



City of Bellevue

Early Referral Pilot: Outcomes and Impact

November 2024-March 2025





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Early Referral Pilot

Overview

The Early Referral pilot aimed to proactively improve housing stability by connecting residents with conflict resolution services before eviction proceedings escalated.

This pilot was a joint effort between the Bellevue Conflict Resolution Center (BCRC), the Allied Residential Property Management Company, and the King County Housing Authority to address housing stability and eviction prevention through early intervention strategies. The findings demonstrate the effectiveness of early referrals in improving resolution rates, reducing escalations, and strengthening support mechanisms for tenants. These strategies benefit both tenants and property managers by fostering stability and avoiding lengthier eviction processes.

This report provides a clear, data-driven narrative for key stakeholders to understand the impact of early referrals and encourage ongoing engagement with proactive intervention strategies. The report highlights key elements for success and findings from the pilot, demonstrates its impact on resolution rates and eviction prevention, and offers some recommendations for next steps.

Key Findings

- **983 Pay or Vacate notices were issued among 3,614 households.** While this may include some multiple notices for a single unit, it indicates that a significant portion of households (up to 27%) were at risk of eviction.
- **41% of those affected (406 cases) were resolved on-site,** showing that direct intervention at the property level plays a significant role in helping to prevent further escalation and eviction.
- **More tenants contacted BCRC than before the pilot,** suggesting that the early referral outreach strategy was effective.
- **BCRC's 90% case resolution rate during the pilot was higher than in previous periods,** suggesting that early referrals to conflict resolution help prevent evictions.
- **Coaching was the most common approach** used in 72% of BCRC's cases, compared to Conciliation used in 18% and Information & Referral without further engagement offered in 10%.
- **Coaching proved to be significantly more successful than Conciliation** in helping parties reach a resolution or develop a plan (96% compared to 57%).

Background and Problem Statement

Evictions in Bellevue and Kirkland (King County) continue to occur in record numbers. While many efforts are underway to address the housing crisis, affordable housing remains in short supply, costs continue to increase, and many residents continue to face job loss, health issues, and economic hardship that make it difficult to pay rent. In turn, landlords often struggle under the weight of lost income, a lengthy eviction process and increasingly restrictive regulations. Often these issues are more acute in low-income and multi-family housing communities.

The Bellevue Conflict Resolution Center's Housing Accord Program provides an alternative to eviction and helps increase housing stability. It provides free, confidential, voluntary and impartial conflict resolution services to housing providers and tenants alike. Through coaching, conciliation, and referrals, Housing Accord staff help parties find solutions that work and avoid the often long and costly eviction process.

Unfortunately, many cases are referred to Housing Accord after a tenant is more than one month behind in rent, making it difficult for them to get caught up, and the landlord has to try and cut their losses by starting the eviction process. Helping parties find a resolution at this late stage is difficult, at best. To really make a difference, the earlier Housing Accord can get involved in a case, the more likely it can help the parties reach a resolution and avoid eviction. The Early Referral Pilot was designed to address this issue and see if early referrals to BCRC help prevent evictions.

Elements for Success

Build relationships with property managers

The Housing Accord Program built on the relationships of trust formed with property managers during the pandemic. During this unprecedented time, BCRC worked with landlords and tenants to negotiate repayment plans that kept tenants housed and landlords paid. These negotiations were mandated by a two-year state-wide "Eviction Resolution Pilot Program" (ERPP), that ended in June 2023.

While the ERPP met with mixed reviews, BCRC was able to help tenants and landlords resolve up to 82% of the 2,880 cases received during the two-year program. This success was due to several factors that helped inform the design and implementation of the Early Referral Pilot and also may be useful in replicating or scaling up the pilot.

Establish trust as a 3rd party neutral

BCRC's neutrality is essential to establishing trust, particularly with Landlords who often deal with tenant advocates and can be skeptical of our impartiality. Getting to know them, listening to and understanding their perspective, and not advocating on behalf of a tenant helped property managers trust BCRC's impartiality, engage in productive negotiations, and reach agreements. This success, in turn, fostered more trust in BCRC's ability to help resolve tenant issues outside of court.



Offer quick and effective conflict resolution services

Phone Conciliation: BCRC mostly uses a phone conciliation model rather than face-to-face mediations. Phone conciliation involves a trained conciliator acting as a go-between for the landlord and tenant. As a neutral 3rd party, the conciliator is able to listen to the concerns and needs of each person individually, and explore what, if any, resolutions would work for them. Helping both parties explore for themselves what options and resolutions work best creates more realistic and durable agreements. In addition, because conciliation is by phone, it balances power, is easier to schedule, and takes less time than in-person mediations.

Coaching: BCRC offers coaching to help landlords and tenants examine issues individually. It is particularly useful in helping tenants see and act on their options, get out of fight, freeze or flight mode, and be better able to make good housing and financial decisions. This, in turn, helps property managers as they are able to work with a tenant who has a clear plan and is able to move ahead. Coaching can also help property managers identify their bottom-line and figure out whether pursuing an eviction is the best business decision in any particular case.

Information and Referral: BCRC also provides updated referrals to community organizations for rental assistance, legal advice, housing and other social services. This referral network can benefit both landlords and tenants.

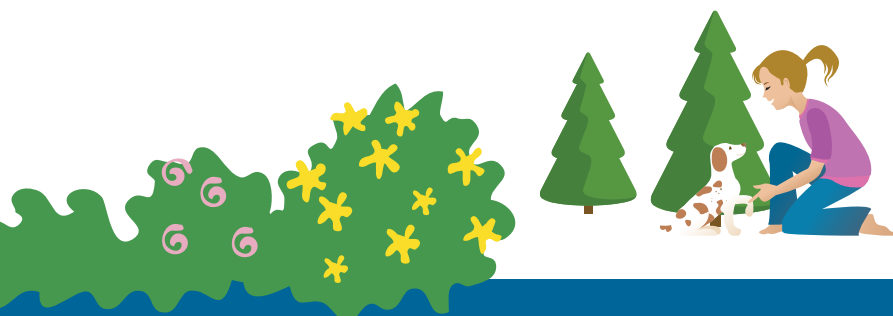
Add value and enhance property manager skills

After the pandemic, the Housing Accord Program continued to nurture its relationships with property managers and other housing providers. This included sending regular email communication, attending housing provider meetings to listen to their needs, exploring together how our services might help, and visiting individual property managers on-site to get to know them and see first-hand the communities they manage.

Through these interactions, Housing Accord staff learned that property managers often wear many hats that require a lot of different skills. They are the person on-site working directly with residents, hosting events and creating a safe and welcoming community while at the same time running a business, enforcing fair housing and other rules and representing the interests and policies of their company. These multiple and sometimes conflicting roles often require excellent communication, de-escalation, and listening skills, among others.

The Housing Accord Program sought to add value by offering property managers:

- **Skill-building workshops** to add to their conflict resolution toolbox.
- **“Coffee and Consultation” gatherings to create “communities of practice”** in which property managers could come together and share common challenges and solutions.
- **Outreach materials** including Housing Accord flyers for welcome packets and posting in common areas, and BCRC business cards for giving to tenants in their office.



Early Referral Pilot Implementation

Building on these relationships of trust, BCRC partnered with the King County Housing Authority (KCHA) and the Allied Residential Property Management Co. (Allied) to implement the Early Referral Pilot and see if referring tenants to conflict resolution services early in the eviction process will help avoid evictions and increase housing stability.

Through this partnership, property managers in 24 multi-family housing communities in Bellevue and Kirkland provided a Housing Accord Program information card (see addendum) with every 30-day Pay or Vacate eviction notice they gave to tenants over a period of five months. Each month they tracked how many notices they gave out and how many cases were resolved on-site and reported aggregate data to Housing Accord.

Similarly, each month, Housing Accord tracked the number of landlord / tenant cases it received, the number of cases that were resolved or required no further action and the number that remained unresolved.

While tracking individual case outcomes wasn't possible and cases from pilot properties were not always able to be identified, the data sheds light on the effectiveness of early referrals and conflict resolution as an alternative to eviction.

Outcomes

1. Early on-site intervention helped prevent further escalation

During the 5-month pilot, 983 Pay or Vacate notices were given to households. While some units may have received multiple notices, a substantial portion (up to 27%) of households faced potential eviction.

Out of the 983 notices issued, 406 – representing 41% - were successfully resolved on-site, meaning that in nearly half of the cases, property managers and tenants addressed the issue without further escalation, external intervention or legal action. This suggests that direct, early intervention at the property level can be very effective in helping prevent further escalation.



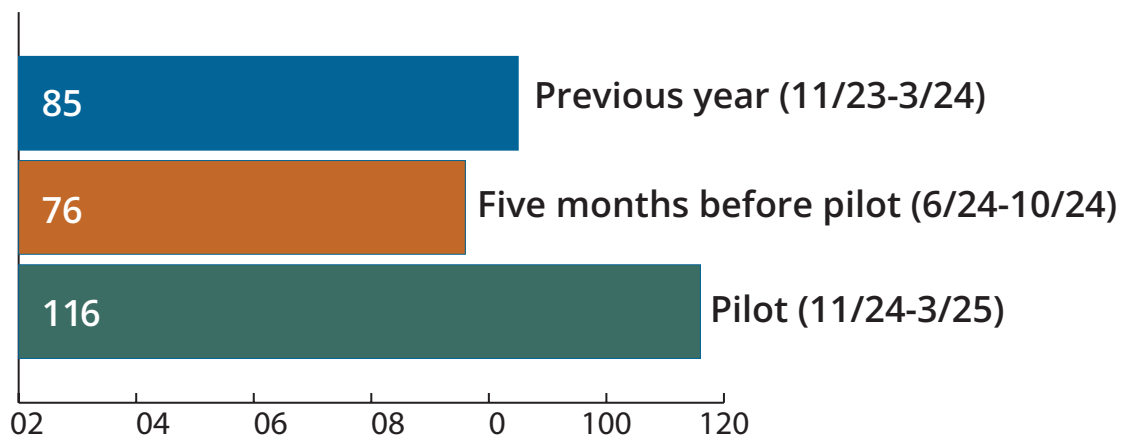
2. Early Referrals to BCRC helped avoid evictions

More tenants called BCRC during the pilot than in previous periods

During the five-month pilot, BCRC received 116 landlord / tenant cases. While this figure includes cases from properties that did not participate in the pilot, it's a 36% increase in referrals to BCRC compared to the same time the previous year, and a 53% increase compared to the five months just prior to the start of the pilot.

This increase in case volume suggests that Early Referral outreach successfully expanded awareness and engagement, leading to more tenants working with BCRC to find a solution and avoid eviction.

Number of early referrals to BCRC increased during Pilot



What do BCRC resolution rates include?

Cases that are either:

- **Fully resolved**, E.g. tenant pays off arrears, negotiates a repayment plan, decides to move - often as part of a mutual termination agreement, etc.
- **Requires no further action by BCRC**, E.g. tenant has a plan, works directly with landlord, no longer needs our help, etc.

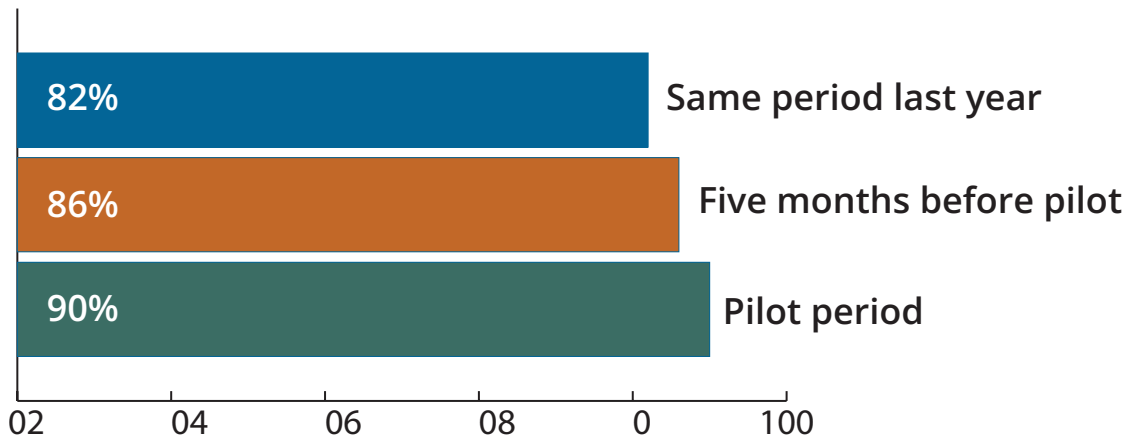


BCRC's resolution rate increased during the Pilot

90% (104) of the 116 cases referred to BCRC during the pilot were resolved or required no further action by BCRC, often because the tenant had a plan of action. Only 10% of the cases remained unresolved.

This is an increase over previous time periods and suggests that early referrals played a significant role in facilitating timely intervention, reducing case escalation, and ensuring more efficient case resolutions outside of court.

Resolution rates increased over time



3. Coaching helped empower residents to find solutions

BCRC Services:

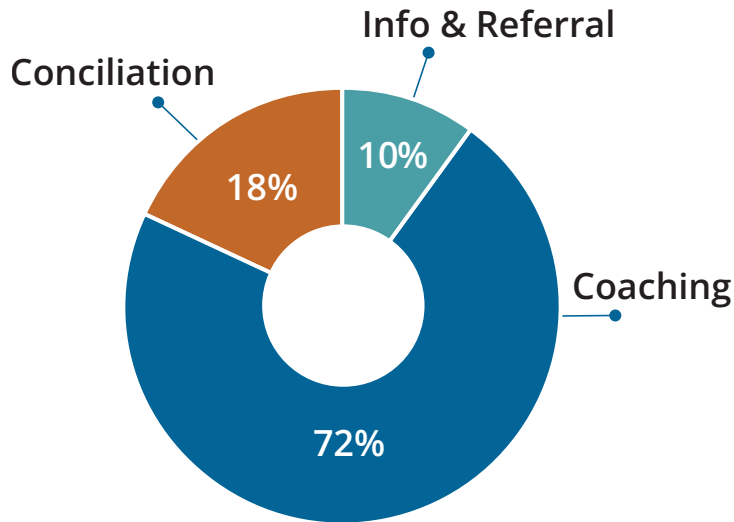
- **Coaching** – listening without judgment or advice to help individual parties sort through options and develop a plan of action to resolve the issue themselves.
- **Conciliation** – speaking with each party separately to understand their position and explore whether an agreement can be reached.
- **Information & Referral** – only providing parties with rental assistance and other resources without further engagement.

Coaching was the most common approach used in the pilot.

While Conciliation was the most common service used during the pandemic, among the 116 cases referred to BCRC during the pilot, coaching was by far the most common service offered.

Most cases (72%) involved coaching, helping tenants think through and identify realistic options. The rest involved conciliation (18%) or referring tenants to resources without further engagement (10%).

Coaching was the most common approach

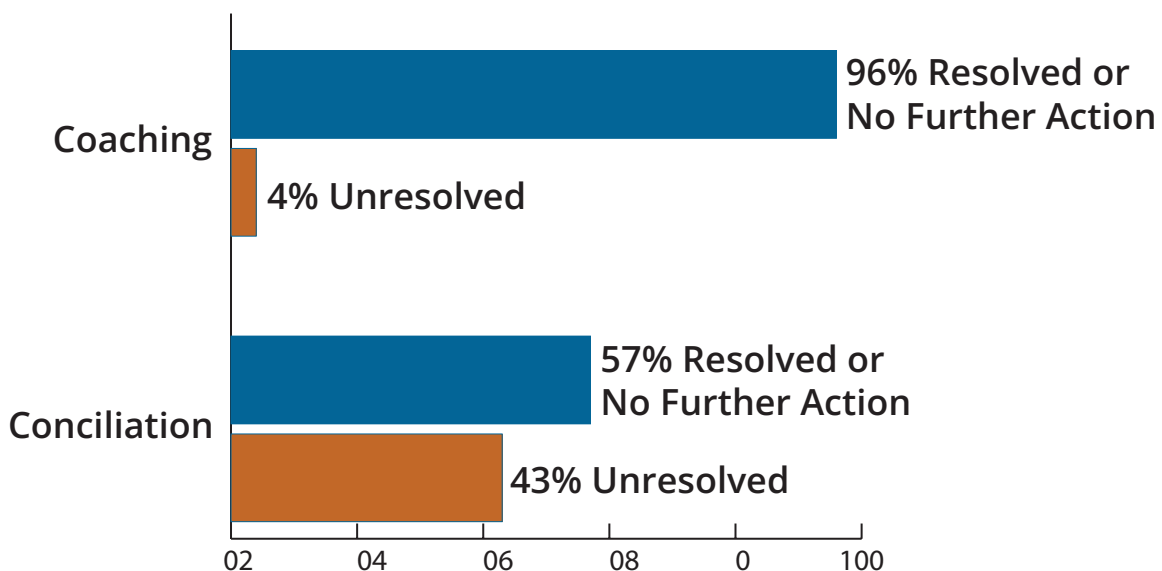


Coaching also proved to be the most successful

96% of the cases that involved Coaching were resolved or required no further action and only 4% were unresolved. Comparatively, 57% of the cases that involved Conciliation were resolved or required no further action, and the other 43% remained unresolved.

These figures highlight the effectiveness of Coaching in helping tenants navigate their situations, sort through options and develop solutions. The results also show that Conciliation played a critical role in resolving disputes. However, its lower resolution rate suggests that there are challenges and limitations to negotiating solutions between parties. Finding out more about when conciliation is effective and using it strategically could improve its usefulness as a tool to help landlords and tenants find solutions that work for both of them.

Coaching was more effective than Conciliation



Why Coaching works

Several factors likely contribute to the high success rates of Coaching, including:

Preventive Rather than Reactive

Unlike Conciliation, which involves conflict resolution between parties, Coaching can be preventive—helping tenants take steps before problems escalate. This proactive approach helps to prevent eviction filings and increase success rates.

Early Intervention & Timely Support

Coaching early in the eviction process allows tenants to find solutions before issues escalate and problems become more difficult to resolve.

Empowering Tenants with Action Plans

A significant number of Coaching cases required “no further action” often because tenants developed a clear plan to move forward independently. This suggests Coaching provides tenants with practical strategies and tools to navigate challenges on their own.

Personalized Guidance & Problem-Solving

Coaching is tailored to the tenant’s specific situation rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Personalized support increases the likelihood of a positive resolution.

High Engagement & Collaboration

Coaching encourages open dialogue between tenants and housing representatives. When tenants actively participate in the process, resolutions tend to be more effective and lasting.

Summary & Recommendations for Stakeholders

► Key Take-aways

On-site resolutions work: 41% of cases were successfully addressed before requiring external referrals.

Early referrals led to higher resolution rates: BCRC’s success rate reached 90%, surpassing previous periods.

Targeted support improves outcomes: Coaching and conciliation played a critical role in helping resolve issues, supporting tenant stability and reducing management burdens.

Collaborative approaches between agencies improve results including case management and resource utilization.

► Strategy and Policy Considerations

Formalizing Early Referral Programs: Given the demonstrated increase in resolution rates, institutionalizing early referrals could become a standard policy for property management and eviction prevention initiatives.

Prioritizing Coaching Over Conciliation: Coaching, with its higher success rate (96%), may be better suited for early intervention, reducing the need for more complex mediation.



Expanding Access to Support Services:

Ensuring more residents are connected to coaching and other resources early could further enhance resolution outcomes and reduce escalations to formal eviction proceedings.

Improving Conciliation Methods: With a 57% success rate, conciliation is less effective than coaching. Strengthening conciliation/ mediation procedures or identifying cases where conciliation is most effective may improve outcomes.

Data-Driven Policy Adjustments: Ongoing tracking of resolution rates, intervention success, and impact on eviction filings can inform refinements to early referral strategies, ensuring sustained effectiveness.

► Actionable Next Steps

1. **Broaden Early Referral network** to other properties and formalize early referrals as part of standard housing assistance programs.
2. **Strengthen tenant communication and outreach** to identify tenants early and ensure timely resolutions and referrals to available support.

3. **Develop Conciliation guidelines with partners** for when negotiation is an effective approach to avoid evictions.
4. **Improve data collection** to better track outcomes and evaluate program impact.

Conclusion

The Early Referral Pilot demonstrated measurable improvements in preventing evictions and promoting housing stability. Its benefits include increased resolutions, cost reduction, stronger relationships, and data-informed strategy, making it a compelling model for future housing policies.

The conflict resolution services offered by BCRC's Housing Accord Program have proven to be effective tools in helping landlords and tenants find solutions and avoid evictions. Early intervention increases the likelihood that the parties can reach a resolution. Coaching is often the most effective tool and can empower tenants and landlords to come up with solutions that work.

Going forward, continuing multi-agency collaboration and data-informed strategies will be key to sustaining progress, expanding early referral best practices, and using conflict resolution as an effective alternative to eviction.



Addendum

Housing Accord Postcard Given to Tenants with Pay or Vacate Notices

EVICTON PREVENTION ASSISTANCE

Do you need some assistance and support to stay in your home?

Have you received an Eviction Notice?

Are you having trouble with a neighbor?

WE CAN HELP!

Regardless of what you're facing, you are not alone.

THE HOUSING ACCORD PROGRAM:

Strengthening Communities in Bellevue and Kirkland



Bellevue Conflict Resolution Center's Housing Accord Program can help you figure out your next steps, access resources, and resolve conflicts that affect your ability to live in a safe, secure and welcoming community that you are proud to call "home." We are here to listen, help you look at your options and sort out ways to **avoid eviction**.

Our services are free, confidential, and independent.

We can explain the eviction process so that you know what to expect and give you up-to-date referrals for financial assistance and social and legal support. If they agree, we can also talk with your property manager to try and find a resolution that works for everyone.

Contact us TODAY! The sooner you call, the sooner we can help you find a solution!



BellevueWA.gov/resolve | 425-452-4091 | bcrcc@bellevuewa.gov



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