



# Diversions Operations Manual

## Overview

Family Promise of Greater Indianapolis, Inc. (FPGI)—a 501(c)(3) organization registered in the State of Indiana—operates a homeless shelter diversion program for families with children who are experiencing homelessness and are trying to enter a homeless shelter. The goal of the program is for the family to find or continue sleeping at another safe residence that is an alternative to the shelter stay, preserving limited shelter capacity for the families in most need, and reducing the trauma of a shelter stay on the families, especially the children. In a timespan of 30 days of intervention or less, 70% of families accepted into the program will achieve permanent housing. The diversion case manager achieves these outcomes through three services: mediation (e.g., resolving family disputes), advocacy (e.g., appealing tenancy applications to landlords), and/or financial assistance (e.g., paying first month's rent and security deposit for a new apartment).

## Staffing & Program Capacity

**Staffing:** The Diversion Program is operated by a part-time case manager working 20 hours per week. The case manager spends the other 20 hours per work coordinating the AfterCare program. Their official title is the Case Manager, Home-based Programs. They report to the executive director of FPGI. They have no supervisees, but receive operational support from the office manager (check writing, purchasing), the program manager (screening), and interns when available (transportation, deliveries, and intakes).

The executive director is responsible for annual review of the Diversion Operations Manual. In short-term absence (fourteen days or less) of the case manager, the executive director will delegate the minimal responsibilities needed to execute the program to other personnel. In long-term absence, the executive director will choose to suspend the program, reallocate personnel, or contract for a temporary substitute case manager.

**Program Capacity:** The Diversion Program is designed to currently serve five families at a time. A family completes the program by either securing permanent housing and transferring into AfterCare (voluntary), entering shelter, or self-terminating without either of these two outcomes. The case manager is responsible for updating the Appointments Plus online system daily by 9:00 a.m. on weekdays to indicate to all staff if there is availability in the program for a new client family. The case manager will also note availability on the dry erase board in the Day Center reception area.

## Eligibility & Acceptance

Diversion is designed to serve families that have options for temporary residence other than shelter. However, the program as FPGI operates it is not simply designed to postpone the entry

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into shelter for a month or year, but to prevent the need for shelter altogether. With that in mind, the following eligibility criteria must be met for a family to be accepted into the Diversion Program:

- 1) A client family must be homeless and requesting admission into the shelter program. “Homeless” is defined by the McKinney-Vento Act, and therefore includes families couch-surfing or doubled-up at the residence of a friend or family member, and includes families paying for a hotel with no permanent housing. Families that have a lease in their name, even with an eviction filed, are not eligible, but should be referred to local homelessness prevention programs.
- 2) A client family must have at least two members, an adult and a child under 18 years old.
  - a. All makeups of families will be included, as FPGI does not define what makes a family unit. Therefore, families can be single dads and children, single parents and children, married couples with children, unmarried couples with children, same sex couples with children, three-generational families, siblings with one’s children, etc.
  - b. A parent or guardian with a dependent son or daughter older than 18 may be accepted if that son or daughter has a disability that requires them to remain in the care of the parent or guardian.
  - c. In the case of a pregnant female candidate for the program with no children outside the womb, the unborn child may be counted as the second family member for acceptance. However, the pregnancy must be in the second trimester, and should be verified by the case manager.
  - d. In the case that a parent or guardian does not have legal custody of a child(ren) due to their removal by the Department of Child Services, and that parent or guardian must secure housing to reunify with the child, that parent or guardian can qualify for acceptance provided the verification of the circumstances is obtained by the case manager.
- 3) A client family must have a safe place to stay for seven days without the financial assistance of FPGI, and the possibility of extending alternative residences to 30 days with mediation or advocacy by the case manager. Only the initial seven-day stay need be verified for program acceptance. The case manager should not support an alternative residence that is unsafe, such as one that exposes children to violence, substance abuse, or building conditions that are not habitable (e.g., no utilities, dangerous mold, etc.).
- 4) A client family must be residing in Indianapolis, Indiana at the time of the intake appointment. If a family is moving to a temporary residence in Indianapolis, they must call back when they have arrived.
- 5) A client family’s income must be 150% of the federal poverty threshold or below for the family size.
- 6) A client family must not be fleeing domestic violence. FPGI does not currently have the training and procedures in place to maintain safety given these circumstances.
- 7) A client family must not have active warrants for their arrest, as these will most likely preclude the family from obtaining permanent housing. If they do, they must call for screening after they have turned themselves in to the authorities.
- 8) A client family—in consultation with the case manager—must have a reasonable path to a permanent housing solution by the end of the intake appointment. Factors for the case manager to consider include the following:

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- a. The ability to secure income, as FPGI's financial assistance is limited and cannot sustain the rent for an apartment past a month or two.
- b. The criminal history of the client family that might preclude acceptance by even second chance landlords.
- c. The rental history of the client family (i.e., past evictions and debts owed) that might preclude acceptance by second chance landlords.
- d. Though a, b, c are relevant, the case manager must engage in conversation with the client family to discover if other creative permanent housing options, such as long-term agreements with other family members, are possible.

All prospective guest families will be treated equally and will not be discriminated against based on race, national origin, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or economic hardship.

FPGI reserves the right to deny entry into its program to any family if, in FPGI's sole discretion, that family does not have the overall ability to thrive within the Family Promise program, and also if any person in that Family: a) has an alcohol or drug dependency or an active alcohol or illegal drug use, b) has any history of violent or other crimes, including, but not limited to, assault, battery, domestic violence and sex crimes, c) possesses, or there is a legitimate concern of possession, of a weapon, d) has tendencies toward aggressive behavior or loss of self-control, e) could be dangerous to other family members, program staff/volunteers, or program facilities, or f) has withheld information or provided false information. In Family Promise's sole discretion, a family may be accepted into the program while another family member seeks in-patient treatment, and Family Promise, as it is able, will provide referral services as applicable.

Background checks may be conducted for each adult family member applying to confirm what was disclosed in the screening and intake interviews. The level and depth of the background checks will be determined by the FPGI Executive Director from all sources of information, including, but not limited to, information shared by the family making application and information gained through referral sources. Each adult family member will sign a release form authorizing background checks and use of the release form to help the family acquire services needed once they are in the program. This release will expire once the family has permanently left the Family Promise program.

### Screening & Intake

**Referrals:** FPGI will accept self-referrals or third party referrals from other agencies, congregations, or concerned individuals to the Diversion Program and on a first come, first served basis, when there is an opening in the program (see Program Capacity above). FPGI currently receives an average of ten requests for shelter daily (most by phone, but occasionally by walk-in), and each will be screened for the Diversion Program pending availability. Reservations for screening will be accepted through the Appointments Plus system, if made by another agency; however, the screening will need to be done with the client family's head of household. For any referral that is not a self-referral, the availability in the program is considered unfilled until the pre-screening can be done by a staffperson with the client family's head of household directly.

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**Eligibility Screening:** FPGI will screen for eligibility for its Diversion Program all hours that phones are answered by qualified staff people, generally 8:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. Monday through Friday. All staff members that answer the phone will be trained in eligibility screening for Diversion (see “Diversion and Shelter Pre-Screening Procedure” in Appendix).

The staff members that provide phone and door service will screen for eligibility criteria numbers 2, 3, and 4 above when a potential client family calls or walks in to inquire about shelter. If referred by a third party, the screening will take place as soon as contact can be made with the client family’s head of household. If the client family meets the criteria, the staff member will email the contact information (e.g., name, phone number, and/or email address) to the case manager for the Diversion Program immediately, and contact will be made to do the intake interview within 24 hours by the case manager.

### **Intake Interview:**

The FPGI case manager for home-based programs is responsible for conducting all intake interviews, although a trained Master’s level intern can do intakes under their supervision. In their absence, see “Staffing” above.

The case manager contacts the family (if not already doing the eligibility screening his/herself) to continue the eligibility screening and conduct the intake interview with the information provided by the staff team member. The case manager follows the questions listed on the “Diversion Screening and Intake Form” (see Appendix).

Upon acceptance into the Diversion Program, the head(s) of household of the client family must be oriented to the “Diversion Participation Guidelines” by the case manager and sign forms allowing a criminal background and credit check, drug test release, consent for release of information (2), and an acknowledgment that their disclosures were truthful (see Appendix). The case manager completes all the actions on the “Diversion Intake & Exit Checklist” (see Appendix).

## Case Management/Program Participation

**Outcome of Program:** The goal of the Diversion Program’s case management is to help secure permanent housing for a client family—whether that be a residence in their name (with or without subsidy) or a shared residence with a long-term agreement (six months or more)—within 30 days after the intake interview. The client family is then encouraged to voluntarily enter the AfterCare program.

Seventy percent or more of individuals in client families accepted into the Diversion Program should achieve permanent housing, which will be measured by counting signed leases or housing agreements. Of those individuals, eighty percent or more should avoid the Indianapolis shelter system, which will be measured by quarterly reports of all previous Diversion clients pulled from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Of those same individuals, an annual phone survey will be conducted to try to assess how many individuals in the client families

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retained housing, and how many returned to homelessness, since HMIS can rarely count those who are doubled-up with family and friends, or in other words, who are homeless/transient but avoid the shelter or homeless services system in Indianapolis.

**Program Participation:** Upon intake, the head(s) of household of the client family sign the Diversion Participation Guidelines (see Appendix), which extends them a timeline of participation of 30 days or less. Their participation ends when they secure permanent housing, enter shelter, withdraw voluntarily from the program, or are terminated from the program (see “Termination” below). They will meet with the case manager at least once weekly, with potential for daily check-ins if needed by phone or other remote communication. They will work towards permanent housing or the steps to get there (e.g., childcare/schooling, employment/income, public assistance/benefits, or healthcare) daily while in the program.

**Case Management:** The case manager will meet weekly with the head(s) of household to discuss and mutually agree to clear, attainable goals for the week. The goals will be recorded on the Case Management Goals form (see Appendix), with a copy provided for the client family. The following week’s meeting will review the goals for completion, and mutually agree to new ones for the following week. Failure to complete goals without a reasonable explanation can be reason for discontinuation of the program, at the discretion of the case manager. The weekly goals should be kept in the client family file, as well as any Confidential Case Notes (see appendix).

**Case Conferences:** The case management team of FPGI will meet weekly or more to discuss and solve case management obstacles and program extensions. The case management team includes all case managers and their supervisor(s). The case manager for Diversion will attend to seek help as needed with connecting to the resources or methods that will aid client families in obtaining permanent housing.

**Data Tracking:** Client family data is recorded in three ways. First, head(s) of household are recorded on a spreadsheet submitted by email to the executive director weekly before case conferences. Second, client family data is entered into the Indianapolis Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and the case manager needs to be trained and licensed to use this database. HMIS assessment data is only entered by the case manager or their designee within 48 hours of intake and within 48 hours of exit for each client family. Services provided are not entered into HMIS, nor is documentation uploaded. The database is only utilized for intake and exit assessments. Last, client family data is recorded into the Family Promise National tracking document by the case manager supervisor, utilizing information from the weekly spreadsheets submitted by the case manager.

Note: Client families participating in the Diversion Program are not eligible for housing assistance through the Coordinated Entry System operated by the Indianapolis Continuum of Care, as that assistance is specifically reserved for client families that are residing in shelter or unsafe living conditions due to homelessness.

**Document Security and Retention:** Client family files are kept in locked file cabinets, in locked offices, in a building with an activated alarm system when unoccupied, for five years

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from the date of the intake interview. Client family files are only maintained for families accepted into the Diversion Program. After five years, all materials in the file are destroyed by shredding.

### Program Exit

Client families exit the Diversion program when they secure permanent housing, enter shelter, withdraw voluntarily from the program, or are terminated from the program (see “Termination” below). The case manager is to complete the relevant items on the Diversion Intake & Exit Checklist (see Appendix) for the client family.

If a family is exiting to permanent housing and requesting Family Promise financial assistance for move-in costs (e.g., first month’s rent, security deposit, utility deposit, etc.), the case manager or their designee needs to complete a Housing Quality Checklist (see Appendix) for the new housing unit with an adult in the family before financial assistance will be provided.

The outcome for the family needs to be documented in the client file using the Confidential Case Note (see Appendix), in addition to any relevant disclosures about the shelter stay or program participation in case the family returns.

Client families are eligible at exit for a referral to Mustard Seed of Central Indiana (furniture bank), Goodwill vouchers (housewares), Crooked Creed Food Pantry (food), a move-in cleaning kit, and bus passes/gas gift card assistance. All are provided at the case manager’s discretion based on need.

### Family Assistance Fund

FPGI recognizes the financial needs faced by the families it serves, and desires to financially assist families in Diversion to avoid a shelter stay and obtain permanent housing as fast as possible. Whenever possible, the Board of Directors will allocate part of the operating budget each year for a Family Assistance Fund (“Fund”) to accomplish this, to be governed by the following principles:

1. **Fairness:** Families will be treated as equally as possible.
2. **Goal Achievement:** Financial assistance shall always be used to directly affect housing and/or income and employment goals of the families.
3. **Stewardship:** Financial assistance is provided in a way that ensures donors—the source of the funding—are confident that the funds are used as intended.

The Program Manager will manage the fund under the following guidelines:

1. **Allocations:** Upon approval of the annual budget, the Executive Director will establish a dollar amount per family to be served in Diversion in the coming year. That amount is the maximum any family can receive in financial assistance from FPGI. No family is guaranteed that amount. That amount will be reserved for the family for their entire participation in Diversion. The Program Manager and Case Manager (Diversion) will be responsible for

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tracking the disbursements and amounts available to families, with periodic review by the Executive Director. Disbursements will be recorded in a family's file using the FAF Tracking Form (see Appendix). All disbursements must follow the separate Financial Policies document of Family Promise of Greater Indianapolis.

2. **Eligibility:** Only families in “good standing” in the Diversion programs are eligible for financial assistance disbursements. Good standing means that the family should not have received a policy violation documentation that lists as a consequence suspension of access to the Fund.
3. **Requests and Approval:** Financial requests can be initiated by any member of the case management team: Program Manager, Case Manager (Diversion), or Executive Director (ED). Disbursement requests will be submitted in writing to the Program Manager using the FAF Request (see Appendix) by the Program Manager or Case Manager (Diversion) as needed. Expenses will be approved by the Program Manager on a daily basis for expediting payment.
4. **Disbursements:** Disbursements from the fund will only be made to pay expenses directly related to help Diversion families achieve their goals of achieving a sustainable income and/or permanent housing. Disbursements will only be made directly to the third party providing the need of the family and never to a family. For a family that has recently moved in, this can include but is not limited to childcare for securing employment, workplace attire for securing employment, transportation for securing or retaining employment, a security deposit or first month's rent for permanent housing, utility deposit for permanent housing, or rental assistance to maintain housing. In these cases, the check would be made out to the childcare, the transportation provider, the auto mechanic, the landlord, or a gift card would be purchased and delivered to the family for the appropriate retail store (e.g., Payless for work boots).

### Landlord Mitigation Fund

Client families in Diversion are eligible to receive support from the FPGI Landlord Mitigation Fund (LMF). The LMF is a sum of money held in a savings account by FPGI. That money is used to guarantee for a property owner/manager the costs of an eviction up to \$1,500 for a tenant referred to the landlord from a program of FPGI (e.g., Diversion).

Memoranda of Understanding are on file for all landlords that participate in the LMF partnership. For a client family to be guaranteed by the LMF, they must not have met the tenant eligibility requirements of the landlord without the LMF, and the LMF is used to appeal that decision. Additionally, the guarantee is only for the client family's first lease term. The guarantee can cover any and all costs associated with an eviction that a landlord can document that they incurred.

All requests to use the LMF need to be submitted verbally or by email to the executive director, and all guarantee letters should be signed by the executive director. The case manager needs to update the LMF tracking form whenever a guarantee letter is granted or expires.



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## Day Center Facility

The lower level computer lab of the FPGI Day Center will be open to Diversion families from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. It is located at 1850 N. Arsenal Avenue, Indianapolis, IN 46218.

Client families in Diversion may only use the Day Center for laundry with approval of the case manager, and should seek laundry services at their current residence first or private laundromat first.

The Day Center will house the offices of all staff associated with Diversion, including the Case Manager.

## Termination Policy

Termination of assistance and exit from the Diversion Program of Family Promise of Greater Indianapolis is necessary when the Case Manager in conjunction with the Executive Director determines that the Client Family has not complied with program guidelines as stated in the printed and signed “Diversion Program Guidelines” form (see Appendix).

### **Exit Criteria:**

A Client Family may be immediately exited from FPGI for behavior including, not limited to:

- Suspicion of drug and/or alcohol possession or use;
- Possession and/or use of weapons;
- Abusive, violent, or threatening behavior toward guest family’s own children or partner, other guests, staff, or volunteers;
- Vandalism or theft of property;

A Client Family that has been exited from FPGI may appeal in person or in writing to the Executive Director after leaving the premises by contacting 317-961-1133 or [mike@fpgi.org](mailto:mike@fpgi.org). A Client Family may appeal in writing to the President of the Board by submitting a written letter or note in sealed envelope to the Office Manager at the Day Center (1850 N. Arsenal Ave.)

### **Termination of Assistance Criteria:**

A Client Family may enter into a process of termination of assistance at 30 days from FPGI for behavior including but not limited to:

- Failure to follow agreed upon case management plans (goals & objectives);
- Displaying disrespectful attitudes and actions toward other individuals related to Diversion
- Repeated or consistent infractions of rules as outlined in the Program Guidelines;
- Failure to attempt goal completion;
- Failure to follow any savings plan.

A Client Family may participate in the grievance procedure as part of the termination of assistance process.



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## Grievance Policy

Family Promise of Greater Indianapolis (FPGI)'s mission is to provide hospitality to homeless families and to help these families find and retain permanent housing. To fulfill our mission, we work for and with Client families in our program. To provide hospitality and support services, we require cooperation from Clients, and have established Program Guidelines to specify Client responsibility. Consequences, up to and including involuntary termination from the program, are established and communicated to Clients in writing in the Program Guidelines.

Consequences may consist of disciplinary action, including termination. If Clients feel that they have been wrongfully accused of breaking the rules and/or that they have been unjustly or inappropriately disciplined, they have a right to bring grievance to the appropriate authorities. The first step is to document their grievance in writing and to meet with the Executive Director at the earliest possible time. If the Executive Director is absent and going to be absent for more than three working days, or the grievance is concerning the Executive Director, the grievance shall be filed with the President of the Board of Directors. If filing a grievance, the Client must immediately inform the staff making the charge and/or directing the disciplinary action. The Client will have three working days to file their grievance. The Executive Director or President of the Board of Directors will answer the grievance within three working days after investigating the circumstances.

In the event that the alleged violation was particularly severe and caused or was likely to cause harm to persons or property, disciplinary action up to and including termination from the program can be enacted immediately. The person charged or disciplined can still file a grievance for reinstatement if so desired.

## Appendix

- Diversion & Shelter Pre-Screening Procedure
- Diversion Screening & Intake Form
- Signature packet (Criminal Background/Credit Check, Release of Information (2), Program Guidelines, Drug Test Release, Truthful Disclosure)
- Diversion Intake & Exit Checklist
- Case Management Goals
- Case Management Confidential Case Notes
- Mediation Agreement
- Family Assistance Fund Tracking Form
- Family Assistance Fund Disbursement Request Form
- Housing Quality Checklist