Implementation of a North Texas County's Coordinated Entry System

James Petrovich, Ph.D.
Texas Christian University
Department of Social Work

Erin Roark Murphy
University of Texas at Arlington
School of Social Work

Background

- In 2010, Opening Doors identified that local system coordination played a key role in reducing homelessness

- Continuums of Care were required to establish and operate a *centralized or coordinated assessment system*

- This system was meant to increase the efficiency of local response system

- Improve fairness and ease of access to resources

- Later, HUD clarified the intent was not to centralize assessment
- Rather, communities should establish an assessment process that was easy to access
- Based on a common assessment
- Terminology now used was *coordinated entry*

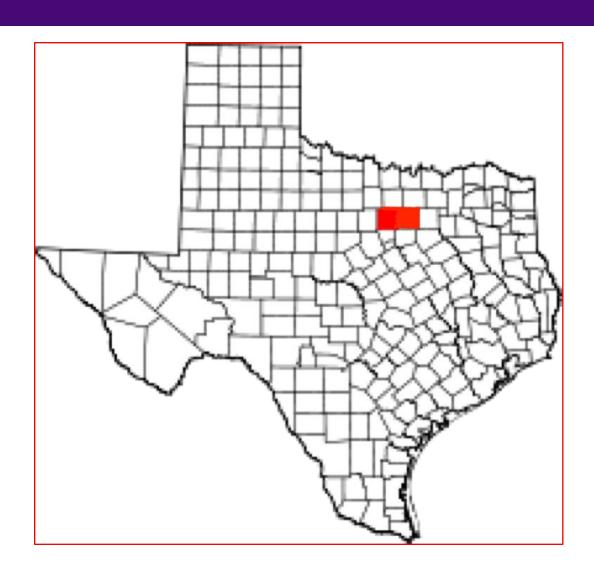Effective Coordinated Entry (CE) systems are considered to:
1. Prioritize people with the greatest need
2. Be low barrier
3. Be Housing First oriented
4. Be person-centered
5. Promote fair and equal access
6. Not delay access to emergency services
7. Use standardized assessment
8. Be inclusive
9. Refer individuals to all ESG and CoC-funded projects

Qualities of Effective CE System (con't):

10. Provide assess to eligible referrals
11. Include unsheltered households
12. Engage in ongoing planning and consultation
13. Be Informed by local planning
14. Leverage local attributes
15. Promote safety planning
16. Use HMIS
17. Cover the entire CoC

TX 601 Continuum of Care

Tarrant County

- 2 million
- Fort Worth (5)
- Arlington (7)

Parker County

- 130,000
- Weatherford (31)

Homelessness in Tarrant and Parker Counties (2017)

- 1,924 (1912 – Tarrant / 12 – Parker)
- 390 Unsheltered
- 1,294 Sheltered / 20 Safe Haven / 220 Transitional Housing

- 2016 - Redesign of initial CE system
- Facilitated by CSH
- Community stakeholder driven
- Focused on four CE components
  - Access
  - Assessment
  - Assignment
  - Accountability

Process

- Individuals assessed through access points

- If eligible, placed on list based on housing type

- As housing opening become available, eligible individuals assigned to navigators

- Locate individuals and assist with obtaining documents for housing – including verification of disability / verification of homelessness

- Client is then interviewed for housing placement*

Process (con't)

- Navigator then hands client off to housing program case manager (HCM)
- HCM assists client in locating housing
- Assists with execution of lease
- Provides follow-up supportive services
- System implemented 6/2017

TX 601 CE System Evaluation

- Formative evaluation approach

- Examine process

- Identify opportunities for improvement

- Qualitative methods

- Triangulated data from multiple stakeholders
  - CE clients (currently and formerly homeless)
  - CE navigators
  - System case managers

TCU   TX 601 CE System Evaluation

- Conducted focus groups
  - CE Clients (CH = 21 / FH = 6)
  - CE Navigators (5)
- Data collected December – January 2017
- Asked participants to discuss:
  - Experiences of what is working or not working with CES
  - Suggestions for improvement

Evaluation Results

Focus groups

- Analyses identified 5 main themes
- Opportunities to improve this still developing process:

    1. Importance of interpersonal interactions
    2. Effective traits of workers
    3. Need for communication and collaboration
    4. Struggles adapting to new system
    5. Community impediments to CE efficiency/effectiveness

1. Importance of interpersonal relationships: Dignity and Respect

(C)"…if you're homeless and you're not under housing yet, man, people are under a lot of stress. When you have people that look down on you and they treat you with disrespect, it just adds to anger. You get a lot of built up anger. It's so hard."

(C)"My first case manager. He stood me up four times, and the fourth time I was there, my appointment was at nine thirty, and it was ten twenty, and he was lollygagging and chatting about. You know, carrying on with somebody else."

1. Importance of interpersonal relationships: Uniqueness of each person

(C)"All I want from you is for you to be fully qualified to handle my situation and to give a damn. What I don't want from you is to just look at me like a number on a piece of paper. Don't deal with me the same way you deal with him, because he might be a problem. But I'm not. So when I walk in your office, don't say "y'all", "you homeless people", or "you guys". Just say "me". I'm an individual. Because I don't know what he is going through, but I know what I'm going through."

1. Importance of interpersonal relationships: Uniqueness of each person

(C)"See what each person needs and whatever their needs or wants are. Realize we're all individual people. Communicate and talk to them. Don't just come in here like I'm a criminal. Don't talk to me like you're the guard in a concentration camp. You know, be a little more sensitive."

2.Effective traits of CE navigators

(N)"**Flexibility** meaning being able to go to camp sites or just go anywhere the client wants to be, because they're not always available to come in and meet us at our location"

(N) "I think you have to be **understanding** for this position, too, because… they're just, like, they're at their lowest at that point. They've heard a lot of no's and a lot of, "You're gonna have to wait for this." They've gotten a lot of rejection. So you just need to understand where they're at and have that empathy that you need to work with them."

Effective traits of CE navigators

(N)"**Patience** and **persistence** together. You do have to be patient when working with, you know, everyone else in the continuum, because you don't know how full their case load is or what's going on with them. But then persistent as in, you know, you gotta, even if they're not responding, keep emailing and pushing. Eventually, you're gonna respond, or we'll figure something else out."

2. Effective traits of CE navigators

(N) "And your role is ever changing with the client…they don't know anything, you don't know them, and then as time goes on…they begin to become dependent on you because they don't understand what's up ahead. Like I said, they count on you and fall back on you because they really don't know what's ahead, so you can always **be that person that they fall back on**."

3. Need for communication and collaboration

(N) "I feel like it's improved, but it's still inconsistent. For me personally, it's still hit or miss. Someone could be responding to me, and then one week, I could just never get an email back, even if I'm going at it every other day. So, communication is definitely a problem."

(N) "I've had instances where I'm not receiving anything back. Nothing. And so I'll just go to the agency and say, "You know, I'm trying to get a hold of this case manager." I ask whether I could speak with them. They are rude and they don't want to hear it."

3. Need for Communication and Collaboration

(N) "We're [navigators] consistent. We're consistently reaching out saying, "Excuse me. Have you heard from this person? Excuse me, can I get some additional information?" and it is literally hit or miss like he said. So, you only have seven days to find them. And you have to move on to the next person."

4. Struggles Adapting to New System: Roles and Responsibilities

(N) "We have case managers that are like, 'Send me the documents… And then we have other case managers, like, 'We would really like for you to come to do the intake.' ….and then some case managers, they're like, "Can you give me a bus pass to go look for apartments?" Or, "Can you take them to go look for apartments?" Or, "Can you bring the furniture?" or there's a whole list of things that a case manager might ask of us."

4. Struggles Adapting to New System: Documentation

(N) "And with the unsheltered folks, too, the only documentation, like proof of homelessness, are those notes that they [outreach workers] take when they meet with someone out at their camp. So, if those notes aren't put in, they're not considered homeless. So, it's really important to stress the importance of documentation, I think, for the outreach teams more so than anybody."

5. Community Impediments: Lack of Available Housing

(C)"They got a lot of people that need second chances but not a lot of people willing to give those second chances"

(F) "I stayed out for months looking for an apartment, which since I'm a felon, and I'm up on an assault case. It was hard. You know what I'm saying? It was very hard."

(C)"Well I've been out here for a while now, trying to get housing. And it's getting kind of frustrating, you know? Everybody keeps telling me to stay patient, stay patient, but how long am I supposed to be patient?"

5. Community Impediments: Decreasing Housing Stock

(F)"My case manager told me that the new owners are not taking housing vouchers this coming up year, but since I have been there they're going to renew my lease for one more year. At the end of that year, everybody is going to be weeded out."

(F)"When [agency] owned it, there was perks…a computer room…public access phone…a food bank truck that would come to the complex. All of that was great, but then now that they changed owners, the new ownership is not going to accept housing vouchers anymore so everybody's got to move."

Evaluation Recommendations

- To promote positive relationships and effective staff:
  - Ongoing training and education for staff
  - Regular staff supervision
  - Targeted hiring
- To promote collaboration and communication:
  - Ensure feedback loops are in place
  - Increased support from CoC Lead Agency
  - Increased monitoring of program implementation

Evaluation Recommendations

- To promote adaptation to new system:
  - Clarify agency roles and responsibilities
  - Increase oversight and support from CoC Lead Agency
  - Reexamine process based on identification of slowing factors and significant barriers
- To address community impediments:
  - Landlord engagement / incentives
  - Community advocacy
  - Grassroots development

Questions?

James Petrovich – j.petrovich@tcu.edu
Erin Roark Murphy - eroarkmurphy@gmail.com