



2023-2024 Grant Finalist Summary

The Lord's Place | Project Divert: A Homeless Shelter Diversion Pilot Initiative

The Organization

The Lord's Place is dedicated to breaking the cycle of homelessness by providing innovative, compassionate and effective services to men, women and children in our community. The agency has served vulnerable households in Palm Beach County for more than 40 years, starting as a soup kitchen in 1980 and then creating the first shelter for homeless families in Palm Beach County a few years later. Today, the agency provides street outreach, housing, job training, health care support, and other essential services for the homeless community. Altogether, The Lord's Place houses 175 households a day and serves more than 1,800 people a year.

The Program

Shelter diversion programs play an important role in addressing homelessness. These programs offer an alternative way to access housing (such as staying with friends and family, re-negotiating leases with landlords, moving away, finding a roommate) without staying at an emergency shelter, the most common entry into homeless services. Despite the diversion model's benefits, there is a lack of research to support it. The Lord's Place is addressing this deficit by launching a national, multi-site pilot project to study the impact of diversion in ending homelessness in partnership with Notre Dame's Lab for Economic Opportunities, the Pulte Foundation, Family Promise of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Family Promise of Spokane, Washington. The pilot project aims to prove that diversion reduces the trauma of becoming homeless by facilitating quick access to housing, and that diversion can lead to long-term housing stability with similar outcomes as standard homeless services, and in a more cost-effective manner. The Lord's Place will contribute to the project by serving more than 160 individuals experiencing homelessness over the two-year Impact grant period. Project participants will receive a combination of housing navigation, financial assistance, and post-housing placement case management. Ideal candidates for the project are those who recently became homeless, have not experienced repeated episodes of homelessness, and do not exhibit other characteristics (e.g. serious mental illness) that would render them more suitable for standard housing services, such as placement into supportive housing.

The Lord's Place launched the diversion project in October 2023 with previous fundraising dollars, but requires additional funding to complete the project by March 2026. The project will provide valuable data on which homeless interventions are most effective, for whom, and at what cost. Study findings will be shared on a national platform, enabling stakeholders across the country to learn from the results. Providers will be able to enhance programs based on the evidence. Policymakers and funders will have the research to prioritize programs that incorporate proven strategies.

How will this program impact Palm Beach County?

Each day, more than 1,100 people in our community are living outside and in places not meant for habitation. This is a 30% increase from the previous year. According to the data, 70% of those experiencing homelessness are experiencing it for the first time, significantly higher than the state average of 28%. With 550 emergency shelter beds available in Palm Beach County, even if every available spot were filled, more than 500 people would still not have a place to sleep at night. Diversion programs address this gap. They strengthen the homeless system's capacity by increasing the pathways people can take to access housing. Although diversion programs are a valuable tool in tackling homelessness, they are often overlooked and underfunded compared to traditional housing approaches. Through the multi-site study, this project will produce actionable findings that nonprofits, governments, and other stakeholders across the country can use to strengthen their homeless prevention programs and provide more effective services, tailored services.

Measurable Outcomes

In the short term, the agency will measure whether participants obtain permanent housing within 90 days of receiving assistance through the diversion program. In the long term, the agency will track participants to see if they are still housed one and two years after receiving help.

How will Impact Palm Beaches grant be used?

\$78,250 of the Impact grant award will help fund a diversion case manager to assist participants; \$1,750 is for office supplies/technology; and \$20,000 is for financial assistance for clients (rent, furniture, IDs, transportation, etc.).