

Working More Than One Approach: Building Vocational Pathways That Meet People Where They Are

The Other Ones Foundation

Morgan Shaffer – Director of Strategic Initiatives
Stephen Hopkins – Chief Programs Officer

09/2025





Morgan Shaffer- Director of Strategic Initiatives

Morgan Shaffer, TOOF's Director of Strategic Initiatives, oversees and plays a critical role in driving forward the organization's commitment to excellence and innovation through both internal and external initiatives. Morgan approaches her role with a data-driven and process-based approach that ensures project deliverables and deadlines are met wholly and on time. Morgan comes to this role with experience in research and data collection and analysis and 5 years of experience within the Austin/Travis County HRS.



Stephen Hopkins- Chief Programs Officer

Stephen is a Licensed Professional Counselor with over 12 years of experience in the Austin area providing and supervising services for individuals at the intersection of mental health, homelessness, and the criminal justice system. Stephen excels at bringing partners together to create and maintain successful programs and develop infrastructure necessary to provide services to our most vulnerable neighbors. As the Chief Programs Officer with the Other Ones Foundation, Stephen oversees the organization's shelter, vocational, diversion, and outreach initiatives. Stephen approaches his role with a trauma-informed lens and champions RDEIB initiatives.



ACTIVITY: WFD Services Availability



Reflect on your experiences supporting this population through

WFD (Workforce Development) services



Where have you seen **successes**?



What **failures** have occurred?



What **factors** contributed to each outcome?

Expectation Setting

- Housekeeping Items
- WFD 101
- Who are we trying to serve?



What is Workforce Development?

Workforce Development (WFD) refers to a range of policies, programs, and services designed to equip individuals with the skills, resources, and support necessary to succeed in the labor market.

This approach isn't intended to be a one-size-fits-all solution, but rather an added pathway that helps ease systemic strain by ensuring those **unable** to work can access vital resources like vouchers. The barriers faced in employment are similar to those in housing, and likewise, the most effective strategies draw from housing best practices—namely harm reduction, Housing First principles, and trauma-informed care.

Core Expectations of WFD

Accessibility

Relevance

Support Services

Partnerships

Measurable Impact

Promote Economic
Growth

Who should be served with Workforce Development Services?

The short answer: anyone ready, willing, and able

**Employment is not just a route out of homelessness-
it's a step towards purpose, identity, and lasting
stability**

**Part-time work is work!- Many receiving SSI/SSDI may
still need part-time employment to afford housing
however it is critical to understand how income effects
benefits eligibility.**

**Just because someone isn't ready right now does not
mean they never will be
(transtheoretical model of change)**

Post-Housing: Employment as a Community Building intervention

- Stability through structure: Daily routines support mental well-being and reduces risk of regression
- Social Connections: Coworkers provide positive, built-in community and help prevent isolation
- Meaningful Activity: Work fills the day with productive engagement, helping residents flourish beyond survival

Workforce Strategies & Employment Concepts

- Foundational Approaches
- Innovative Workforce Models
- Skill Development Categories



Foundational Approaches

Transitional Jobs

Time-limited, wage-paying positions combining real work, skill-building, and support to help participants enter the labor market.

Individual Placement Supports (IPS)

Evidence-based model supporting individuals with mental illness to find and keep competitive jobs at or above minimum wage.

Supported Employment

Services for individuals with significant disabilities, offering long-term supports and job matching for sustained employment success

Innovative Workforce Models

Sector-Based Training

Industry-specific training aligned with workforce demands, developed in partnership with employers.

Alternative Staffing Organizations (ASOs)

Dual-client staffing firms that support employers while building readiness and confidence in job seekers

Supported Employment Specialist

Trained professional who performs assessments, matches jobs, facilitates training, and provides ongoing support.

Skill Development Categories

Hard Skills

Technical knowledge and task-specific abilities (e.g., machinery, coding, bookkeeping).

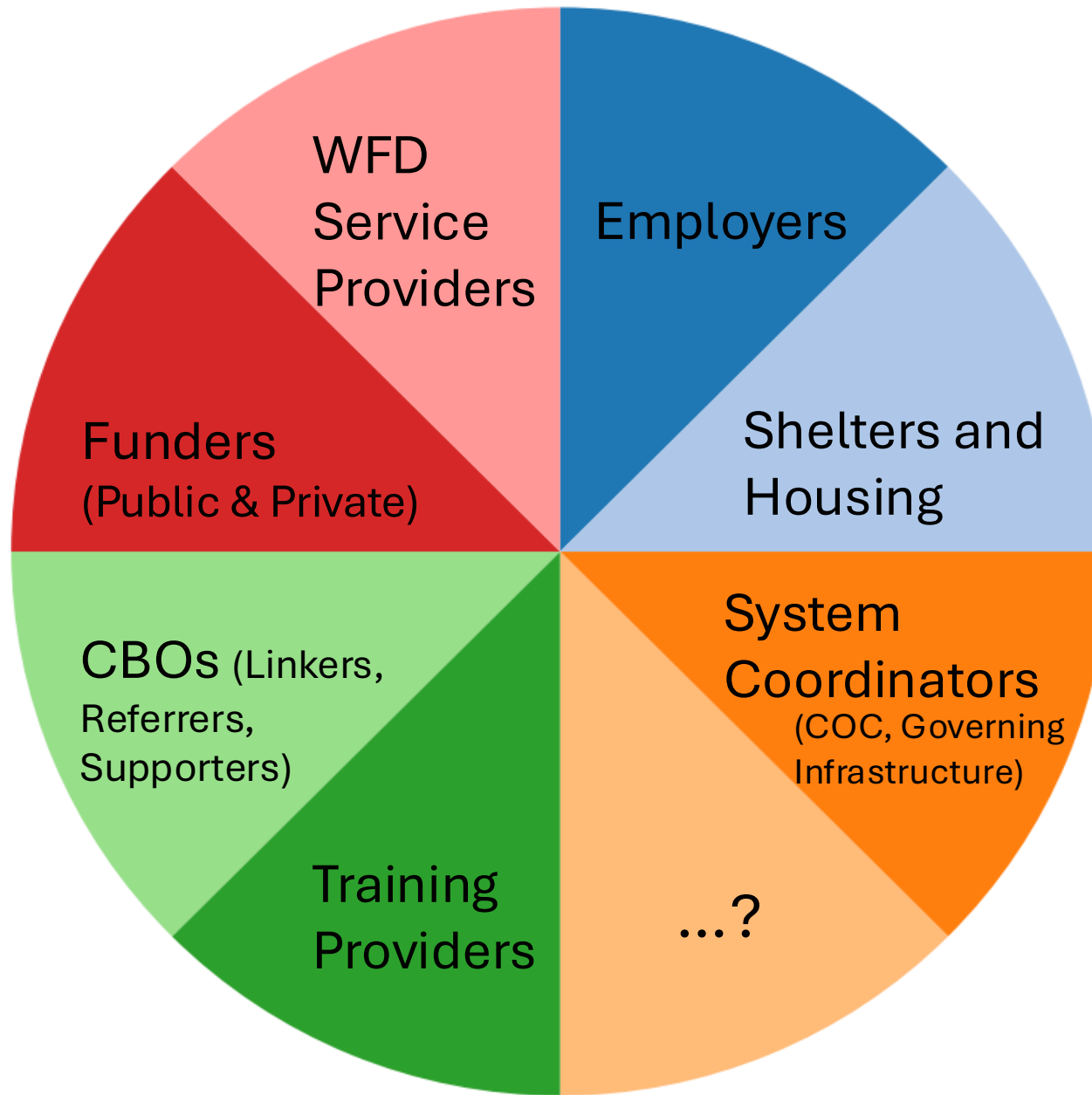
Soft Skills

Interpersonal and workplace behaviors (e.g., attendance, punctuality, communication, reliability, teamwork).

"Just Right" Skills

Practical employment-readiness skills like resume writing, computer basics, and etiquette. Skills our population may need more support and hands-on support with.

Building the Vocational Continuum



TOOF's Vocational Journey

- Why TOOF?
- Why Vocational Services?
- Why now?



It Started with Hard Work

Workforce First (WFF): A Program in Demand: Our flagship initiative continues to draw strong interest, consistently generating a waitlist- demonstrating just how eager participants are to engage in meaningful work.

Participant Feedback: A Call for More: WFF participants tell us, *"This program is great- but it's too short."* Their enthusiasm highlights the impactful value of the experience and the opportunity to expand the continuum.



Seven years later, we're doubling down on what we know best—creating purposeful, skill-building opportunities that open doors.

- Engaging and building community through work
- Sense of purpose, increasing confidence, improved prospects
- HOPE



“We’re not just cutting a ribbon on a skills center today—we’re investing in the futures of folks who are trying to build better lives for themselves, all the while, strengthening our homeless response system. The John Paul DeJoria Vocational Skills Center will connect folks living in TOOF’s Esperanza Community to the Austin Infrastructure Academy, an initiative we’ve been building over the past 22 months, to create opportunities for vulnerable Austinites to get the training they need to take full advantage of our economic prosperity,” - Mayor Kirk Watson

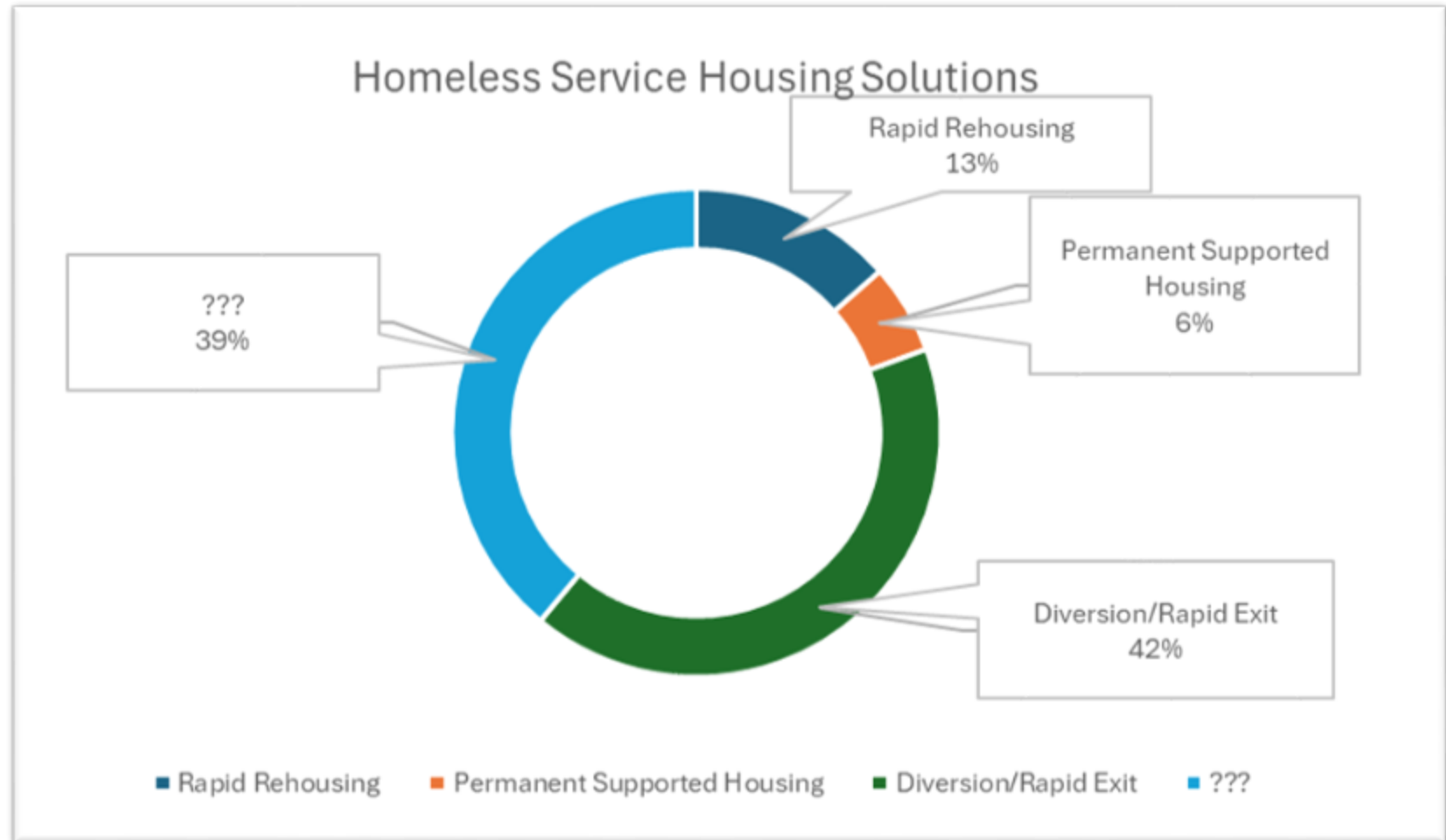
Emerging Best Practices Sparking Innovation



The “Middle Third”: Overlooked and Underserved:

A 2022 study revealed that homelessness assistance systems often neglect the “middle third”—people who aren’t chronically homeless, but who are also unlikely to achieve housing stability without at least minimal, formal assistance

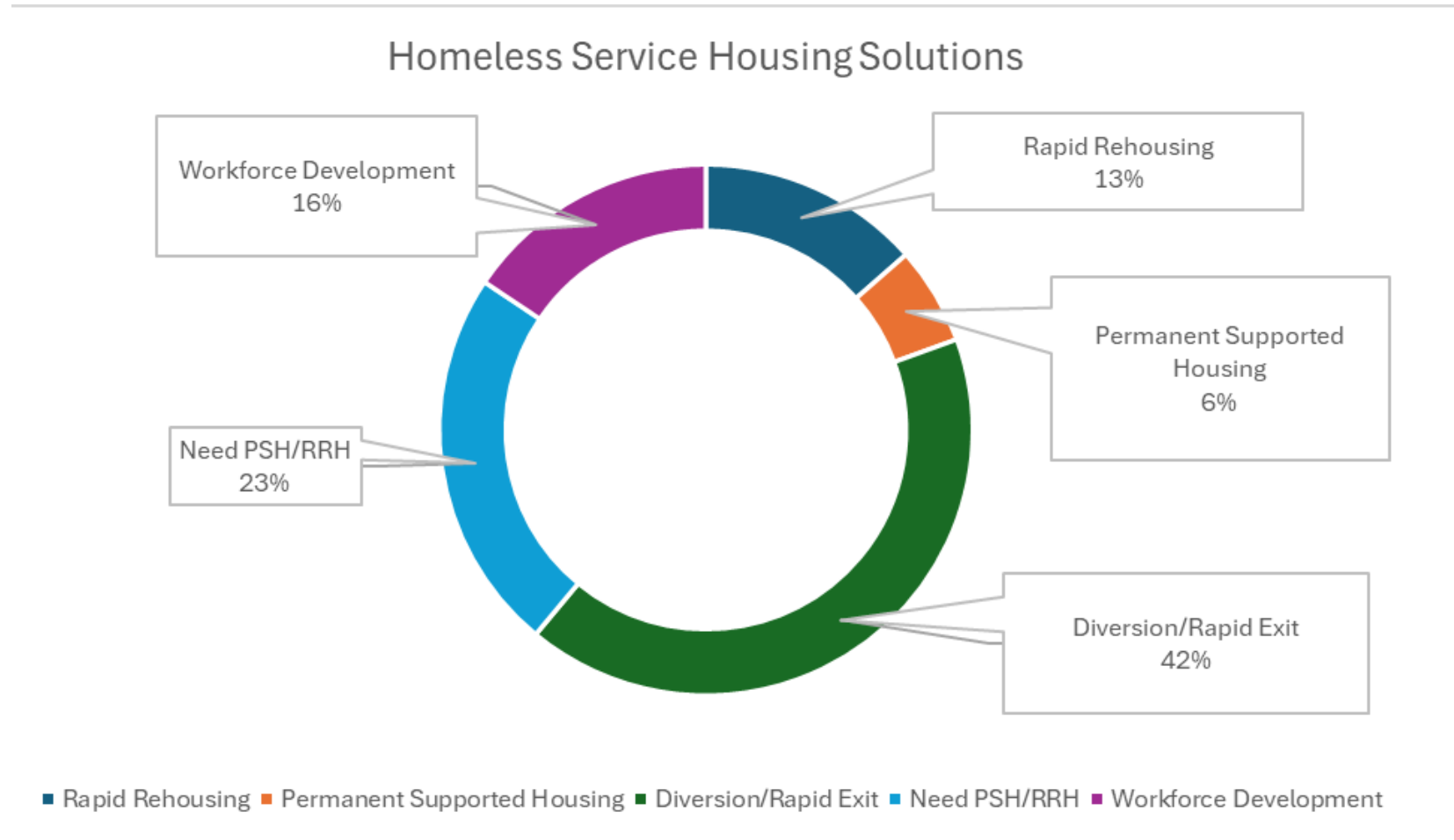
The Middle Third in Austin/Travis County



In ECHO's 2024 State of the Homelessness Response System Report, it was estimated that 4,940 people were experiencing homelessness at any given time. On average, this is how they exit homelessness.

We have to assume that some of those in the 39% are a result of an under-resourced PSH & RRH system. But others **could be good candidates for WFD.**

Our Niche in Workforce Development - the 16%



The same report estimates 60% of all those experiencing homelessness have a disability. This is a PSH/RRH capacity issue. 16% (770 people) at any given time, could benefit from WFD as a resolution to homelessness.

Emerging Best Practices Sparking Innovation

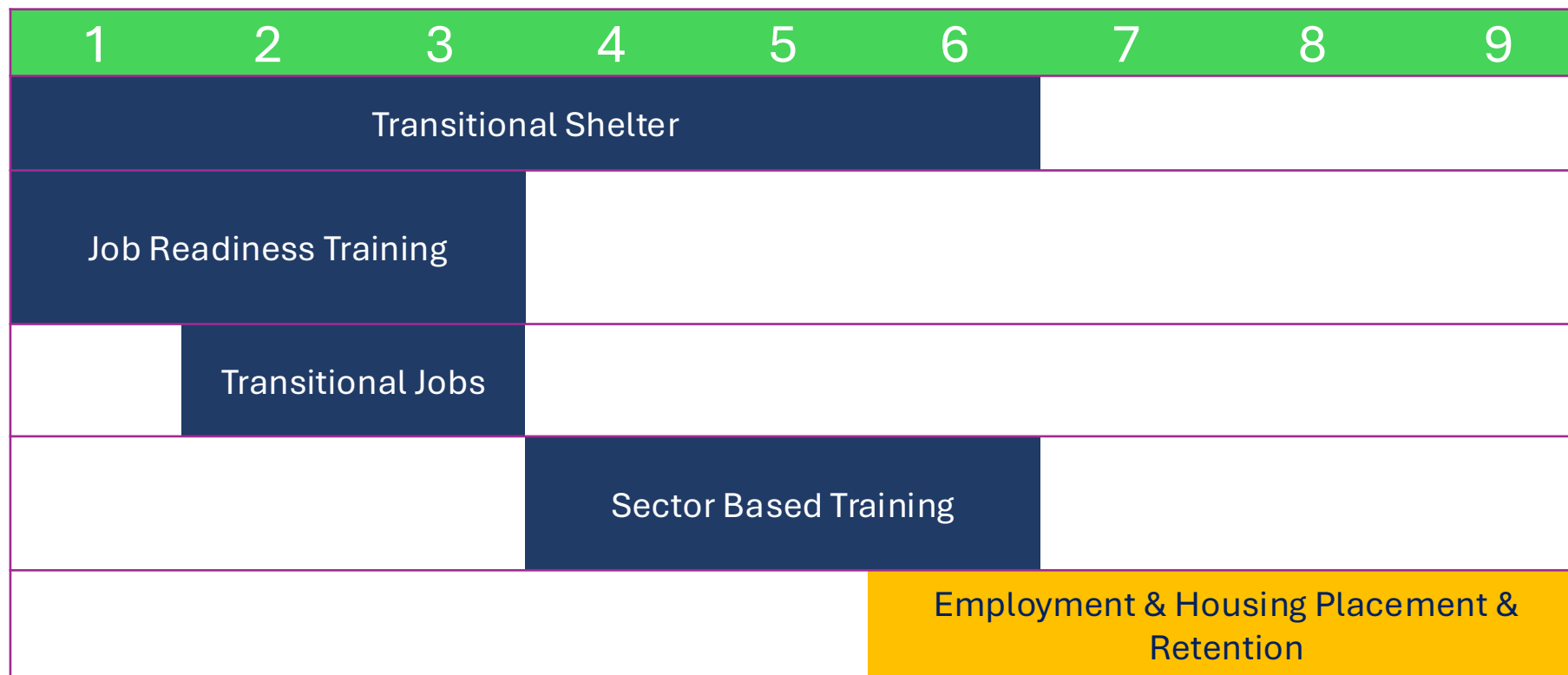


Pairing Vocational Case Management (VCM) with Rapid Rehousing (RRH) has shown powerful results:

A 2022 HUD study showed programs that integrated VCM saw a marked boost in participant income. In the highest-performing initiative, 82% of participants left the program with earned income—compared to just 54% in less successful efforts. This approach demonstrates that blending employment services with RRH not only prepares participants to exit successfully but also supports long-term stability as they transition to self-funded housing.

WFD Shelter + RRH:

How does it all fit together?



RRH paired with the WFD participants receive while in shelter would allow participants to utilize RRH as it is intended: a short-term assistance that leads to independent sustained housing

Participants would be exiting shelter with the skills, certifications, and connections to employers needed to reasonably be able to pay for a market rate apartment at the end of their voucher period

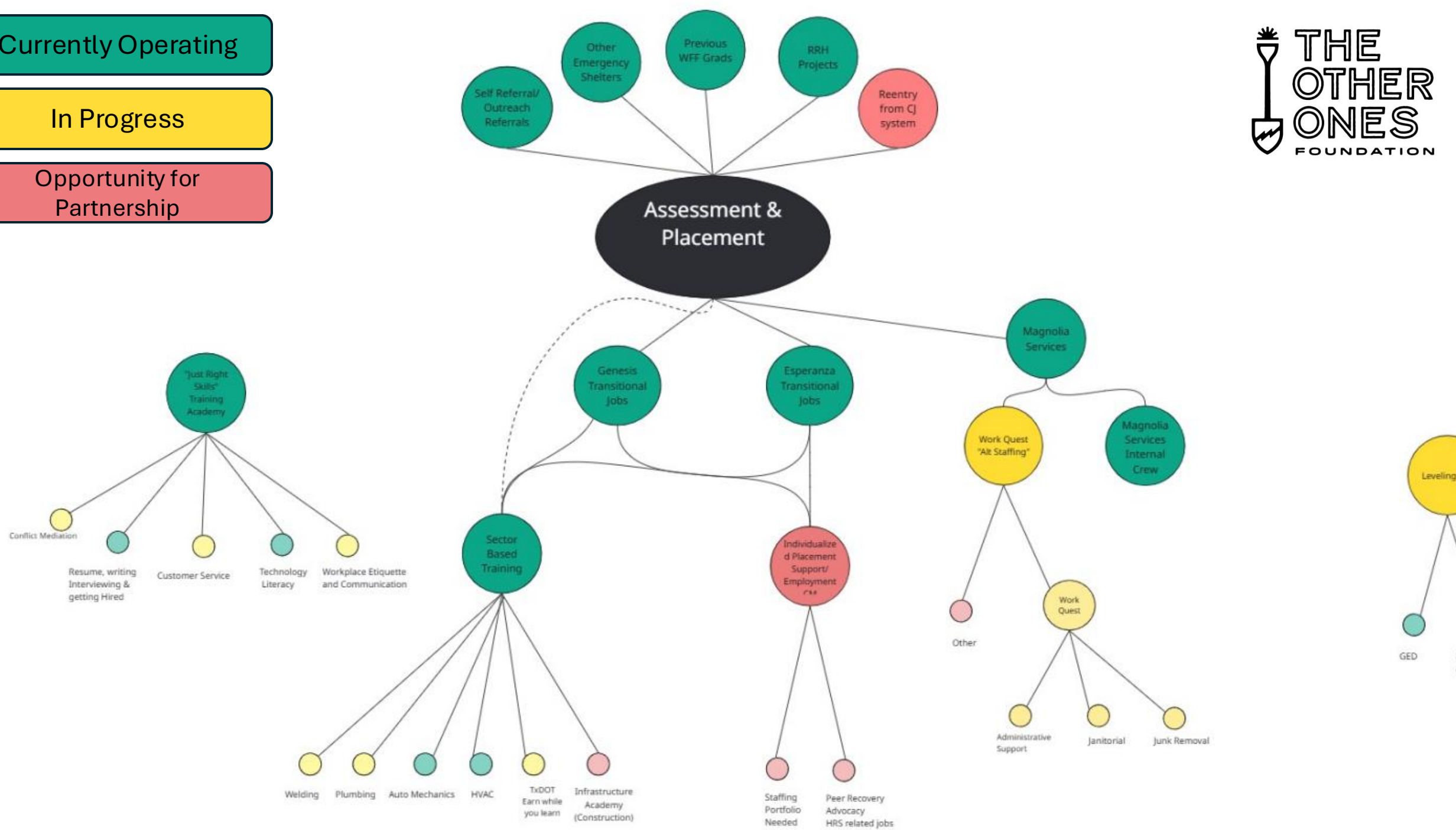
WHY NOW?

- **Bridging the Gap in Housing Support:** While Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and Rapid Rehousing (RRH) effectively serve individuals at the highest and lowest ends of the Coordinated Assessment scale, *a critical group falls through the cracks*: those in the middle who still need meaningful support.
- **A Path Forward: The Infrastructure Academy:** The City of Austin's Infrastructure Academy is a game-changer—offering members of our community a direct route to **well-paying, dignified careers**. But for this opportunity to truly succeed, we as a Homeless Response System must be prepared to connect our clients to this transformative pathway.

Currently Operating

In Progress

Opportunity for Partnership



Planning your Vocational Journey

- Project Planning Tips and Tricks
- Logic Modeling
- Timeline Example



Project Planning 101

1

Targeted Space

Having a recurring, dedicated space to collaborate, plan, make decisions, etc. is essential

2

Establish Role Clarity

Pick a point person to keep a pulse on things, who is an approver, a collaborator, just informed of progress, etc.

3

Creating a Guiding Document

Creating a guiding document that lays out project goals, mission, target timelines, documents market analysis, potential community partners, and overall landscape review findings

4

Be flexible!

The plan WILL change- and that is okay! Be able to pivot to new opportunities, re-prioritize parts of the project, etc.



TOOF Vocational Services

How do we plan serve that 16%?

Vision Statement:

A sustainable continuum of vocational support, that offers a wide range of career pathways, matched to the strengths and needs of individuals experiencing homelessness and aligned with market demands.

Project goals:

- Develop targeted vocational strategies and support plans
- Optimize service delivery, enhance program effectiveness, and provide tailored and impactful vocational pathways for clients
- Serve community workforce needs with capable, competent workers
- Prepare the homeless response system for coordinated efforts on employment

Logic Model Components

Inputs- What we invest

Activities- The tasks we actually do

Outputs- Direct product of services

**Short-term Outcomes- learning,
knowledge, skills, motivation**

**Mid-term Outcomes- action, behavior,
practices, policies**

**Long-term Outcomes- consequences,
social, economic, environment**

MISSION MOMENT:
Lean into your organizational
mission, vision, and values!

Inputs

What we contribute

- Skills Center (building)
- Community partnerships
- Skills Center Coordinator
- Supported Employment Specialist team
- Funding for training (financial aid)
- Funding supplies (training, employment)
- Transportation

Activities

The tasks we actually do

- Help participants obtain and maintain employment
- Facilitate enrollments to training opportunities
- Mediate obstacles to student success
- Troubleshoot financial aid for trainees
- Provide training
- Facilitate transportation to training sites and work sites
- Coordinate connection to shelter and/or support services
- Facilitate connection to ACC support networks

Output

Direct product of our activities

- In-demand trainings and certifications
- Job placements/connections to employment
- Increased income
- Reconnection to support networks and community resources
- Contribution to community demand for labor
- More favorable community attitudes towards population being served

Outcome

Short-Term

- Participants attain sector-specific skillsets, based on their chosen training pathway
- Participants receive certifications to do a given trade
- In terms increase income and obtain benefits while developing in-demand skills
- Increased self-esteem
- Increased self-confidence

Outcome

Medium-Term

- Participants are connected to employment opportunities based on the skills developed
- Increase of skilled/qualified laborers to the job market
- Increased income (all pathways)
- Building positive work history
- Decrease in financial strain on social services as individuals are better equipped to self-resolve

Outcome

Long-Term

- Participants are reconnected to the workforce
- Secure and stable employment
- Secure and stable housing
- Community partners reinvest in TOOF/vulnerable populations
- Impact on sociopolitical landscape – demonstrated success of person-centered approach to WFD + housing crisis (replicable model)

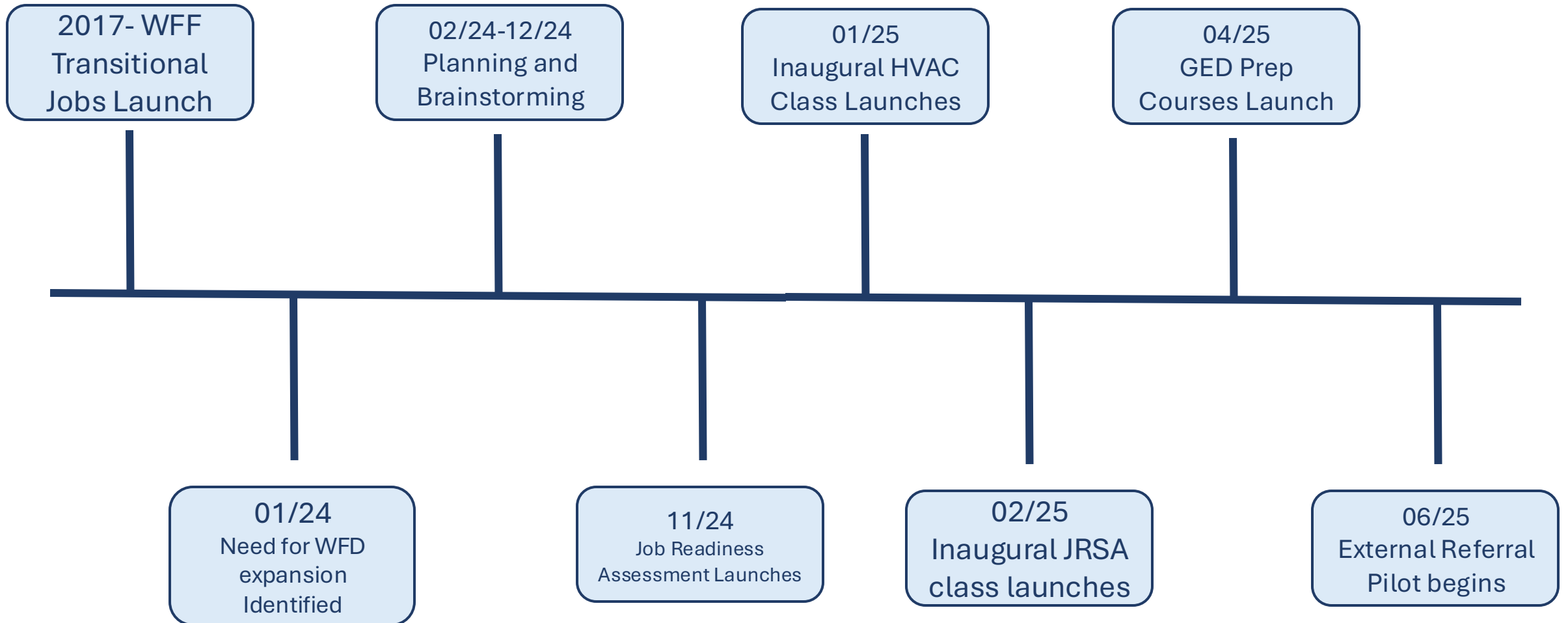
Assumptions

- Adequate funding can be identified to support connections to housing/support services, staffing, and material needs.
- Participants are in a place to prioritize long-term advancement of personal and professional goals.
- Sufficient diversity of employment opportunities can be identified, to mitigate barriers associated with a history of being justice-involved.

Context

- Systemic issues faced by those impacted by homelessness, such as discrimination, complications around personal preparation and transportation logistics, workplace accommodations, and employer stigma make up the primary barriers to successful re-entry into the workforce.
- Environment of abundant economic and development opportunities, driving the need for increases in number of skilled laborers.

TOOF's Vocational Continuum Development Timeline



Limitations and Questions

- Housing affordability
- Persons impacted by the justice system
- What potential barriers do you see to making this a reality?
 - ✦ Disempowering beliefs within your HRS?
 - ✦ WFD services availability?
 - ✦ Resources?
 - ✦ Staffing?
- Any questions or comments about the presentation





THE OTHER ONES

FOUNDATION

- People impacted by homelessness and poverty deserve the opportunity to participate in training and employment
- Accessing the economic prosperity of their communities
- Plan, invest, and prepare – expect success.