

Closing the Case

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Closing a case

- Exit planning starts at entry: Discuss goals of rapid re-housing (RRH), assistance available, and criteria for ending assistance — well in advance.
- Client and case manager create an exit plan so the household can continue to work toward housing stability and other life goals they choose (with or without community resources that can assist).
- The exit plan includes “Plan B”: options if a housing crisis recurs — whether that is the RRH program, community resources, the household’s personal network, or some combination.
- Case managers regularly review progress toward goals and keep exit date flexible, adjusting as necessary based on the person’s progress, and changes in their circumstances.

When is it time to complete services?

	Indicators for Closure	Indicators for Continuation
INCOME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Housing subsidy secured <i>or</i> ✓ Income is sufficient to pay rent (despite severe rent burden) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Income is not sufficient to pay rent in the near term.
LEASE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Tenant is not in violation of lease and has no rent arrears ✓ Landlord agrees that tenancy is stable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Landlord reports violations and arrears and wants services to continue
LINKAGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Person is connected to resources necessary to sustain housing (e.g. benefits, daycare) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Critical connections have not been secured
CHOICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Client chooses to exit program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Client wants and needs additional assistance

Remember, stress weighs on case managers too

Ask yourself, as you are considering closing a case, whether you have any of these signs of stress overload:

- Anger, irritability, impatience
- Anxiety, worrying, panic
- Lack of direction
- Apathy
- Mood swings
- Cynicism (pessimism, doubt)
- Nightmares
- Defensiveness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Depression
- Feeling of impending danger or doom
- Restlessness
- Feeling of insecurity
- Sadness
- Helplessness
- Suspiciousness
- Hopelessness, worthlessness
- Increased smoking, drinking, drug use

Contemplating an exit

- Don't do it alone; use your supervisor.
- Request case consultation with peers for complicated cases.
- Consider: Does this decision primarily benefit the interests of the participant or the needs of your program?
- Remind yourself that the great majority of people who receive RRH will not return to homelessness. People are more resilient than you think.
- Understand that some program participants will show increased stress symptoms due to case closing discussions or decisions. This does not "prove" their case must be kept open; it suggests the case manager should discuss the stress of program exit with the client.

An exit can be “phased”

- Case management can continue after financial assistance ends — to monitor the household’s ability to meet tenant expectations and to help make connections with other community resources.
- A household’s case can be continued on inactive status in the event that the person or family may need intervention in the near term to keep housing.
- A household does not have to use their RRH all at one time. If they have another homelessness crisis or need periods where active assistance is suspended, they can come back.
- The program can make one or more follow-up contacts to identify housing stability problems.

Activity #1: Closing the case

Consider three case scenarios. In each case, the program's guidelines require that the case manager review the person's case for potential exit.

For each case...

- What are the factors that support closing this case?
- What are the factors that support keeping the case open?
- If you think the case should be kept open, what actions or objectives must be completed so that the case can be closed?

Case scenario: Rochelle

- Rochelle, 36, had been staying in a sober shelter for two months when she entered RRH.
- Within 45 days, her case manager helped her secure a one-bedroom apartment with rent of \$520 (including utilities) and a part-time job at 20 hours/week for \$9/hour (about \$720/month).
- RRH has been subsidizing the rent by \$200/month for three months — ever since Rochelle started to work.
- When making home visits, the case manager has twice found Rochelle appearing intoxicated. Rochelle firmly declined treatment, saying she is not an alcoholic.

Rochelle: The case for exiting RRH

- She has worked at her job for 90 days so her income seems stable.
- She paid her share of the rent for the past 3 months and she should be able to maintain her housing even without the subsidy.
- Later, when she is ready, she may consider increasing her work hours to reduce rent burden, but she has stable housing at this point.

Rochelle: The case for continuing RRH assistance

- She is drinking and needs treatment before exiting RRH.
 - **But**...she says she is not an alcoholic (many sober shelters do not restrict shelter to people with a diagnosis of substance abuse) and she doesn't want treatment.
 - **And**...a Housing First program does not require sobriety or treatment.
 - **And**...she has been maintaining her housing for 3 months, regardless of any drinking. Alcohol doesn't appear to be a housing retention barrier.
- She has not yet paid the full costs of her housing.
- It's reasonable to stop the subsidy but continue case management for a month or so to assure that she can pay the full rent.

Case scenario: Danny, Stella, and their children

- After Stella lost her job and the family was evicted for failure to pay rent, Danny, 25 (a Veteran who recently served in Afghanistan), Stella, 24, and their two children (Michael, 7 and Arleen, 4) moved into shelter and applied for RRH.
- The case manager negotiated a return to their previous housing by promising to pay their rental arrears and guaranteeing a rental subsidy for another 6 months.
- Stella quickly obtained a new part-time job. With Danny's disability, they now have an income of \$1420/month. Their 2-bedroom apartment costs \$840.
- The landlord's guaranteed rental subsidy of \$200/month is supposed to last 3 more months.

Danny, Stella, and children: The case for exiting RRH

- o The family's income is sufficient to pay for their housing.
- o The landlord has not reported any lease violations, rental arrears or conflict between the family and the landlord or other tenants.

Danny, Stella, and children: The case for continuing RRH assistance

- The landlord was promised a six-month subsidy and expects the program to keep its word.
 - **But**...the case manager should have discussed with the landlord that the subsidy is not for a fixed duration. The case manager should explain that since the tenant is in good standing with the landlord and is able to pay the rent, the subsidy has to end.
 - **And**...the case manager can offer to keep case management open for another month or two so that if problems come up, the program can still offer assistance to the landlord and tenant.

Case scenario: Jerry

- Jerry, 61, a Vietnam War Veteran, was living with several men under a bridge when he was approached by an outreach worker and subsequently enrolled in RRH.
- He has no income, so his case manager is subsidizing the entire cost of his new \$610 single room occupancy unit.
- His case manager has been pursuing SSI on the basis that Jerry has a traumatic brain injury. Unfortunately, approval of the application is expected to take many months.

Jerry: The case for exiting RRH

- Jerry needs a longer-term subsidy. RRH is not long-term and Jerry has utilized more than the agency's rent assistance limit.
 - BUT... the funder (SSVF) allows additional months of assistance and does not restrict the total expenditures per person.
 - AND... even though it is more difficult for the agency to manage its budget, flexibility is both possible and expected for SSVF programs.

Jerry: The case for continuing RRH assistance

- Jerry still has no income.
- The case manager still has options:
 - Work with someone who is SOAR-trained to develop the SSI application (greatly reducing the time for a decision and increasing the likelihood of approval).
 - Utilize flexible funding for the subsidy until the decision on SSI is final.
 - Search for “Plan B” housing that is subsidized or shared.

Program exit phase: Checklist

Objective: End program assistance with reasonable anticipation that participant will not return to homelessness.

- Use exit plan and frequent reassessment to determine when to close the case and any “aftercare”
 - On track with income plan?
 - In compliance with rent and lease? No serious complaints?
 - Connected to services or supports if needed long-term?
 - Client view/choice
 - Exit plan includes “Plan B” for what to do if another financial/housing crisis occurs
- If situation not working, increase or extend support as necessary
 - Keep trying, even if client must move to another unit or another program
 - Do right by landlord even if household must move out
 - Case management can continue after financial assistance ends
- Trust that most clients will do fine without us; we can move on to next.
- Case manager and program participant celebrate!

Question:

What will you do differently next week?