

Guide to Effective Housing Focused Street Outreach

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I. Introduction

Street Outreach exists to help individuals experiencing homelessness overcome barriers in the process of obtaining housing. Street Outreach is a professional service striving for excellent customer service. Professionalism should not be compromised because your customers are experiencing homelessness. What does professional Street Outreach look like operationally? This guide can assist you in finding ways to help people obtain housing as quickly as possible in a dignified way.

People can move from the streets directly into housing. Street Outreach provides these opportunities for people experiencing homelessness. Street Outreach is often the only connection to housing for many individuals experiencing homelessness. Street Outreach works to accommodate the specific needs individuals may have while connecting them to housing opportunities. People Street Outreach encounter may be disengaged and are likely experiencing significant barriers, making traditional service delivery difficult to navigate. It is not unusual for individuals experiencing homelessness to juggle their own survival while simultaneously attempting to fulfill the requirements necessary to access assistance. Individuals experiencing homelessness may be wary due to past negative experiences while trying to access help.

WHAT PROBLEM DOES STREET OUTREACH SOLVE?

The problem that Street Outreach solves is filling the gap between people who are homeless and access to housing. Street Outreach helps to build legitimacy for housing interventions. Street Outreach ensures documents necessary for housing are obtained, criteria needed for housing programming are met, and appointments necessary for movement are attended.

HOW SHOULD EFFECTIVE STREET OUTREACH BE MEASURED?

Effective Street Outreach should be measured by how many people are experiencing outdoor homelessness, how many people experiencing outdoor homelessness enter housing, and how many people who were experiencing outdoor homelessness entered housing then returned to homelessness.

THE PRACTICE OF STREET OUTREACH

The practice of Street Outreach involves professionally applying values, principles, and techniques to provide services to assist people end their homelessness; connect people to resources or other services for basic needs or ending homelessness; help communities or groups provide or improve homeless services; and educate and inform decision makers on issues impacting homelessness.

ROLE OF AN OUTREACH WORKER

This guide will help to define the role of an outreach worker. The real benefit of Street Outreach is the ability to find a way for people experiencing homelessness, who don't access the traditional models of service delivery, to get the services necessary for ending homelessness and long-term housing stability. Below is a basic framework of the role of an outreach worker:

- Find
- Assess
- Prioritize
- Re-find
- Solve their homelessness

II. Core Values

Street Outreach must be committed to social justice and empowering individuals experiencing homelessness, socially marginalized, and disenfranchised. Street Outreach workers approach clients as ready for housing and work to help them get there.

- Privilege to serve
It is a privilege to be part of some of the most difficult situations in individuals' lives. It is honorable to be allowed to help someone with a matter as crucial as homelessness. Experiencing homelessness can be a matter of life and death; therefore, great care should be taken in addressing it.
- Committed to the end of homelessness
The end goal of Street Outreach is to help end homelessness. The harm of managing homelessness is increasing the length of someone's homelessness rather than reducing the time some is homeless. Street Outreach works to end homelessness through ongoing

individual encounters. Street Outreach cannot be all things to all people. Street Outreach activities should all be things necessary for obtaining housing.

- Accept people can be unstable
This does not mean they cannot be stably housed. Embrace that you will encounter people often at the lowest point in their lives.
- Believe that people can and do recover
It is difficult to recover while living on the streets and we cannot predict who will be successful in housing. Housing helps to reduce harm and promotes recovery.
- Don't fix people
Healing is not a requirement for services. We want to connect individuals to housing as quickly as possible. Once an individual is housed, he or she will be supported in housing related issues.
- Never give up
It is our job to help individuals be successful in obtaining housing or entering programs when available. We must examine our approach to find a way that best helps a struggling individual end their homelessness. Individual responses to offers of support and systematic barriers are not reasons to stop helping individuals.
- Non-judgment
We all have our own set of values and moral beliefs. It is important that we set these aside when working with individuals whose beliefs may be different than our own. Differences should never affect how an individual is treated or their ability to be housed.
- Respect
People experiencing homelessness are not helpless. Do not treat people you encounter that way. People may need some help in certain areas but remember, they have had a whole life of experience before meeting you.
- Collaborate, no really
Coordinate and collaborate with other community partners and across systems. Ending homelessness requires collaborating with partners and service providers within the homelessness response system as well as across systems. Lack of collaboration is a dis-service to people we serve; meaning don't try to do it all yourself.
- Advocate for change, remove barriers and impact policy
Sometimes clients are faced with systematic barriers. It is your job to bring those barriers to light or notify a supervisor when this occurs.

III. Individual worker Competencies

- Strong boundaries
This may be the most important skill in Street Outreach. You will be faced with a desire to alleviate suffering and justification of doing something "just this once" a lot in Street Outreach situations. You will be presented with many questions and propositions by people you encounter because it is a natural reaction for human beings to seek the

fulfilment of basic needs. It is important to stay focused on the task of assisting with housing and maintain a professional relationship in all encounters.

- Don't take it personal
Be aware of your own internal reactions to rejection. Use your assertive engagement skills when facing individuals with ambivalence. Only give out survival items as warranted, not as tools for engagement.
- Cultural competency
It is important to recognize that people have their own world views. Environment and culture shape who we are. Educate yourself on cultural aspects of the individuals you are working with. If you have a question about someone's cultural beliefs or how to best approach their beliefs, just ask them.
- Changing demographic of clientele
New people will fall into homelessness. While everyone is different, it is important to recognize emerging demographic trends in your service area. It is important to consider changes in age groups, emerging uses of substances or other risk factors.
- Allow for the silences
You may feel the need to talk when the client is not. Resist this temptation. This silence allows for the individual to process the concepts you are proposing. This also gives the individual time to contemplate their options.
- It is okay to go deeper
Ask more in-depth questions. This will allow for more sharing to take place. It is okay and can be a source of information for a more in-depth assessment. Building on this information can help you assist the client obtain an appropriate housing intervention.
- Trauma informed approach
Widespread trauma is woven throughout homelessness. Many people experience it before and/or during homelessness. Recognize the signs and symptoms and avoid re-traumatizing clients. It is important to promote safety, be trustworthy and transparent while working in Street Outreach. A trauma informed approach means aligning with a client in collaboration while working towards a solution to their issue of homelessness. It is important to promote empowerment and choice. Allow a person to be heard. Other considerations include gender issues, sexual preference, and historical trauma.
- Work alone
Much of your time in the field may be alone. It is critical to maintain strong boundaries, stay safe, stay focused and participate in accountability. Strive to achieve targeted tasks. Maintain communication with your teammates or team leader. Commit to keep up with documentation.
- Knowledge of services and resources
Street Outreach must be aware of real-time service and resource availability. Respectful collaboration with service providers can help with this aspect. If partners are educated about your important work, then they are more likely to keep you informed of emerging

or changing resources. It is also important to be knowledgeable about requirements and criteria for housing options and housing services, including non-conventional housing options.

- Capacity to navigate multiple complex service systems
People experiencing homelessness may be connected to or need services from many different places. Ending homelessness and long-term housing stability requires the participation of many other sectors of service. You may need to coordinate partnerships within larger systems to assist in means in obtaining housing.

IV. Team Competencies

- Open and honest communication promoted and supported
Create an environment for open sharing. It is important for Street Outreach workers to be able to share their outreach experiences freely without fear of repercussions. Street Outreach workers should be supported in working with individuals in real world situations. A safe sharing environment helps for honest discussion and proper guidance in supervision.
- Problem solving and brainstorming
Leadership should allow for the team to be able to brainstorm and problem solve together when difficult issues arise. Leadership should also be approachable for situations where guidance is needed.
- Harm reduction approach
Adopting a harm reduction philosophy aligns with the goal of ending homelessness. Regardless of an individual's behaviors, harm reduction approaches are known to help individuals remain housed.
- Support workers out in the field
Street Outreach workers are out there performing amazing work in the streets to help end homelessness. Leadership should listen to them and support the work that they do. Understand what Street Outreach workers do to make housing happen.
- Time allowed to do the work supported
Some days will be more successful than others. Leadership should understand that the time it takes for engagement will vary from client to client. Allow time that is needed to develop creative strategies Street Outreach workers can use to engage with some clients.
- Training
Leadership should build in time for training for Street Outreach workers and leaders. Street Outreach is often the first step in ending homelessness and the professionals conducting it should be trained accordingly. Staff should also have up to date evidence-

based practices available to them. This can include face-to-face training, refreshers, and structured access to relevant online trainings.

V. Standards of Service

- Targeted
Street Outreach targeting involves focused thinking and decision analysis.
Triage, Prioritization, BNL
- Planned
Lay out a plan each day of who you will visit and why. Establishing tasks and goals daily, when possible, in advance helps to stay on task of helping people end their homelessness.
- Structured
There are more needs in the unsheltered world than can be met. It is important to keep a basic structure for time to keep the task of ending homelessness at hand.
- Documented
The world of unsheltered homelessness is difficult to understand, especially for “outsiders.” The outreach worker has an obligation to inform the needs and the work that it takes to help. Proper documentation promotes movement towards housing for clients and educates the realities of homelessness in a professional way.
- Strategic
Ending homelessness doesn’t happen automatically, great care needs to be considered when helping people most in need to get out of homelessness.

VI. Targeted

Street Outreach is an intervention, an action to improve a situation. You could think of it as running interference into the affairs of another. Bringing resources to help people end their homelessness should not be random, rather targeted.

- Approach
It is important for Street Outreach to come up with different and innovative ways to engage with individuals we are seeking to serve. Rather than waiting for individuals experiencing homelessness to change what they are doing to engage with us, it is up to us to change what we are doing to engage with individuals on the streets. Describing how you can help in assisting with accessing housing programs can be a helpful engagement tactic.
- Ask Permission
Asking “will you allow me to help you” can be a helpful engagement technique. Asking permission to discuss individual topics can help gain buy-in from clients and promote

trust. Asking “would you be interested in...” allows for client choice in your interactions while still letting you offer progression on the path towards housing.

- **Progressive engagement**
Engage at the level the individual’s needs. Over involvement in an individual’s situation is not empowering. Progressive engagement means your efforts get more intense overtime as needs are identified.
- **Persuasion to consider alternatives**
Using Motivational Interviewing techniques with clients can resolve ambivalence and help a client formulate motivation to engage. Use Motivational Interviewing to guide a person through the process of obtaining housing.
- **Triage**
Triage assessments help guide a targeted outreach approach. Seek the people who need Street Outreach the most first.
- **Prioritization**
Staying focused in Street Outreach work means you cannot be all things to all people. There is not enough time to assist everyone in need. Your time is important. Each Street Outreach worker should have housing focused engagements with 2 to 6 clients with high acuity daily. The intent is to have productive time with individuals that need you the most rather than attempting to help as many as you can.
- **By-name Engagement List**
Keeping a list of prioritized clients is an important part of keeping focused in Street Outreach. Knowing the document ready status and where to find individuals quickly is important. This can be a challenge due to the range and fluidity of the work. Adjustments should be made as necessary. Work to ensure the list is up-to-date. Information collected on the engagement list should include:

Street Outreach Client Engagement List									
HMIS Number	Client Name	County	Outreach Worker	VI-SPDAT	VI-SPDAT Date	Full SPDAT	Full SPDAT Date	Homeless History Interview	Birth Record
Social Security Card	ID or Driver's License	Verification of Disability	Verification of Chroncity	HCV Status	Engagment Status	Objectives	Best Meeting Location	Best Way of Contact	

Client engagement review is helpful and should be clear, concise and to the point. This time is to help stay on task and keep information updated.

VII. Planned

Lay out a plan each day of who you will visit and why. Daily tasks and goals are established in advance whenever possible; not ad hoc. Set up a plan to engage with people that have declined help and seem unwell.

Objective-based interactions

A tactic used in effective housing-based case management can be adapted for use in Street Outreach. Keeping interactions with clients objective based helps to move things along. Indicating to a client how much time you have available can be helpful for focus. Reviewing the steps accomplished in your last interaction and reviewing the plan for the current interaction helps to accomplish the end goal and reducing the distractions living unsheltered constantly brings. Being objective in interactions is a trauma informed approach that helps to ensure there are no surprises to the client.

Housing Focused Engagements

A solution focus in Street Outreach is a focus on housing. Once relationship is established, focus on housing. This is the first encounter most of the time. A housing focused engagement is an interaction with a focus on housing. Each engagement is objective based, meaning it is purposeful, deliberate, and planned. Housing focused engagements involve performing activities that lead housing and working on the things required to obtain housing. You are there to help them through that process.

- Programs that come with housing vs. housing that comes with programs
Describe the programs that may be available to the person. Using a supportive program that comes with housing approach promotes future program engagement and longer-term housing stability. Explain housing intervention throughout interactions.
- Process
Describe the process the client must go through to qualify for the program and meet eligibility requirements. This promotes buy-in from the client and establishes expectations for what the client will go through and what you will work on together.
- Assessment
Inform the client that the purpose of the assessment is to help identify what type of housing intervention is right for them. Explain that honesty in answering the questions is meant to help determine ways to keep housing and not to exclude them from housing. Describe how it is ideal that housing work for them and their life.
- Verification of Homelessness
This is critical for meeting criteria for most housing programs and subsidies. Documenting interactions and episodes may be necessary for qualification to special programs such as for people experiencing chronic homelessness.
- Verification of Disability
Many people experiencing homelessness on the street also live with one or more disabilities. Obtaining documentation of disability is necessary to verify chronic homelessness as well as enter certain housing programs. It is possible in some cases to provide observation notes of disability and obtain verification within 90 days of gaining program entry. Verification must be provided by a licensed professional. Some locations to consider for this include:
 - Community Health Clinics

- Jail medical
- Healthcare for the homeless
- Hospitals
- Counselors
- Detox Centers
- Community Mental Health
- Document Ready

This includes state issued identification cards, birth records, social security cards, and may include verification of income and/or assets. Know what documents are required before being considered for each housing program for matching and leasing. Assist clients in obtaining necessary documents.
- Housing Location

While limited options may be available, choice in where a client will live promotes long-term housing stability. Take the person to see the unit. A person should see themselves living there. Things like accessibility, access to transportation and distance to places to obtain basic needs should be considered.
- Healthcare referrals

Referrals to healthcare may be needed for verification of disability for eligibility to certain housing programs. This also can be a way to gather more information for more in-depth housing-related assessment.

VIII. Structured

- **How to divide your time (70-20-10?)**

There is a lot of important work to be done in Street Outreach. It is easy to get distracted with crisis and busy work. Using the 70% of your time-20% of your time-10% of your time model can help guide your time to be more effective. Remember, helping individuals end their homelessness is the goal.

- 70% of your Street Outreach time should be spent actually helping individuals get into housing. This may include:
 - Looking for housing
 - Completing rental applications
 - Talking with landlords
 - Viewing housing
 - By-name list management/matching process
 - Housing subsidy applications

- Document readiness- 20%

Approximately 20% of your Street Outreach time should be spent assisting individuals obtain necessary documents for housing. This may include:

- State issued identification
- Birth records
- Social security cards/statements
- Acuity/Prioritization assessments
- Program referrals
- Verification of disability
- Verification of homelessness
- New clients- 10%

10% of your Street Outreach time should be spent finding new individuals experiencing homelessness on the street. (See location section.) This can also be done through referring agencies, other clients and relationships with multi-disciplinary teams. Finding new clients may include:

 - Locating
 - Engaging
 - Acuity/Prioritization assessments

IX. Documented

Verification from an outreach worker weighs heavy in the world of ending homelessness. Proving someone's homelessness has an impact on whether they can get assistance or not. Clear record keeping of outreach interactions is crucial to both the lives of people living homelessness and to the reflection of the severity of the need. Street Outreach has the obligation to tell the world about often unseen homelessness, this is accomplished with documentation. The official place for this documentation is the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). This is vital to the ending homelessness efforts for the people Street Outreach serves. Streamlining services and coordinated entry for housing programs happens through HMIS. If you are not connected in HMIS, contact your local Continuum of Care.

- **Location, identify**

Recording where people are helps to ensure each person is known to outreach. Knowing who is where is important for re-finding and delegating within teams.

- **Data, intervention, housing**

Data collected by outreach helps to show the level of interventions and housing programs needed to end homelessness.

- **Clipboard**

Using a clipboard can help stay organized with paper in the field.

- **Device**

Real time data collection and paperwork completion is efficient on devices in the field. Vital docs can be scanned and uploaded, signatures can be collected, and forms can be completed right where people are.

- **Acuity Assessment (such as SPDAT)**

Assessment for triage and prioritization might only happen for people if brought by Street Outreach.

- **Program Entry**

Street Outreach will ensure the most vulnerable on the street stay in the que for coordinated entry.

- **Universal Data elements**

HUD data standards are important to reflect the demographics of people served. This information can assist policy makers improve services and interventions for people experiencing homelessness.

- **Chronic verification**

Street Outreach helps to prove the need through data collection. Important work by Street Outreach creates a bridge to life saving housing programs. These programs require verification of length of homelessness and disabling conditions. Outreach is often the only intervention ensuring access for people that need it most.

- **Document chronicity**

- **Record contacts**

- Documenting each interaction Street Outreach has with a person proves length of homelessness. Verification from Street Outreach can meet documentation criteria for homeless housing programs.

- **Verify disability**

- Observation notes by outreach can meet documentation criteria for verification of disability required for initial access to certain housing programs.

- **Verify homelessness**

Street Outreach documentation fills homeless verification requirement criteria for assistance.

- **Re-certify as needed**

Some program waitlists require time sensitive re-certification of homelessness. Street Outreach documentation meets this need.

- **Citizenship & Residency**

People experiencing homelessness often lack the proper identification needed to access basic needs and housing assistance. Street Outreach can help people obtain documents

necessary for proving citizenship and residency. Street Outreach documentation meets criteria for programs requiring municipality residency.

X. Strategic

Engagement

Building trust with people experiencing homelessness is an important piece of engagement leading towards the result of assisting to end individual homelessness. People you are seeking to help may have lost faith in the system, may have given up on themselves, or may be experiencing extreme feelings of brokenness. Initial meetings are important in building trust. This can be done quickly. It is important to be consistent.

- **Dignity**
The quickest way to engage with people experiencing homelessness is to treat them with dignity and respect. Introduce yourself- “Hello, my name is...”, “What’s yours?”, “Nice to meet you.” Then get on with it. You are talking with this person for a reason.
- **Respect**
Be yourself, offer a handshake. Treating people experiencing homelessness the same as you do others helps to build trust quickly. People experiencing homelessness see a lot of other people, most of their interactions are undignified, even ones intended to help.
- **Listen**
Listening is the most important thing you can do to build trust. Beginning with a simple question like; “What’s going on?” and then just listening can go a long way.
- **Do what you say you are going to do**
Don’t promise anything, getting client buy-in does not require the client to like you. Only describe what you can do. This may be hard to grasp; however, you are there to assist in housing access, not earn likability with providing things.
- **Maintain privacy**
People experiencing homelessness have a right to their privacy. Be intentional about this. Temptations to break privacy to gather information quickly or promote the cause of your program will present themselves often. Breaking a person’s privacy will be detrimental to any trust building efforts.
- **Be on time**
Always. This helps relate that you care about the person and that they matter. People have things to do, not just wait around for you. Valuing your time over clients’ time conveys the wrong message.
- **Presence**
Remain focused and present with the client. You are providing a service for the person. Don’t let your stressors or other obligations get in the way of time with the person you are working with.
- **Explain processes**

The client deserves to understand what they will be going through. The client will be more engaged when they know what is going on in the process. Helping the client understand the expectations also helps to build trust.

- **Choice**
Forcing, demanding, threats, or coercion do not build trust. Allow the person you are working with choices while providing services. This builds trust and promotes engagement. This can look like choosing the order of documents to obtain or applications to fill out, choosing to miss meetings with you, choosing not to like you, choosing to engage in bad behaviors.
- **Non-judgmental, no really**
Accept that people can be broken or unstable. It is okay for people to be different. People do not have to do things the way we do things. Non-judgmental means to work with a person-centered approach.
- **Coordination**
Coordinating in Street Outreach happens internally and externally. Within the team, match strengths of team members with challenges of clients. Within the community/region, coordinate with partners for intake, discharges, and program transfers. This can take place at places like hospitals, detox centers, treatment centers and jails.
- **Hours of Operation**
Although times can vary when assisting clients through Street Outreach, morning engagements typically result in fewer distractions and better results. Street Outreach workers may find it easier to find clients in the morning before they have left for the day. Another benefit to morning engagement is that it allows ample time to connect with resources, supports and programs during business office hours. Scheduling Street Outreach workers for earlier shifts generally promotes a more productive workday and gives time at the end of the shift to complete leftover documentation of the day's events. On-call outreach workers can be beneficial to handle referrals and afternoon community partner communication.

Partnership with housing focus

Street Outreach efforts are only as strong as partnerships are as related to obtaining housing. Street Outreach is a conduit to housing. Street Outreach cannot operate in a bubble. Connecting to partners and other sectors of service is vital.

- **Health Services**
Your involvement in hospital discharge planning for your clients can be beneficial. Hospitals want to reduce recidivism; housing can help with that. Hospitals and other medical resources can help with obtaining verification of disability that is required for certain housing programs. Collaborating with healthcare providers can also help you assist your clients with easier access.
- **Mental Health**

Partnering with mental health providers that have existing relationships with mutual clients (with permission and release of information) can help to streamline services or build engagement. This partnership can also speed up obtaining verification of disability for certain housing programs. Knowing mental health providers can also help ease anxiety for clients while trying to gain access.

- Substance Use Treatment

Much of your encounters with substance use disorder treatment providers may be with detoxification centers. Collaboration can help create prioritization of detox seekers experiencing homelessness. Street Outreach also may be able to assist with encouraging clients to stay until discharge during this difficult time. Substance use providers can also provide verification of disability for certain housing programs. Collaborating can also help to facilitate seamless transition from detox to treatment programs.

- Judicial Courts

Courts may be willing to wave some outstanding fees if it helps in obtaining housing for Street Outreach clients. Jail discharge planning can improve with Street Outreach involvement. Triage assessments may be completed and/or on-going document gathering necessary for housing can take place while your client is in jail.

- Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women. It is important to have a working relationship with domestic violence recovery providers to ensure access for clients seeking this assistance.

- Continuum of Care (CoC)

The CoC is the collaborative body working to end homelessness at the local level. Street Outreach is an important part of the CoC. Street Outreach serves as an entry point to the local homelessness response system. Street Outreach may be the only contact to the services intended to end homelessness for some people. It is important to be an active member of the CoC.

- Veteran's Affairs (VA)

The VA has resources intended to end homelessness for qualified veterans experiencing homelessness. It is important to connect with VA homeless providers and know the eligibility criteria for VA resources. Collaborating and connecting with veteran service organizations can create opportunities for veterans you are working with to obtain housing.

- Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS (HOPWA)

Connection to HOPWA providers can help clients with HIV/AIDS stay alive. There are also resources available for people to obtain housing. An effective partnership with these providers can help your work greatly. It can also be a source for verification of disability for certain housing programs.

- Faith-based

There may be faith-based providers that supply food, clothing, shelter and even housing or other basic needs necessary for survival. Staff and/or volunteers at these places can direct people in need of your services to you. Furthermore, rather than you trying to provide survival means for people on the street, you direct people to places that provide

these things. You can usually find faith-based providers that are willing to partner with you in activities that promote the end of homelessness. This includes group settings or on an individual basis.

- **Parks**
Parks departments face people experiencing homelessness all the time. Sometimes parks are the first-place people go when they fall into homelessness. Establish a relationship with your parks department to promote engagement opportunities rather than confrontations or “move alongs.”
- **Law Enforcement**
It is not unusual for law enforcement to receive numerous reports from concerned citizens about individuals experiencing homelessness. Forming collaboration with your local law enforcement officials can ease burdens on your clients and result in engagement opportunities. Educate law enforcement on homelessness facts and what is being done to end it. Police are more likely to be helpful if they know there are alternatives. Do not engage in police work but work with them to help your efforts of ending homelessness.

Direct offer of housing

Street Outreach needs to be able to offer opportunities with no intermediary steps required or referrals to others for housing. This is Housing First. Once a person has required documentation, meets program criteria and is matched through prioritization, Street Outreach should be able to offer housing.

- **Provide resources to end homelessness**
Street Outreach brings the access to housing to the people rather than vice versa. Housing directly from the streets does not require meetings at other places along the way.
- **Range of housing options**
Long-term housing stability is more likely achieved by offering a variety of housing options. It is best to offer scattered site locations with supports, identified permanent supportive housing units, etc. Long-term housing stability can be compromised if the client cannot see themselves living there.
- **Access to funds to facilitate**
Street Outreach should have access to funding for housing opportunities. This gives workers leverage when talking with landlords. This also helps to create seamless time for moving from streets to housing.
- **Direct accountability**
Street Outreach workers should work to get all people housed. It is not admirable for Outreach workers to know someone for many years but not got them into housing.

What to do when clients say “No”

What you perceive as client resistance is an opportunity to examine your engagement approach. There are many reasons behind barriers to housing focused engagement. This may include lack

of awareness, avoidance, clients otherwise being unengaged or underserved, previous negative experiences, complicated requirements for assistance, among others.

- **Be persistent**
Willingness to continue to reach out to attempt to engage communicates to the individual your commitment to them and their housing. Doing this consistently conveys that you are reliable. As a Street Outreach worker, it is important to not give up on your clients. Be flexible and search for a way to help that works for your client. Engagement can be a process and typically gains momentum over time.
- **Person centered approach**
Do not force your will. Allow an individual to make their own decisions, even if you think they may be detrimental. Clients have the right to self-determination and oversee their own lives just like you are of yours. It is the Street Outreach worker's role to guide, assist, and promote choice. Giving individuals the dignity to make decisions in their lives promotes engagement.
- **Ask health related questions**
Engagement can become a natural bridge by inquiring about health matters affecting individuals experiencing homelessness. Acknowledging plight and confirming issues can help you build legitimacy.
- **Seizing new opportunities**
Times when clients are being told to move along or sleeping locations are compromised can be great opportunities for engagement. Other times may include a clients' declining health, impending severe weather, the loss of a peer, among others.
- **"Sorry I missed you."**
Leaving a note at an individual's dwelling when they are not there can help to build consistency. It also conveys that you care about that individual and you are following up. This should happen even if there was a scheduled time to meet and the client was not there.

Meet People where they are at/ Client Process (Workflow)

You must go to where people are to reach the need. Street Outreach brings resources to end homelessness to where people are physically, emotionally, and mentally. Targeting who you serve is strategic.

- **Physically**
You will find clients, or potential clients, in many different places at many different times. It is important to be strategic in targeting for engagement. Each visit has a purpose. You may be making a first contact, verifying homelessness, assessing acuity, educating clients about programing that comes with housing, and/or assisting with document readiness.
 - **Streets**
There are many places in the streets where people experiencing homelessness may be. When approaching someone sleeping or sitting on the streets, identify

yourself and your role. This conveys your purpose to the person and can help with fear and uncomfortableness. This includes near buildings and heat exhaust vents.

- Encampments

Remember you are approaching someone's domain. Announce your presence and identify yourself. You may be invited to a camp, receive a tip or a complaint of a camp, or you may find one in your travels. Be discreet. It is important to try not to give away the sleeping locations of people experiencing homelessness. However, you get there, you are a guest with a purpose.

- Abandoned buildings

Identify yourself and your role prior to entry if necessary. Use caution when entering. Abandoned buildings present unique safety challenges. Abandoned buildings may be structurally compromised, locations for wild animals, or locations of crime unrelated to homelessness. Always be alert to your surroundings and aware of exit routes.

- Storage units

People living in storage units may be new to homelessness or unaware of services. People living in storage units may be afraid of the owners finding out they are living there. Finding people is more likely at night, especially if there is electricity available.

- Campgrounds

It is difficult to determine who is experiencing homelessness in campgrounds. Most contacts will be because of referrals. Remember to be discrete when reaching out to people and families in campgrounds, other campers may be within hearing distance.

- Vehicles

People living in vehicles may be new to homelessness or unaware of services. You will find people living in cars in 24-hour grocery type store parking lots, church parking lots, parks, beaches, boat launches trails, trailheads, and many other places. Identify yourself and your role. Sometimes the best approach is a business card with a "sorry I missed you" note. People in vehicles may not acknowledge their homelessness to you at first. Sometimes an initial re-visit is required. Another aspect of vehicle living is people living in campers in the yard of a family member or friend.

- Community Meals

Get to know people who run, organize, or manage meals for feeding people experiencing homelessness or for the community in general. This is a source of many referrals. People volunteering at the meals often have built trust already and can help you engage quickly with potential clients. Community meals can also be good meeting places to follow up with people quickly.

- Day drop-in Centers

Get to know people who run and volunteer in drop-in centers or day shelters. This is a source for referrals and an excellent meeting place to complete paperwork.

People volunteering at drop-in centers often have built trust already and can help you engage quickly with people experiencing homelessness.

- Shelters
Shelter is not an end destination in Street Outreach. The end goal is housing, you may have to warm transfer to shelter-based housing navigators or work with them in some cases.
- Library
Libraries are often default day shelters. This is a source for referrals and an excellent meeting place to complete paperwork. Libraries may be a place where you can access clients quickly. Library staff may appreciate your engagement with your mutual clients as well.
- Other public places?
There may be additional places people can be located unique to each community.

- Emotionally
Meeting people where they are at also requires consideration of experiences of the client. Understand where a client or potential client is coming from. Careful consideration should be made to not retraumatize people in the engagement and housing process. Accept the person's reaction to their situation. This forms a basis for where to begin with engagement.
- Mentally
Mental wellness includes the realization of abilities, coping with the normal stresses of life, productivity, and contribution. Meeting people where they are at includes working with someone when any or all of these factors are not satisfied.

Housing focus when housing is not readily available

Waiting may be required for housing program openings, housing subsidies, or unit availability. It is important to keep in touch with your clients during this time. Clients may feel that housing will never come and get discouraged. Work to keep engaged with clients during this time and be mindful of time sensitive requirements.

- Look for housing.
Do not give up. Think of non-traditional routes to housing such as rooms for rent and shared housing. Find out how people with low incomes are housed in the community.
- Frequent follow-up
Meet with your clients at least once per week. Keep them updated on the housing search. Continue to explore non-conventional options for housing.
- Stay engaged.
Keep up on any major life changes with your clients. Ensure time sensitive documents are up to date. Re-certify homelessness as required by housing program or subsidy sources.

Warm Transfer

Clients have a greater chance for long term housing stability when a warm transfer is completed. This process entails you meeting with the client and the case manager (meeting the client for the first time) and reviewing each of the 15 components of the SPDAT (or other related assessment tool) in detail. Clients appreciate the opportunity to provide clarification and incoming case managers appreciate the opportunity to seek clarification. This allows for the client and the new case manager to hit the ground running with services. These are the warm transfer steps:

- **Introductions**
Introduce all staff that may be working with the client. Introduce the client to the new staff.
- **Explanation**
Explain the program again. This provides the opportunity for potential participant to ask questions and gives the opportunity for the housing-based case management staff to provide clarification or more details about the program.
- **SPDAT (or other related assessment tool)**
Street Outreach provides a detailed walk-through of results for each SPDAT (or other related assessment tool) component. This gives the participant the opportunity to provide more information or clarification for any component. This also provides the case management staff the opportunity to ask questions for clarification. The case management cannot adjust the score of the intake SPDAT (or other related assessment tool).
- **Refusal of program entry**
This only occurs if the client reveals information that clearly identifies that they gave inaccurate or untruthful information during intake which significantly impacts the assessment. This also can occur if there is evidence that the participant does not meet the program requirements (e.g., not homeless).
- **Exchange file**
Information given to the case management staff will be used to help the participant develop a plan for long-term housing stability. You have assisted in housing a client! Much of this information exchange may be electronic.
- **Set next meeting.**
A time is set for the case manager to have the next meeting with participant within two business days. Support at this stage is critical for the participant depending on acuity and needs. The work of establishing long-term housing stability is built on the foundation you created during engagement. Passing the service off to the case management staff is necessary for it to come to fruition.
- **Summary**
Document the warm transfer with a summary and place in the client file.

XI. Safety Training

It is important to remain safe in Street Outreach. While going to where individuals experiencing homelessness is necessary, it is also important to be aware of your surroundings. Observation is an important part of Street Outreach. While observing the condition of a client's living space, keep in mind a safe exit if needed as well as health hazards around you such as drug paraphernalia, feces, and wild animals. If you are conducting a woods outreach or an abandoned building outreach, make sure to remember the way out. Here are some safety tips:

- Awareness of surroundings
Announce yourself and ask permission before entering a camp. Observe camps or dwelling locations for dangerous terrain, traps, needles, other people, etc. Remember to watch where you step. Inquire about camps or sleeping spots in the surrounding area. Never touch what could be a mobile meth lab or dumpsite.
- Lavatories
Encampments are often accompanied by a lavatory area or areas. Sometimes these areas are very creative. Be mindful of where you are walking. Try to find the entrance to the camp rather than just trucking through. People will usually tell you where the entrance is if you ask. Even though you may never need it, remember to acknowledge a possible escape route.
- Abandoned buildings
Observe abandoned buildings for structural damage before entering. Keep an eye out for traps or alarm systems. Always announce yourself before entering an abandoned building. This will help establish that you are a safe person. Be careful not to cut yourself on sharp objects, especially in entrances. Observe for hazardous terrain such as holes in the floor and things falling from the ceiling and watch where you step. Watch out for drug paraphernalia, feces, and other people. Never touch what could be a mobile meth lab or dumpsite.
- Location
There may be a location where you want to let someone know where you are going. Let your contact person know where you will be, what time you will be there and when you plan to leave. Check in with your contact person to let them know you are safe.
- Belligerency
You may encounter situations that require de-escalation techniques. If you are unable to calm someone down, you may have to vacate the premises. Allowing an individual to express their feelings or vent is often appropriate, however personal attacks are not. You can end a contact and try another time. You also do not want to exacerbate a situation.
- Never interrupt a drug deal
This could be the number one safety rule. You are there to help end homelessness, not do police work. If you accidentally roll up on a drug deal, you could say sorry to interrupt, I was just trying to follow up with some people experiencing homelessness and simply state you are conducting Street Outreach and walk away.

XII. Conclusion

Hopefully you find this guide to Street Outreach helpful in your ending homelessness efforts. Street Outreach is a unique opportunity to meet people where they are at for assistance in moving directly from unsheltered situations to permanent housing solutions. The professional approach by Street Outreach is purposeful and meant to alleviate the suffering of homelessness once and for all. As part of a larger system with the same goal, Street Outreach provides ways to access help for people who otherwise remain disenfranchised. Remember the role of Street Outreach as a vital part of any homelessness response system and happy housing people!