



**PATH Street Outreach  
Video Series Discussion Guide**  
SMA-10-4581



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
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**PATH** Projects for Assistance in  
Transition from Homelessness

## **Acknowledgements**

This discussion guide was prepared for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) with the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) Technical Assistance Center under contract number HHSS280200600029C with SAMHSA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Mattie Curry Cheek, Ph.D. served as the Government Project Officer.

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## **Recommended Citation**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. PATH Street Outreach Video Series Discussion Guide. HHS Publication No. SMA-10-4581. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2010.

## **Originating Office**

Homeless Programs Branch, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 1 Choke Cherry Road, Rockville, MD 20857 HHS Publication No. SMA-10-4581



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SMA-10-458I





# Episode 1—Initial Contact

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## Synopsis

In this episode, we meet Jeff and Tina. Jeff is an experienced outreach worker who is mentoring Tina, a new outreach worker, as they conduct street outreach to people experiencing homelessness. They are focused on engaging people and building relationships so they can connect people with other services. They meet a man on the street and attempt to engage in conversation. He does not seem ready to talk. They tell him about nearby services, leave an information card and a bottle of water, and ask if they can check in with him another time. The encounter is brief, and the outreach workers move on.

## Key Messages

- Assess your environment in outreach settings.
- Be open-minded and non-judgmental.
- Meet people where they are.
- Prepare yourself to do outreach.
- Give people space.



## Discussion Questions

1. What is the purpose of outreach to people experiencing homelessness?
2. How can outreach workers “prepare themselves” for outreach?
3. What does it mean to “meet people where they are”?
4. How might you assess from a distance what is going on with a person on the street?
5. What can you do if someone does not seem “ready to talk”?
6. What does it mean to be non-judgmental?
7. What does it mean to “follow the client’s lead”?
8. Tina says, “He was really resistant at first.” What do you think of the term “resistant”?
9. What are some of the things you notice about Tina related to her being new? What does the persistent offer of food reflect about her values and how does this relate to understanding the values you bring onto the streets, your awareness of them, and strategies to overcome them?
10. What did Jeff and Tina do well? What could they do better?

## Optional Activities

- Get into groups of 3 or 4 to discuss “What is the purpose of outreach?”
- Take out a sheet of paper and write down the word “non-judgmental” at the top. Then write down every word or phrase that comes to mind when you think of the term. Discuss your responses with the rest of the group.



# Episode 2—Follow Up Visit

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## Synopsis

Jeff and Tina come back to the same street corner a few days later. The man tells them that his friends call him “L.D.” Tina notices an open beer bottle next to L.D., and has some concern that he is under the influence. L.D., though, is much more open and talkative than he had been on the last visit. They also see that he has a bandage on his arm. Jeff and Tina tell L.D. about the free medical clinic. Tina offers him food and water. Jeff offers to bring out a new sleeping bag because L.D.’s had been stolen. Again, the encounter is brief, but the outreach team has more rapport than they did previously.

## Key Messages

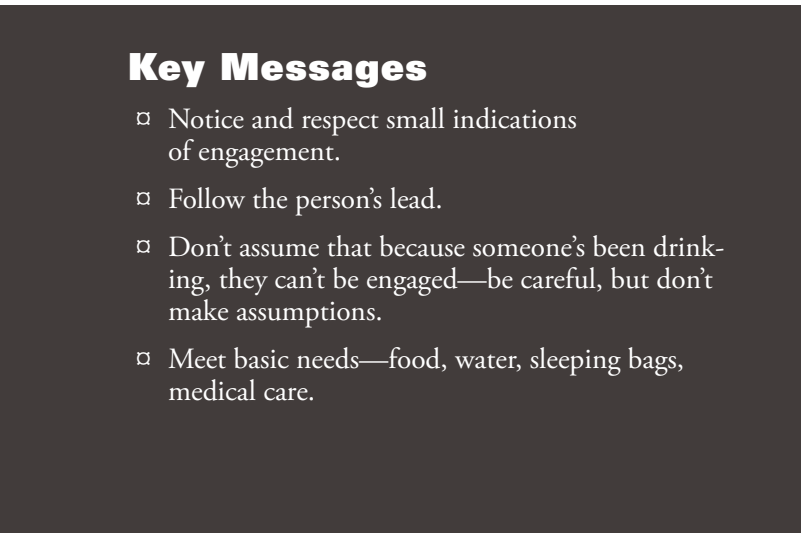
- ❑ Notice and respect small indications of engagement.
- ❑ Follow the person’s lead.
- ❑ Don’t assume that because someone’s been drinking, they can’t be engaged—be careful, but don’t make assumptions.
- ❑ Meet basic needs—food, water, sleeping bags, medical care.

## Discussion Questions

1. Are you associated with the PATH program? What is your role?
  2. Are Tina and Jeff too friendly? Not friendly enough?
  3. How might you handle an outreach encounter with someone who has been drinking?
  4. Why do you think “L.D.” is more open today?
  5. How might Jeff and Tina better handle the medical situation with L.D.’s arm?
  6. How do Jeff and Tina physically give L.D. space and “stay on his level”?
  7. L.D. doesn’t shake Tina’s hand. What do you make of that?
  8. What did Jeff and Tina do well? What could they do better?
  9. How can outreach workers “follow a person’s lead”?
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## Optional Activities

- ❑ Get into groups of 3 or 4 to discuss “What does it mean to follow a person’s lead? What are some concrete examples of how outreach workers do that?”
- ❑ Get into groups of 3 or 4 to discuss how outreach workers can assess physical health, mental health, and substance use when on outreach.
- ❑ Write down 5 tips for ensuring outreach worker safety. Share with the group.



# Episode 3—Connecting People With Services

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## Synopsis

During this encounter, Jeff and Tina bring L.D. a sleeping bag and ask about his arm. L.D. tells them he made it to the clinic, then asks them about housing options. Jeff offers to call their housing director and begins the application process for housing. They confirm a housing application appointment, then Jeff gives L.D. a bus token to get to the housing appointment. Tina offers L.D. socks, a hat, sunblock, shampoo, food, and juice. Jeff and Tina discuss the fact that everyone is different, and that we measure success in small steps.

## Key Messages

- ❑ Building on the relationship, offer information about housing and supportive services.
- ❑ Don't get discouraged.
- ❑ Everyone is different—some people can connect with you very quickly, while with others it may take months or years.
- ❑ Measure success in small steps. Celebrate small victories.

## Discussion Questions

1. Is it important that someone is happy to see you when you're on outreach?
  2. What are Jeff's strengths and weaknesses as a mentor to Tina?
  3. What are Tina's strengths and weaknesses as an outreach worker?
  4. Tina says that L.D. is "wanting to make a few changes in his life." Do you agree?
  5. How can you tell if someone seems ready for change?
  6. What does Tina carry in her outreach backpack?
  7. What items do you think workers need to take on outreach?
  8. How do you think Jeff handled L.D.'s concern about the government?
  9. Is access to housing programs realistic in your community?
  10. How does the process of engagement and relationship building impact the ability of outreach workers to connect people with housing and services?
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## Optional Activities

- ❑ Work as a group to name everything that should be in the ideal outreach worker backpack. Use a flipchart or sheet of paper to create a checklist of supplies.
- ❑ Get into groups of 3 or 4. Discuss issues of culture and race related to outreach. In these videos, the two outreach workers are white and the "client" is black. How can outreach teams ensure cultural diversity and cultural competence?



## Conclusion

In this video series, all the parts were played by actual outreach workers. They volunteered to be part of the training videos, and each selected the part he or she would play. In the videos, both “outreach workers” are white and the “client” is black. Outreach teams should always strive for diversity – in race, language, cultural background, skills, and training – so they can better connect with the diverse population of people experiencing homelessness.

Finally, these videos are only a taste of the experiences faced by people doing street outreach. New and experienced outreach workers should always strive to improve their skills and knowledge to better serve those living on the streets. We recommend the following resources as a starting place for outreach workers who want to learn more.

## Resources

Erickson, S. & Page, J. (1999). To dance with grace: Outreach and engagement to persons on the street. In Fosburg, L.B., Dennis, D.L. (eds.), *Practical Lessons: The 1998 National Symposium on Homelessness Research*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/progsys/homeless/symposium/6-Outreach.htm>

Homelessness Resource Center – Outreach Topic Page. Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. <http://www.homeless.samhsa.gov/Channel/View.aspx?id=35>

Kraybill, K. (2002). *Outreach to people experiencing homelessness: A curriculum for training Health Care for the Homeless outreach workers*. Nashville, TN: National Health Care for the Homeless Council. <https://nhch.org/Curriculum/curriculum.htm>

McMurray-Avila, M. (Ed.). (2001). Outreach. In *Organizing Health Services for Homeless People: A Practical Guide* (pp. 166-180). Nashville, TN: National Health Care for the Homeless Council.





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