

# Case Management

Housing Stability Tenant Supports

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# Keeping housing: What does it take?

- Pay the rent on time.
- Treat the building with respect.
- Treat other people with respect.
- Follow the lease.
- Avoid violating the law — especially if it might cause trouble for the landlord.

**If your clients can do these things, they can keep their housing.**

# How much is a “good” tenant worth?

## What does an eviction cost?

- Increased expenses:
  - Court filing fees for an eviction
  - Court process may take weeks or even months to finalize an eviction
  - Repairs and cleaning after the evicted tenant leaves
  - Advertising for new tenants, paying staff for interviewing prospective tenants
  - Paying for utilities on empty units
- Lost revenue:
  - Rent payments usually stop when the eviction is filed
  - Lost rent while cleaning/repairing the unit and finding replacement tenants

**Landlords estimate that each eviction costs thousands of dollars. And after all that, there's no guarantee the next tenant will be any better!**

# SSVF saves landlords money

- SSVF home visits can identify problems before they escalate into major problems for landlords.
- SSVF case managers provide tenancy supports — reducing problems that lead to eviction.
- SSVF case managers can help clients voluntarily relocate when the landlord would otherwise evict.
- SSVF programs have partnerships with community resources that may be able to create a risk mitigation fund and/or offer some minor repairs for landlords.
- SSVF rapid re-housing (RRH) programs can offer a steady supply of tenant referrals, reducing advertising costs and the time to rent-up.

# Tenancy supports are landlord supports

- If you help your clients to pay the rent, follow the lease, care for the unit, and avoid conflict or problems with the police, your landlords will be happy.
- That's a better guarantee than landlords have with any other tenants.
- But if/when things don't go that smoothly, the landlords want someone who can help resolve the problem — and that's why they will work with you.
- So, what do you do to help your program participants retain their housing?

# 1. Pay the rent on time

- Increase income/decrease expenses — even small amounts help.
- Develop a spending plan and ways to track spending.
- Set up automatic withdrawal or vendor pay (a formal agreement where a portion of a person's benefits are paid directly to a provider of goods or services) to pay rent.
- Call or text "reminders" a week before rent is due.
- Ask landlord to accept 2 payments/month, timed with tenant paychecks.
- Create an emergency savings account for financial emergencies.
- If income is erratic, tenant can buy a series of smaller money orders made out to landlord when income is available, and can use them to pay the rent when income is unavailable.

## 2. Treat the building with respect

- Damage can be accidental: Sometimes people don't know how to avoid damage.
- If there is a history of damage, find out how it occurred, then help the client deal with the cause: Children? Parties? Domestic violence?
- Where new skills are needed, they are most effectively taught where they will be used — in this case, in the tenant's own unit.
- Home visits are an opportunity to help the client identify problems early — grease in sink; toys in toilet; fire-safety risks.

### 3. “Peaceful/quiet enjoyment”

- A clause in most leases: “Tenant shall not disturb the peaceful /quiet enjoyment of the premises.” *This is actually a tenant rights clause, protecting all tenants from many problems, including the behavior of other tenants.*
- Intentionally vague language allows landlords to evict for almost any problem behavior such as conflict with other tenants or failure to control trash, children, guests, or noise.
- Tenants are often not aware of this lease requirement; explain it to them!
- Notice problems like loud TV or trash in the building hallway when visiting the home; ask about concerns when you talk with the landlord.



## 4. Follow the lease

- Read and explain — in simple terminology — the client's lease
- If the language is too obscure or anything looks questionable, consult a legal services or tenant advocacy resource to learn more.
- Focus on violations that could result in eviction.

# Tools for clients

Example: summarizing primary lease requirements

## Things that can get me EVICTED:

- Rent is more than 5 days late
- Someone moves in with me (stays more than 2 weeks)
- I get a dog
- The police are called about me twice in 30 days

## Things I can do WITH WRITTEN PERMISSION from landlord:

- Get a roommate
- Get a cat

Call: Megan (my housing case manager): 123-456-7890

## 5. Don't get the landlord in trouble with the police

- Landlords cannot turn a blind eye to drugs. They can lose their license or even their property in some communities.
- Likewise, some communities prioritize enforcement of local laws such as:
  - Under-age drinking
  - Occupancy standards (crowding)
  - Noise ordinances
  - Zoning (e.g. running a hair salon in your apartment)
- Landlords can face legal trouble for violations.
- Ask landlords and/or tenant organizations about important local community laws and ordinances. It's helpful to have a simple "cheat sheet" listing key requirements.

# Tools for Clients

## Example: summarizing important local laws

### LAWS in MIDDLEBURY

- **Noise Ordinance:** 10:30 p.m., 7 days/week
  - Check to make sure music, TV, and guests can't be heard on the sidewalk after 10:30. Fine: \$700.
- **Social Host:** You can be arrested or fined if a guest who used too much alcohol or drugs is injured or causes injury or property damage.
- **Under-age Consumption:** If police come to your home on a noise complaint, they will ask to see ID for guests. If a minor in your housing is consuming alcohol, you will have to go to court. Fines start at \$1000.
- **Drugs:** If the police find anyone buying or selling drugs in your unit (or acquaintances outside, on the property), the landlord is required by state law to evict you.

# So how do you find out about tenancy problems?

- Conversation with the individual or family: Any problems with the landlord or other tenants? Any damage to the unit, even if accidental?
- Check-in calls or visits with the landlord: How are things going? Any concerns that need attention?
- Home visits: When you visit, did you notice damage, excessive noise, or disruptive behavior of children or guests?

# Be proactive: Anticipate problems

- Plan ahead, with your participant, about how to prevent previous rental problem (Housing Retention Barriers) from recurring.
- For example...
  - How will you prevent your friends from using your apartment as their party room?
  - What will you do if you know in advance that you won't have all the rent on time?
  - How can you stop your children or friends from making noise in common areas that bothers the neighbors?
  - What can you say if someone in your family wants to borrow the rent money — and you don't think they can pay you back by the first of the month?

# What if being proactive isn't enough?

- Suppose the first time you find out about your client's tenancy problem is when the landlord contacts you and is really angry?
- What do you do to save the partnership (and your client's housing)?

# Dealing with contentious situations

- Define the problem — ask for details about what your client (or you) may have done wrong.
- Distance yourself emotionally; speak slowly, calmly.
- Avoid ego battles, arguing, and replaying past issues.
- Apologize for yourself for any failures to meet expectations.
- You may ask for time to make a plan (after you speak with your client); set a date/time for a call or meeting.
- Or, agree on a correction plan — what you can do differently.
- Follow up with the landlord and your client. Make sure the plan is working as intended.



# Dealing with contentious situations (continued)

- Here is a common contentious situation. The landlord has called you with a complaint.
- Using the principles on the previous slide, brainstorm some good responses to the landlord.

**“You didn’t return my call. You promised you would return my calls!”**

# “You didn’t return my call. You promised you would return my calls!”

- Define the problem — ask for details about the call they made: when was it, whom did they talk to, did they leave a message?
- Apologize for the failure to promptly return the call.
- Ask for time to figure out what went wrong.
- Let them know you will figure out what went wrong and then let them know. (And *do* call back to follow up!)
- Turn the conversation back to the reason for the call and let them know you will follow up with your client (if needed).
- Ask them to please call again if they have concerns.
- If they called after hours, you may want to remind them that evening/weekend calls may not be returned until the next business day.

# Plan responses to common conflicts

- Brainstorm the kinds of landlord conflict situations that you and your colleagues have experienced and sketch out basic responses.
- Examples:
  - “Your tenant had an out-of-control party last night. The police were called and today all my other tenants are complaining”.
  - “Your program’s rent check is late — again.”
  - “Your rent is on time but your client hasn’t paid their share for three months.”

# Home visits\*

- During home visits, be aware of potential tenancy issues, but not as a “gotcha” mission.
- Home visits are an opportunity to notice “red flags” such as significant problems with noise levels, basic housekeeping, or unauthorized tenants.
- It’s also a “teachable moment”: an opportunity to discuss the importance of an issue and ways to resolve it.
- If a landlord “suddenly” evicts your program participant, you haven’t been paying attention.

\*RRH programs generally have policies on home visits that protect client privacy and staff safety.

# Question:

What will you do differently next week?