Tips for Enhancing Long-Term Housing Stability

This page provides tips for enhancing the housing stability of clients once they have been placed in permanent housing. Many of the same activities that are critical to successful housing placement also serve a vital role in enhancing long-term housing stability.

- Assign responsibility for housing retention services.

As discussed in other parts of this Toolkit, there are a number of different models for providing housing search assistance. In some communities, case managers may be responsible for providing housing search assistance and follow-up services to clients. Other communities may have specially designated staff (housing advocates) to provide these services. In communities that have specially designated housing search staff, it is important to determine the respective duties of case managers and housing advocates - particularly post-placement - to ensure that client stabilization services do not fall through the cracks. In many instances, it will likely be the housing advocate's responsibility to provide retention and stabilization services, particularly for clients that have spent little time in the system. However, in situations where the client has been part of the homeless service system for a period of time (e.g., participating in a transitional housing program) and has been working with a specific case manager to address barriers and access needed services, it may be important to include that case manager in the provision of follow-up services.

- Provide tenant education.

By providing participants with tools and guidance on how to be good tenants before they are placed in permanent housing, your organization can greatly increase the likelihood that your clients will retain their housing for the long term. Learning how to budget, understanding a rental agreement, and maintaining an apartment are crucial skills for successful independent living. A tenant education program also provides a jumping off point for offering individualized services to clients, such as working with clients to create a monthly budget.

- Develop Individual Service Plans.

Check in with clients on a regular basis to ensure that they are following their service plans. Remember, the Individual Service Plan addresses issues that came out of the intake process, including previous barriers to finding and keeping housing. The goal of these discussions is to help clients prevent similar problems from recurring in the future. So, if clients are not meeting their goals or target completion dates, discuss ways that they might modify their strategies for achieving these goals. In these discussions with clients, be on the alert for any "red flags" that might indicate serious or imminent threats to housing stability. Collaborate with other agencies that your clients may be working
with to ensure that they are receiving all the services and benefits to which they are entitled and which might enhance their housing stability.

- **Invest in landlord relationships.**

Once your organization has established a solid reputation with landlords in your community, they will know that they can call you if problems arise. By making the effort to contact you worth their while, landlords may be more willing to work with tenants and less likely to simply evict. However, do not wait for landlords to contact you. Check in with them to make sure everything is going well with new tenants and to see if they have any questions or concerns. Remember to complete a Landlord-Tenant-Case Manager Communication Agreement, which should help promote open communication and early identification of problems.

- **Provide ongoing support.**

Once placed in permanent housing, some clients will want to move on and will choose not to participate in any ongoing programs your organization provides. As long as they are not encountering problems, this is fine. However, many of your clients may be more likely to succeed if follow-up services are available to them for at least six months following placement. When it comes to follow-up services, housing advocates have found that there is no "one size fits all" approach. Some clients may need a weekly telephone call to discuss progress on their Individual Service Plan or troubleshoot issues as they arise, while other clients may want to participate in workshops or a support group. As a result, it is important to be able to offer your clients a range of services and to be aware of individual needs and preferences. Consider providing some or all of the following follow-up services:

  - **Workshop series:** Develop a workshop series based on the specific needs of your clients. As clients go through the intake process, work on Individual Service Plans, and participate in tenant education workshops, topic ideas should arise. Additional ideas for workshops may come out of your weekly telephone calls with clients. To ensure client interest in the workshop series - ask them for input on what topics they would be interested in learning more about. Providing food, childcare, and/or travel stipends may also improve participation.

  - **Support groups:** Once placed in permanent housing, your clients will likely encounter similar problems and may benefit from hearing directly from one another. Support groups provide an opportunity for creative problem solving and peer support. However, having an experienced mediator is critical to the success of a support group.

  - **Ongoing financial counseling:** Ongoing financial counseling can assist clients who repeatedly spend beyond what they have allocated in their monthly budget. Some clients may need additional financial counseling to revise their monthly budget once they have applied it to the real world or if changes occur in their financial situation (e.g. a change in salary, a rent increase, or a loss of financial benefits). Additionally, since a majority of your clients will not have financial
cushions to help in emergencies, they may need to request Emergency Assistance (EA) funds from your organization from time to time. Most organizations that provide EA funds have found it useful to make financial counseling a condition for receiving the assistance (see below).

- **Establish an Emergency Assistance Fund.**

Establish an Emergency Assistance (EA) fund to help prevent your clients from returning to homelessness. Even those clients who successfully complete a tenant education program, comply with their Individual Service Plans, and do not spend more than their monthly budget allows may still encounter financial difficulties. For example, a client may have an unexpected medical emergency for which they have not set sufficient funds aside. An EA fund can be used for such things as rent, utility bills, automobile repairs, and healthcare bills. To maximize the effectiveness of your EA funds, formulate ground rules that participants must comply with in order to receive funds. For example, require clients to demonstrate how the money will solve their problem by developing a revised budget and plan for paying bills in the future. Provide additional financial counseling. Finally, limit the frequency with which clients may seek emergency assistance, for example, to once in a twelve-month period. HUD funding sources for homelessness prevention include the Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG) Program, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, and the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) Program. Some communities have also committed municipal, local business, foundation, and/or mainstream agency funding to provide significant levels of homelessness prevention assistance. Your organization could seek resources to establish its own fund or partner with another organization that already provides homelessness prevention assistance.

- **Solicit furniture donations.**

Once your clients find a house or apartment to rent, they will need to furnish it. This is a major expense, which many of your clients may not be able to afford. Work with furniture banks in your community to help your clients find new or used furniture. If there are no furniture banks in your community, contact the National Furniture Bank Association (NFBA), which operates a national clearinghouse of furniture resources. This assistance will be critical to helping your clients stay within their budgets.

Select each resource and its embedded links above to learn more.

Back to Client Retention and Stabilization Resources