B6. SHARED HOUSING AND ROOMMATE MATCHING — IT DOES WORK!

2018 Rapid Re-Housing Institute

WELCOME

THIS SESSION OBJECTIVES

- ✓ You will learn about different models of shared housing
- ✓ You will learn about different considerations for establishing your shared housing program
- ✓ You will learn from actual practitioners about their experiences in this work

What is Shared Housing?

A shared housing unit is one that is occupied by *two or more unrelated individuals*.

- ✓ Must consist of a sleeping area and shared common space.
- ✓ Could include a unit that has several bedrooms or a studio.
- ✓ Must include a bathroom and have facilities for cooking and food storage.
- ✓ Bedrooms can be used by a single resident or shared with another un-related individual.
- ✓ Each individual/household must have a standard lease or rental agreement that provides full rights of tenancy.
- ✓ Housing unit must meet your CoC/program housing habitability/quality standards

1. How many of you are regularly using shared housing as a housing option in your Rapid Re-Housing and/or other permanent housing programs?

2. How many of you share your living space with another person?

Let's Share….

QUESTIONS/CONCERNS	SUCCESSES/EXPERIENCES

What is the challenge? Why try shared housing?

- Many of our participants have very low income.
- We don’t have the resources for long-term rental subsidies.
- Many of us live in communities with extremely high rent and very low vacancy rates.
- Achieving shorter shelter length of stay requires housing options for very low-income individuals.

Brief Overview

Benefits

- Reduces rent burden
- More sustainable
- Reduce loneliness and isolation
- Resolves housing barriers for a few people at a time
- Can serve as a stepping stone to their “own place”
- Shared childcare with families

Challenges

- Interpersonal issues between participants
- Additional work for landlords and case managers
- Tenancy rights and responsibilities

Models of Shared Housing

1. Agency "managed/run" shared housing

- May include a Master Lease
- Agency-held property ensures housing quality and moves the vacancy risk to the agency

2. Matching roommates and assisting with sharing options in private landlord units

- Match to 2 to 4 Bedroom Units/Houses
- Negotiate with the Landlord and assist them with the set-up
- Each tenant has a separate lease

3. Other model considerations

- Shared Rooms vs. Private Rooms
- Month to Month leases preferred
- Rent includes all utilities, cable, internet

Roommate Matching

- Standardized form used to match
- Match with roommate preferences in mind (with staff assistance)
  - Gender, substance use tolerance, cleanliness tolerance, noise tolerance
- Roommate Contract
- “Speed Dating” roommate matching events
- Arrange Pizza Parties (or other similar events) where people can meet in groups
- Ensure that staff are well-versed in conflict mediation strategies to assist when needed.
- Always separate leases

Working with Landlords on "Conversion"

***<u>Conversion</u>**: When a landlord agrees to change their single family rental house into one that will be shared by several un-related persons.*

- PATH LA Program:
  - Landlords with 2+ bedroom units or houses work with trained staff who assist with the "conversion process"
- Advantages for Property Owners
  - Fewer tenants in the unit (3BR Voucher = 5 tenants; 3 BR Roommate= 3 Tenants)
  - More income (with rent and utilities included, monthly income can be higher than renting on the open market)
  - Peace of Mind: Case Management + Incentives
  - Lease-Up Incentives
- Standardized Rent and Utility Analysis Worksheet
  - Rent Comparisons to determine rent per room
  - "Splitwise" and old utility bills can be used to determine monthly utilities per tenant. Splitwise is an online platform that can help roommates, families and friends share and split bills and expenses.

Some Best Practices

- Each room has it’s own lock on the door
- If possible, rent a furnished unit
- Provide each room with their own (reduces friction):
  - TV (with cable)
  - Mini Fridge
  - Internet Access

❖ Know zoning rules about # of unrelated people living together

❖ Business Model Planning

  ❖ Plan on evictions

  ❖ Enforce terms of lease; pay attention to security

  ❖ Have a process to fill vacancies quickly

  ❖ Make sure the housing sets a high standard in the neighborhood

More Best Practices

- Honor participant choice
- Invest time in understanding deal breakers (of participants)
- Be flexible
- Be prepared to exchange roommates or re-locate people if it goes badly
- Seek supports for participants (in-home care, skill building)
- Sometimes pairing a high barrier person in need and low-barrier caregiver helps
- Use roommate agreements to outline expectations
- Don’t knee-jerk a re-location after the first roommate conflict but also don’t let a bad situation drag on
    - Identify the conflict and seek to mediate or resolve it (i.e. mini fridges, separation in the home, etc.)

Engaging and Supporting Landlords

- Make sure the agreement between landlord and tenant and **each** tenant is clear on:
  - Responsibilities
  - Expectations
  - Schedule
  - Visitors
- Make sure all housemates understand roles and responsibilities
- Develop clear communication channels
- Possible impact of long-term plan of participants on the household
- Agreement with landlord and housemates on recruitment of housemates
- ***Staff attend community landlord groups and neighborhood liaison meetings, engage congregations, use web resources and streamline the process for Landlords when possible if neighborhood concerns may arise.***

Community Perception

- This is a household just like any other (clear messaging on this)
- Neighbors among neighbors
- Not a “facility”
- The organization is not directly responsible for the site or what happens there
- ***But,*** supportive counseling and community relations are used to resolve issues during the service cycle and sometimes afterwards

Key Lessons Learned

- **Program/Staff buy-in**
  - Willingness to try process
  - Normalize co-habitation
  - Discuss shared housing as an equal or better option than living alone
- **Client buy-in**
  - Offer the option
  - Discussion of value of living in the area
- **Landlord buy-in**
  - Units leased faster
  - If rooms lease up one at a time, the landlord is receiving some rent instead of zero rent

More Lessons Learned

- **Shared Housing is NOT the same as Group Homes**
  - Not a program
  - Not licensed
  - Needs to blend in as a “neighbor”
  - Think about stigmatization, privacy and confidentiality
  - People do not have to be monitored by their neighbors or community members.
- Working with a homeowner who wants to share a room in their home has different dynamics to navigate
- **Special Populations**
  - Evolving practice with Domestic Violence, Youth, Families, etc.

Panel Discussion

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Shared Housing Best Practices

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Some Numbers

- Nationally
  - Americans 53 and older are sitting on some 3.6 million unoccupied rooms in their homes - known as “boommates”
  - Shared housing by adults has increased from 55 to 79 million since 1995 (3% increase).
- DC
  - 13% increase in shared housing since 2012
  - 80% of all participants housed through Home Now (Singles RRH) have been in shared housing in DC

FRIEND-SHIP PLACE

Shared Housing

- Good examples
  - Single case manager when possible (divide based on location)
  - Housing Specialist involved on landlord side
  - Clear expectations for all
- Some not-so-good examples
  - When your landlord decides to bring in a film crew
- Benefits: a rapid solution, quicker move-ins, flexible screening criteria, waived fees, more options

FRIEND-SHIP PLACE

Identifying Shared Housing

- Consider a Housing Specialist to “talk business, not social work”
- Program offers: long-term support from Housing Specialist, potential replacement of tenants with turnover, 24 hour emergency line, conflict resolution, new tenant stabilization meetings
- Benefits to working with our program
  - We work with 100 Veterans at a time looking for housing
  - You screen Veterans to find the right tenant fit for your unit
  - We’ll list your units for free

FRIEND-SHIP PLACE

Conversion (SFH to Shared Housing)

- Increased income vs. risks with multiple tenants
  - Good time to bring up how we mitigate those risks
- Important to cover housing code violations and license requirements
- Other things for landlord to consider:
  - ADD FLAT RATE UTILITIES TO THE LEASE
  - Include cleaning services in lease/agreement
  - Roommate agreement

FRIEND-SHIP PLACE

Roommate Matching

- Roommate Matching Form
- Participant Housing Needs Tracker
- Housing Directory/Inventory
  - Track shared, apts, voucher friendly, senior housing separately
- Weekly Case Conferencing
  - Separate from staff meeting
  - w/ Housing Specialist

FRIEND-SHIP PLACE

Rapid Re-Housing
&
Shared Housing

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Landlords & Shared Housing

DO'S

- Be as honest and clear about your program and the population as possible
- Focus on the positive, while taking responsibility for the negative
- Keep the landlord in the loop
- Have landlord support

DON'TS

- Don't over share
- Don't make promises or agreements you or the client cannot keep
- Don't Ignore the landlord.
- Don't speak for the client

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Housing Specialist

The importance of having a Housing specialist:

- Having someone on staff that can outreach and build relationships with landlords and brokers as their primary job function can be a strong asset in landlord engagement.

Benefits:

Direct support	–Landlords are more likely to work with programs that have a person who will be able to answer and address their questions and concerns. –Landlords want to feel supported (just like clients) and the role of the Housing Specialist is to provide that support when needed. – if the landlord is happy, the tenant is happy.
Avoids miscommunication	– Communication and information will be clear, precise and direct. – Tenant rights and landlord rights can be address easily. – Prevents side deals.
Faster Intervention with issues or concerns	Housing Specialist will be the first person to address concerns and provide interventions, especially between landlords and tenants. (landlord/tenant mediations etc.)

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Shared Housing

- **Participants**
  - Be mindful of the client's needs, wants and means
  - Take into account personalities and individual character
  - Life skills, communication and housing
  - Rent, contribution, budgeting and savings
- **Landlords**
  - Prevents overcrowding
  - Lease and Utilities
  - Don't be afraid to negotiate
- **Roommates**
  - Roommate Match-up
  - Responsibilities (common areas, cleaning, visitors etc.)
  - Issues and Concerns
    - Prepare the participants for unexpected circumstances

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Housing Retention

- Affordability and accessibility
  - More likely to retain their housing if its affordable and accessible to them
- Budget –contribution, savings and paying rent
  - More likely to pay rent if its on their budget
  - More likely to save money due to low rent
- Market rent/ Rental increases
  - Even at the increase of market rent rooms will still be affordable and manageable
- End of program assistance- what now?
  - Less fear of rental responsibilities
  - Higher rate of success when utilities and rent are shared

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Q&A

Key Takeaways

- Sharing Housing is a real option – for tenants who need or want the advantages and are willing to work through the inevitable rough patches!
- Clarify expectations and review service modalities with housemates and landlords.
- Avoid the perception from the beginning that you are “running” the house or a “facility.”
  - But have staff readily available. This is a good time investment. It saves you from being pulled into conflicts later on.
- Staff understands Fair Housing Laws, lease agreements and mediation tactics when they are needed to “intervene”.

Planning time

1. 5 minutes to fill out key take-away ideas for when you return home
2. Break into small groups (your table) (10 minutes)
   - ✓ Share your ideas
   - ✓ Action steps
   - ✓ Generate questions for the larger group/panel
3. Report Out to Full Group (15 minutes)
   - ✓ Share ideas for next steps
   - ✓ Surface new questions

That's all Folks!
SUPERB wallpapers