



# The Firehouse Model

Ideas for how *behavioral health* crisis services can effectively communicate the critical role of *availability* in delivering timely and effective care





*“It’s important to understand actual costs. Non-profits have a tendency not to know how much things cost. But maybe they have capacity that isn’t being used.” -- Metro Crisis Intervention Services, 1995*

**...Or was it a smoldering crisis of our own making?**

## Wildly successful...sure

**150+%**

Annual growth rate  
between 1993-1996...

**~100**

New funding sources in  
just the first 3 years

**\$5 - \$7**

Revenue per call (\$10-\$14  
in today's inflation-  
adjusted dollars)

**Also nearly grew ourselves out of business!**

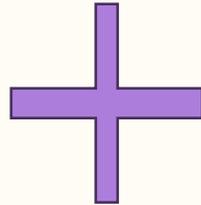
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# The Inherent Unpredictability of a Crisis Meets the Need for Speed



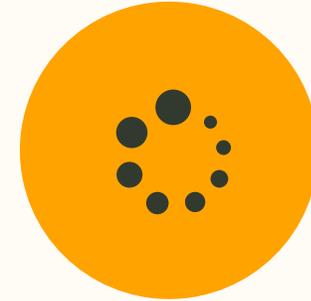
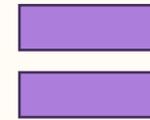
## Inherent Unpredictability

Crisis response needs have no schedule - they vary from moment to moment, with an unpredictable 'variable rate of arrival'.



## Need for Speed

Response times are critical - every second counts, whether answering a call, arriving on-site, or having space and staff ready.



## Valuing Availability

The time spent **waiting** for need to occur is a critical part of meeting the mission, like a firehouse's constant readiness.

**The unpredictable nature of crisis services, its “variable rate of arrival,” combined with service level with service level goals, are what define the “minimum to underwrite our availability.” availability.”**

# The Crisis Continuum of Care



## Crisis Lines

Provide 24/7 access to trained professionals who can offer support, assess the situation, and connect individuals to appropriate resources.



## Mobile Crisis Teams

Dispatch trained mental health professionals to the location of the crisis to provide on-site assessment, de-escalation, escalation, and connection to ongoing care.



## Crisis Receiving Centers

Offer a safe, therapeutic environment where individuals experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis can receive immediate stabilization and access to appropriate care.

***“Every Second Counts, Every Minute Matters”***



**“The Firehouse Model emphasizes the critical importance of the time spent just *being available* to respond to someone in a behavioral health crisis.”**



10-30%

## “Unit Hour Utilization”

For the Firehouse, a standard measure of availability is called Unit Hour Utilization, or “UHU.” It’s the percentage of time in a 24-hour day that a unit is assigned to an incident.

Meanwhile:

The National Fire Protection Agency’s (NFPA) recommended standard for a response is “5 minutes and 20 seconds for not less than 90% of dispatched incidents.”

*So, what would you guess is a recommended UHU for a firehouse seeking to meet this standard?*

Agent Occupancy: ~50%  
Agent Available time: ~37%



## “Agent Occupancy”

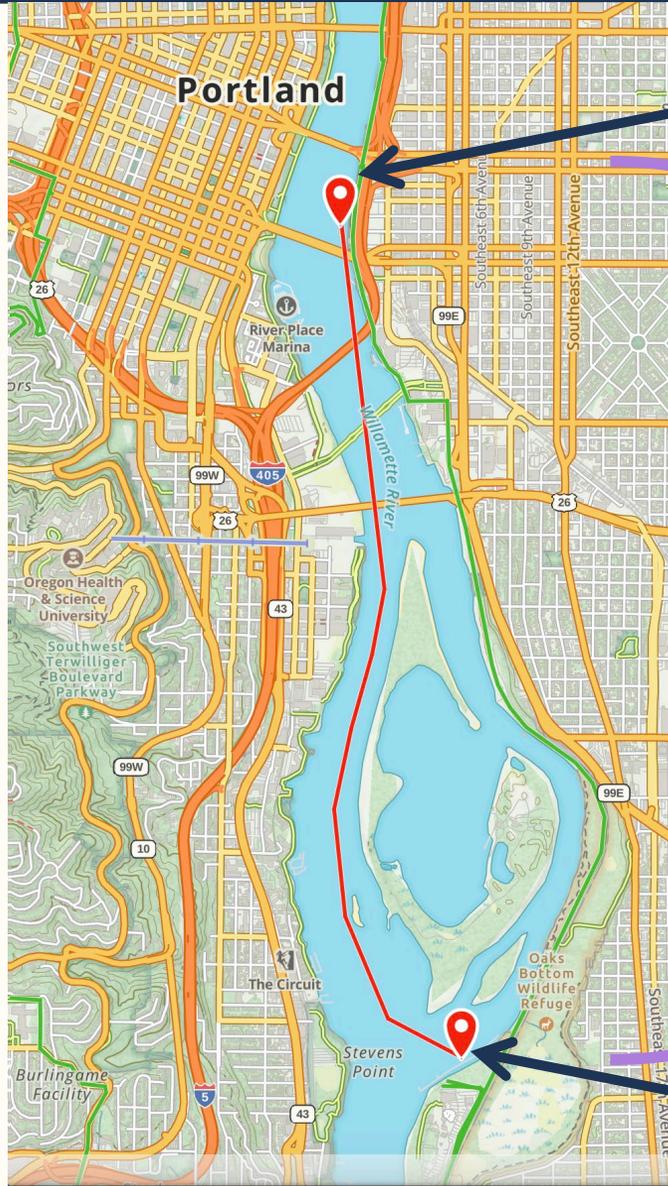
The equivalent of a “UHU” for a call center is “agent occupancy.” It’s the percentage of time an agent is directly engaged in call taking related work. (Outside of a crisis call center context, call center occupancy goals can be as high as 80-90%.)

**Meanwhile:**

A typical performance target for a crisis call center might be something like “90% of calls answered within 30 seconds.”

*Do you know what % of your staff’s time needs to be spent in a “ready and available” mode for a call to reach your goals?*





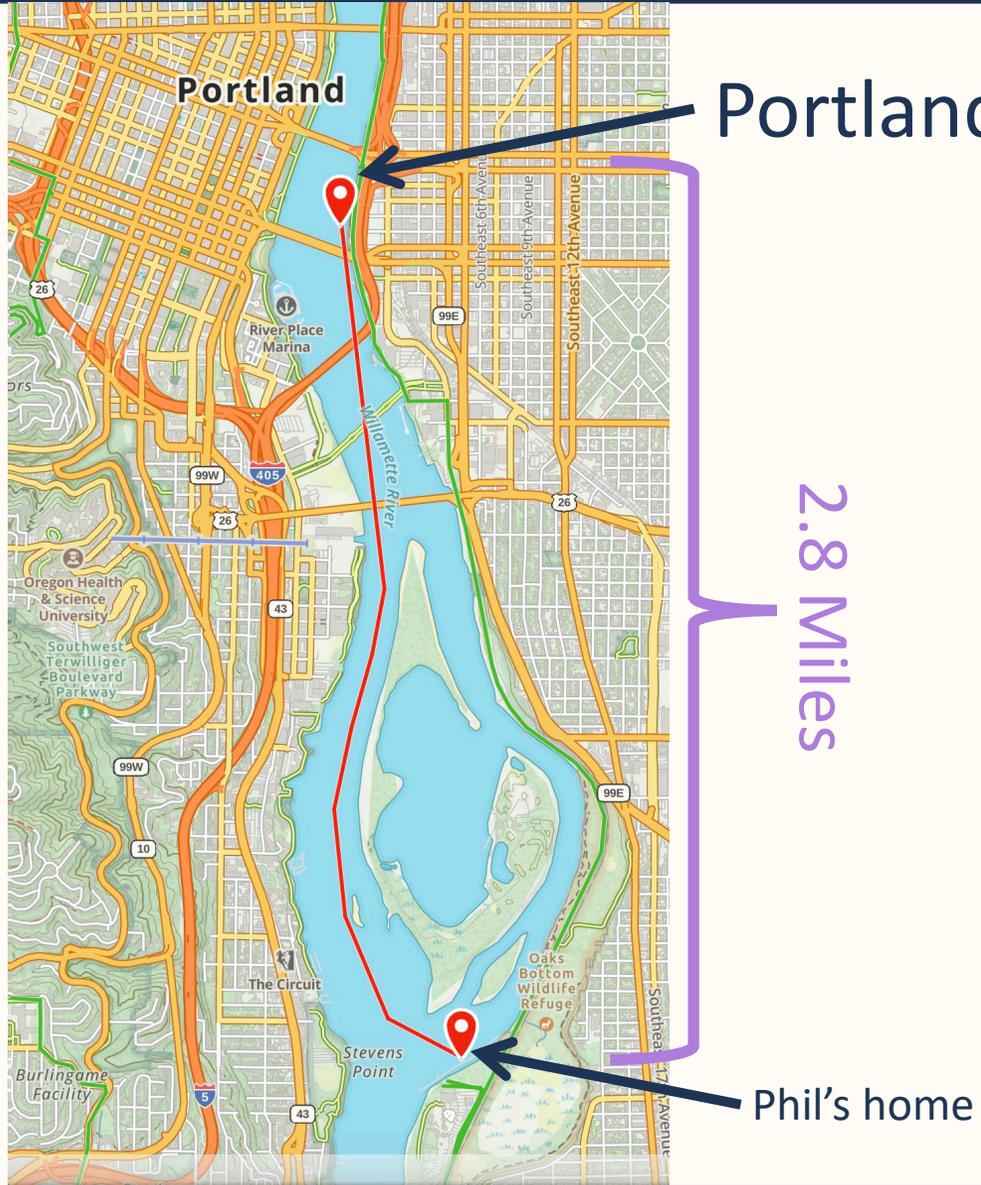
Portland Fire Station 21

2.8 Miles

Phil's home



Not your typical Firehouse



Portland Fire Station 21

2.8 Miles

Phil's home



Not your typical context



# Burning questions? Hot Topics?

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