

What is Progressive Engagement?

Progressive engagement is an approach to support families to quickly self-resolve their homelessness by tailoring services to offer just what is needed.

In a progressive engagement (PE) approach, a family seeking housing receives a small amount of assistance, tailored to their most critical need, with a keen focus on quickly resolving the housing crisis. The family keeps in regular contact with their provider, mutually monitoring whether the initial support was successful. If needed, the provider can adjust the amount and intensity of tailored service until the family has obtained permanent housing. With PE, the family and provider work together to get the family into housing first, and then may identify additional goals.

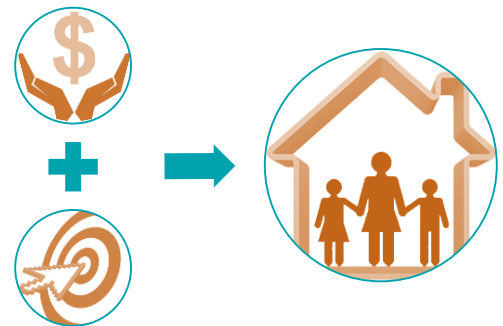
The PE approach can be broadly applied within your homeless housing system, complementing strategies such as Diversion and Rapid Re-Housing. PE can help improve efficiency across the entire system and community by matching the most intensive and expensive resources with the families who demonstrate they need them most.

“We find that by offering a small amount of services in the beginning, we can identify families who need a different services strategy more quickly. It saves time and resources for the agency, and more quickly meets the needs of the family.”

—Steffanie Bonwell, Homeless Programs Manager, Housing Authority of Grant County

Progressive Engagement Fundamentals

- Voluntary and flexible participation by families
- Critical thinking and problem solving shared between the family and provider
- Starts with a little bit of support, based on what families identify they need
- Connections made to community resources
- Builds on family resiliency and strengths
- Focused goal: to quickly resolve the immediate crisis of homelessness



What We're Learning

Case managers already have many of the skills needed to be effective with progressive engagement. Motivational interviewing, trauma-informed care, and family-focused goal setting enhance a strong PE approach, and are generally already part of a case manager's toolbox. PE builds on these strengths, paired with a focus on quicker self-sufficiency for families.

Recent data shows that most families use homeless services one time only, and require only a small amount of assistance to get

“Keep the focus on housing. We're working with families on an individual basis, providing services only as needed. If things are going smoothly, there is no need to burden families with extra hoops to go through.”

—Dana Peterson, Rapid Re-Housing Collaborative Coordinator, CCS/Family Housing Network

back into housing.¹ In fact, most families can succeed in permanent housing with relatively shallow subsidy and services.² About 20 percent are homeless for longer periods of time and may require longer or deeper support, while very few cycle in and out of homelessness repeatedly. Assuming most families can succeed with shallow supports helps housing and services dollars go farther.

Research shows it can be hard to predict at outset of services who will succeed in permanent housing—even among families with high barriers to housing.³ It is also difficult to anticipate at outset how much assistance a family will ultimately need. PE lets families *demonstrate what they need* through frequent reassessments with their providers—while in their own permanent housing.

Endnotes

¹ Culhane, D.P., Metraux, S., Park, J.M., Schretzman, M., Valente, J. (2007). Testing a Typology of Family Homelessness Based on Patterns of Public Shelter Utilization in Four U.S. Jurisdictions: Implications for Policy and Program Planning. *Housing Policy Debate*. 18(1), 1-28.

² National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2013). Promising Strategy: Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and the CATCH Program.

³ Rodriguez, D. (2013) Homelessness Recurrence in Georgia: Descriptive Statistics, Risk Factors, and Contextualized Outcome Measurement. Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

Learn More About Progressive Engagement

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This document can be found online at:

<http://www.buildingchanges.org/library-type/other/item/841-what-is-progressive-engagement>

Related Resources

- Progressive engagement: see [Progressive Engagement in Practice: Tools for Implementation](#)
- Progressive engagement within a rapid re-housing strategy: see [Rapid Re-Housing Tenets](#)
- Better matching housing with family needs: see [Balancing Resources to Meet the Needs of Homeless Families](#)
- Diversion: see [Diversion Strategies to Meet the Needs of Homeless Families](#)

About Building Changes

Building Changes serves as an intermediary among philanthropy, government agencies, and service providers, seeding and nurturing fundamental change in the ways our communities collaborate to address homelessness.