Progressive Engagement: How less can truly be more

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Overview

• National objectives from HEARTH and Opening Doors
• Common approaches to assigning resources
• What do we mean by “Progressive Engagement”?  
• Essentials of a progressive engagement approach  
  o Planning the program  
  o Working with the households  
• Leading the culture shift
From the HEARTH Preamble

“...to establish a Federal goal of ensuring that individuals and families who become homeless return to permanent housing within 30 days.”

- HEARTH Act purposes – Sec. 1002(b)
“Transform homeless services to crisis response systems that prevent homelessness and rapidly return people who experience homelessness to stable housing.”
How do we assign resources locally now?

• Luck?
• Persistence?
• Assessment and Triage
• Progressive Engagement
Progressive Engagement

A different kind of design:

The lightest touch possible

OR

“You can always add more, but you can’t take it away.”
What about Assessment?

- Assessment is critical: need knowledge of the client’s relevant history, their current plans and desires
- Understand housing barriers to be able to assist, not to refuse assistance
- Developing a realistic approach to finding landlords and housing situations
- Ability to link clients to supports in the community

But:
- Assessment up front may not be a good way to size the financial assistance or length of time services are offered

*Example: Let’s all go on a job hunt...*
Progressive Engagement Approach*

Point of Entry

RRH 1 $

RRH 1 $$

RRH 1 $$$

Independently Housed

PSH $$$$$

*Graphic from National Alliance to End Homelessness

http://www.usich.gov
Progressive Engagement

One resource or many?

- Use different resources in tandem, based on their requirements and strengths, for different levels or phases of assistance

Example:

- Use one resource with regular reassessments and adjustments

Example: ESG alone, local Child Welfare dollars
Creating the Program

**What do you need to know?**

- The rules of the funding
- The population and their housing barriers
- Trends for lengths of stay and exits
- Community partners
  - *If we’re not going to provide the service, who can?*

Projecting the overall program size – knowing how to budget and staff
(See Refinement)
Working with the households

- Frame the programs expectations and the help they’ll get to achieve them
  - Strengths-based approach
  - Specific plans to address concrete issues related to housing
- Make clear you won’t abandon them but don’t over-invite more assistance than needed

Set them up to succeed!
What is essential to a progressive engagement approach to rehousing?

- Flexible resources (money and staff)
- Relationships with landlords
- Links to other services in the community
- Skill managing a flexible program
- Partnership with clients to make a realistic plan
- Messaging to clients, landlords, partners
Core: A change in culture

- Idea of doing the least for each household rather than the most
- Believing people can make it without us
- Staff get rewards from seeing people leave and helping more people
- *The pace is fast*
Leading the culture shift

- Learn about successful approaches
- Hear from clients about what they want
- Take things step by step
- Offer staff lots of support and training, but...
  - Also be open to staff changes
- Use agency data to evaluate and adjust
Measuring your impact

From HEARTH

- How many households are exiting to permanent housing?
- How quickly?
- Do they experience homelessness again?

Also, consider cost per outcome
Refining the Model

Look at your outcomes and refine based on results:

- Unacceptable loss rate or returns?
  - *Maybe resize, assist longer, check in more, improve partnerships*
- Virtually everybody sticks?
  - *Maybe do less*
- Some succeed and some don’t?
  - *What factors can we look at to tell us what’s happening?* (ex: family size, differences in income source, staff working with household, etc.)
For More Information

- USICH website (www.usich.gov)
  - Tools for Local Action
  - Program Profiles (coming soon)
- National Alliance to End Homelessness (www.endhomelessness.org)
- Homelessness Resource Exchange (www.hudhre.info)
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