

Partnering with Landlords – Guidelines for Developing a Relationship

Keep the following points in mind when doing landlord outreach:

- Do not be afraid of rejection.
- Be persistent, yet respectful at all times.
- Make things happen, don't wait for them to happen.
- Keep a positive attitude and expect success.
- Landlord's relaxing screening criteria (i.e. overlooking an eviction) for participants is not a violation of federal or state fair housing laws, which only cover protected classes (race, gender, creed, etc.).

Presenting the Agency

- Describe the history of your agency.
- Describe the history of your agency in providing rental assistance with supportive services.

Presenting the Program

- Case Managers work with clients on creating a plan for self-sufficiency by addressing the barriers that often keep individuals in homelessness and/or abusive relationships.
- Financial assistance may include moving costs, rent application fees, security deposit, last month's rent, utility deposits, utility payments as well as rent payment assistance.
- Once housing is obtained, staff will begin to work with the household on issues that will help the person keep their housing.
- Services offered during this phase include regular home visits, job search and job training referrals, case coordination with other systems, linkages to legal services and support groups, and help with budgeting and goal planning.

In order for this program to be successful we need partnerships with landlords who believe that we can help people start over and rebuild their lives.

Some incentives and protections for landlords:

- **Tenant education** – responsible renting, financial management, working on employability, taking care of a home (maintenance and cleaning).
- **Home-based case management** – working with the person or family to address the issues that led to their homelessness.
- **Landlord backup** – because the agency is engaged with the individual or family until they are stabilized and able to assume full financial responsibility, there will be someone to call who can help mediate issues with tenants to avoid eviction or departure from the unit.
- **Free, quick tenant referrals.** While some of the participants in this program have some barriers that can make it difficult to access housing (e.g. credit issues, criminal histories or bad housing histories), most are successful in supportive housing programs with the help of a case manager.

What we ask of landlords in the program:

- Allow support services and financial subsidies provided to the participant offset any barriers that a participant faces in meeting the landlord's traditional screening criteria.
- Agree to communicate (with signed consent forms from the participant) with the case manager about any concerns/challenges that arise so that the case manager can assist the participant in addressing those concerns in a responsible/productive way.

Advocacy Strategies

- Explain how prospective tenant has taken responsibility for past mistakes and can demonstrate positive steps to resolve those issues.
- Explain that the supportive services mean that past rent history will not necessarily predict future rental behavior.
- Poor credit is not necessarily due to not paying rent on time in the past. If possible, demonstrate history of on-time rent payments.
- If possible, provide documentation from accounts in good standing (i.e. medical co-pays or premiums, car insurance payments, phone bills, storage facilities etc.).
- Negotiate rents, deposits.
- Obtain support letters – i.e. from probation officer, local pastor, other service providers.
- Describe how the person has participated in specialized services (substance abuse treatment, mental health counseling, financial education classes) if applicable.

Maintaining Good Relationships

- Follow up with property owner or agent.
- Call regularly, get feedback on rental situation.
- Don't just check in when things are going downhill.
- Keep your commitments.
- Respond within the timeframes promised.
- Intervene/mediate when appropriate.
- Ensure committed home visits and case management occurs.
- Keep open lines of communication.

Examples of responses to specific concerns regarding barriers for high risk applicants (*only use those that apply to the client*):

"She's a survivor of domestic violence." (i.e. "What if her abuser comes looking for her and destroys property?")

- She has a protection order; if he is on the property she will call the police.
- She is working with her Case Coordinator to develop a safety protocol and teaching her children how to stay safe.
- She has a case manager. This means she is getting education and support around the issues. As a result, she is much more likely to think through the decisions she is making and the consequences of them. She has a support system that she uses for guidance and support.
- One in four women will experience an abusive relationship and it is possible that some of your current tenants are in situations that are abusive, violent and unhealthy. The difference here is that this person is working on rebuilding and making healthy decisions about living a life free from this and has the support of an agency to do so.
- We can offer an increased security deposit to offset any risk to your property.
- Relaxing rules or screening practices to give her a chance does not violate fair housing laws, provided that the housing determinations are not made on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, color, creed or national origin, religion or family status. It is lawful for you to give preference to one applicant over another on the basis of his or her participation in a case management program, even if the applicant has a poorer rental "resume" than other applicants.

- This is your opportunity to help keep your community safer and to help bring some accountability to this abuser with the protection order. She will give you a copy of the protection order, his picture and a description of his car. You and your staff can become partners with law enforcement and the courts to keep her and everyone else in our community safer.

“She doesn’t have a rental history.”

- With our assistance she will build up her rental history. She has a much higher likelihood of succeeding with us supporting her financially and emotionally, and holding her responsible to her goals. You can be a part of creating her successful new life.
- Not having a rental history does not speak to her character or her ability to be a responsible renter. I can show you character letters.
- I can also guarantee you that she will receive education about being a responsible renter and her Case Coordinator will work with her the entire time she is in the program to ensure she understands her responsibilities to you as the landlord.
- Her commitment to being responsible and successful here means the difference between being homeless and in a shelter and finally having her own safe space.

“She has bad credit.”

- Part of the dynamics related to domestic violence is control of finances. When an abuser does this it prevents their partner from being able to leave or start over without them because they have bad or no credit; just like she is experiencing now. He did not allow her to have her own credit cards or bank accounts. He told her he was paying bills they jointly owned, and he wasn’t. She will receive support during the program to create a budget and improve her financial literacy.
- She is working with creditors to clean up her credit. Even though her income is very limited she is attempting to set up payment plans.
- I can show you evidence of other accounts in good standing since she has made the decision to create a healthy life.
- I can show you a letter from her employer talking about her dependability and reliability.
- In addition to receiving financial rental assistance, her case manager will be working with her to develop a monthly budget and receive education about healthy financial literacy/management.

“She has a felony.”

- Women in abusive relationships are often forced to break the law in order to stay safe in the relationship. Sometimes these incidents involve self-defense, an abuser forcing their partner to hold or sell drugs etc.
- Let’s look at that felony. It wasn’t violent. Weapons were not involved. It happened more than 5 years ago and she was drug dependent. Since the conviction she has worked hard to get her life back together. She has been clean for a year and a half, and has fulfilled the legal obligations related to the conviction. She has her children back and is ready to take the next step in her new life.
- She is required to check in monthly with her parole officer. Her Case Coordinator will support her in doing that.
- Since we’ve known her she has shown she is determined to stay clean and to work hard to stay independent and safe.

“She has an eviction on her record.”

- Her eviction was related to the abusive relationship she was in up until last year. (Tell her story. For instance: Her abuser was responsible for the rent and she believed him when he said he was paying the rent every month. She found out he wasn’t when they got the eviction notice. That was the tipping point for her and why she left the relationship).
- With our financial support case management she is more likely to pay her rent. She will meet regularly with a Case Coordinator and develop short and long term goals toward self-sufficiency. The way the program works is that she gradually takes responsibility for the rent until she can pay in full.

- Her eviction was related to property damage/disorderly conduct caused by a former batterer, even though he was not on the lease at the time of the incident.
- Sometimes Case Coordinators may have to explain that a participant's past evictions were because they used poor judgment and lacked education in withholding rent money to try and force a landlord to address maintenance or health and safety issues. Explain that a large part of the program is about finding responsible landlords and helping participants address issues in the proper and responsible ways through education and coaching.

“How do I know her boyfriend won’t move in with her?”

- If her boyfriend moves in she is violating her lease and the guidelines of the program. She risks losing her housing. The Case Coordinator will help reinforce that.
- Part of the education about abuse and safety planning the Case Coordinator provides is about the pluses and minuses of getting into another relationship. Whether she does is her choice but she will be well aware of the dangers of getting too involved too fast.
- The Case Coordinator will meet regularly with her in her apartment. If she sees evidence that another adult is living there, she will let you know.
- If there are ever problems with her tenancy, her Case Coordinator is a resource for you to call. She can act as a liaison between you two, and also mediate conflicts.

“What happens in a year when the program ends?”

- The way the program is designed is that she will gradually assume full responsibility for the rent by the time the year is up. She will receive a lot of support in terms of goal setting, advocacy, and community referrals to reach independence.
- She will be held accountable to her goals throughout the year, with special emphasis placed on her current income and housing situation every three months.
- Her ability to pay her rent will be addressed throughout the program. If it looks as though she will not be independent, that possibility is addressed early with referrals, accountability to provide for herself and referrals and advocacy to other housing resources, if needed.