

## **1. Diversion Program for Homeless Families and Individuals - \$134,000**

Pinellas County currently has significant resources in Prevention services through Pinellas County, the Juvenile Welfare Board, and other entities. However, there are currently very few, if any, services dedicated to diverting those who are newly homeless from further entering the system. This proposal is to request funding for two highly trained Case Managers who would provide short-term crisis intervention and case management services (average of 30 days), to those individuals and families who are touching the homeless system of care for the first time, with the goal of keeping them from further entering the homeless system. Strategies include: problem solving, crisis intervention, family mediation, linkage to other community services, and flexible funding for potential home repairs, medical supplies, food, bus tickets, etc. Due to the high intensity of services, Case Managers must be trained in trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing and harm-reduction strategies. The funding request totals \$134,000 and includes \$113,922 for two Master-level Diversion Case Manager positions - one would be permanently stationed at Safe Harbor and one would be mobile in the field working with individuals and families; and an additional \$13,382 in flexible funding for related client assistance.

Diversion is a strategy that prevents homelessness for people seeking shelter by helping them identify immediate alternate housing arrangements and, if necessary, connecting them with services and financial assistance to help them return to permanent housing. Diversion programs can reduce the number of families and individuals becoming homeless, the demand for shelter beds, and the size of program wait lists. Diversion programs can also help communities achieve better outcomes and be more competitive when applying for federal funding.

The services families/individuals are provided with when being diverted include:

- provision of financial, utility, and/or rental assistance;
- short-term case management;
- conflict mediation;
- connection to mainstream services (services that come from agencies outside of the homeless assistance system, such as welfare agencies) and/or benefits; and
- housing search.

The main difference between diversion and other permanent housing-focused interventions centers on the point at which intervention occurs. Prevention targets people at imminent risk of homelessness, while diversion targets people as they are applying for entry into shelter, and rapid re-housing targets people who are already homeless.

Assessment and service delivery for interventions would ideally begin at the system entry point for homeless families/individuals. Once families/individuals come to the entry point, they should be assessed to determine what housing needs they have. To determine

who is appropriate for diversion, staff will need to ask families a few specific questions, such as:

- Where did you sleep last night? If they slept somewhere where they could potentially safely stay again, this might mean they are good candidates for diversion.
- What other housing options do you have for the next few days or weeks? Even if there is an option outside of shelter that is only available for a very short time, it's worth exploring if this housing resource can be used.
- (If staying in someone else's housing) What issues exist with you remaining in your current housing situation? Can those issues be resolved with financial assistance, case management, etc.? If the issues can be solved with case management, mediation, or financial assistance (or all of the above), diversion is a good option.
- (If coming from their own unit) Is it possible/safe to stay in your current housing unit? What resources would you need to do that (financial assistance, case management, mediation, transportation, etc.)? If the family/individual could stay in their current housing with some assistance, the focus should be on a quick prevention-oriented solution that will keep the family/individual in their unit.

Families/Individuals typically meet with a case manager to start housing stabilization planning immediately after being assessed and deemed appropriate for diversion. Housing planning involves both finding immediate housing and planning for longer term housing stability. If an immediate alternate housing arrangement cannot be made, a shelter stay is likely the most appropriate option.

Some may not be good candidates for diversion programs due to a lack of safe and appropriate housing alternatives and require immediate admittance to shelter, e.g. families fleeing domestic violence. Safety should always be the top consideration when thinking through what intervention fits best.

Diversion Case Managers will be familiar with intake and assessment processes, have experience with landlord mediation and conflict resolution, and be knowledgeable about rental subsidies and financial literacy programs. Additionally, successful diversion often requires the involvement of service providers from outside of the homeless assistance system. Mainstream service providers can be pulled in to help families stabilize once they have been diverted or found a new unit and/or to refer families to the diversion program who appear to be eligible. Successfully diverting families may require the provision of financial assistance to get them back into their former housing, to enable them to stay a bit longer in a doubled up situation while they look for permanent housing, to unify them with family members, or to help them move quickly into a new housing unit.

For diversion assistance, the primary outcome is the prevention of homelessness. This outcome will be measured as below:

- **20% of Individuals and Families receiving Diversion Assistance will avoid homelessness.**