

**Centralized Intake Refinement  
Community Meeting  
February 3, 2015**

**Question & Answers**

**Question 1**

I'm assuming the City of Tacoma and their contracting department is aligned with this and will be a full system integration of these things, that won't be programs that are dually funded having to do one set of things for the County and one set of things for the City?

Shelly, of the City of Tacoma responds: This is my first exposure to what the plans have been so we will do our best to align but that will have to be a series of conversations. I can't promise anything at this point.

Tess Colby (Pierce County Community Connections – PCCC) responds: My assumption is that yes, we will end up being fully aligned because, we are not actually asking you to do anything different than we have asked you to do over the last several years. The only real difference is that the County would be moving more towards performance based contracting, which I think the City has been doing for some time. But beyond that, the priorities continue to be the same priorities. Shifting to rapid re-housing, shifting to permanent housing. The difference will be in centralized intake moving to a prioritization process where we are explicitly serving the households with the highest acuity of need, which as far as I am aware, is consistent with the cities priorities as well.

**Question 2**

Am I understanding you correctly when you talk about the assessment being too long and asking questions about strengths, that we may be getting away from that and going to more about - what are the biggest barriers (that is probably not the correct terminology) that will become the focus of centralized intake? Is that what I'm understanding you say is going to happen in the future?

Megan (Focus Strategies -FS) responds: I would say it a little differently. What we are saying is that right now you ask a lot of questions about the household, and what we are suggesting that you do is stop asking so much about the household, all their needs and challenges and so on and instead that you really ask the questions that get you to what are they eligible for. Because there has to be an element of prioritization – right? A lot of the conversation has been about serving the highest need folks or the highest barrier people, highest acuity of need – as Tess says. You have to collect enough information to be able to prioritize people because there isn't enough inventory to house everybody who asks for assistance. You have to be able to prioritize on some level but what you want to be able to do is ask as few questions as possible that help you do that. What you want to do is ask all the questions that you need to, to determine what people are eligible for. It combines a couple of things. What happens now is you ask all these things, 90 minutes worth of things and most of that information doesn't tell you what programs

they can actually be housed by and only a little of it is telling you that they are eligible for anything. If you think from a systems perspective, and obviously from a client perspective, asking fewer and less intrusive questions, if we are not going to use the information, is a good thing. From a systems perspective you always want to be thinking about what is the most streamlined, seamless way to get from point A to point B because every time we spend 90 minutes on something where we could spend 20 minutes, all that time, 70 minutes that could have been spent on somebody else or multiple other households. If you just think about that kind of math across the system then you can see why you want to get to the most efficient strategy possible and have the best most targeted use of staff time so that you can provide the most assistance.

### **Question 3**

My immediate happiness comes when you say “Oh you don’t need to ask all those questions” because, I come from language barriers systems. I’m happy for those new changes for that. I still have trouble, and I don’t have time to accommodate all the clients who come to us, to Pierce County and City or where ever the housing assistance is. There really needs to be where language barriers are addressed – really, truly because you are not even counting the language barrier people who are not even coming to the systems. So there is a lot more than what you data says.

Megan (FS) responds: I’m really glad that someone is taking down these points because I don’t have an immediate answer today but I appreciate that input. That is one of the things that we can wrestle with. And I like that your comment started with “immediate happiness!”

### **Question 4**

Is there an existing tool that is being recommended?

Megan (FS) responds: Yes-ish. Basically what we are recommending is taking a lot of what you already ask in the HMIS system and putting it in a particular order and adding a few things that are based on the barriers that you all told us you have. For example, the funder mandated criteria. So all of it exists – it does not currently exist as a tool. This is our approach in a number of places and there is some local customization or work that needs to be done, particularly around the prioritization piece, which is where the community input will be sought in March.

### **Question 5**

One of your presenters, mentions that there are a number of households, seemingly individuals who are homeless but are not on the placement roster. My questions related to this are: So what should we do about that population who are homeless and not on the placement roster, especially since the people would be the most acute, highest need, are for a variety of reasons less likely to successfully navigate that system? And how, in light of this need, should this reflect our prioritization of resources?

Kate (Focus Strategies – FS) responded: I don't know that we have a data answer. To get from the initial call to the centralized intake onto the placement roster is a fairly complicated process. There is a phone conversation, then if you meet the initial intake criteria you have to actually show up in person for an appointment and produce documents. My strong feeling about why some people never make it to that place is that they are more likely to be folks who have maybe transportation issues, maybe they are disabled, for a variety of reasons that is too much and too complicated and so those folks never get on to the placement roster. Theoretically if the assessment process and the process of getting onto the roster is a lot quicker and faster and doesn't involve quite so many steps, more people will be able to get on to it. As part of our work, we didn't get into the whole global issue but whether it is important to get out and talk to people in the field and I know Tess wants to talk about that. Is there mobile outreach and intake?

Tess responded: We have begun to move, for purposes of the lease up of our two new permanent supportive housing projects, Randal Townsend and Nativity House, we have moved the intake and referral process to those projects through centralized intake and have been using the PATH Teams and outreach teams on that. But this is a piece, moving the single adult population through centralized intake is still a piece of the puzzle that we are going to be working on the coming year. And Nick – to your question about the allocation of resources – theoretically, if we are successful with diversion and if we are successful with rapid rehousing, both of which are much less resource intensive interventions, that will free up resources that we then can begin to put into making sure that we have appropriate housing interventions for folks that have higher needs and need for permanent supportive housing. The goal is, in this right sizing effort, to actually identify where our resources need to be invested in order to make sure that we've got interventions that serve the full array of folks that need our assistance. And we agree that we don't have sufficient permanent supportive housing – I don't know of anybody that would disagree that we don't have sufficient permanent supportive housing, and this process will help to illuminate for us how our resources can help to address that. And it won't happen tomorrow and it won't happen overnight but it is part of the overall goal of right sizing our system.

### **Question 6**

I'm in very strong agreement with what you have been saying about the intake assessment process that centralized intake went with. My question then is at the provider level. Since one of the dilemmas is re-assessment at the provider level. Would my understanding be that the focus of the re-assessment at the provider level should be the purpose of service planning rather than exclusion?

(Tess) Yes! Did everybody hear what Al just said? Al turn slightly and

(Al) Did you hear? I'm sorry. I hear things really well – that's a recurring problem! My comment was I really strongly agree with the narrowing the focus of assessment and centralized intake. Then the question becomes – there is a re-assessment that seems to happen at the provider level and in this new system, my assumption would be that the assessment at that level would

be where the purpose of service planning, not for the purpose of exclusion or inclusion. (Applause.)

Megan: I just wanted to add a couple things to that. Absolutely yes and it is probably hard to imagine what this new assessment tool will look like without actually seeing it, but yes, the idea is that a small number of questions will get asked but then serve to actually get the person referred and placed in a program because there are not that many criteria left that you have to screen for once they get to the program they are being referred to. Then an assessment can happen to figure out how you are going to work with that person to help them to get housed. But again, I'm going to harken back to the provider academy training on Housing Focused Services it still doesn't mean that you need to do an enormous assessment with folks if your goal is going to be to get them housed in 30 days. There is also going to need to be some thinking about that at the provider level as well.

#### **Question 7**

Kind of related to that, I guess I commend you on the feedback to us, the community providers, that we may be part of creating the barriers. I find it ironic to know that we are often that part of the community that is saying to everyone else "Hey, those market rate providers out there, they screen our people out, we can't get a bed, they won't take anybody with a criminal background, gosh they need to make sure their not using," so on and so forth. And yet it is perfectly understandable all of us – well, I would speak for ourselves, but most of us I think are part of contributing to that in some way and there is good reason for it. We all know kind of how that evolves. We are part of our communities and neighborhoods too and we have our own organizational dynamics and pressures but I think it's really important for us as providers to reflect on, you know, how barriers that we are putting in place really have impacted families, and without a centralized intake system we wouldn't have known this. But it is interesting that folks are getting bunched up there that have these types of issues. We should challenge ourselves to remove barriers so that people can get into housing. Thank you. (Applause.)

#### **Question 8**

I have a two parter. One part would be I'm wanting to know, it seems to me that the PATH Team was doing all the referrals for the Randal Townsend and the new Nativity House and Housing First and it just seems to me that that adds another clog into centralized intake to switch that process over. Kind of what was not working with that process is unclear. And also I wanted to know about the community providers where we refer people or Access Point refers people, how do we get those agencies to remove certain rules or barriers that they put in place that, let's say, are not required by a housing authority or whatever – how would you guys go about getting private agencies to remove their barriers?

**Tess responds:** That is a really good question and getting private organizations or organizations that are not funded either through the city or the county to change their program rules is definitely going to be a longer haul. Admittedly, we have a little more leverage with the folks that we are funding and a little less leverage, some might say not very much leverage what

so ever with the folks that aren't actually going through our system. Nevertheless, I still think that there's work we can do, communication work. I think that the data that will be able to demonstrate successful outcomes, successful housing of households with higher barriers. I think that is a compelling message and I suspect that the first place that we are going to need to start is really, with that messaging and with sharing the successes and that it is, in fact, completely possible to house everybody that comes into our system. But it is a good point and as we noted earlier – we are taking notes on the questions and the comments that come up that are excellent and that we don't have perfect answers for right at the moment. Thank you for that. That's a good reminder for all of us.

**Question 9**

I'm also really impressed with the way which your presentation is data informed and flexible and responsive to data. And so my question is about issues of racial equity and racial disparity that have been part of the community organizational conversations for a long time. Particularly when you talk about the criteria that make people barriers to referral, the barriers to housing and how we all know some of those are very correlated to race, criminal history and those kinds of things. So I'm just wondering how that conversation about racial justice and equity is being connected with the conversation about priorities and data collection feeding back into the system so that we get more out of what you are doing?

Megan (FS) responds: I'm sure Tess has a locally more relevant answer. I was going to say, that's cool that you brought that up and that that is a known issue in the community, that is something that as we move through this process if the data exists, which I don't actually know, you know, the data sets are at different places so we have the right data in the right place to be able to look at something like that. I think that would be a very cool thing to do. I don't know why we couldn't. So I'll stop there.

Tess responds: One of the things that this gives us the opportunity to do is to really go back and look at everybody's experience going through the system. And one of the lenses that we can use to look at the experience of people going through our system is based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability, lots of different factors so that we can begin to pin point better what really are the barriers aside from the ones that we know commonly, criminal background or substance use, what are the other factors that might be changing people's experience going through the system and begin to address that. I actually am excited about going back and looking at the data and using this opportunity to talk about prioritization, to actually dig in a little deeper so that we can start to see where those challenges exist. It is part of the calculus, and it is on the parking lot because I don't quite have an answer for you yet.

**Question 10**

To follow up on that though – some data isn't data that you capture somewhere, so I do have a concern that this is all being done without consumer input. But there is qualitative data that you are not going to find in your quantitative data that has to come from the people who are experiencing it. So like – we know the data about the disproportionality of the criminal justice

system for African American people and the disproportionality of eviction and all kinds of problems for undocumented immigrants and things like that and there is quantitative data on that. But the qualitative data, what that actually means for peoples' lives moving through the system really has to come from them. That would be my one, sort of like, hesitation about all the talk on data sets and you know that I love the spreadsheets and the database and the pretty bar graph and all of that but like that just doesn't capture the qualitative information and so I would just want to really, really be sure that that is part of the plan.

Tess responds: Yes – and it is a very important part. I think that the one can't happen without the other. And I agree, I think that we can't go with either just qualitative data or just quantitative data.

### **Question 11**

This is a complex question and I'm not expecting an answer right now. How are we, based on percentage or dollars, prioritizing our resources? How are we dividing our resources across these five strategies; permanent housing, rapid rehousing, diversion, emergency shelter and centralized intake, and I guess you could say across populations families and others? Or how should we?

Tess responds: Better. Not a satisfying answer I'm guessing! Or the other answer would be yes! We have tools and the tools are only as good as the information that we are putting into the tools but the goal, not just for this coming round of funding but for all the rounds of funding that we have going forward is that the County will be using needs based funding model so that there won't be one single answer from year to year about where the resources go but the resources. I also don't want you to think that it is going to shift wildly from year to year, but our priorities will continue to be based on who is in our system, who is getting served and more importantly, who is not getting served and what we need to do. So you are right, we don't have an answer for that right now, but part of the reason that we were excited about Focus Strategies excepting our invitation to assist us in refining this process is because they bring tools to specifically address that question.

Kate (FS) responds: The full report that we produced which was our assessment of the centralized intake and the broader system which will be posted on-line, we are hoping shortly, if you go in there is a short section where we did a little bit of a kind of ballpark assessment of what capacity you need to get to and what you could get in terms of rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing, what you could get to just by shifting resources and what would actually have to come from new resources. So it sounds like that is the question that you are asking, like where do we need to get to, how many units and what would it cost. There is a little bit of that in our report. It's somewhat schematic because it wasn't really the main focus of the report but there is a little bit in there.

### **Question 12**

My perception is that, and it may be faulty, that many of the providers' instated barriers are paralleled with housing authority barriers in the programs that utilize housing authorities. I'm curious if those barriers are just considered funder barriers and aren't going to be touched or if there is also going to be work in place to address those as well.

Tess responds: I know we've got representatives from both of our housing authorities here so I'm going to say something and then I'm going step back and see if they want to say something, which is my hope is, that while any of their requirements that are HUD driven may not be open for discussion, but any other requirements that might not be driven by HUD might be open for discussion. And now I'm going to step back and see if either would like to add anything.

Charlie, Pierce County Housing Authority responds: This is a thorny costs systems collaboration issue that we are aware of as a housing authority and are considering. We are hearing back from folks, whether it's through centralized intake or through providers directly, that there are issues that are slowing, two things, so they are slowing down - there's a bottle neck. So if you apply to house somebody in a housing authority subsidized unit, there are layers of subsidy and many of those are statutory. That is, congress made a law that says you have to do this. You cannot house somebody with public resources and funds that is convicted of methamphetamine or is a life time sex offender. You can't do that unless you do a background check. The background checks take time depending on commonality of the name and things like that, so we might have to go back, so there is that issue, that the housing authorities are a slower process and most of that is because it is statutory and there are not a lot of areas that we can touch.

The other component is there are additional layers that are created by the housing authority under their administrative plan and to understand this, you have to understand how housing authorities get paid. Under the statutory rules you can only have one standard of guideline for everybody in your housing, in subsidized section 8 housing. So we can't have a rule that is just for homeless systems providers and their consumers - it has to apply to everybody across the board. And across our board we have 26 hundred vouchers that require voluntary landlord participation in the process. Denny talked about the for-profit model and how we look at their screening as often a barrier. One of the challenges that we have with somebody that might have been issued a housing choice voucher is that they have to go out and quality for housing in the community with that voucher. The challenge there is that the housing authority doesn't get paid their administrative fees unless somebody is in a house each month. So if we have a housing choice voucher, if we have somebody issued, looking for housing that isn't going to house because of criminal background and credit are the two big barriers, that is going to telegraph back to the housing authority. Since sequestration, we are receiving 70% of the administrative fees that we received previously. So that is one of our concerns is that if we could, through HUD headquarters, find some relief from the statute that says that for programs that are providing complementary services as part of a communities plan to end homelessness, you can have these rules and expectations that apply just to the three hundred or four hundred or so

household that we would be serving that are homeless. And I would be more than happy to have that conversation and make that appeal.

The other is that setting an expectation, it is an expectation if somebody is denied a housing choice voucher based on criminal background and there is intervening variables such as addiction and treatment that followed or that mitigate the rest to that, each person that is denied housing can appeal but that is not a speedy process. Part of it is because housing authorities were not created to be emergency housing providers. It is so much easier to go out and drill for oil in the gulf coast, so many fewer statutory barriers than it is for somebody to come in and get a section 8 voucher. I mean it is a monumental effort. And so – I don't want to be an apologist, I want to be a partner because I think both housing authorities, if I could speak a little for the Tacoma Housing Authority and housing authorities in general, when you go to our meetings housing authorities are at all of the community meetings and interested in being an important tool in the tool box to end homelessness. It is not the bulk of our work but it is important and it is complementary to the work.

So in that diagram there is a lot of overlap between the subsidized housing and ending homelessness but there are a lot of barriers and we created some and some are just, you stick your finger up in the air and then say ok, three years is reasonable for a non violent crime, seven for others. You know I'm interested in and have been talking with folks about, is there better science on how you determine the risk of housing folks with a criminal background. Where is that data? And then how do you communicate it to our other landlords because, one of my big fears is that landlords think that everybody with a housing choice voucher has a criminal background is going to be a challenge. They are going to close doors and I sort of wish we were having this conversation four years ago when a lot of landlords that would never accept section 8 in our county threw their doors open and were saying yes, because they were having a hard time with vacancies.

Those are issues that are rattling around in my brain and I'd love to have conversations with folks, especially if you can point to better data sources in terms of setting your administrative plan in criminal background. I think that when I listen to our presentation, that is the area I was like – OK this is where the community and the housing authorities are going to have some issue. The other point I guess, is that to date we don't have vacant units that are homeless system built. The slots that we have available are filled but as I look at the diversion and as I look at right sizing the system, and the nexus between this conversation about housing authorities and their barriers, is all around section 8.

Megan responds: I just wanted to say, I think one piece that we could maybe help with over the course of the continuing work is to just offer some examples of things other communities have tried. It is hard, you know, housing authorities, I used to work for a housing authority. They are operating in a very constrained environment but there are examples of ways, you know, things around reasonable accommodation and things around waiting lists and priorities and waiting lists and so on that some communities have tried that have worked to sort of speed the access

of homeless people into HUD funded section 8 public housing units. So we can definitely get you some tools and some thoughts about that.

Charlie responds: And I would just say one more thing is that we are going to be opening our wait list probably sometime in 2015 – 2016. One of the things we have talked about and started conversations and would like to further continue those, is to create a preference for homeless families. But what we would want to see there is that the community supports those folks in locating the housing. We know they are going to have probably higher barriers to housing than many of the folks on our wait list. So if we were going to do that we could seek community resources to make sure that those folks, it is not just issuing the voucher, that is the easy part, it is finding the housing in the community for those folks with higher barriers.

Tess: That is a good point. April, did you want to?

April Black, Tacoma Housing Authority: I'll just comment on behalf of the Tacoma Housing Authority, and we are a little different than the Pierce County Housing Authority because we have some regulatory flexibility. So we are actually directly investing in the homeless system. The recent relationship that we have with Nativity House where we are trying deregulation with our project based vouchers. So many of you have project based vouchers with us or homeless vouchers we can renegotiate our contracts with you. With Nativity House we are not managing a waiting list for them. They are managing it. They are screening the participants and we are relying on their screening, we aren't then re-screening the household prior to letting them in the house and relying solely on the criminal background checks and income verification. So we are trying our best to remove barriers. I think that background check negotiation will be helpful. Those partners that have project based vouchers with us, we will continue to offer permanent supportive housing and we are happy to have those conversations.

Another Response: Building on what Charlie said, it strikes me that one specific, explicit thing that I don't see in your plan so far is to assertively address the rules and regulations and laws that impede us, such as lobbying for changes where we can. I don't see that in your plan and that is part of what impacts this effort in the system. The other thing that I was wondering about, we always sort of talk about this like this is a closed system, you know - it's Pierce County. But we have people moving in and out of Pierce County all the time. It's an open system. I can certainly see it at Nativity House. What are you thinking about how to address the transient folks who are here among us for a while but not necessarily for long?

Tess responds: Al – are you asking in terms of connecting them with services outside of Pierce County or our collaboration?

Al responds: No – while they are here. While they need a house here but they may just be coming in, they aren't necessarily a citizen of the county.

Tess responds: Generally speaking, and it is different depending upon different funding programs, but generally speaking, if you spent last night in Pierce County you are eligible for housing services in Pierce County. I don't know that anybody asks how long somebody is planning on staying in Pierce County or how long they have been in Pierce County. The other piece I did want to say is that question about moving across because, of course, we don't have a closed system and we don't have a closed county – you actually can leave Pierce County - we all do it from time to time – so we have been having conversations with our cousins to the north, King County and most recently with some placements where we had some folks that have said the best place for me to be is in Burien. And our answer is if that's where you should be then we need to help make that happen. Likewise, we know that we need to be having similar conversations with counties to the south and so, both having no long-term residency requirements within Pierce County is important but also being able to move through those porous county boundaries is important. Thank you for both of those.

**Question 13**

I just want to touch again on what Carolyn had started in the conversation about race and disproportionality and we know that we have disproportionality around several different populations in the homelessness system. So I was wondering, I know that the City of Tacoma really values high cultural competency and sensitivity both in representation and in ideology with the organization providers that they are funding to. What priority are you placing on cultural competency and sensitivity in terms of representation from the top down in Pierce County and our next NOFA funds and policy funding?

Tess responds: I hope that folks see us as placing a high value around sensitivity and around cultural competency. We have invested in cultural competency trainings, we have invested in working with the providers to develop cultural competency plans, we've just recently done another provider training. We did one in 2014 I believe and have done another one this year. We will continue to invest in making sure that we are bringing resources to the providers. It is also part of our contracting relationship with our providers is that there be a plan in place for addressing cultural competency. We could always do better and where we are not using the best practices, we need to know.

**Question 13 part two** – I think specifically it was about representation from the top down also, in terms of questioning that - from the admin level down not just at the direct service level, is there any concern about asking questions about that in your future contracts?

Tess responds: Our contracts don't address staffing at any particular level, they assume that the entire organization is addressing cultural competency.

**Question 14:** I was really interested in the diversion aspect of the plan and I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit more specifically as what those programs would look like?

Tess: Yeah – I could or I could look at Alan... you could talk a little bit about the program, I was just looking to see the folks that were still here. Would you mind answering a little about the questions about the diversion program and what we are doing?

Alan responds: Sure. Homeless diversion, I think it was explained in the presentation what it is. It's meeting at the front door in this case, AP4H, and meeting with people to come up with solutions that will possibly keep them out of the homeless system. Right now that just started, Tess mentioned the partners, Catholic Community Services, Associated Ministries and the Center for Dispute Resolution are assisting that. Our goal, and we're sort of piloting the project and then we have a plan to take it to scale, but our goal will be that everyone who comes into Access Point 4 Housing that is eligible for services, literally homeless, the first thing that will happen, they will have a diversion conversation with a diversion specialist to see if there's options other than going into shelter or into the homeless system. And either they will have an option and the person will work on that with them or if they don't have another option they will have an assessment right at that time so they won't be leaving and come back.

(My question was, what would those options be?) The options we look at, for example, if somebody was kicked out of a situation, is there anything that we can do to support them staying in that situation? Is there anybody else or is there any other family or friends that could possibly help them out, even temporarily while they make a longer term plan? Do they have family somewhere else outside of Pierce County, family in Texas where they have support that is a safe place for them to go? We can help get them there or maybe they just need a little bit of help to get into their own permanent housing, like assistance with a deposit or something like that.

Megan responds: I just want to add something to what Alan shared, I thought that was a great description of the kinds of options that they are asking people. I know that here in Pierce County the word program has been used related to diversion and that is appropriate because it is a pilot and that is kind of how it rolled out. But really, I'm wanting to encourage everyone to think about diversion as a *strategy* and it is, you know in our sort of collective little world, right, of working on homelessness, we tend to call anything a program that has certain staff and certain funds, right, to do certain activities, then we call that a program. The thing about diversion, if you just think about what Alan just shared about those kinds of different options and really think about applying that throughout the homeless system, of course, first and foremost, when people are knocking on the homeless system door trying to get in and seeing can we divert you back to permanent housing that is a safe place for you so you never have to spend a night homeless. Like that's of course, at the front door, but then throughout our systems just thinking about it is really important to really digest and think about what that means to adopt that approach so that at any point, most homeless people in the country house themselves. The majority of people who exit to permanent housing actually exit without rental assistance. They leave our shelters, they leave our programs and they find their own permanent housing and maybe somebody helped them find a unit but they are leaving unassisted. They don't have a section 8, and in fact most people are finding those exits and what we are finding is if you kind of embrace that

diversion mentality and really talk with people about where can you go. Could we solve the problem that you had a great set up living with your brother or whatever that situation was, that it fell apart because you're eating their groceries, that didn't work out. OK - how do we solve that problem?

Because that is a much cheaper solution and it helps ensure that two very low income households, just as an example, are very often doubled up, right, very poor people are very often doubled up. We shouldn't see that as a failure, we should see that as a success when people are exiting to permanent housing successfully and will stay there. Most people don't ever return to homelessness. So anyway, I was just sort of sharing all that to really encourage the thinking around diversion, that we as a system need to move away from welcoming people in to homelessness and the homeless systems and instead, really help people successfully exit to the next permanent housing. I just wanted to add that.

#### **Question 15**

I know from my organization, I've been there 15 years and when I started there I would not say they were culturally competent in any way that you could define that, so it was very dysfunctional. There were very high levels of burn out. There was very limited training available for staff, and most of it wasn't focused on any kind of wellness; it wasn't a trauma informed care model and it was high turnover and our list of rules was like, 15 pages long. So it took five, six years of going back through and going back through and going back through and having different leadership and re-analyzing and re-analyzing to get to a place where we could be closer to what you are describing with a very consumer driven model for our shelter program and we are still going through that process now. And now through the High Performing System Grant we are re-looking at how we do that, what our data collection process is, all of those things. So I just know from my own experience at my agency, that is a lengthy process and it requires a buy in of an internal organizational cultural change at all levels. And it requires a collective process of an openness to hearing feedback from consumers, and openness to hearing feedback from direct service staff and then really having that sort of like 360 feedback loop and all of those things and it took a long time and we are still evolving. I guess I'm just super curious, how are you really defining cultural competency and how do you envision this sort of metamorphosis taking place for places that maybe aren't at the place where they are even really ready and open to that?

Tess responds: I'm not envisioning a metamorphosis is going to happen overnight. I'm expecting that as a community we will come to embrace the idea that we are constantly learning how to do our jobs better in whatever definition that takes, whatever challenges our organizations face, whatever obstacles our clients face that we may be placing or that we may be able to help them overcome, that we will, as a community continue to work to continuously improve. That was sort of one of my slides - what does systems change mean for us, and what system change means for us is continuous process improvement, continuous program improvement, continuous systems improvement and I absolutely agree that it stems from, it has to come from inside the organization. The County can provide support and resources and the

County cannot force anyone to change. So at the end of the day, this room is as much a peer collaborative as any of the sort of small learning collaboratives that we have going. This is a peer process. So I'm going to look to you to constantly be reminding us what we need to be doing better, just as I will look to every other provider in the room to constantly be questioning the direction that we are going and how we can make that better. If somebody's got a perfect answer for how we change overnight our system I would love to know it. I'm not that smart yet. But I feel like I'm getting there and I feel like as a community that is where we are going to get to.

#### **Question 16**

Tess talked about diversion and it sounds really simple and I'm a person who is out there doing that every day - getting people what they need to do and there is usually multiple layers to that process. And my finding is that you have got to pretty much stick with that person and walk them through multiple layers. So I guess what my question would be is, is AP4H going to look at having their counselors or somebody available, I mean it sounds real easy to say, "oh yea, you have a relative in Texas, we'll get you a plane ticket and send you there. Or you have a family member, we'll get you there." But you're doing this for many, many years, if you don't walk through the process with people it is always, "well, I have to stop here and I have to get that, and I have to fix this and I have to tell this person, pick up the check." There are usually multiple things that go wrong with that process. So I guess my question would be – is there going to be somebody that can help them complete that process?

Tess responds: I think what your question brings up for me is the reminder that all of the work that we are doing is focused on the needs of the consumer and focused on really listening to the consumer and recognizing what that person, that family, that household needs. Diversion will work with some households, it will not work others households. Rapid rehousing will work, we believe, based on data that we are seeing, with a vast majority of households but it won't work with others. Permanent supportive housing is necessary for some households, so where I'm headed is, you are absolutely right that there is no one size fits all – what we are trying to do is fund a system that drives resources where the needs exist and gives consumers the empowerment, the position of helping us understand how to help them. I appreciate that for some folks it may or not be the best tool in the tool shed. We want to make sure that we do have the best tool.

#### **Question 17**

Just to touch, because I work with Holly a lot. I think the important piece that Holly brings up, for people that don't know, Holly kind of works with the chronically homeless population and I think that is one of the exciting things when I hear this is, serving all populations. I think the chronically homeless population has increased, very visible and as everyone knows, it is the hardest population to serve when you talk about barriers. You are not going to find anyone with more barriers. I think that one of the challenges of AP4H and that population is really just geographical getting them from point A to point B without issues she is talking about. I think it's not that it won't work for that population because, I think we have seen partners in King County,

across the nation – that diversion has worked great for this population but I think it is being realistic about how we serve that population and understanding that they are not going to come to us, we need to go to them. That needs to be a piece of it. But I don't want to say that it won't work because definitely it will, but I think we need to be realistic about the barriers.

Tess responds: Colin you make a really good point. We have been very lucky as a county to be part of a tri-county initiative and we've had a lot of resources that have been brought into the County to help us to address family homelessness. Pierce County from the very get go said, that is great, we want your money around family homelessness, we are going to serve everybody. So when we did our centralized intake – we didn't limit it to families, we opened it up to all populations. What is important to keep in mind is that there are learning that we can take from those investments in the family system and begin to apply those lessons, those skills, those tools more broadly and I'm just going to keep saying because I know it will be true – right sizing the system will allow us to free up resources so that we are efficiently addressing family homelessness and we are efficiently addressing homelessness across the single population. And I am frustrated, I won't speak on anybody else's behalf, I am frustrated by the lack of progress we have made around chronic homelessness and I feel like this is the step that we need to take to be able to dedicate those resources in an effective way.

#### **Question 18**

Just a possible suggestion or just a question about the cultural competency conversion that we are having. If it's potentially peer driven like you suggested and if there is funding available, if as a system, rather than individual providers, we decide we want to explore undoing institutionalized racism or employ participatory research as a group, is that something if there is funding available, is that something even engaged in over time to start to sort of move the system in that direction in a better way or maybe a more productive way or, I don't know.

Tess responds: I'm not sure how to answer your question specifically. I will say that the County remains a committed partner and open to new ways of approaching this question and if there are funding opportunities we'd be interested in seeing what those look like. And we have had an ongoing relationship with the University of Puget Sound around data that is being collected around racial inequity in particular and that data will then help to feed us more information about what can do.

Another respondent: Just a quick follow up on that too. The City of Tacoma has a new innovation and capacity building fund but we are still working out details around what that should go for and it is a fairly small amount of money but this might be an area that we can use it for.

#### **Question 19**

My question is around the diversion and is it the intention that AP4H would be using that strategy or mind set for every call that comes in or is this a pilot that involves a small subset and then kind of a follow up, I don't want to get too complicated but one of the things that seems to

be absent from this assessment is any mention of homelessness prevention. I know that this system is set now to deal with accessing housing and dealing with individuals and households that are experiencing homelessness, but there has been in the past, some work around homelessness prevention and I don't want that to get completely lost in the conversation, especially with us looking at AP4H as centralized or coordinated entity for all the services.

Kate Responds: I just want to say, in terms of the diversion piece, what is rolling out now is the pilot and as you have heard, what we have recommended and what we have seen work really, really well in other communities, as Megan said, is kind of, diversion as a strategy so that everybody who touches the system and at any point they touch it, you have a conversation with them about where have you been housed before, can we get you back to that same housing or to some similar kind of situation, what would it take – oh you only need two hundred dollars? OK, let's do that. And the whole kind of, as Megan said, not sort of trying to invite people in but to figure out a way to get them as quickly as possible into permanent housing and reserving the precious resources of our homeless programs for those who really, there is no other option for them. So yes, the idea for AP4H specifically would be everybody has the diversion conversation with everybody who comes in. I'll let Megan talk about prevention verses diversion.

Megan responds: In general the way we, at Focus Strategies (and I won't speak for Tess on this point exactly, unless you love what I say). Basically how we are looking at prevention and diversion and the way that we are talking about it we are basically being very careful about those two labels. Homelessness prevention, in general, is sort of like the term continuum of care, it has like five different meanings depending on the context. Where when we say prevention, in the big picture we generally mean preventing people who are housed from becoming homeless right, and specifically when we talk about prevention programs, that generally, especially in the past has meant rental subsidies, rental assistance to maybe utility assistance to keep people in their current housing and by and large that current housing, not always, but most often was a lease in their own name right? What we have learned as a country primarily from HPRP, that massive experiment in prevention and also from other program evaluations that have been done is that in fact, those programs do a very poor job of targeting people who would have actually become homeless but for that assistance. So there are different estimates but the most solid basically say you have to serve five or six families to hopefully include one household who would have become homeless without that assistance. So with that kind of program model it is very expensive. You have to serve a lot of people with a lot of assistance and you have to run a whole program to catch some people who would have become homeless.

Diversion, in that big picture sense of homelessness prevention, preventing people from ever becoming homeless, diversion is prevention in that large definition right? Because you are catching people who are knocking on the door of the shelter or the homeless system trying to get in and saying I can't stay where I've been staying. Where did you stay last night? I stayed with my friend, brother, whatever. At that moment those households generally look very different than people who receive prevention program assistance. They already have gone through a

process of, most likely having a lease in their own name, lost their housing, became doubled up, and ultimately are facing homelessness. If you serve those households who are actually knocking on the system door, they are in housing, you divert them back to where they stayed, this is a safe place and a cheap solution or re-house them quickly for much less money and the likelihood that they would have become homeless without that assistance – very high, because they are actually entering the shelter door. They are not at the beginning of the pathway that sometimes ends in homelessness, they are at the end of that pathway. In general, what we would say is that there is actually not a lot of evidence that prevention programs are effective. They are very ineffective and they're expensive. It is really hard to target well, so that you are actually serving households who would become homeless. Diversion programs have a much higher likelihood of serving people who, but for that assistance, would have become homeless and it is in that larger definition, homelessness prevention. You are preventing people from becoming homeless and it is really effective and generally very inexpensive. So that is sort of how we would talk about prevention vs. diversion and we would encourage systems to put basically every dollar that they can into diversion rather than prevention because of that cost effectiveness. Because what your system goal is, is to reduce your homeless population size, then what you want to do is you want to invest in the most cost effective strategies to prevent new entries into homelessness. So if you can turn a large number of people who otherwise would have been welcomed into our system, which also means welcome into homelessness, right, if we can successfully divert them we can keep the resources that we have, as Kate said, for the highest barrier folks who can't divert, then if we keep working on those lengths of stay and getting them shorter and then moving people out to permanent housing and improve those outcomes, then what you get is a much smaller homeless population.

#### **Question 20**

I just want to ask then, because I think that is a great idea; but one of the goals that our county has said is to reduce recidivism as well, so I would very much like to see diversion play a role in that. In a lot of the on-line webinars that we have been watching it shows that as part of it where they are in a rapid rehousing program for three months, they get exited out but they are still kept in touch with and maybe on the six or seventh month they have hit a hard problem and they are going to lose all that progress that they have made but they just need that one month's help. So I don't know if I believe the diversion can be used in that place, to keep them from re-entering into it. So if we could possibly develop a strategy around that, where they are kept on the burner for a year or six months after exiting rapid rehousing, so that we can make sure that they are really stable, instead of, because their philosophy was instead of getting eight months of help they only had the first three, plus that eight months so it was a much cheaper way to do it. But they still were able to access help and the way that we have diverted to like now, which is a very new program, is that because they are not literally homeless they can't receive that help – so I would love to see us look at that and build that into the strategy of diversion can be available as homeless prevention or people who resettled into the homeless system.

Megan responds: I'm going to say two things about that: one is that was a heck of a pitch for an integrated data system. (Laughter) Actually – that whole task around getting everything in HMIS

and using one data system actually, you can't look and see what happened to people who you diverted if that is a different data set then this data set and they don't cross. There is no cross walk, right? So – thank you for that. And the other thing that I want to say is, you guys have already done a ton of work with reinvesting in higher performing interventions, as you continue to do that, actually, your opportunities to reduce recidivism decrease because you are already investing in things that have incredibly high performance. So if your rapid rehousing programs have, let's just say, this is not from your community but a national average, 85% success rate, right, and you see 15% of people come back, the average communities transitional housing exit rate is just over 50%, so as you're making that switch you are already seeing these incredible results, then there is trying to improve on really good results get really hard. You are actually not talking about very many people. That is the other thing, we really encourage folks, especially at this stage of systems change, to not get too hung up on thinking about and planning for returns to homelessness because, right now you have far more returns than you will have when you are right sized because, you are not in the high performing interventions right now. So you have far more people returning to homeless programs than you will in a few years.

**Question 21**

Two things – number one; one culture that I have not heard mentioned is youth, homeless youth. Are there system adaptations or adaptations to this approach that you are aware of that work better than other adaptations? The other thing I do want to say is that when I saw your three or four page report, I bragged about your knowledge of systems to the Human Service Providers Coalition and said it was essentially the best piece of work I've ever seen. (We'll take it – Thank you!)

Tess responds: I think my answer for the youth is similar to my answer to addressing chronic homelessness, which is, we need to make sure that we've got the resources to be able to address those issues that are particular to youth. One of the things that we seem to be finding is, the rapid rehousing program, the permanent housing program that we've got for young adults, that is a longer stay, we are allowing much longer period of time within that rapid rehousing program, is producing really good results. We know from neuroscience that young people need a longer time to achieve full brain maturity and so as we are looking at transitional housing, for example, that's an intervention that we are looking at to see whether or not that still continues to make sense for youth and young adults and what length of period of time. So part of this right sizing exercise is about identifying what works across populations, youth and young adults being important to that.

I think that we are out of time. Thank you everybody for coming. Thanks for great questions.

**Parking Lot:**

- Language barriers
- PSH supply & access
- Reducing private agency barriers
- Integrating mental health

Add'l factors as barriers? – race, ethnicity, gender, etc.  
Qualitative data (consumer voice)  
Resource allocation  
Addressing HA barriers  
Funding to address institutional racism