



Giving Hope Today

## **HHB Housing and Support Services Shelter Diversion Program**

### **Program Description**

The City of Hamilton has developed system-wide shelter diversion programs, to support safe and appropriate connection with existing housing options for Individuals that are experiencing homelessness or the possibilities of being homeless.

The goals of shelter diversion:

- For individuals to have safe and appropriate housing alternatives to emergency shelter to be supported in achieving and maintaining those alternatives
- To prevent the use of emergency shelter by providing individualized supports
- To help people seeking shelter to identify immediate alternate housing arrangements and, if necessary, connect them with services and financial assistance to help them return to permanent housing
- Capture indicators that tell a story of homelessness in Hamilton to support evidence-based investments

Diversion concentrates efforts in ensuring safe and appropriate living accommodations are sought prior to admittance into emergency shelter or shelter overflow within the hotel system. Diversion is not saying “no” to sheltering people that have exhausted all of their alternate housing options. Rather, diversion works to prevent people from accessing emergency shelter services where other housing options can be explored and ensures shelter beds are used as a resource only when necessary.

Staff will support eligibility of individuals to stay in their existing temporary or permanent housing with access to time-limited supports. If an assessment determines that an individual has no safe and appropriate alternative to them in the community, the individual will be referred to emergency shelter services and THE SALVATION ARMY will remain housing-focused in order to support the individual on their pathway to housing.

## **Service Standards**

THE SALVATION ARMY provides targeted shelter diversion supports including:

### **1. Screening and Assessment**

- a. Staff will support eligible individuals in exploring all possible housing options by
  - Performing a diversion assessment as soon as possible from the time of entry, with a target of being diverted within 48 hours of the time of entry.
  - Based on the outcome of this assessment, staff will progressively engage with the individual to provide the appropriate level of diversion services, starting with the lightest supports available and increasing support as needed, to work together with the individual in accessing a safe and appropriate housing alternative to emergency shelter.
- b. HIFIS 4.0
  - Staff will use HIFIS 4.0 to determine if an individual presenting for service has already received diversion services from another shelter and will commit to the existing plan, in consultation with shelter partners.

### **2. Prioritized Interventions**

- a. The completed assessment will likely result in one of the following streams of service:
  - The individual is at risk of homelessness but able to remain in the community with some light supports and referrals (remain with a friend/family member, delay loss of housing with staff intervention, eviction still pending, etc.). These individuals may access flex funds to support housing stability.

- Individual is currently homeless or living in a highly precarious environment but has an established plan to move rapidly into new housing, typically with low or mid acuity as per the VI-SPDAT. Staff will work with this individual during their brief shelter stay to help actualize their plan and provide supports as required. These individuals may access flex funds to support their quick move into housing, unless the individual is already a client of case management or a permanent housing with supports program as per Hamilton's by-name priority list. Existing clients of case management or a permanent housing with supports program are supported on their pathway to housing through the facilitation of income source applications and assistance with securing identification documents.
  - Individual is absolutely homeless with no identified plan and/or are unengaged in their housing plan. They will be booked into shelter and work together with shelter staff to find and maintain housing. Staff will complete a Common Assessment (currently the VI-SPDAT or Indigenous common Assessment) with clients who have been homeless for 14+ days to facilitate further assessment through the BNPL for additional supports within Hamilton's Homeless Serving System.
- b. Housing Focused Sheltering
- Each individual eligible for diversion supports (as determined above) will be assisted in their plan to find or maintain housing. Staff can assist with mediation, advocacy, referrals, housing search, and access to time limited financial supports through the provision of a flex fund. If an assessment determines that an individual has no safe and appropriate alternative to them in the community, the individual will be referred to emergency shelter services, and THE SALVATION ARMY will remain housing focused in order to support the individual on their pathway to housing.
- c. Provision of Flex Fund
- Flex funds are financial resources that aim to provide an immediate and flexible source of support to individuals with housing stability.
  - Flex Funds may be used for the following purposes:

- Shallow Assistance (bus tickets, grocery cards, phone cards, gas, transportation, locksmith)
- Deep Assistance (rent arrears, last month's rent, first month's rent, furniture, appliances, utility arrears, storage, moving costs, household items, tenant insurance.)
- It will be required that all existing and eligible resources will be exhausted prior to accessing flex funds. This includes:
  - Housing Stability Benefit,
  - Utility Arrears program,
  - LEAP Transportation allowance, personal savings, etc.
- In addition, staff will assist each family to access all available income supports.
- These funds may be used to bridge time gaps (e.g. employed, but between pay days) to address situations where timely access to resources threatens housing stability or timely access to re-housing. These funds are not intended to be used for worker program expenses.
- **Requests for flex funds will be made to THE SALVATION ARMY management team, and/or subject to their approval.**
- Case management plans aimed at a safe and appropriate housing alternative to emergency shelter will need to be developed prior to the issuance of flex funds.

### **3. Target Populations**

The target client population is individuals who require immediate supports to avoid becoming homeless or to resolve homelessness through new housing stability, typically with mid or low acuity as per the VI-SPDAT. These individuals are engaged in their housing plan, typically have not already experienced long shelter stays, and are not already connected to case management or a permanent housing with supports provider.

Staff at THE SALVATION ARMY will utilize diverse skills to build on the existing strengths and resources of individuals. Staff will work to solve the initial housing crisis and support housing stability on a long-term basis. These strategies may include:

- Family reunification/accessing help within family
- Landlord mediation
- Access to housing listings
- Assistance accessing other community-based supports and resources including physical and mental health, treatment, education, training, and employment
- Navigating other systems of supports
- Short-term case management
- Begin relationship building and trust from a person directed approach
- Assess housing history, needs, strengths, and challenges to achieving housing stability
- Explore housing options, submit housing applications where appropriate and/or begin housing searches
- Development of individualized short and long-term goals from a strengths-based approach to help participants maintain housing stability
- Connect, reconnect or develop supports that will help maintain housing
- Assess, review and refine short term goals
- Review and revise as necessary ongoing supports and services, connections to community agencies, and landlords and housing providers
- Provide practical supports using the flex fund to help meet basic needs and engagement
- Support people in the early stages of change
- Shallow assistance through flex fund
- Deep assistance through flex fund
- Successful exit from program supports and services

#### **4. Participant Exit / Transition Out of Program**

Planned exits from shelter will be initiated during the intake process. This program is intended to provide brief interventions.

## **5. Data Management**

THE SALVATION ARMY will record diversion efforts on HIFIS as well as use any data reporting tools provided by the City of Hamilton.

Service data will be collected daily by staff and submitted to the Housing Services Division monthly throughout the pilot as otherwise directed by the City for the purposes of pilot evaluation.

Staff will complete diversion surveys available in HIFIS, and when diversion is successful, staff will note “turn away – diversion” in this section.