

STREET-BASED PROBLEM SOLVING: CASE STUDIES FROM LA FAMILY HOUSING

LA Family Housing (LAFH) operates in Los Angeles County to help individuals and families transition out of homelessness and poverty through a continuum of housing and supportive services. Over the past three years, LAFH has been intentionally incorporating problem solving into their work with families at-risk of and experiencing homelessness, and has recently begun problem solving with individuals who are street-based or highly at-risk of homelessness.

The following case studies were provided by Alynn Gausvik, LAFH Senior Director of Engagement, and Nicole Sarmento, LAFH Engagement Coordinator based on their work providing problem solving interventions to individuals experiencing homelessness or housing instability. These case studies highlight some of the different goals, intervention, and outcomes that can result from problem solving, along with some of the lessons learned by LA Family Housing through each case.

Case Study #1

Goal: Extend Temporary Housing and Secure Permanent Housing



Household Description: The household is composed of two adults - a blind adult dependent and their caregiver. The household had experienced 6 years of housing instability following the loss of housing due to a death. The household had been staying temporarily with family for 3 years, most recently the client's sister. The client's sister wanted to sell her house which would leave the client household without anywhere to live, creating conflict between the households. The capacity of the client household to search for new housing was limited due to caregiving needs.



Problem Solving Intervention: The client household was initially assessed by outreach staff at the public library. An Outreach Specialist connected with the client's sister and conducted three months of conflict mediation to convince the sister to delay the sale of her house until the client household could find an alternative housing option. The Outreach Specialist worked with the client household to build rapport and identify an apartment. The household was then referred to a Problem Solving Specialist to provide the household with an apartment deposit and first month's rent.



Outcomes: The household caregiver was able to increase their income through public benefits advocacy. An Outreach Specialist also made a program referral that helped increase the household's benefits. The household now has its own apartment and enough income for rent. The client's sister is selling her house, and conflict mediation helped resolve some of the tension between the two sisters.



Lessons Learned:

- Outreach workers are able to begin problem solving conversations and conflict mediation, with support from Problem Solving Specialists to access the resources to put solutions into action (such as funding for the apartment's deposit and first month's rent).
- Agency support and conflict mediate can help families address tensions that can create unnecessary housing barriers for clients.
- Conflict mediation can take a great deal of staff time and effort, but can make a significant difference in improving a client's housing situation and family supports.

Case Study #2

Goal: Secure Permanent Housing



Client Description: The client is 56 years old and legally blind. The client does not work but is able to collect Social Security Income (SSI). The client was living doubled up with her sister and two other roommates. The sister was the primary leaseholder on the current apartment and was planning to move out by the beginning of the next month. The sister would not be able to take the client nor the other roommates with her to the new apartment, and the lease would end on the old apartment once the sister moved out.



Problem Solving Intervention: A Problem Solving Specialist provided the client with grocery gift cards in the total amount of \$120 to help provide food for herself and her roommates. The Problem Solving Specialist also worked to figure out the dynamic between the client and her roommates, through which it was discovered that the household did not know how to navigate a new housing situation. An Outreach Coordinator worked to connect the client and her roommates to a low-income apartment. The Problem Solving Specialist worked with the apartment landlord to complete documentation for financial assistance.



Outcomes: The client and her roommates were accepted for the apartment. The client and her roommates were no longer doubled up and their quality of living in the new unit improved with large rooms, a stove, refrigerator, and dishwasher in unit with access to underground parking, a community room, and a computer room in the apartment complex.



Lessons Learned:

- Outreach workers are likely to meet and build relationships with people experiencing housing instability who can benefit from problem solving. LA Family Housing has seen success with training outreach workers to begin problem solving conversations and referring clients to a Problem Solving Specialist to focus on the necessary documentation, aftercare, and linkages after diversion from the homeless response system has occurred.
- It is important to consider social dynamics beyond family supports, including roommate relationships.

Case Study #3

Goal: Secure Basic Needs and Temporary Housing While Searching for Permanent Housing



Client Description: The client is 65 years old and had been homeless for about 5 months. The client was recently hospitalized for pneumonia and placed into medical aftercare for rehabilitation. The client was not receiving any income because his General Relief (GR) financial assistance lapsed, and he would not begin receiving retirement payments for a month.



Problem Solving Intervention: A Problem Solving Specialist advised the client to visit the GR Office to resolve the issue with his financial assistance benefits. The client identified a potential housing opportunity with friends in Arizona. The Problem Solving Specialist provided information on financial assistance to help him relocate if his friends agreed to let him stay. The client was also provided with bus tokens, socks, a blanket, grocery gift cards in the amount of \$40, and safety information in case he was unable to secure temporary housing or shelter for the weekend. The Problem Solving Specialist requested that he visit again the next week to discuss his case further and possible housing options in Arizona.



Outcomes: The client returned to the hospital for medical care over the weekend and returned to visit the Problem Solving Specialist the next week. The client does not currently want to further explore the option of relocation to Arizona. The Problem Solving Specialist is working to keep the client engaged, build rapport, and identify other potential housing options.



Lessons Learned:

- It can take months to determine if an individual can or cannot be diverted from the homeless system of care through problem solving. It takes time and frequent engagement to build rapport with the client and identify a problem solving intervention that works for their situation.

Case Study #4

Goal: Secure Temporary Housing While Searching for Permanent Housing



Client Description: The client is 58 years old and was recently diagnosed with congestive heart failure. The client was working until he was diagnosed with this heart condition; since then, he has stopped working and his only income is through public assistance and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The client is in the process of applying for disability and Social Security Income (SSI). The client is splitting a room with 3 roommates for \$650 a month, but has fallen behind on his rent payment. The landlord has expressed that he is willing to give the client time to get the rent money together.



Problem Solving Intervention: A Problem Solving Specialist met the client while co-located at the General Relief (GR) Office. The Problem Solving Specialist is helping the client secure legal assistance to apply for disability and SSI and is providing the client with resources to address basic needs such as hygiene supplies and grocery gift cards as needed. A Coordinated Entry assessment was conducted for the client and concerns regarding the recurrence of a substance use disorder were identified as a result of the threat of housing instability. The Problem Solving Specialist connected the client to a Substance Abuse Counselor to help address the client's current substance use concerns.



Outcomes: The client is stable and seeing the Substance Abuse Counselor regularly. The client does not report any additional needs at this time, but the Problem Solving Specialist will keep in touch to ensure that the client is stable and reaching his goals.



Lessons Learned:

- Problem solving is about providing the right supports, in the right amount, at the right time.
- Stabilization and aftercare supports are crucial for ensuring that the client is getting what they need and are remaining stable in their current housing situation.
- Problem solving interventions can include more than housing and basic needs supports, including substance use treatment and legal assistance.

Case Study #5

Goal: Relocate Back to Family Out of State



Client Description: The client is a highly vulnerable individual residing on the streets as part of a large encampment. The client has been engaged in outreach services, with an Outreach Specialist working consistently to build trust with the client and explore alternative housing options with family.



Problem Solving Intervention: The Outreach Specialist referred the client to a Problem Solving Specialist to assist the person with relocation assistance to reconnect with family out of state. The client required identification in order to relocate, which took 3 weeks to obtain due to documentation challenges in HMIS. This resulted in challenges between the Outreach Specialist and Problem Solving Specialist, as the Outreach Specialist expressed concern that the client may decide against returning to family if too much time passed between the referral and relocation.



Outcomes: After several introductions and attempts to bridge communication and culture gaps between the Outreach Specialist and the Problem Solving Specialist, the client received their identification and was still willing to relocate back to family out of state.



Lessons Learned:

- Outreach and problem solving teams work with a high volume of clients in limited environments, which can create temporary challenges around communication and culture.
- Problem solving requires a high level of case management, including dedicated efforts around documentation. These processes can require time and client advocacy.
- Rapport building is a crucial aspect of problem solving. The Outreach Specialist's time and effort building a relationship with the client helped identify relocation back to family as a housing option.