

UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCES OF BLACK CLIENTS USING PIERCE COUNTY COORDINATED ENTRY SERVICES

Report of the Tacoma/Lakewood/Pierce County
Continuum of Care Racial Equity Demonstration
Project Workgroup

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Executive Summary

In Pierce County, as in the U.S. generally, individuals and families who identify as Black or African American are significantly overrepresented among people likely to experience homelessness (e.g., HUD, 2018, 2020). For example, between 2012 and 2016, Black or African American people represented 26.3% of Pierce County’s homelessness population but were 6.6% of Pierce County’s general population (Dones et al., 2018). This disparity heightens the need for a coordinated entry system in Pierce County that is responsive to the particular needs of Black or African American households facing homelessness.

To address this need, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) piloted a demonstration project focusing on improving racial equity within coordinated entry (CE) systems. The Tacoma/Lakewood/Pierce County Continuum of Care (CoC) was one of eight housing and homelessness CoC’s across the U.S. selected to participate in this project. Between October 2020 and January 2022, a workgroup convened that included members of Pierce County CoC’s Racial Equity Committee, homelessness service providers in Pierce County, the Pierce County Department of Human Services, the City of Tacoma, people with lived experience of homelessness in Pierce County, and other stakeholders, to design a project to improve racial equity in Pierce County’s CE system. HUD supported the project with technical assistance and meeting facilitation provided by a three-person consulting team. The workgroup identified improving cultural competence in the delivery of CE services as an important objective towards better meeting the needs of Black/African American households facing homelessness.

Over the course of this project, the racial equity demonstration project workgroup worked towards this objective in two ways:

- 1) Describing and assessing a recent partnership between a major CE service provider in Pierce County (Catholic Community Services) and a coalition of primarily Black churches in Pierce County that provides homelessness services (Tacoma Ministerial Alliance). This partnership improves CE for Black families by integrating the Tacoma Ministerial Alliance’s relationships in Pierce County’s Black community with Catholic Community Service’s expertise in coordinated entry. We term such a partnership a “cultural hub” approach to coordinated entry.
- 2) Investigating the experience of Black families and individuals with Pierce County’s CE system. To investigate this, in December 2021-January 2022, the workgroup implemented a study involving open-ended interviews with 16 Black heads of households who experienced homelessness and went through Pierce County’s CE system. A particular focus of the interviews was the quality of the caseworker-client relationship. A positive and trusting relationship between casework and client may improve clients’ engagement with homeless services and be vital to a successful housing outcome.

The interviews were conducted by staff members at Tacoma’s Brotherhood RISE Center and transcribed and coded by members of the CoC’s Racial Equity Committee and students at the University of Puget Sound. Interviewees were primarily heads of households with children (88%) and mostly women (75%). Participants were asked about their experiences with coordinated entry, the quality of their relationship and interactions with their CE caseworker(s), and the way race may have affected their experiences with CE.

The interviews suggest that:

- Caseworkers play a critical role in helping individuals navigate the CE system. Clients identify responsive, regular, timely, honest, and clear communication as something that makes the experience more positive. A trusting relationship, which relates to the quality and frequency of communication, also seems to be important. Resources, policies, and training that help caseworkers to connect and communicate frequently and responsively may result in more positive caseworker-client relationships, better engagement from clients, and better outcomes.
- Individuals who identify as Black or African American frequently experience interpersonal and systemic racism when searching for housing and navigating service and housing systems. Having a caseworker who shares the client’s identity may be a foundation for developing a trusting relationship in this context. Multicultural training may also benefit all caseworkers working with clients with marginalized identities.
- The CE system, including the policies and timelines related to Diversion and the priority pool, can seem complicated, unclear, and overwhelming to clients. In addition to clear communication between caseworkers and clients, other resources such as accessible on-line resources may be useful. Efforts to develop and evaluate these tools in collaboration with people experiencing homelessness may be particularly valuable.
- One aspect of the complexity of the CE system may be the many tasks and social contacts that clients need to manage. Reducing the number of contacts may improve trust, reduce the number of people with whom personal information must be relayed, and improve outcomes. Additionally, CE approaches that assist clients in CE system navigation may reduce the number of contacts a client needs to manage and improve their ability to manage the points of contact that remain.
- While our small samples do not allow us to evaluate the effectiveness of particular programs or the relative effectiveness of different CE models, many of the issues above speak to the strengths of cultural hub resources such as the TMA-CCS partnership in Pierce County. This cultural hub model centers relationship-building, trust, and cultural competency in supporting Black clients. The findings suggest that communication between caseworkers and clients is an important factor that can determine the quality of an individual’s experience with coordinated entry. A cultural hub approach may reduce negative experiences related to communication and trust through improved cultural competence of caseworkers. By enhancing trust and communication, cultural competence may give a caseworker greater information with which to assist the client in meeting needs.

Background and Project Overview

Extensive data documents the overrepresentation of people who identify as Black or African American among families and individuals experiencing homelessness in the U.S. (e.g., HUD, 2018, 2020) and in Pierce County, Washington (Dones et al., 2018). Long histories of racial discrimination in housing, banking, education, employment, and other systems contribute to these patterns (e.g., Johnson, 2010; Jones, 2016; Olivet et al., 2021; Rothstein, 2017). Additionally, systems serving people experiencing homelessness reflect patterns of racial inequity, such as a predominance of White service providers and administrators in many large agencies providing homelessness services (Dones et al., 2018). Thus, Black individuals may avoid or distrust service providers and agencies (Weisz & Quinn, 2017), or may experience a lack of cultural fit navigating homeless services including the coordinated entry system.

To address these inequities, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development piloted a racial equity demonstration project beginning in October 2020 focusing on coordinated entry (CE) systems for housing. CE systems are a critical arm of homeless services in which trained staff across multiple agencies use common tools to assess individuals' needs, connect them with services and resources, and/or enter individuals' personal information into a common database where they can be assigned prioritization for particular programs. During the CE process, caseworkers gather information and guide clients in a conversation to help them decide whether to pursue *Diversion* or to be placed in the *priority pool*. In *Diversion*, a caseworker supports the client, typically for up to 30 days, to come up with their own solution to their housing crisis, and may provide resources or some financial assistance to facilitate that solution. Clients in the *priority pool* are put on a referral list for housing for 90 days where referrals are based on barriers, vulnerabilities, and availability of housing. Individuals who remain unhoused after 30 days (in *Diversion*) or 90 days (in the *priority pool*) can repeat the CE process.

The Tacoma/Lakewood/Pierce County Continuum of Care (CoC) was one of eight housing and homelessness CoC's across the U.S. selected to participate in the demonstration project. Between October 2020 and January 2022, a workgroup convened that included members of Pierce County CoC's Racial Equity Committee, homelessness service providers in Pierce County, the Pierce County Department of Human Services, the City of Tacoma, people with lived experience of homelessness in Pierce County, and other stakeholders, to design a project to improve racial equity in Pierce County's CE system. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development supported the project with technical support and meeting facilitation provided by a three-person consulting team.

The project initially focused on evaluating and improving upon a unique partnership between Catholic Community Services (CCS), one of Pierce County's traditional CE providers, and the Tacoma Ministerial Alliance (TMA), a coalition of primarily Black churches in Pierce County that has incorporated homeless services as part of their mission. The partnership aims to enhance cultural competence in CE by supporting TMA's role in providing CE services and by

making use of TMA’s status as a “trusted messenger” to Black Pierce County families. This partnership is an example of a *cultural hub*, i.e. a partnership that connects organizations at the level of the neighborhood or community (like TMA) that know the people and the circumstances and needs of that community, with organizations and agencies that have resources and experience related to the homeless service system (like CCS). The community organization in the partnership (TMA) has well-established and long-lasting relationships in the community it serves, and brings localized knowledge of particular circumstances, conditions, and problems faced within the community. In this sense, the hub is emergent or grass-roots-oriented, rather than planned and implemented from the top-down. As an agency with knowledge and experience with coordinated entry, CCS can mobilize resources like experience and connection to the CE system to support TMA’s entry as an organization that offers CE services. Both organizations have learned from each other as they seek to understand and address the needs of Black clients. Under this partnership, 211, which is administered by United Way of Pierce County, refers some Black family clients to TMA for coordinated entry as capacity allows. TMA is also able to directly recruit clients into coordinated entry from within its own network. CCS supports TMA staff in learning and managing Pierce County’s CE and Homelessness Management Information Systems (HMIS).



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Between October 2020 and February 2021, individuals representing various stakeholder groups, including Pierce County’s Continuum of Care Racial Equity Committee, met regularly with three HUD-sponsored consultants to identify tangible ways in which the Continuum of Care could improve racial equity in the County’s CE system. The group identified itself as the HUD Equity Demo Project workgroup. The workgroup identified improving cultural competence in CE as a pressing need. Additionally, the 2018 SPARC report found that network impoverishment, an absence of family and friends with financial resources to provide emergency support, contributed to the vulnerability of Black families to homelessness (Dones et al., 2018). This suggested to the workgroup that an important component to addressing the needs of homeless Black families in Pierce County would be to strengthen pathways that link them with organizations able to provide culturally-aligned resources and support within the community.

Beginning in March 2021, the HUD equity demonstration project shifted its focus to design a study to better understand outcomes and experiences of Black and African American clients of the TMA program and other CE providers. The workgroup’s membership was extended to include representation from the Pierce County CoC Racial Equity Committee, Pierce County Department of Human Services, the Tacoma Ministerial Alliance, Catholic Community Services, Associated Ministries, the Brotherhood RISE Center, and other key homelessness stakeholders such as Building Changes. The workgroup also included members with lived experience with homelessness. Our goal was to identify features of the cultural hub and standard service approaches associated with outcomes such as housing stability and satisfaction with the

CE experience, and to provide this information to policy makers, service providers, and funders to inform decisions about funding priorities and to improve CE systems.

As a starting point, Catholic Community Services staff used quantitative data from Pierce County’s HMIS to provide the workgroup with a comparative analysis of Coordinated Entry outcomes, showing a pattern of positive housing outcomes among the initial clients using TMA for coordinated entry. Over the period from April 2020 through March 2021, 68% of the TMA’s clients who went through its Diversion program exited to permanent housing, compared to 57% of Black/African American clients with Catholic Community Services and Associated Ministries. In addition, the data also suggested that TMA clients were more likely to use TMA’s Diversion counseling services for a longer period of time than Black families engaging Diversion through other agencies, an average of 46 days for TMA compared to 31 days elsewhere. This may indicate greater success in relationship-building with clients for TMA caseworkers compared to traditional CE providers.



Over the period from April 2020 through March 2021, 68% of the TMA’s clients who went through its Diversion program exited to permanent housing, compared to 57% of Black/African American clients with Catholic Community Services and Associated Ministries

To gain a deeper understanding of TMA’s success in CE, as reflected in the quantitative data, the workgroup developed a plan to collect additional qualitative data by conducting interviews with Black clients of Pierce County’s CE system. The recruitment methods, interview questions, and research procedures were developed by the entire workgroup to take advantage of the diversity of expertise and perspectives of the team. Data collection and analysis then occurred through collaboration and commitments of a number of key partners. Principal investigators for the project came from the University of Puget Sound and The Evergreen State College, whose institutions reviewed and approved institutional review board (IRB) proposals for the project. The City of Tacoma provided financial support for the project, and Building Changes served as a fiscal agent. Pierce County assisted by providing lists of potential participants from the HMIS system. Associated Ministries staff provided assistance with recruiting participants. Staff at the Brotherhood RISE Center assisted with recruiting and conducted all of the interviews with participants. Members of the CoC Racial Equity Committee and students from the University of Puget Sound assisted with coding interviews. Members of the HUD Equity Demo Project workgroup, CoC Racial Equity Committee, and other stakeholders helped to interpret the data and provided feedback on early drafts of this report.

Examining the Client-CE Caseworker Relationship

Context for the workgroup’s analysis was provided by the 2018 SPARC report, which described the large racial disparities in homelessness in Pierce County and other communities across the U.S., and particularly high rates of homelessness among people who identify as Black or Native American (Dones et al., 2018). Local and national Point-in-Time and HMIS reports across time and through the present show similar patterns. A key finding in the SPARC report was the role of network impoverishment in contributing to homelessness among people of color in Pierce County and other communities. Network impoverishment includes an absence of individuals within a person’s social network that have financial resources to provide a safety net when that person experiences housing instability (Dones et al., 2018). As the SPARC report put it, “it is just not that the people we interviewed are experiencing poverty—it is that everyone they know is experiencing poverty, too” (Dones et al., 2018, p. 6). The fragility of the financial network also strains social relationships and can result in a lack of emotional support.

The role of network impoverishment in homelessness in Pierce County suggests that the relationship between client and caseworker in the CE system may be particularly crucial to a successful housing outcome. For a network-impooverished client, the CE caseworker may be one of the only actors in a position to facilitate a long-term housing solution and a short-term housing arrangement (Bassuk & Geller, 2006). The workgroup’s discussions with CE providers and people with lived experience of homelessness found that a persistent challenge in Pierce County’s CE system is client distrust or lack of confidence in the capacity for the CE system to both respect the client’s dignity and autonomy and to find safe and affordable housing for the client. This distrust matters because case managers must often obtain highly personal and traumatic information from a client to provide the most effective service and to be successful in finding permanent housing that supports the client’s needs. Without a trusting relationship, good communication between client and caseworker is compromised. A client may provide less information than is optimal with a case manager, and cooperate less with the CE process more generally. Consequently, a trusting relationship between client and caseworker can play a critical role in achieving well-being for the client (Building Changes, 2018; Chinman et al., 2000; Rapp & Goscha, 2004).

The caseworker-client relationship may be made more fragile in Pierce County by fragmentation in the CE system. It is common for clients to work with multiple caseworkers across multiple organizations (Building Changes, 2018). This fragmentation can increase the vulnerability of clients to poor outcomes, since a failure at any point in the process can undermine a positive outcome for the client (Rapp & Goscha, 2004). Moreover, fragmentation means that a client may go through multiple intake processes, and thus have to establish new relationships with caseworkers and disclose personal and traumatic experiences multiple times. The complexity and challenges of navigating a fragmented process may reinforce a client’s distrust in the CE system and negatively impact the client’s willingness to use the homeless services in the future.

At the same time, for Black clients and those who are members of other marginalized groups, there may be additional barriers to developing a productive and trusting relationship with traditional CE case managers. Values, attitudes, and experiences of clients can differ significantly from those of caseworkers in ways that may make communication and trust-building more difficult (Garrett-Akinsanya, 2014). And, these differences often fall along lines of race, class, and neighborhood, and thus disadvantage people of color more so than others. And, as noted above, poor communication and distrust can become self-reinforcing if a client needs to go through multiple intakes, or when setbacks in one part of the process reinforce a client’s hesitancy about engaging with CE procedures or staff.

These observations led the HUD equity demonstration project workgroup to identify the client-caseworker relationship within the CE process as a focus of investigation. One goal of the project was to identify factors that positively or negatively impact the relationship between Black clients and their caseworkers, and that might relate to successful exit to permanent housing for the client. We focus especially on dimensions of trust, communication, and helpfulness within client-caseworker relationship, as well as on challenges and satisfaction with the CE process more generally.

A second goal of this project was to better understand a promising alternative model for delivering coordinated entry that the workgroup has termed a *cultural hub*. We define a cultural hub as a partnership between a traditional CE organization and a community-based organization at the level of the neighborhood or community that is considered a “trusted messenger” within the community it serves. In this arrangement, a traditional CE provider such as CCS supports a community-based organization such as the TMA with access to and training in the CE system. The community-based organization is able to draw on well-established relationships in the community it serves to inform the implementation of coordinated entry so that it is tailored to the needs and circumstances of that community.

The cultural hub model also reflects core principles of *Targeted Universalism* (Powell et al., 2019). Targeted Universalism is an approach to systems change guided by the idea that achieving a universal goal, such as permanent housing for all people who are homeless, requires strategies that are differentiated to the needs and circumstances of particular groups served by the system. One benefit of the cultural hub model may be enhanced cultural competence within the client-caseworker relationship. Cultural competence refers to approaches and methods that take into consideration the differences in values, attitudes, and experiences that exist between CE clients and the organizations and staff that provide services. Cultural competence, exercised by individuals or



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organizations, can improve trust and ease communication in the caseworker-client relationship (Garrett-Akinsanya, 2014). TMA coordinated entry caseworkers share Black clients' racial identity, are attuned to issues of racial discrimination and racial trauma, and may be able to help clients connect with other members and communities that are part of the TMA, including but not limited to other Black and African American individuals and other religious and non-religious organizations.

In April 2020, CCS and the TMA began a partnership, following the cultural hub approach, in order to improve the experience of Black families in Pierce County's CE system by building greater trust between client and caseworker. Because we had a particular interest in the cultural hub approach to CE, and because TMA's CE work primarily serves Black families, our project focused on Black heads of households using the CE system. We designed the project with an aim to provide information to help better understand the effectiveness and potential of the cultural hub model and to improve CE experiences and outcomes in Pierce County.



Research Methods

Recruitment

Participants were recruited using the Pierce County HMIS database. HMIS identification numbers were selected for Black or African American heads of households with at least one child who had used CE services with one of three agencies in the last year. Some similar adults without children from two of the agencies were also included. Working from this list of HMIS numbers, a staff member at a designated nonprofit organization with experience working with CE clients accessed names and contact information from HMIS and called these individuals to invite them to participate. Shortly after initial recruitment began, the work of accessing contact information through HMIS and recruiting participants shifted to the Brotherhood RISE Center. It is important to note that many individuals in the HMIS database did not grant permission to be contacted or did not have usable contact information, and that most individuals contacted declined participation. Thus, one should not assume the interviewees are a representative sample of Black CE clients.

When contacting potential participants, recruiters described the study, explained confidentiality procedures and compensation (a \$50 Visa gift card), and asked whether the individual wanted to participate. The individual was then asked if they preferred to do an in-person or telephone interview, and the interview was either scheduled or the recruiter indicated that someone from the Brotherhood RISE Center would call to set up an interview time. Recruiters called and/or left messages for all individuals on the TMA list with available contact information, resulting in a small number of TMA participants who scheduled and completed interviews. The remaining participants were recruited primarily among those who had completed coordinated entry with Associated Ministries.

Interview Procedure

Following recruitment, two staff members at the Brotherhood RISE Center conducted interviews. Most interviews took place over the phone and several occurred in person at the RISE Center located in the Hilltop neighborhood of Tacoma. Interviewers read the consent form to participants and requested their verbal consent. Next, with consent of the participants, interviewers turned on an audio recorder to begin the interview. In some cases, interviewees were managing distractions such as childcare or outdoor noise. Interviewers used the script to guide the interview (see interview script in the Appendices), but also allowed the interviewees to guide the narrative. As a result, interviewers sometimes varied in the way they asked questions and how they followed up with probes. In some cases, participants did not hear or answer particular questions, or steered the conversation in different directions.

The first interview questions asked about why and how people had sought CE in the last year, past experiences with CE, and how they decided between Diversion and the priority pool. Interviewers then asked about positive and negative aspects of the interviewee's experiences with CE and resources they received. The next questions asked about the interviewee's

relationship with their caseworker(s) including probes that asked specifically about feelings of trust and comfort, and about patterns of communication and contact. Interviewers then asked about ways race affected access or experiences involving services or housing, and if there were any helpful ways service providers dealt with issues of race. The interviewer then asked, what is one thing the interviewee would most like to change about their experience with coordinated entry, and if there was anything else the person wanted to add.


At this point, the interviewer informed the interviewee that they were turning off the recording. The interviewer then asked a series of demographic and background questions and wrote down the participant's responses on a survey form (see Background Survey in the Appendices). The survey included demographic questions (gender, race/ethnicity, age, education, employment, household income, children in household, Veteran status) and questions about housing history and current housing. The interviewee was also asked two closed-ended questions about their satisfaction with their CE experience and with their relationship with their CE caseworker (*not at all, somewhat, very, or extremely satisfied*). The interviewers then explained that the study was over and offered to assist interviewees with referral information they might want. For in-person interviews, the participant then received their \$50 Visa payment card. For telephone interviews, participants could choose to pick up the card in person at the RISE Center or to have the card mailed to them.

Recordings were transferred from recording devices to one of the principal investigator's secure stick drive. The recordings were then uploaded to a secure online transcription service (REV). One of the principal investigators checked the match between recordings and transcripts, resolved inconsistencies, and removed any identifying information from the transcripts. Recordings will be destroyed shortly after the study is complete, and de-identified transcripts will be stored in secure locations and eventually destroyed as well.

Participant Characteristics

Seventeen individuals consented to be interviewed. One participant was mistakenly recruited and interviewed twice because their HMIS number appeared on two lists. This person only received one gift card, and we coded themes in both transcripts to understand that person's experiences. Additionally, we did not transcribe or analyze an interview with one participant because of poor sound quality and because the person ended the interview early. This left 16 participants in our sample.

The sample included 12 women and 4 men, all who were identified as Black or African American through HMIS (during the interview, 2 of these self-identified as "other" race or ethnicity, and 3 identified as multi-racial). Most participants (14)



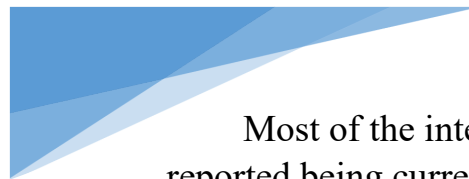
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identified as heads of households at the time of CE (8 with one child, 4 with two children, and 1 each with five and seven children). Participants' ages ranged from 26 to 56 years. At the time of the interview, 10 participants were working or students (2 full-time, 4 part-time, 1 self-employed, 2 students, and 1 working part-time as a student). Among the others, 5 were currently looking for work, and 1 was not looking. One female participant was a veteran. Participants' responses to a question about current household income indicated that 8 had incomes under \$12,000; 3 between \$12,000 and \$20,000; and 5 from \$20,000 to \$35,000.

Participants also reported diverse histories of homelessness, and this information was based on self-reports rather than HMIS records. Most of the interviewees (11) reported being currently homeless, with 4 staying with family or friends, 3 in a shelter, 2 in vehicles, 1 outdoors, and 1 indicating in a house or apartment. The five individuals indicating they were not currently homeless were all staying in a house or apartment.

Interviewees indicated how many of the last 12 months they were homeless: 4 indicated 0-3 months; 6 indicated 6-8 months, and 6 indicated 10-12 months. In their lifetimes, 2 participants reported being homeless once, 5 reported being homeless two times, 7 reported 3-4 times, and 2 reported more than 10 times. For total months ever homeless, 7 participants reported 6-18 months, 5 reported 2-3 years, and 4 reported 4-7 years.

Determining which organization participants had used for CE was difficult in some cases because the clients indicated interacting with multiple agencies or because their self-reports did not match the agency indicated on HMIS. Where participants discussed multiple engagements with CE over time from multiple agencies, it was sometimes difficult for them to remember or clarify when their comments related to one agency or another. Additionally, some people discussed CE experiences occurring up to several years before, and others had begun the CE process very close to the time of their interview. We noted which agency or agencies individuals may have worked with by considering both HMIS records and interviewees' self-reports. Of the 16 interviewees, 10-12 interacted with AM, 4-7 interacted with TMA, and 1 indicated interacting with CCS. During CE, 7 participants chose Diversion, 2 chose Priority Pool, 5 indicated choosing both (3 sequentially and 2 said at the same time), 1 reported being unsure which they chose, and 1 said they received neither. The amount of time participants remained in contact with CE agencies was also difficult to determine based on their responses. Several participants reported limited contact (0-2 conversations) and others reported being in contact over weeks or months and having contact that ranged from daily to monthly.



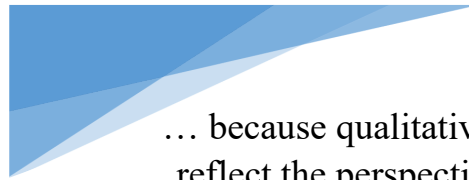
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Data Analysis and Findings

Coding of Qualitative Data

Identifying themes from the interviews followed key practices of a Grounded Theory approach (Chun Tie et al., 2019) to qualitative data analysis. This method uses the transcripts themselves, rather than preconceived theories, to guide the development and refinement of a coding scheme. Moreover, because qualitative analysis can reflect the perspectives and biases of researchers, we used a diverse team to develop themes and to code transcripts. This team included both principal investigators (a White woman and White man), a bi-racial man with extensive experience in direct service, leadership, and race and equity scholarship, and three undergraduate students (a Black man, a Filipino man, and a White woman).

Multiple members of the team independently read a subset of the transcripts to identify emergent themes. Following discussion, the female PI developed an initial coding manual. Members of the team continued to use and refine the manual throughout the process of coding new transcripts. For analyses reported here, each transcript was coded by two members of the team and discrepancies were resolved by the PI.



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Grounded Theory involves not only identifying themes, but also considering theoretical understandings that might emerge from the context of participants' responses and connections among themes. To this end, the analysis below presents a summary of key themes as well as observations informed by survey responses, patterns across themes, contextual considerations, and conversations among coders, interviewers, and other members of the project team.

The coding manual used for analysis identified seven major thematic areas, subcategories within each area, and specific codes within subcategories. We also identified representative quotes to illustrate specific themes, and these will be available in future drafts of this report. Some of the language used to label or summarize themes reflects participants' own words, and so may lack clarity or specificity. Additionally, to simplify the presentation of findings, we have combined, where possible, similar themes across and within each level of coding. The seven major coding areas emerging from the analysis were:

1. Initiating CE Services
2. Help Received Through CE

3. Problems with CE
4. Relationship with Case Worker or Staff
5. Life Challenges
6. Race Related Themes
7. Other Issues

Satisfaction Ratings

Most of the interviewees provided ratings of satisfaction with CE and with their caseworker using a 4-point scale for each question (*not at all, somewhat, very, or extremely satisfied*). A summary of satisfaction ratings for the 16 participants appears below. In general, participants reported higher satisfaction with their caseworkers than with CE. Five individuals indicated being *very* or *extremely satisfied* with CE, and eight indicated being *very* or *extremely satisfied* with their caseworker, with three of these overlapping for both items. Four individuals indicated being *not at all satisfied* with CE and three of these also indicated being *not at all satisfied* with their case worker. Additionally, one individual indicated being *somewhat* satisfied with CE and *not at all satisfied* with one caseworker, but *extremely* satisfied with a different case worker they eventually worked with later.

Satisfaction with Coordinated Entry	# of participants
<i>very or extremely</i>	5
<i>somewhat</i>	6
<i>not at all</i>	4
(1 missing)	
Satisfaction with Case Worker	# of participants
<i>very or extremely</i>	8
<i>somewhat</i>	3
<i>not at all</i>	4
(2 missing, 1 gave two ratings for different case workers)	

To understand how qualitative themes related to overall satisfaction with CE and caseworkers, we also noted how satisfaction ratings by particular participants related to themes that appeared in their transcripts. Some of these observations appear in the analysis below.

Connecting with Coordinated Entry

Most participants used 211 to connect with coordinated entry. Many heard about CE through word of mouth and others through referral by other agencies. One person connected using online information. Some respondents indicated more than one way they connected with CE.

How Did They Hear About or Connect with CE?	# of participants
211	9
word of mouth, friends, family	5
online	1
referral (1 each): Catholic Community Services, Veterans Services, Child Protective Services, United Way, YWCA, welfare	6

Experiences with Coordinated Entry

Participants discussed a range of factors that were helpful or positive about coordinated entry resources.

- Housing resources that were particularly helpful included actual housing, moving costs, caseworker help with landlords, and housing lists (although other participants did not find these lists helpful).
- Participants also pointed to other helpful resources or referrals, particularly for furniture and food. The table below lists other forms of help mentioned less frequently.

Helpful or Positive Aspects of CE Resources and Outcomes	# of participants
Generally positive	8-9
Housing resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Housing that came through (4) ● Housing list (3) ● Moving costs (4) ● Place to stay while waiting (1) ● Case worker connected regularly with landlord (1) 	10
Other helpful resources or referrals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Furniture (4) ● Food (3) ● Personal hygiene and diapers (1) ● Employment (1) ● School (1) ● Parenting support (1) ● Counseling (1) ● General (1) 	6

There were also a number of aspects of CE identified as not helpful.

- Participants frequently mentioned issues related to time. Many participants indicated dissatisfaction with the waiting time for housing and other administrative processes, as well as uncertainty about when assistance would be available. One person indicated that the expectations for them to complete tasks quickly was challenging and stressful.

Problems and Challenges with CE	# of participants
Issues of timing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Waiting (9) ● Uncertainty about when/if things will happen (4) ● Rushed to do things (1) 	11
Problems with housing resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Housing option affordability (5) ● Housing lists not helpful (4+) ● No temporary housing while waiting (2) ● Poor quality housing referral (1) ● Income too high for PP, had to quit job (1) ● Past eviction (1) ● Got nothing (1) 	10
Complexity and poor understanding of CE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unclear (4) ● Too complex (3) ● Too many hoops and tasks (4) ● Misunderstood (1) 	6
Negative emotional toll <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frustration, disappointment (4) ● Invisibility (4) ● Stress, anxiety (2) 	6
Other problems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Residency in two counties complicated eligibility for CE (1) ● 211 rudeness (1) ● Lack of initial responsiveness (1) ● Easy to fall through the cracks (1) 	4

- There were also problems with housing resources including lack of affordable options, housing lists that were not helpful (not affordable, not available, poor contact information), and poor quality of housing offered. Two individuals mentioned dissatisfaction with the lack of temporary housing available while waiting for other housing solutions to come through. One person mentioned that their family income was too high so one of the adults in the family had to quit a job so they were eligible for the

priority pool. Another person mentioned past eviction as creating an obstacle to a housing opportunity that might have otherwise gone through.

- Responses of 6 individuals reflected difficulty understanding CE processes or being overwhelmed by the complexity. They felt aspects of the process were not clear, were too complex, or involved too many tasks and “hoops” to go through.
- Other problems identified by one person each included residency in two counties (King and Pierce) creating obstacles to eligibility, rude treatment by 211 staff, lack of responsiveness in the initial contact, and a general statement about it being easy to fall through the cracks.
- Participants also mentioned the emotional toll of these problems including disappointment, frustration, stress, and feelings of not being seen or recognized (invisibility).

Relationships and Communication with Caseworkers

We coded comments related specifically to relationships with caseworkers separately from those above, although in many cases the themes overlapped for a particular participant (e.g., helpfulness, ineffectiveness, invisibility).

Overall, more than half of the participants expressed satisfaction and appreciation for their caseworkers, although many of these had experienced mixed satisfaction across experiences with multiple caseworkers and CE experiences.



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- The most frequently mentioned quality of positive relationships was regular and responsive communication from caseworkers, which included returning messages promptly and reaching out to check in, offer assistance, or follow up with steps in the process. The participants with the highest ratings for CE and caseworker satisfaction frequently mentioned this theme, whereas the least satisfied rarely did. Some participants also felt positively about regular communication that happened in a variety of modes (text, call, email, etc.), although this theme was also present for some less satisfied clients.
- The second most frequent positive theme, also related to high satisfaction, was trust and honesty. Participants frequently mentioned this theme even when housing resources had not come through or they were facing other challenges or uncertainty. A related theme

was clear, direct, and transparent communication, and another was when caseworkers followed through with what they said they were going to do for the client.

- Participants also identified encouragement and support as positive characteristics. Two individuals also indicated that supportive “pushing” could be helpful (in the context of a trusting relationship).
- Shared identity was also a positive theme, with two individuals linking trust and understanding to sharing a racial identity with the caseworker, and one person mentioning shared status as veterans.

Relationship and Communication with Caseworker	# of participants
Overall Quality, Satisfaction, and Helpfulness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mostly or all positive (6) ● Mostly or all negative (3) ● Mixed - different staff (7) 	16
Positive Aspects of Relationship and Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Regular, responsive, consistent communication (9) ● Trustworthy, trusted, honest (8) ● Encouraging, supportive (4) ● Transparent, clear, direct (3) ● Multiple communication methods (text, call, email, etc.) (3) ● Followed through (3) ● Shared my racial (2) or other (1) identity ● Provided helpful pushing (2) ● Organized (2) ● Comfortable (1) ● Respectful (1) ● Flexible, accommodating (1) ● Being able to request and change caseworkers (1) ● A friend (1) 	11
Negative Aspects of Relationship and Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unresponsive (9) ● Ineffective (4) ● Not trustworthy (3) ● Not enough communication (3) ● Unreliable, inconsistent (2) ● Confusing, not clear (2) ● Didn't follow through when I did my part (1) ● Didn't remember me (1) ● Had an attitude with me (1) ● Said what I wanted to hear (1) ● Re-opened trauma (1) 	10

- Less frequently, participants mentioned other characteristics related to caseworkers including organization, respect, comfort, flexibility, and being a friend.
- One individual had repeated challenges with one caseworker (being unresponsive), and felt positively about being able to request a change to another caseworker whom they then worked with in a more positive way.

Negative aspects of caseworker relationships, communication, or behavior were generally linked to lower satisfaction.

- Lack of responsiveness, particularly to communication attempts, were mentioned by a majority of participants and linked to low satisfaction. Three participants also mentioned that there was not enough communication generally.
- Some participants described negative aspects of caseworker behavior as ineffective or inconsistent.
- A theme of low trust was expressed in a variety of ways and was frequently related to lack of responsiveness, inconsistency, and invisibility. A few people indicated a lack of trust directly. Two indicated a lack of follow-through by the caseworker. One participant said the caseworker did not remember them, and another felt the caseworker was simply telling them what they wanted to hear.
- Two individuals described the caseworker communication as confusing or unclear, although many others expressed lack of clarity regarding the CE system more generally (see above).
- Other negative themes mentioned by at least one person included being treated with a bad attitude and feeling that interactions re-opened trauma.

Life Challenges as Context for CE Experiences

We coded themes related to participants' lives that did not directly characterize their CE experience, but indirectly provide context.

- Most participants indicated lack of stable, affordable housing as a challenge, and most identified this as the reason they sought CE services. One person mentioned that their housing challenges were related to having a history of eviction and another indicated that their housing challenges were related to having a felony history.
- Fourteen of the participants cared for children when they went through CE, and about half of these indicated that parenting or childcare was a challenge in the context of experiencing homelessness.
- Some participants mentioned other financial challenges generally, or related to the need for resources such as gas, clothing, or tuition, or to lack of employment or

underemployment. The survey results revealed that the majority of households had incomes under \$12,000, and the rest did not exceed \$35,000. At the time of the interview, five participants were looking for work, two were working full-time, and most of the rest were working part-time.

- Some participants mentioned emotional, social, or health challenges including stress, hopelessness, mental illness, COVID, and lack of a support network.
- Two mentioned coming from out of state and not knowing the area as a challenge.

Life Challenges Alongside CE Experience	# of participants
Housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unstable, unaffordable, or no housing (9) ● Felony history (1) ● Eviction history (1) 	9+
Children, parenting, single-parenting, childcare (7)	7
Other financial challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● general financial and expenses (money, gas, clothes) (5) ● underemployment, can't work (2) ● student - tuition (1) 	5
Health, emotional, and social strain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stressed, overwhelmed, hopeless (3) ● Covid (1) ● Mental illness (1) ● Lack of support network (1) 	4
Unfamiliar with area, coming from out of state	2

Race-Related Themes

Interviewers asked participants specifically about housing experiences and CE experiences related to race, including difficulties they faced or positive ways caseworkers dealt with issues of race. Themes emerged related to both negative experiences with racism and positive dynamics with caseworkers.

- Four individuals reported feeling or suspecting racial bias or discrimination from landlords or housing managers. One person indicated experiencing racism within a transitional housing program, and one person indicated experiencing racism from their caseworker.
- Five participants mentioned themes related to systemic racism such as general or everyday experiences of racism, financial difficulty linked to being Black, and navigating stereotypes about race and criminality.

- Four indicated that they did not experience discrimination themselves or that they thought CE or caseworkers were not biased. Two people linked this to their caseworker being a person of color.
- Four participants seemed not to want to engage the question, or expressed uncertainty about whether they experienced racism. It is important to note that we were intentional in using interviewers who shared participants' racial identity to minimize the potential harm of asking participants to think about and discuss issues of racial mistreatment or trauma.
- There were other themes or suggestions related to race. Two people suggested it would be helpful if their caseworker was Black, one person (a TMA client) appreciated that the caseworker connected them to other Black people, and one recommended (diversity) training for all staff.

Race-Related Themes	# of participants
Housing related discrimination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● From landlords and housing managers (4) ● Within transitional housing (1) ● Suspected from case worker (1) ● Training would be useful for staff (1) 	7
Systemic racism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Experiences of everyday or general racism (4) ● Related to financial well-being, minimum wage (1) ● Related to felony history, stereotypes about incarceration (2) 	5
Felt treatment was fair and non-discriminatory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Because caseworker was Black/bi-racial (2) 	4
Other race themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Don't know, hard to answer, ambivalence about treatment (4) ● It would help if caseworker was Black (2) ● Caseworker connected me with Black people (1) ● Training would be helpful (1) 	7

Other Themes

A number of additional themes did not fit easily into the categories above, but reflect participants' understanding of or experiences with coordinated entry.

- We had asked participants about whether they chose Diversion or the priority pool and how that decision was made. While most knew what they had chosen, 5 participants indicated that the question or the experience was confusing or complex, or that they didn't remember or know what they chose; 4 indicated that they were the one who made

the decision; 2 said the caseworker decided, and 1 said they decided together. Additionally, 1 person said guidance provided by the caseworker was useful, and 1 said it was not useful.

- We also coded statements reflecting participants’ beliefs or understanding about Diversion and the priority pool. One person seemed to understand the process clearly, and a few understood that they could choose one option and later choose another. Others seemed unaware of issues such as the timeframe for being able to re-engage CE services if they had not been housed or in contact with their caseworker.
- Some participants mentioned beliefs that affected their decision: one person said they heard that the priority pool was supposed to be better than Diversion, another that Diversion is faster than the priority pool, and a third that Diversion was a one-time thing. Some participants shared general impressions of CE including that CE is supposed to help people with kids, that caseworkers are overloaded, and that they didn’t know who created (the ineffective) housing lists.
- Additional themes included experiencing gender stereotyping (not from caseworker), engaging in training to work at a shelter (while staying at that shelter currently), and reflecting that they could have participated more actively in the CE process themselves to have a more positive experience.

Other Themes	# of participants
Choosing between Diversion and PP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Too complex, poor understanding (5) ● Client made the choice (4) ● Caseworker made the choice (2) ● Both decided together (1) ● Understood 30- and 90- day timeline for Diversion and PP (1) ● Seemed Diversion-ready so chose Diversion (2) ● PP is supposed to be better than Diversion (1) ● Diversion is faster than PP (1) ● Diversion is a one-time thing (1) ● Guidance from caseworker was useful (1) ● Guidance from caseworker was not useful (1) 	11
Perceptions and beliefs about CE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CE is supposed to help people with kids (1) ● Caseworkers are overloaded (1) ● Doesn’t know who creates the housing lists (1) 	2
Other themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gender stereotyping (1) ● Training to work at shelter (1) ● I could have participated more actively (1) 	3

What Would Participants Change about CE?

Interviewers asked participants directly, what is one thing they would most want to change about their coordinated entry experience. Most interviewees provided one or two responses. The answers were included as part of the themes described above, but we also provide the list here as a description of participants' own suggestions.

- Increase the amount monetary help (3)
 - for moving (2)
 - for housing (1)
- Speed up the process (3)
 - to get housing (1)
 - generally for steps (2)
- Get me into some housing while I wait for housing
- Get me housing - take me seriously
- Provide more affordable housing listings
- Provide contact numbers for housing that work
- Be more patient with clients
- More communication (4)
 - Caseworker, somebody, should call more often (1)
 - Follow up with their clients (1)
 - More communication (1)
 - More follow-up communication (1)
- Caseworkers should follow through with their part, especially when you do your part
- Have a person of color on the line
- Educate caseworkers (about inclusion, race)
- Give my caseworker a promotion



Conclusion, Summary, and Recommendations

Comments on Strengths and Limitations of the Study

Although our sample was small and not representative of all Black clients using the CE system, the interviews do provide a snapshot of the experiences of 16 Black clients who engaged with CE in the last year, were able to be contacted, and agreed to participate in the interview. Our sample included mostly women parenting at least one child during their CE experience, although the sample also included four men with children and two women without children. Additionally, although the small sample does not allow assessment of particular agencies or CE approaches such as the cultural hub model, the themes identified do relate to issues that cultural hub models or other inclusive CE practices are intended to address.

Our findings point to factors that may be related to clients' positive and negative experiences with CE. Importantly, because our analyses reflect the subjective experiences and reports of clients, and not, for example, of their caseworkers, the themes may not reflect the complexity or fullness of events or interactions. However, clients' subjective experiences of the CE system as effective or ineffective, friendly or unwelcoming, clear or confusing, are important outcomes in themselves because such subjective evaluations may influence clients' willingness or ability to navigate CE processes concurrently or in the future.

As with all research, the quality of participants' responses may also be limited by their understanding of research processes and questions, and their willingness to provide full and honest responses. We took several steps to address these challenges. The development of recruitment and interview scripts was a collaborative effort of a diverse group of individuals, many with extensive experience working with clients of Pierce County's homelessness system and some with lived experience of homelessness. The recruiters and interviewers were all people of color with experience and training related to trauma informed communication with individuals experiencing housing instability and homelessness. We also compensated participants with Visa payment cards to acknowledge the time, effort, and value of their participation.

Analysis of participants' narratives can also reflect the biases of researchers. To this end, we used a team approach to develop a coding manual, code transcripts, and synthesize themes in this report, with a team that included individuals with diverse backgrounds and identities. Ongoing analysis and interpretation of findings was informed by conversations with the interviewers, service providers, members of the HUD equity demonstration project workgroup, and other stakeholders.

Finally, a strength of the study is our effort to center the voices, experiences, and outcomes of Black individuals using the coordinated entry system. This is a best practice within a *Targeted Universalism* approach to systems analysis and change (Powell et al., 2019) endorsed recently within the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan to Reduce Homelessness. Central to the Targeted Universalism approach is the idea that improving systems requires attention to the

experiences and outcomes of distinct groups, particularly those most vulnerable and/or whose outcomes are furthest from the universal goal. Within a Targeted Universalism approach, knowledge and decisions that arise from attending to targeted populations will improve outcomes within the system more broadly. In Pierce County, Black individuals and families are overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness, second only, perhaps, to Native American and Indigenous people. While some issues attended to by centering these populations, such as effects of structural or interpersonal racism, may be unique to groups that have been historically or chronically marginalized, our findings point to themes that can improve CE and homelessness systems more generally for all clients. The homelessness system can function most effectively and equitably when decisions and policies are responsive to the needs of all unique groups, particularly those most overrepresented within the homelessness system and those whose outcomes are furthest from the universal goal of permanent, stable housing.



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Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

Although our findings do not reflect experiences of all clients using coordinated entry, or even of all Black clients, our findings may be useful in improving CE systems for all clients, and particularly for Black clients. Several points stand out from our analysis, and we offer recommendations informed by these themes.

- Caseworkers play a critical role in helping individuals navigate the CE system. Clients identify responsive, regular, timely, honest, and clear communication as something that makes the experience more positive. A trusting relationship, which relates to the quality and frequency of communication, also seems to be important. Resources, policies, and training that help caseworkers to connect and communicate frequently and responsively may result in more positive caseworker-client relationships, better engagement from clients, and better outcomes.
- Pierce County does not have enough affordable housing, either for permanent, stable homes or for short-term housing while individuals wait for more permanent housing. More should be done to create a range of housing options that meet people's needs with as little delay as possible.
- Individuals who identify as Black or African American frequently experience interpersonal and systemic racism when searching for housing and navigating service and housing systems. Having a caseworker who shares the client's identity may be a

foundation for developing a trusting relationship in this context. Multicultural training may also benefit all caseworkers working with clients with marginalized identities.

- Given the challenges of limited housing options, CE clients find it especially frustrating and stressful when they receive referral resources (particularly housing lists) that include outdated contact information, unavailable housing, and mostly unaffordable options. It may be helpful to more regularly update such lists and tailor them to the characteristics or challenges faced by particular clients. In one case, a client spoke positively about their caseworker's role in vetting landlords and later checking in with the landlord regularly once they were housed. This may be a service useful for some clients who do not feel confident navigating housing options, especially for individuals who have previously experienced housing-related or systemic racism.
- The CE system, including the policies and timelines related to Diversion and the priority pool, can seem complicated, unclear, and overwhelming to clients. In addition to clear communication between caseworkers and clients, other resources such as accessible on-line resources may be useful. Efforts to develop and evaluate these tools in collaboration with people experiencing homelessness may be particularly valuable.
- One aspect of the complexity of the CE system may be the many tasks and social contacts that clients need to manage. Reducing the number of contacts may improve trust, reduce the number of people with whom personal information must be relayed, and improve outcomes. Additionally, CE approaches that assist clients in CE system navigation may reduce the number of contacts a client needs to manage and improve their ability to manage the points of contact that remain.
- Some circumstances create challenges for particular people navigating CE. These include individuals residing between two counties while homeless, households with incomes too high to qualify for the priority pool, and people with histories of eviction or felonies. It may be useful to develop policies and resources to better serve people in these particularly challenging situations.
- While our small sample does not allow us to evaluate the effectiveness of particular programs or the relative effectiveness of different CE models, many of the issues above speak to the strengths of cultural hub resources such as the TMA-CCS partnership in Pierce County. This cultural hub model centers relationship-building, trust, and cultural competency in supporting Black clients. The findings suggest that communication between caseworkers and clients is an important factor that can determine the quality of an individual's experience with coordinated entry. A cultural hub approach may reduce



The findings suggest that communication between caseworkers and clients is an important factor that can determine the quality of an individual's experience with coordinated entry

negative experiences related to communication and trust through improved cultural competence of caseworkers. By enhancing trust and communication, cultural competence may give a caseworker greater information with which to assist the client in meeting needs.



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Appendices

Script for Arranging Date for Interview

Hello. My name is (name) and I work at (Associated Ministries/the RISE Center in the Hilltop). I'm calling because you gave permission to a staff member from (AM/RISE) for me to contact you to participate in an interview study on coordinated entry for housing. If you are still interested, I am calling to set up a good time for us to do the interview and to answer any questions you have. Would that be alright?

How are you today?

The interview would ask you about your experience with the coordinated entry process in order to improve those services, and your answers won't be connected with your name or your personal treatment by those service organizations. The interview takes about an hour and you would receive a gift card for \$50 as compensation (it will be either for Walmart or a Visa card). Would you be willing to set up a time to do an interview either in person at the RISE center or over the phone? Do you have any questions?

I want to remind you that the interview would be audio-taped, and then to protect your privacy, the recording would be destroyed after it was converted to a written record with any identifying information such as your name or names of family members removed.

(Set up time and modality. Ask if it is ok to send a reminder text or email. Record name, ID#, and interview information on the interview planning sheet. Interview planning sheet should be kept secure and provided to one of the principal investigators at the end of interviewing.)

Interview Script

Interview Introduction and Consent (unrecorded)

Hello. I'm (name). How are you today? What do you prefer to be called?

Before we begin, I want to describe what we will be doing and get your formal consent to participate.

- The purpose of this research is to better understand what is working and not working with the Coordinated Entry system for housing in Pierce County.
- Additionally, research shows there are racial disparities in who is able to secure and keep housing, including here in Pierce County. This research is meant especially to help make

the coordinated entry system better for people who identify as Black, Brown, or African American, and to understand what is working and not working.

- Although our conversation will not influence the type or quality of services you personally receive, your participation will help local decision-makers and service providers to improve services and outcomes for people using the coordinated entry system in the future.

As someone mentioned to you when they invited you to be in the study, I will be audio-taping our interview, and to protect your privacy, the recording will be destroyed after it has been converted into a written record with identifying information removed. We also take other steps to protect your confidentiality and these are described in a consent form which you can read or which I can read to you before we begin. You can also ask me any questions before we begin recording or at any stage of the process. Would you like me to read the form or would you like to read it yourself?

(Read the form if needed.) Do you have any questions?

(If in person :) You can indicate your consent to participate by signing the form.

(If conducting the interview by phone:)

You can indicate your willingness to participate verbally. Do you consent to participate?

I want to remind you that our conversation is confidential. If you share any names or personal information about peers or family members, any identifying information will be removed from the written record. You are also free to ask me questions at any point or not to answer any questions I ask, or to take a break. Additionally, if you want to stop the interview at any time, that is fine, and you will still receive the gift card.

When I start recording, we will talk for about 30 minutes and then I will stop the recording and collect some background information from you.

Our conversation will focus on reasons that led you to seek out housing assistance and how you first got connected with coordinated entry. We will then shift to talk about your positive and negative experiences with the services you have used or tried to use. After we have done that, we will focus on issues of race and discrimination in particular in a bit more depth. Do you have any questions?

With your permission, I will turn on the recording now. Is that OK?

- III. **Recorded Interview Segment:** (Begin recording) Today is (date) and I am interviewing (initials), whose ID # is _____, and who did coordinated entry at (TMA, CCS, AM).

1. As background, can you tell me how you first heard about or connected with coordinated entry for housing, and what factors led you to seek help?
 - 1a. Did you use any coordinated entry or housing services before working with (Tacoma Ministerial Alliance, Catholic Community Services, Associated Ministries) this last year?
2. When you went through coordinated entry this time, did you choose Diversion or instead go on the priority pool waitlist, and how did you make that decision?
3. Next, I'd like to ask about positive aspects of your contact with coordinated entry services at (TMA, CCS, AM) or anywhere else you also tried to get housing services. What aspects of services or treatment were you satisfied with and what was particularly helpful?
4. What challenges or obstacles did you face in the coordinated entry process or in accessing or receiving services? Can you describe what you were less satisfied with?
5. Most people going through coordinated entry meet with one or more case workers or staff members; how would you describe your relationship, connection, or treatment with those individuals?
 - 5a. How would you describe your feelings of trust or comfort working with folks at (TMA/CCS/AM)?
6. What kinds of things made you feel more or less of a sense of trust in working with coordinated entry?
7. Next, I'd like to ask about the length of your connection with your case worker or organization. In what ways did you connect with the service providers over time, and who decided how long you or how often you would be connected?
8. Are there any additional or unexpected ways that your connection with housing services in the last year helped you with your housing or personal needs? For example, did your provider connect you with other resources or with other sources of social or practical support? What was particularly helpful?
9. Next we are interested in how your experiences might be affected by issues of race. Racial inequities and histories of anti-Black discrimination in society are also reflected in high rates of homelessness among Black families and individuals. Your input in this research is valuable to help us understand these findings and to make recommendations about how to improve services. Are there ways that getting access to services or housing becomes difficult or uncomfortable because of race? Or, are there positive ways you feel service providers have dealt with issues of race?

10. What is one thing you would most like to change about your experience with coordinated entry or Diversion services?
11. Is there **anything else** you want to add related to your experiences?

Transition.

I have turned off the recording now. **Thank you** all for your time and effort in sharing your experiences and perspectives. I also have a survey form so we can collect personal background information. I will ask you the questions and write down your answers on a survey form.

Background Information Questionnaire

1. How do you describe your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender Male
- Transgender Female
- Non-binary
- Other
- Prefer Not to Answer

2. How do you describe your race or ethnicity? (please check all that apply)

- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native American or American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Asian/Asian American
- Native Hawaiian
- Pacific Islander
- White
- Other (please specify): _____

3. What is your age? _____

4. How many children under the age of 18 do you have? _____

5. At the time you went through coordinated entry,
a. how many people were in your household? _____
b. and how many of those people were under the age of 18? _____

6. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.

- Nursery school to 8th grade
- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree

7. Employment Status: Are you currently...?

- Employed part-time for wages
- Employed full-time for wages
- Self-employed
- Out of work and looking for work
- Out of work but not currently looking for work
- A homemaker
- A student
- Military
- Retired
- Unable to work

8. What is your current household income?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than \$12,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$12,000 - \$19,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$20,000 - \$34,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$35,000 - \$49,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 - \$74,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75,000 - \$99,999 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> over \$100,000 |

9. Do you identify as a U.S. Veteran? yes no

10. Are you currently experiencing homelessness? yes no

11. What is your current housing situation?

- Currently in a private house or apartment
- Staying in transitional housing
- Staying in an emergency shelter
- Staying temporarily with family or friends
- Staying in a vehicle
- Sleeping outdoors or in a tent
- Other: _____

12. In the last year, how many months have you been homeless? _____ months (out of 12 possible)

13. a. How many different times have you been homeless overall in your life? _____ times

b. Approximately how long have you been homeless overall in your life?
 _____ months OR _____ years

14. In your most recent coordinated entry experience, did you choose Diversion assistance or the Priority Pool? (check one) Diversion Priority Pool

15. How long did you stay in contact with your case worker following your initial appointment?
_____ (note days, weeks, or months)

16. Overall, how satisfied were you with your coordinated entry experience?

- _____ not at all satisfied
- _____ somewhat satisfied
- _____ very satisfied
- _____ extremely satisfied

17. Overall, how satisfied were you with your relationship with your case work or service provider for coordinated entry?

- _____ not at all satisfied
- _____ somewhat satisfied
- _____ very satisfied
- _____ extremely satisfied

18. Is there any other information about your experience you would like to share?

IV. Closing

1. Thank the participant and explain gift card (electronic or in person)
2. Offer referral information as appropriate and desired by interviewee.



Consent to Participate in Interview Research

Research Title: Understanding Pierce County Coordinated Entry Services

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This research project is designed to gather information about how individuals who identify as Black or African American experience the Coordinated Entry system for people seeking assistance with housing insecurity in Pierce County. The information gained from this research will help local service providers and policy makers understand strengths and limitations of coordinated entry and housing services, and will be used to improve services and outcomes. The findings may also inform research articles about coordinated entry systems and racial equity more generally.

To accomplish this research, we are interviewing people who have used the coordinated entry system in the last year. Interviews will take approximately an hour and will be recorded. Your participation is voluntary and confidential, and your responses will not be connected with your name or personal identifying information. The interview questions will ask about your housing history and experiences with housing-related services and coordinated entry. The interviewer will also ask some survey questions about your personal characteristics and background as context, and will record these responses in writing but will not audio tape these responses. You are free not to answer any of the questions or to stop participation at any time.

Interviewers are trained in procedures to protect your confidentiality, and participating in this research will not affect the type or quality of services you are entitled to receive. To protect your confidentiality, the audio tape and written records of responses will include a participant code number, but will not include your name. Audio recordings will be transcribed into writing and any identifying information such as names will be removed from these written transcripts. The audio recordings will then be destroyed. Only members of the research team trained in confidentiality procedures will have access to recordings or transcripts. All data files of transcripts and survey responses will be stored on password-protected computers, and will be destroyed after 3 years. Consent forms, which may include identifying information, will be destroyed after 5 years and will be stored until then in a locked file cabinet in a different location from the transcripts and survey responses.

In creating reports of our findings, key ideas from your interview will be combined with those from other respondents to identify patterns and themes. Reports of the findings may include brief quotations from the transcripts to illustrate important themes. These research reports of the findings will not include names of individuals or personally-identifying information.

The potential benefits to you for taking part in this study are contributing to existing knowledge of coordinated entry system and efforts to improve these services for Black and African American individuals and families. As compensation for your participation, you will receive a \$50 gift card. When the study is complete, you may also contact the researchers and we will be happy to share reports of our findings with you.

All studies include some risks to participants. In response to questions, you may choose to share sensitive or upsetting information which can be stressful. Additionally, although we take many precautions to protect your identity, there is some risk associated with sharing personal and sensitive information and any harm that might come from a breach of confidentiality.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You do not have to respond to any question that you do not want to answer. You may choose not to answer specific questions and you may stop participating at any time without penalty and still receive the gift card. Additionally, your decision to participate (or not) will have no effect on your present or future relationship with individuals or organizations providing housing services. You are also free to ask any questions of the interviewer before providing consent or at any time during the interview process. If, at the end of the interview, you choose to withdraw your participation, the interviewer will destroy the recordings and written records of your participation.

This study has been reviewed and approved by The Evergreen State College Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have any questions about the study or would like to receive a report of the findings, please contact Dr. Michael Crow by e-mail at crawm@evergreen.edu or by phone at (360) 867-8620. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact Evergreen's Institutional Review Board at irb@evergreen.edu

Consent Statement

I acknowledge that I am at least eighteen years of age and that I understand the information above. My signature or verbal assent indicates my consent to voluntarily participate in this research. I also acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form or had a copy emailed to me.

Participant Signature

Date

Or affirmation of verbal consent indicated by a check mark here: _____

Witness/Interviewer Signature

Date