

# **Diversion I: A Vital Piece to An Effective System**

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***Presenter:***

**Kay Moshier McDivitt**  
**Senior Technical Assistance Specialist**  
*National Alliance to End Homelessness*

# DIVERSION I: A VITAL PIECE TO AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM

Kay Moshier McDivitt

Senior Technical Assistance Specialist

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National Alliance to  
**END HOMELESSNESS**



Center For  
**CAPACITY BUILDING**  
National Alliance To End Homelessness

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is the leading national voice on the issue of homelessness. The Alliance analyzes policy and develops pragmatic, effective policy solutions. The Alliance works collaboratively with the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to build state and local capacity, leading to stronger projects and policies that help communities achieve their goal of ending homelessness.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness identifies and evaluates hundreds of policy and project strategies and their impact on homelessness. The Alliance's Center for Capacity Building helps communities replicate and customize the best of those strategies. The Center focuses on strategies that are cost effective, data driven, and can be implemented at a scale that can significantly reduce homelessness.

# Poll

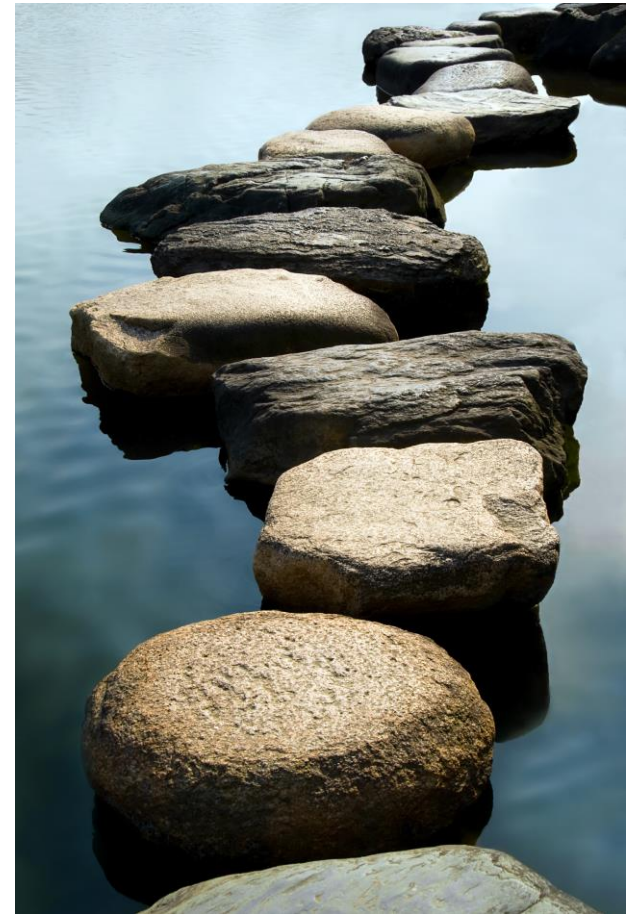
## Who is Here?

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- Role:
  - City/County/State Government/Funder
  - CoC/CAN staff
  - Executive Director
  - Program Managers
  - Case manager/ Housing Navigator/ Service Coordinator
  - Diversion Specialists
  - Outreach Specialists
  - Advocate/ Peer Specialist
  - Person With Lived Experience
  - Other

# Session Objectives

- Recognize elements of an effective homeless response system
- Outline the important role of diversion and its impact on ending homelessness
- Recognize how diversion and problem solving is a system-wide strategy
- Introduce the key elements Integrating Diversion in our work





Are you currently practicing  
diversion in your CAN?

# THE ROLE OF DIVERSION IN AND EFFECTIVE HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM





# Effective, Efficient and Equitable Homeless Response System: **GOAL**

**House** people as quickly as possible and  
**divert** people from imminent homelessness whenever possible

**End Homelessness = Make homelessness rare, brief and one-time**



# Systemic Impacts of Diversion

## What role does it play in improving system outcomes?

- Reduces entries into homelessness
- Stems the inflow and reduces demands for shelter beds
- Conserves and targets homeless resources for those who need it the most
- Cuts down on shelter and housing waitlists
- Less costly than shelter
- Avoids emergency-related costs of unsheltered homelessness
- Shelter can be traumatic, unhealthy, and unsafe.

# System Flow

An efficient and coordinated process that moves people from homelessness to housing as quickly as possible



# The Tub is Overflowing

Diversion helps people find alternatives to the homeless system. Slows the inflow!

Waiting in shelter only increases the overflow or staying unsheltered while on a "list" only increases the flood.

Waitlists are like mops pushing the water around but not making progress

Shelter Waitlist

Unsheltered



# **DIVERSION**

## **WHAT WHERE WHY AND HOW**



# What is Diversion?

**Diversion** assists people who just lost their housing and are seeking emergency shelter or facing unsheltered homelessness by helping them identify and access safe alternative options. It is a client-driven approach. The intent is to promote positive alternatives to entering emergency shelter or unsheltered homelessness, not to erect barriers to shelter.

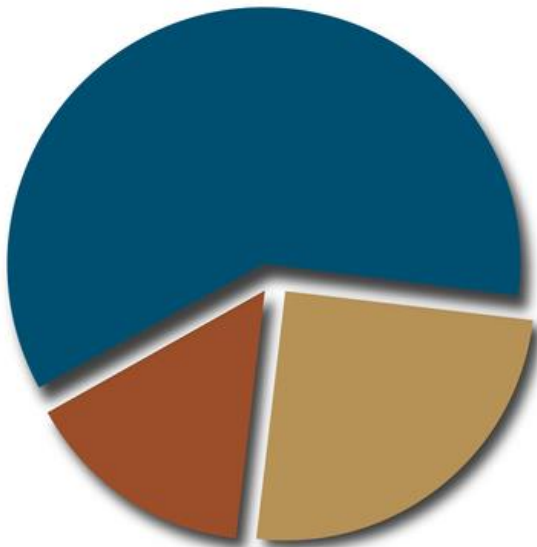


# When Should the Crisis Response System Use Problem-Solving Strategies?

Consumer's Housing Situation	Intervention Used	Services Provided in All Interventions
At Risk of Losing Housing (precariously housed)	<b>HOMELESS PREVENTION</b>	<p>Services (Strengths-Based Case Management)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative Problem-Solving Conversation</li> <li>• Conflict Resolution</li> <li>• Housing Search/Placement</li> <li>• Landlord/Tenant Mediation</li> <li>• Connection to Mainstream Resources</li> <li>• Tenant Legal Services</li> <li>• Credit Repair</li> </ul> <p>Financial Assistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rental Application Fee</li> <li>• Rental Subsidy/Arrears</li> <li>• Security/Utility Deposits</li> <li>• Utility Arrears</li> <li>• Moving Costs</li> <li>• Transportation Costs</li> <li>• Other Financial Assistance</li> </ul>
Seeking Shelter (at "front door" of system and seeking place to stay)	<b>DIVERSION</b>	
Literally Homeless (on the street/place not meant for human habitation/ shelter)	<b>HOUSING FOCUSED, RAPID EXIT SERVICES</b>	

# Diversion vs Traditional Prevention

## Which Strategy Has the Greatest Impact on a Community's Response to Homelessness?



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### **DIVERSION**

- Serves people who have lost housing and are facing **IMMINENT** entry into shelter or sleeping outside
- Reduces number of entries to a system
- Lowers demand for shelter beds
- Shortens wait lists

### **HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION**

- Serves extremely vulnerable people who are about to lose their housing
- Only effective when targeted to those most at risk of becoming homeless

### **EVICTION PREVENTION**

- Serves low income people who have received an eviction notice
- Most recipients **DO NOT** face imminent risk of homelessness

[endhomelessness.org](http://endhomelessness.org)



# Diversion: Where To Begin Within the Homeless Response System

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Ideally, Diversion happens anywhere someone is presenting for homeless services....

SOO...

Diversion using problem solving should happen **AS** the **VERY FIRST** contact for people accessing Homeless Services (**wherever that happens**)

# System-Wide Orientation: Housing-Focused Problem Solving

- To end homelessness, more must be done to assist a household in crisis **using creative problem solving and limited financial assistance**
- Diversion occurs **before a household becomes homeless** (i.e., first presenting at emergency shelter or other CES access point)
- When homelessness cannot be prevented, **housing-focused services** provide to rapidly *exit* households
- **Effective problem solving** should be client-centered and focuses on a conversation that explores creative, flexible, and cost-effective solutions that can be implemented quickly

# Integrating Diversion at the Front Door of the Homeless System

Shift From	Shift Towards
Are you willing to enter shelter?	How safe do you feel in the place you are staying? What can we do to help you remain there? What can we do to help you find a safe place other than shelter?
What programs are you eligible for? Who has a bed?	What would resolve your current housing crisis?
Beginning with eligibility determinations	Begin with brainstorming and structured problem-solving conversations about household's situation and resources
Beginning with screening and assessment tools and shelter waitlists	Support crisis resolution to avoid shelter entry through problem solving conversation

# Integrating Diversion at the Front Door of the Homeless System

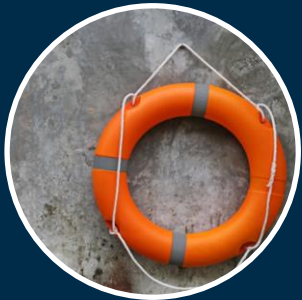
## Diversion Is/Isn't

- Diversion is **NOT** a separate “program” but rather part of the entire system
- Diversion is **problem solving and solution focused**
- Diversion should always be **safe and appropriate** for the client

## Diversion Requires

- Coordinated entry process and shelter front door
- **Resourceful staff trained** in:
  - Mediation, conflict resolution
  - Strength based assessment
  - Problem solving
  - Respect for client choice and
  - Recognition of safety
- **Linkages** to mainstream services and natural supports
- **Flexible** funds

# Guiding Principles of Systemic Diversion



Crisis  
Resolution



Client  
Choice



Progressive  
Engagement



Maximizing  
Resources



# Why Diversion?

Many people face a housing crisis, but few become homeless, even when it looks like they will...

**So...**

How do we target intensive interventions and resources to those with higher needs who to find alternatives to a shelter stay or unsheltered homelessness?



# How Does Diversion Work?



Diversion is an intensive service intervention. Through an interactive problem-solving conversation with the person or household, staff seek to:

- understand what caused a person's housing crisis;
- explore what immediate solutions to the crisis may be possible; and
- help them pursue a solution(s).

# How Does Diversion Work?

Diversion seeks to immediately get the person or household into a safe housing alternative, which may be short- or longer-term. Some of these solutions may include:

- Connections to community resources
- a negotiated return to their previous housing;
- short-term, non-shelter accommodation;
- apartments or homes, (including shared housing);
- returns to family.





# Brainstorm

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What are the types of services/organizations in your communities you think could support/offer resources to help with diverting household from homelessness

# How Does Diversion Work?

## Examples of Services Offered...

- Creative Problem-Solving  
Conversation focused on immediate housing options
- Connections to Family and Natural Supports
- Strengths-Based Case Management
- Conflict Resolution/Mediation
- Housing Search/Placement
- Landlord/Tenant Mediation
- Connection to Mainstream Resources
- Tenant Legal Services
- Credit Repair
- **\*Financial Assistance when necessary**

# When Should The System Use Diversion Strategies?

At **ALL** access points or “front doors” to the homeless system

- Coordinated entry system access points
- Emergency shelter
- Other places people are seeking homeless services assistance



# Who Can Be Diverted?

*Try* diversion with **everyone!**

- *Try* having a problem-solving conversation with **everyone** seeking shelter to determine whether it is viable, desirable, safe, and appropriate to divert them.
  - Remember, people seeking shelter are not different from those that find their own alternatives to shelter
  - Recognize that we all have biases; Check them and ensure that we are approaching each diversion conversation believing that diversion can work.
  - Ensure every diversion conversation is approached with the BELIEF that diversion can work.

# Who Can **Not** be Diverted From Emergency Shelter/Homeless Response System?

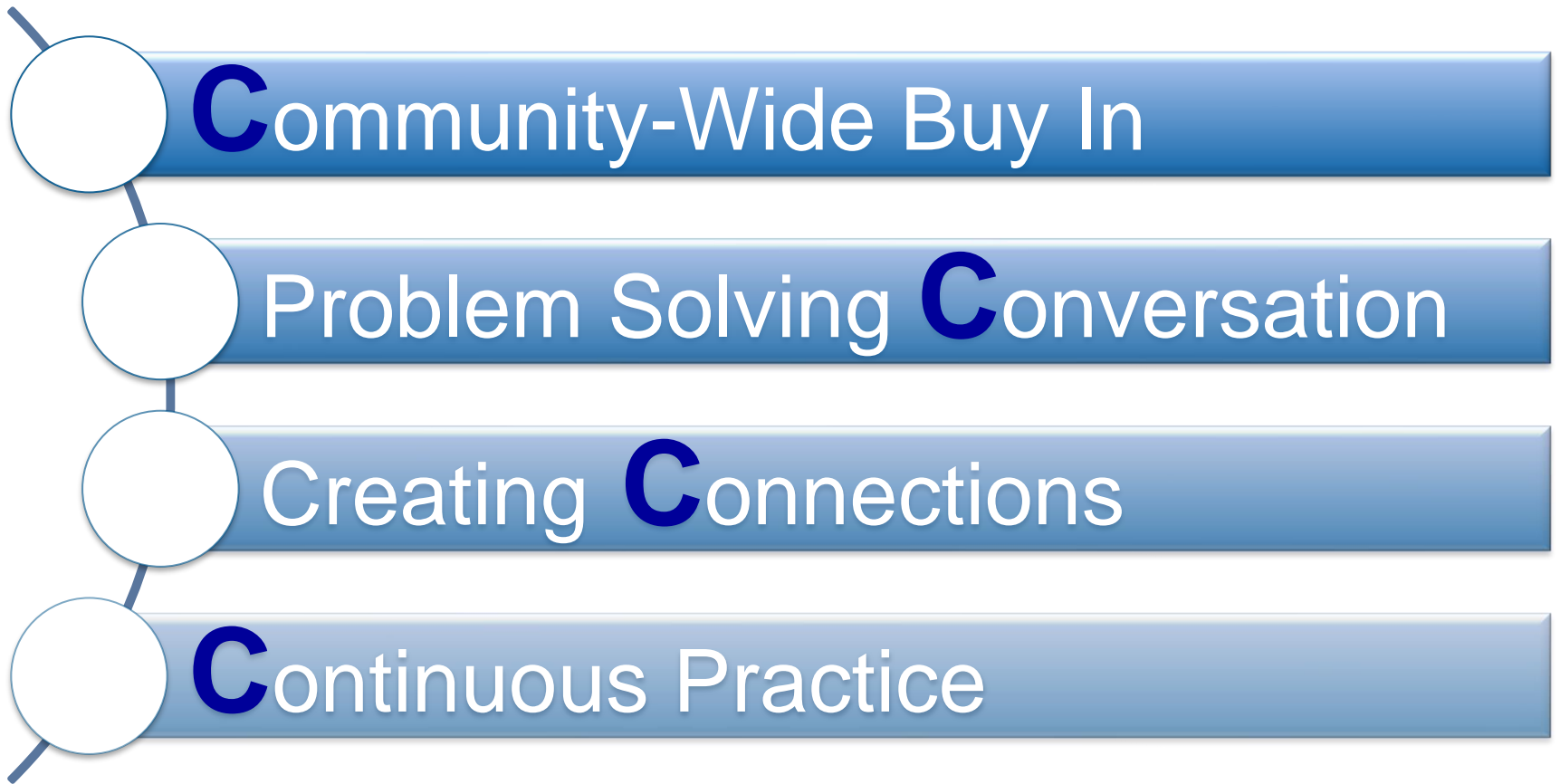
Individuals or families that do not have any safe or viable alternatives aside from staying in shelter



# DIVERSION IN ACTION



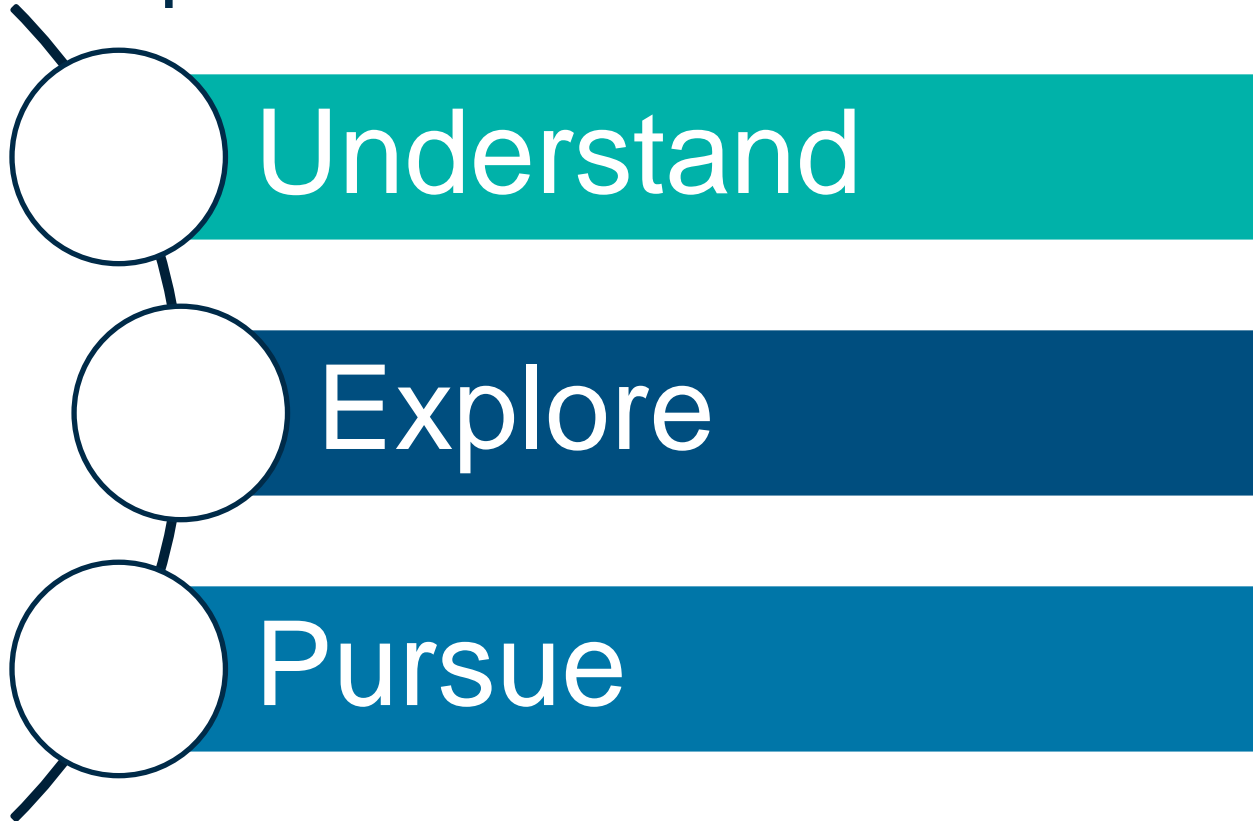
# Effective Diversion Practice: Four Fundamentals “Cs”



# Effective Problem-Solving

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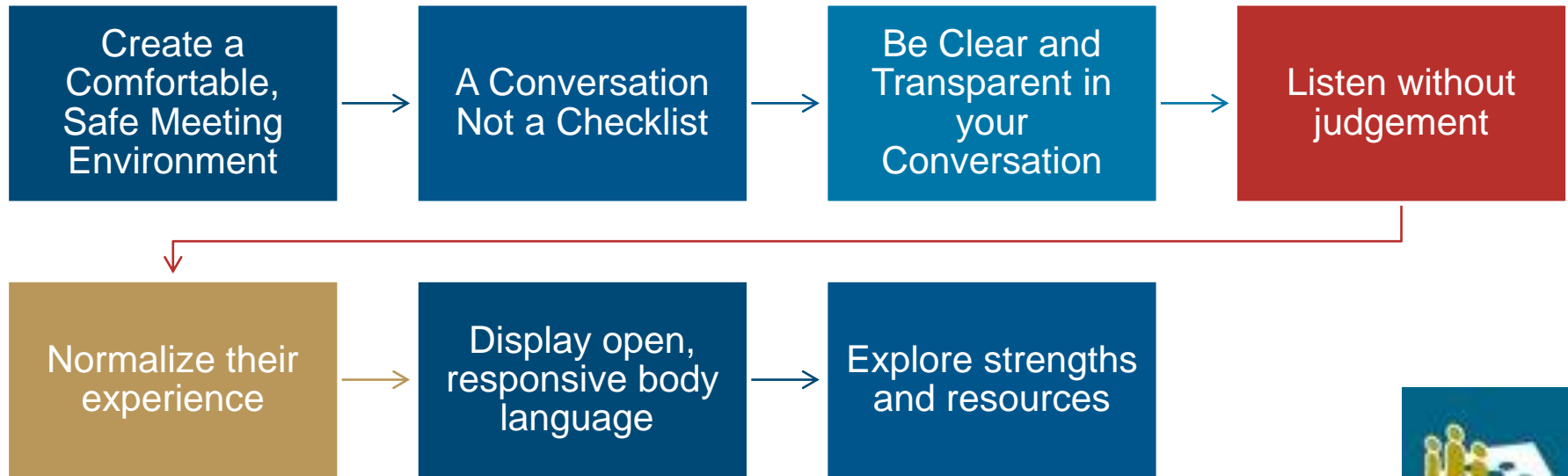
Requires practitioners to:





# Problem-Solving Conversation

## The Basics:



# Examples of Successful Resolutions

**Permanently Back with  
Friends or Family**

**Return to Current  
Residence**

**Temporarily Diverted  
While Seeking New  
Housing**

**Permanent Relocation  
To Safe Place Out of  
Town**

# Hone The Skills, Not A Tool

## Question

“We have someone who wants to fund a diversion program... He would like to find a **good diversion screening tool** and I am wondering your thoughts on this and if you have anything you could recommend?”

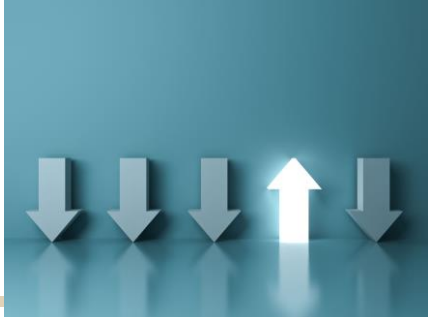
## Answer

“I suggest that the screening tool is in fact the relaxed, client-centered, strength-based, empathetic conversation we have with the client. In other words unfortunately no short-cut screening tool.”

~ Ed Boyte

(former staff Cleveland Mediation Center)

# Summary



- Diversion is a strategy that helps people identify and access alternatives to homelessness and resolve their immediate housing crisis.
- The guiding principals of diversion are immediate crisis resolution, client choice, progressive engagement and maximizing system resources
- The four “C’s” of diversion are Community-wide buy-in, Problem-Solving Conversations, Connections and Continuous.
- Messaging: An effective homeless response safely diverts people from imminent homelessness whenever possible

# Questions

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# Contact

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Kay Moshier-McDivitt

Senior Technical Assistance Specialist

[kmoshiermcdivitt@naeh.org](mailto:kmoshiermcdivitt@naeh.org)

@Alliance\_Kay

# Questions?

[www.cceh.org](http://www.cceh.org)  
[info@cceh.org](mailto:info@cceh.org)

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