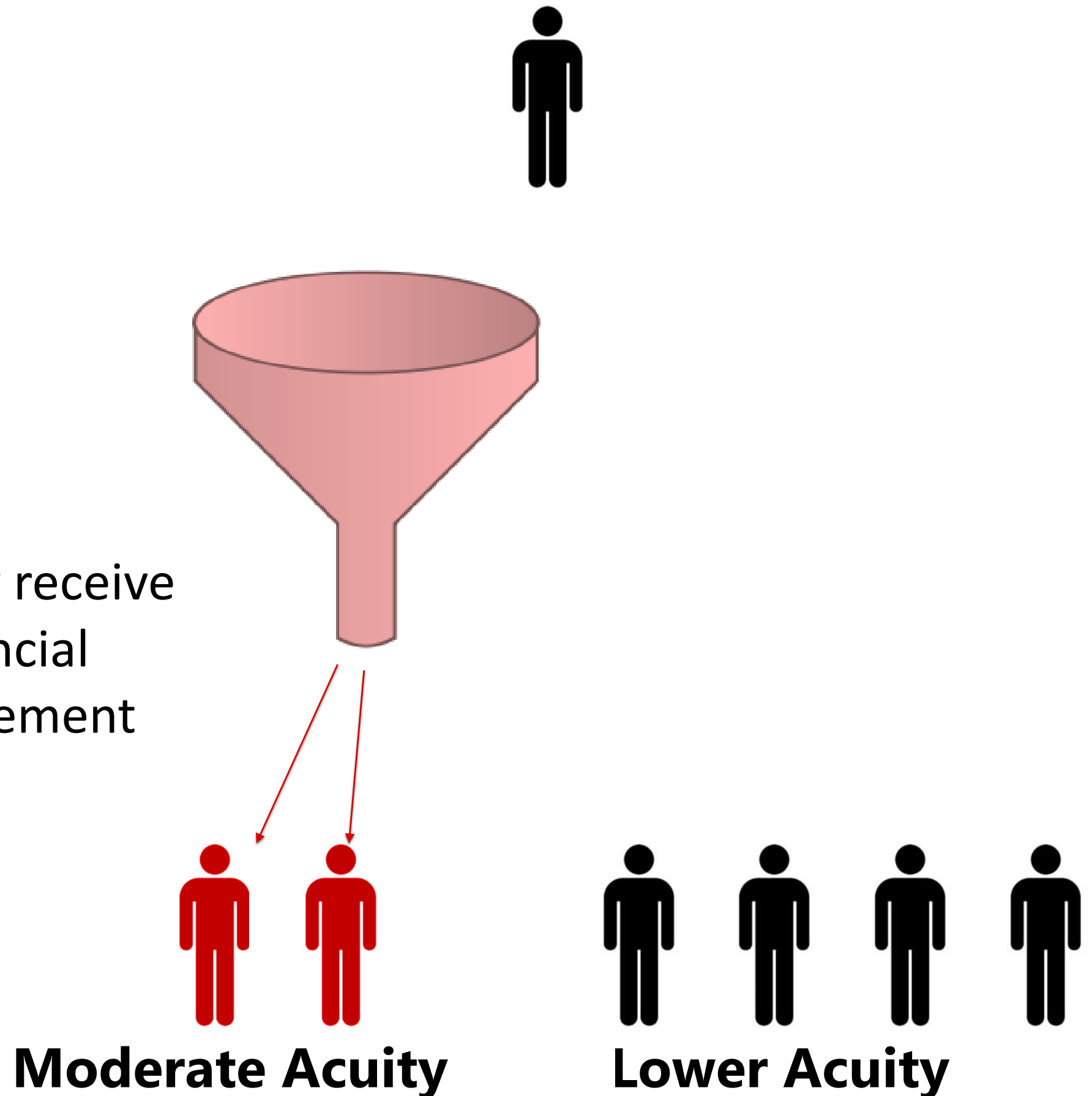
***lower acuity.***

They should receive the  
lightest touch possible



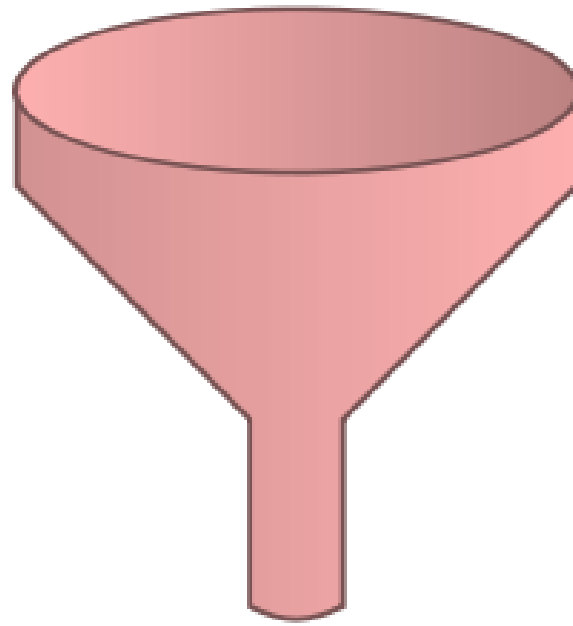
**Lower Acuity**

These folks have ***moderate acuity***.  
They should usually receive **time-limited** financial and/or case management supports



These folk(s) have  
*higher acuity*.

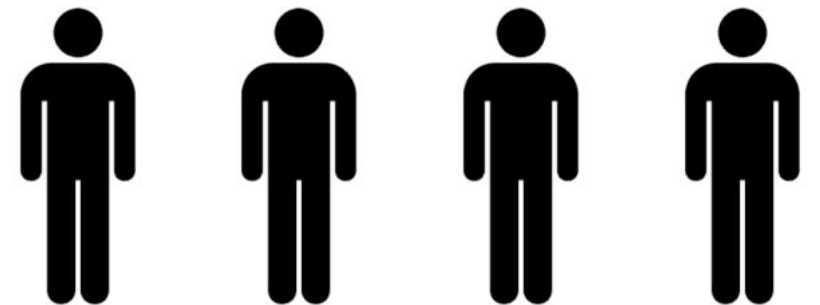
They usually need a  
**Housing First**  
intervention and/or  
**Permanent Supportive  
Housing**



**Higher Acuity**



**Moderate Acuity**



**Lower Acuity**

# The Truth about Homelessness

There are three “types” of people who are homeless

- About 80% are “**transitionally homeless**”
- They are homeless once in their lives, usually for about a week
- They are able to quickly find new housing, and they are never homeless again
- *These are the people the emergency shelter system was designed for*



# The Truth about Homelessness

What about the other two types?

- About 10% are “**episodically homeless**”

These people cycle in and out of homelessness

- About 10% are “**chronically homeless**”

These people are homeless for over a year, some for much longer

# The Truth about Homelessness

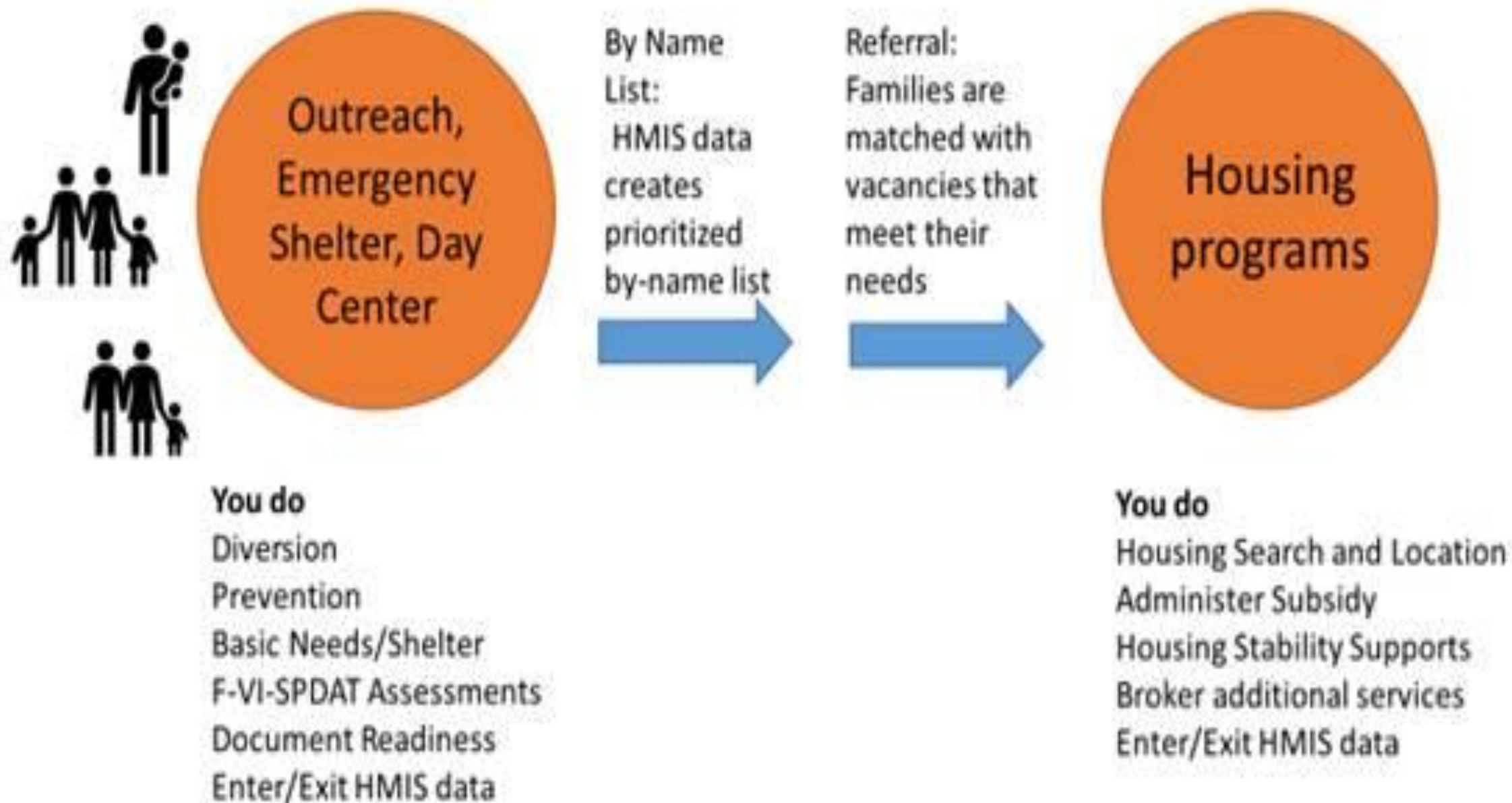
For these 20%, the common response to homelessness is clearly not working

- Or else wouldn't they be housed by now?
- Instead, we've been seeing an increase, not a decrease, in homelessness

# Shelters are most effectively used when:

1. Those that you are sheltering resemble the same characteristics of the households you are prioritizing for housing and support programs in your community;
2. Those that you are sheltering desire a housing solution, and programming within the shelter addresses these desires;
3. Only those individuals and families with no safe and appropriate alternatives other than shelter are admitted.

# System Map and Roles



# End Homelessness by:

- Closing the front door into homelessness –
  - Diversion & Prevention
  - Coordinated Entry
  - Discharge Planning
- Open the Back Door out of Homelessness –
  - Housing focused Shelters
  - Housing First
  - Housing Development & Location Service
- Find the Courage to do things differently Together
  - Solution Focused Innovation

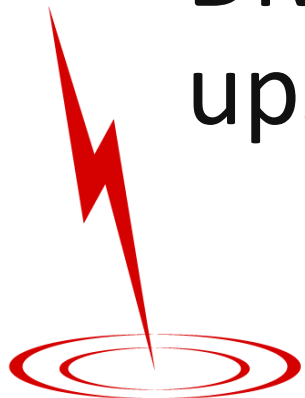
# Ending Homelessness

- A *functional* end to homelessness means no person has to remain homeless longer than 30 days prior to moving directly into *permanent* housing.
- Ending homelessness requires:
  - ✓ Shelters working as a process, not a destination
  - ✓ Diversion is a service with an outcome
  - ✓ Housing-focused conversations
  - ✓ Access to permanent housing quickly (less than 60 days)
  - ✓ By name registry of all people to be served

# Diversion & Prevention

# What is Diversion?

- Diversion is about saying “YES” to helping households navigate a **safe alternative** to shelter that is appropriate to their circumstances through an investment in staff time by dedicated staff that have specific problem-solving skills and access to flexible resources to put the solution into action.
- Diversion is NOT a refusal of service.
- Diversion should NEVER use assessment too far upstream.





# Prevention vs Diversion

**Prevention** = sustaining an existing safe, appropriate tenancy

**Diversion** = locating safe, appropriate alternatives to shelter once a person/family has become homeless

# Backbone Premises

- Homeless and housing services are not always easy to figure out
- Most organizations work really hard to be exceptionally good at its work - but that doesn't mean everyone that comes to its door is a good fit.
- “Service shopping” is inefficient and ineffective for people in need and for service organizations.
- Helping a youth get to the right intervention at the right time to end their homelessness is important.
- If a young person can end their own homelessness they should be empowered to do so before intensive services are provided.
  - Often youth diversion happens within a shelter setting

# Realities

- There is a difference between WANT and NEED.
- Most people that experience homelessness will do so only once in their life, for a short period of time, and will not experience it ever again.
- Meanwhile, there are a smaller percentage of people that experience episodic homelessness or chronic homelessness.
- We do NOT have an infinite supply of resources, nor do we have more staff and time than we know what to do with.
- Acting like a system requires that we have coordinated access and common assessment.
- All of this occurs within heightened emotional context.

# For Diversion to Work...

- Diversion IS a service. NOT the absence of service.
- Diversion should NEVER use assessment too far upstream.
- NO over-rides for diversion attempt.
- NOT assessing for assessment sake...NOT about creating waiting lists.
- Diversion must mean a safe option has been identified.

# The Usual Struggles with Prevention

- Administrators of prevention and even funders see cause and effect where there is not any.
- Prevention for youth needs to have strong partnerships with child welfare and juvenile justice = intersectionality and upstream assessment/identification
- Service providers think they can predict how a household will do in the future.
- Households deemed to be too high risk are most often screened out.
- Analysis of service use often shows repeat users of the service as soon as eligible.

# Characteristics of a Diversion Specialist

- Solution-focused
- Objective
- Maintains confidentiality
- Willingness to find alternatives
- Integrity of process
- Impartial to all parties that may influence current situation unless legal duty to report
- Professional boundaries
- Embraces self-determination
- Honesty

# Coordinating Residential Solutions



# Effective Engagement Strategies

- Think before reacting to what is presented.
- Exercise active listening.
- Focus on the problem, not the emotions.
- Accept responsibility for trying to solve the problem, but do not over-promise or be dismissive from the start.
- Use direct communication. What exactly do they need? Why do they need it? What do you need them to do?
- Focus on the future - not the past.
- Ensure fairness.



# Different Scenarios to Consider

1. People homeless for the first time.
2. People that keep coming back to homelessness.
3. People stuck in homelessness and/or not using any of the “usual” homeless services.
4. Diversion for youth has to be grounded in safety and choice
  - Often done while in shelter

# Where Is Diversion Happening in Your Community?

**Via Coordinated Entry?**

**Via Agency Referral?**

**At Your Front Door?**

**As a Rapid Exit Strategy?**



# **9 Steps to Effective Diversion Practice**

# STEP ONE: Explain the Process

**Explanation of the diversion conversation.**

*“Our goal is to learn more about your specific housing situation right now and what you need so that together we can identify the best possible way to get you a place to stay tonight and to find safe, permanent housing as quickly as possible. That might mean staying in shelter tonight, but we want to avoid that if at all possible. We will work with you to find a more stable alternative if we can.”*

# STEP TWO: Today's Urgency and Untested Options

Why are you seeking emergency shelter today?

What are all the other things you tried before you sought shelter today?

What are all the other things you have thought about trying but have not attempted yet in order to avoid needing shelter today?

# STEP THREE: Last Night's Safety

## Where did you stay last night?

- a. If staying with someone else, what is the relationship between them and you?
- b. How long have you been staying there?
- c. Where did you stay before that?
- d. Would it be safe for you to stay there again for the next 3-7 days?
- e. (If a couple and/or household with children under 18) Would your whole household be able to return and stay there safely for the next 3-7 days?
- f. If indicate that the place where they stayed is unsafe, ask why it is unsafe.
- g. If cannot stay there safely, or if were staying in a place unfit for human habitation, move to Step Six.

# STEP FOUR: Story Behind the Story (At Last Night's Safe Place)

What is the primary/main reason that you had to leave the place where you stayed last night?

Are there additional reasons why you can't stay there any longer?

# **STEP FIVE: What Would it Take to Stay (At Last Night's Safe Place)**

Do you think that you/you and your family could stay there again temporarily if we provide you with some help or referrals to find permanent housing or connect with other services?

If no, why not? What would it take to be able to stay there temporarily?



# STEP SIX: New Place to Stay Temporarily

If no, is there somewhere else where you/you and your family could stay temporarily if we provide you with some help or referrals to find permanent housing and access other supports?

For example, what about other family members?  
Friends? Coworkers?

What would it take for you to be able to stay there temporarily?

# **STEP SEVEN: Identifying Barriers and Assistance Required**

What is making it hard for you to find permanent housing for you/you and your family - or connect to other resources that could help you do that?

What do you feel are your barriers?

What assistance do you feel you need?

# STEP EIGHT: Current Resources

What resources do you have right now that could help you and your family find a place to stay temporarily or find permanent housing?



# STEP NINE: Housing Planning

If admitted to shelter there is still an expectation that you will be attempting to secure permanent housing for you (and your family).

What is your plan at this point for securing housing if you are admitted to shelter?

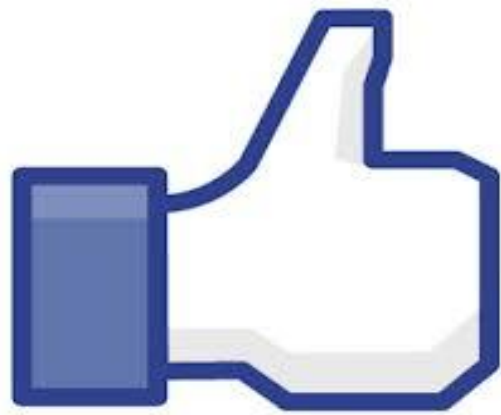




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416-698-9700



tflaherty-willmott@orgcode.com



orgcodemobile