

July 2009

Rapid Re-Housing: Creating Programs that Work



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FOREWORD

With the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, President Obama and the United States Congress created the “Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program,” funded with \$1.5 billion. This new program represents a striking shift in the federal priority for homelessness prevention, and may herald a paradigm shift in the area of homeless services. Prior to this program, most communities had relatively few and uncoordinated programs to help people avert homelessness. Most poor people faced with an acute housing crisis have had to resort to short stays in emergency shelters. And most people have had to exit such programs without any formal assistance, often returning to shelters as a stop-gap between stays with friends and family. Shelters have been able to offer protection from street homelessness and safe harbor from potentially dangerous or abusive conditions, but they have not always been able to do much more.

The Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) acknowledges that we can and should do more. Our responses to poor people faced with acute housing loss have often been too little, and too late. With a renewed commitment and resources, communities can now help many families and individuals to avoid homelessness, or when a short term shelter stay is unavoidable, get people rehoused and reintegrated into their community as quickly as possible.

The new initiative places a priority on *housing stabilization* as the centerpiece of homelessness assistance. Whether a household is on the brink of losing its home, or whether a family or individual has been in shelter for a significant period of time, the new program provides resources for communities to help resettle people into housing. At the same time, the initiative recognizes that some people will need more than housing assistance to stabilize. Some people have treatment or service needs, or require assistance in finding job training or employment. Receipt of such assistance will be necessary for some people to stay housed, and to resolve the underlying circumstances that may have contributed to their housing problems. Communities will have the opportunity to use these new resources to connect people to the network of services in their communities which can provide ongoing support to the people who need them.

For more than fifteen years, communities have organized their homeless service systems into “Continuums of Care.” These local Continuums have tried to assure that individuals and families have access to an array of supportive services and temporary housing options while they are homeless, as well as some permanent housing options for people with disabilities and histories of chronic homelessness. Some have even gone further to develop homelessness prevention systems. The new HPRP initiative recognizes that as good as they may be, local homeless services systems alone cannot solve the problems of the diversity of people experiencing housing loss. By necessity, local Continuums will need to form partnerships with a broad range of community organizations and resources which can help with the new goal of housing stabilization. This includes legal aid organizations, immigration assistance agencies, health and mental health providers, employment development programs, family services, and host of other programs. A lack of access to these services has often been cited as a frustrating source of homelessness, and many homeless programs have had to rise to the task of

delivering such services out of necessity. However, in the emerging paradigm, mainstream community service systems can no longer be left on the sidelines, but have to be engaged as full partners, with mutual responsibilities for the vulnerable households who need both their services on an ongoing basis, as well as the emergency housing assistance that the homeless system can provide.

For too long and too often, becoming homeless has been akin to entering a black hole. Without the anchor of home, people have lived without knowing where they would find their next bed, their next meal, or if they would have to do without. People have anxiously hoped for assistance, some finding it, and others having to fend for themselves on the streets. Just as recent efforts to get people with chronic homelessness off the streets and into housing have helped to re-energize communities, the new Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program promises to provide an opportunity for communities to renew their commitments to addressing the needs of people experiencing temporary housing crises.

For many communities, homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing will be new areas of practice. Of course, as in all things new, there is much we do not know. We may not yet know with certainty which households should be targeted for which resources and for how long. But we are starting that learning process now, and we will gather evidence and data to refine our practices as we go forward. The HPRP initiative also provides us with an opportunity to evolve our service systems in a new direction, consistent with the recently reauthorized McKinney-Vento Act. This guide provides advice to communities on how to begin to organize themselves toward these goals. It advises communities on how to embark on a newly responsive path of providing direct and practical assistance to households so as to help them quickly move from homelessness to stable housing, while getting connected to the services and supports that can help them to achieve long-term housing stability.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide was prepared by Abt Associates Inc. for the National Alliance to End Homelessness. This guide is intended to help communities and providers plan how they will expand or develop Rapid Re-Housing programs and to end homelessness in their community. The team that produced this guide includes a variety of experts on prevention and homeless programs. Marge Wherley served as primary author of this guide, under contract with Abt Associates. Additional content and editorial support was provided by Tom Albanese, Brooke Spellman, and Emily Holt (Abt Associates Inc.) and Dr. Dennis Culhane (University of Pennsylvania).

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INTRODUCTION

In the last two years, our nation has witnessed profound changes. Unemployment has reached levels not seen in a quarter century. Homeowners and renters alike have been driven from their housing by foreclosures to compete against each other in a tightening rental market. Wages and public assistance benefits have declined in relation to escalating prices for everything from consumer goods to food and housing. Accordingly, those whose financial and personal supports place them at the bottom of the ladder are increasingly only one financial crisis or one episode of family conflict away from homelessness. Yet shelters for families, youth, single adults, and victims of domestic violence often do not have room to help them when homelessness does occur. Many of those who become homeless stay in shelter for prolonged periods because they lack the resources to move back into housing. Thus beds that were designed to meet temporary crises are not available to serve those experiencing them.

Those are the crises. But there are also new opportunities to effectively intervene. Communities are being given new resources to respond to the challenges of some of their most vulnerable citizens.

On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which includes \$1.5 billion for the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP). This funding is being distributed on a formula basis to 540 metropolitan cities, urban counties, states, and U.S. territories. Within a matter of months, hundreds if not thousands of programs will be developed or expanded to help American citizens avoid homelessness or leave homelessness for permanent housing.

This unprecedented opportunity will require each participating government agency and non-profit agency to thoroughly but quickly plan how they will re-house homeless individuals and families and prevent homelessness in their own communities. This is no small challenge! Yet, fortunately, much more is now known about the causes of homelessness and the various strategies that might help resolve it and prevent its recurrence. Programs have been offering financial assistance and services to prevent and resolve homelessness for nearly two decades. Research has identified many risk factors.

The HPRP funding offers a unique opportunity to accomplish a shared vision: effectively and efficiently preventing households in crisis from losing their housing, or if they become homeless, resettling them back into permanent housing as quickly as possible. This Guide is an attempt to distill some of the lessons learned, so communities can make that happen. That is why this Guide is written. We hope it is helpful and look forward to hearing about your plans and results, so they can in turn inform the work of other communities.

CHAPTER ONE

RAPID RE-HOUSING

1.1 Why Rapid Re-Housing?

Rapid Re-Housing has become a major emphasis in communities' strategies to end homelessness. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has targeted \$1.5 billion through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 for the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP). Rapid re-housing is also an emphasis in the recently enacted Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act. The priority for rapidly ending homelessness, when it occurs, is now a national one. Yet some jurisdictions and non-profit agencies that will receive HUD funding for rapid re-housing know little about how and why this approach can be implemented in their own communities. This Guide is designed to answer those questions.

Rapid Re-Housing is a strategy that has been successfully used by many communities to reduce homelessness. Today, most households become homeless as a result of a financial crisis that prevents them from paying the rent, or a domestic conflict that results in one member being ejected or leaving with no resources or plan for housing. Most households who become homeless today have already lived in independent permanent housing, and they can generally return and remain stably housed with limited assistance. And homelessness itself is associated with a host of negative outcomes that can be minimized by limiting the period of time people experience it. By helping homeless households return to permanent housing as soon as possible, communities have been able to reduce the length of time people remain in homeless shelters. This opens beds for others who need them, and reduces the public and personal costs of homelessness.

Rapid Re-Housing addresses the two primary obstacles homeless households face in trying to leave shelter:

- **Obtaining new rental housing is expensive.** Households with incomes far below the federal poverty level are usually extremely rent-burdened, sometimes paying as much as 80% of their income on rent and utilities. One relatively minor financial crisis—a missed day at a job that offers no sick leave, an unexpected car repair bill—can leave the household without enough money to pay the rent. Someone who became homeless because he or she was \$300 short of the full rent is unlikely to have two thousand dollars (or more) for a new security deposit and first/last month's rent. Waiting in shelter until it is possible to save enough money for housing start-up is a very poor use of scarce shelter resources.
- **Landlords often deny rental applications from extremely low-income households.** To minimize the risk of unpaid rent, property damage and criminal activity, many landlords use public records and verification of information on the rental application to screen and select tenants. Tenant screening is based on the assumption that past behavior predicts future behavior and that lower income households are more likely to become delinquent on rent. Accordingly, people with

prior problems are rejected. Red flags that tend to eliminate potential tenants include problems in past rental housing, criminal history, credit problems, excessive debt, and a poor employment or income situation. Unfortunately, many of these are poverty-related problems and people with extremely low incomes often have late or unpaid debts, a history that causes landlords to screen them out. Some also have a criminal history. Once homeless, a household can spend months filling out rental applications and paying application fees, only to be screened out by landlord after landlord. Some are only able to find poor-quality housing owned by “slumlords.” These are obstacles that housing locators can help address through advocacy.

Successful programs have demonstrated that returning people to permanent housing as quickly as possible has positive outcomes for their clients and their communities. Rapid Re-Housing has become part of the national “toolkit” for communities seeking to end homelessness. Federal funding is now available to support these efforts.

1.2 The Psychology of Rapid Re-Housing

The most useful construct for understanding Rapid Re-Housing is Abraham Maslow’s theory of human motivation, also known as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.¹ Dr. Maslow believed that people are motivated to fulfill unmet needs, and their efforts are dominated by satisfying the most basic unmet needs first. For example, a person who is hungry or dehydrated will attempt to secure food or water; nothing else will direct his or her behavior until this survival need is satisfied. Second only to physiological needs are the needs for safety and security: freedom from violence, illness, theft, control over who they allow – or refuse – to allow in their living space.

We all become accustomed to a familiar environment. When there is a change in the environment, we automatically become anxious and alert. Whether or not we are aware of it, biologically, our bodies are preparing to fight or flee. Heart rate and blood pressure rise, digestion and sleep are disturbed. If the threat is temporary, our bodies quickly return to normal. But if the stress continues, the stress response also continues. Over time, our physical reserves become depleted; we are exhausted. Anxiety, illness, depression, and loss of concentration result.²

Homeless people who are living on the streets or in shelters are often described as living on a day-to-day survival mode, unable to plan beyond where they will secure their next meal or where they will sleep that night. They are focusing on their most basic unmet needs. People who have lost their housing have, in a real sense, lost their safety. Good homeless programs recognize that the anxiety, depression, and irritability, the disorganized, “apathetic” or aggressive behaviors they may see in their homeless clients are very likely to be consequences of the stress of homelessness rather than enduring personal characteristics. Reducing the length of time a person is homeless and moving them to their own private, permanent space, where they can control their physiological, safety and security needs is the quickest and most effective way of minimizing the destructive impact of stress.

¹ Maslow, A. H. “A Theory of Human Motivation”. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), pp. 370-396, 1943.

² Maslow, 1943.

Once people are no longer driven to fulfill survival and safety needs, they will strive to meet higher needs for friendship, intimacy, self-esteem, and fulfilling their potential. This evolves naturally, over time, as a person is ready to progress. Once they feel safe in housing, Rapid Re-Housing clients nearly always become motivated to achieve other personal goals. Employment, relationships with their children's schools, and re-connecting with family members become the new priorities for many. Successful Rapid Re-Housing staff responds to changing motivations on their client's psychological timetable, without expecting every household to move forward at the same pace or achieve the same goals.

1.3 Who Can and Should be Rapidly Re-Housed?

First, clients obtain housing. Then, as they are ready to learn and grow, they can and will address other needs related to stability and greater wellness. Clients learn by doing, by practicing skills in the exact setting where they will be utilized.

Although Rapid Re-Housing shares many characteristics with permanent supportive housing programs, there are also some very significant differences. Permanent supportive housing generally targets people with very chronic and severe impairments; supports are provided on a permanent basis. Rapid Re-Housing is a temporary program. The goal of Rapid Re-Housing is to help homeless families and individuals obtain permanent housing and stabilize relatively quickly—in months rather than years. Rapid Re-Housing is targeted to people who are homeless but have lived independently in permanent housing at some point in time, for some period of time. Some will have disabilities; but most will not. Most homeless households do not need permanent supports to remain in housing.

This does not mean it will be easy to help them obtain and sustain housing. Communities with Rapid Re-Housing programs offer services to people who have had multiple evictions and criminal histories. Their clients may be abusing substances and/or have a mental illness. Many have experienced trauma or violence. Their lives, even after they obtain housing, will not always be uncomplicated or trouble-free. But they can return to addressing their own problems and pursuing their own dreams from the safety of their own permanent housing.

Case Examples: Practitioners to Practitioners

We have a client, who (based on his experience and outcome in a Transitional Housing Program) we were concerned would not do well in independent housing. This individual has really thrived being in his own space and has been very accountable. A key reason is that peers—and their crises—no longer surround this client.

Another family had housing but the husband got into drugs and was arrested and sent to prison for actions related to drug use. Since he may no longer have contact with his family other than supervised visits, and since his disability income was suspended while he is in prison, this family lost their housing. With the program's subsidy and ability to find housing again, this now-single mother has been able to find necessary community supports for herself and her children-- who have special needs.

I have one client who is over \$3,000.00 in debt from a previous apartment. The agreement was I would help with rent subsidy if she took a portion of her paycheck every month and started to make payments toward her debt. The payments would have to be verified every month with either a statement or copy of the money order used to pay for it. I then explained to the landlord our services and the plan to work off the debt to the previous landlord. I believe this helped the landlord accept my client and her eviction history and feel it won't happen again

1.4 What is the Definition of Rapid Re-Housing?

The most succinct definition is provided by HUD: Rapid Re-Housing is for ***“individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness (residing in emergency or transitional shelters or on the street) and need temporary assistance in order to obtain housing and retain it”*** (HUD Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing (HPRP) Notice, March 19, 2009). This Guide explores this definition in much more detail but, briefly, these are the key components:

- 1. The individual or family is currently homeless.** For persons assisted by a Rapid Re-Housing Program funded with HPRP, HUD has defined homelessness to include:
 - Sleeping in an emergency shelter;
 - Sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, streets/sidewalks, abandoned buildings;
 - Staying in a hospital or institution for up to 180 days but was homeless immediately prior to entry into the hospital or institution;
 - Graduating or timing out of a transitional housing program; or
 - Survivors of domestic violence.
- 2. The “Rapid” in Rapid Re-Housing.** Rapid Re-Housing means that the household is assisted to obtain permanent housing as quickly as possible. There is no universal deadline or time limit that defines “rapid.” Households vary and housing markets vary. It may take days or weeks to find a vacancy in housing an individual or family can afford, with a landlord who will accept their rental history. The important point is that permanent housing is the

immediate goal. Households are not required to wait in temporary housing while they attend classes, acquire skills or otherwise demonstrate a given level of “housing readiness.” They move directly into permanent housing. If there are skills and information they must learn to sustain their housing, those things are learned in their own housing.

3. **Assistance is needed to obtain housing.** The household is not able to rapidly find permanent housing without assistance. Usually, this is because the household lacks the financial resources to secure housing and/or has barriers that would cause a landlord to deny their rental application. Without financial assistance and/or help finding the right landlord, the individual or family would remain homeless much longer.
4. **Assistance is temporary.** While the assistance needed for different households will vary in intensity and duration, Rapid Re-Housing is not a permanent support. The target households for Rapid Re-Housing are those who have experienced a temporary (sometimes severe) housing crisis that has de-stabilized their lives. They may have other service needs, sometimes intensive ones, but the Rapid Re-Housing program helps them achieve stable housing, or when necessary bridge to a longer term housing subsidy and linkage to community-based supports or to permanent supportive housing.
5. **Assistance may be needed to retain housing.** Assistance to retain housing can include any combination of financial help (such as rental or utility assistance) and the support services needed to set up a new home, meet the expectations of the lease and avoid serious conflict with the landlord or other tenants. The intensity and duration of assistance will depend upon the household’s prior experience in housing and the steps in their Housing Plan. But help is not long-term. Most households are able to achieve stable housing relatively quickly even if longer-term or specialized assistance is needed from other community-based services to address more serious barriers.

1.5 Principles of Rapid Re-Housing

Communities that have implemented Rapid Re-Housing recognize and seek to embody the following basic principles in their Rapid Re-Housing initiatives:

- People move directly from homelessness to housing. There are no intermediate programs that delay their move to housing.
- The key to successful re-housing is understanding the individual’s barriers to getting and keeping housing—then finding ways to eliminate or compensate for those barriers.
- Rapid Re-Housing provides the minimal amount of assistance—amount and length—needed to obtain and retain housing.
- Households are empowered to make their own choices and to respond to the consequences of those decisions. Rapid Re-Housing does not guarantee risk-free housing and some households will fail. But services are voluntary. Choices are “consumer” driven.

- The focus is housing; household problems that are not directly related to housing are addressed only if and when the client chooses. This does not mean that programs offering short or medium-term rental assistance have no expectations of the household. Effort or progress towards obtaining a long-term subsidy or increasing income enough to remain housed without the rental assistance is a reasonable program requirement. But the focus, again, is directly related to housing.
- Mainstream resources are a critical part of stability for everyone living in a community. Rapid Re-Housing helps households connect to the supportive, community-based resources they will use long after Rapid Re-Housing services are ended.
- Landlords are a Rapid Re-Housing program's most valued resource. If the Rapid Re-Housing program cannot meet the reasonable expectations of landlords, many clients will not be re-housed. Programs that adopt an adversarial attitude towards landlords are much less likely to succeed.
- The most appropriate housing situation may involve moving in with family members who can provide financial or other support.

In summary, Rapid Re-Housing is a successful community strategy for ending homelessness. The intent is to minimize the length of time an individual or family remains in the limbo of homelessness and to help the household quickly re-establish stability. In the safety and predictability of permanent housing, they are encouraged to choose how, when and where they will address other life problems or goals using mainstream resources. Rapid Re-Housing resolves the crisis of homelessness; the rest is up to the individual or family—and their community support systems.

CHAPTER TWO

ASSESSING YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY: SELECTING A RAPID RE-HOUSING STRUCTURE

In some parts of the country, homelessness systems are well-developed and well-coordinated. When a household becomes homeless, the path to housing is clear, direct and automatic. Public and private resources know their role along this path: outreach and homeless shelter access or diversion; assessment of housing needs and barriers; recruiting landlords; housing search; funding for housing start-up; where necessary, offering short or medium-term rental assistance; and providing time-limited or ongoing stabilization services. The process may be so well-established that the time required to move from homelessness to housing, crisis to greater stability, is very short.

In most places, however, the community's homelessness resources are freestanding and independent. Each shelter or outreach team develops its own services for its own clients. Coordination occurs mainly to address high demand periods caused by severe weather or other conditions. Re-housing assistance and supports have traditionally not been funded, or have been under-funded, and so are often limited or non-existent. Most homeless people can find services that focus on sobriety, education, job readiness, and/or compliance with medical and mental health treatment. But at program completion, those households are expected to secure and sustain their own housing. If they are unable to achieve stable housing, many of their hard-won gains are lost.

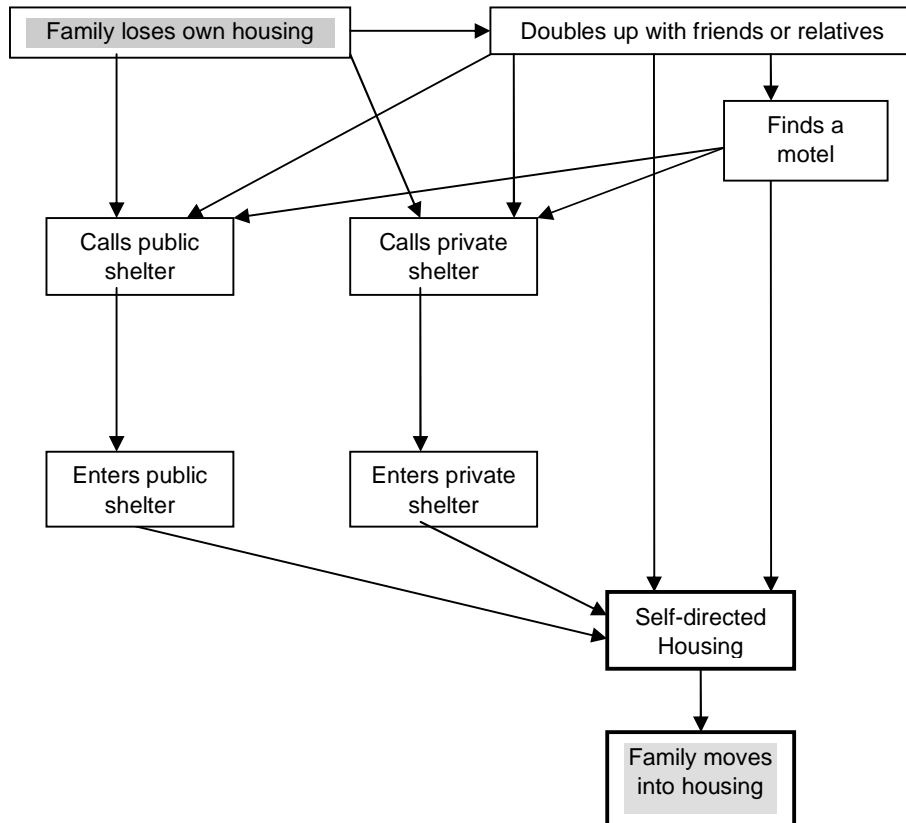
A few communities will be ready, willing and able to re-design their homeless system to improve both prevention and rapid re-housing responses. For these communities, this chapter will provide invaluable guidance to a process they can use to assess current resources and propose future ones. But many Rapid Re-Housing programs will begin without a high-level assessment of the current system and without all the potential stakeholders involved in planning or decision-making. Throughout the chapter, broader-scale planning will be referred to as **system redesign**; planning by a single agency or small collaboration of agencies to develop a new program will be referred to as **program development**.

2.1 Determine the Path from Homelessness to Housing

It is very helpful to diagram the path persons who are homeless follow to obtain and sustain housing. Two communities will likely have very different resources and pathways for persons who are homeless and these often vary by household type (e.g. families with minor children). The pathways may be direct or circuitous and there may be gaps between steps. Diagramming the various pathways individuals and families must follow will suggest the type of assistance that is needed and when it should be offered to be most effective. Whether a community is considering structural changes (**system redesign**) or a service provider is planning to offer a new service (**program development**), the diagram will help identify where, when and how Rapid Re-Housing will identify referral relationships and partners.

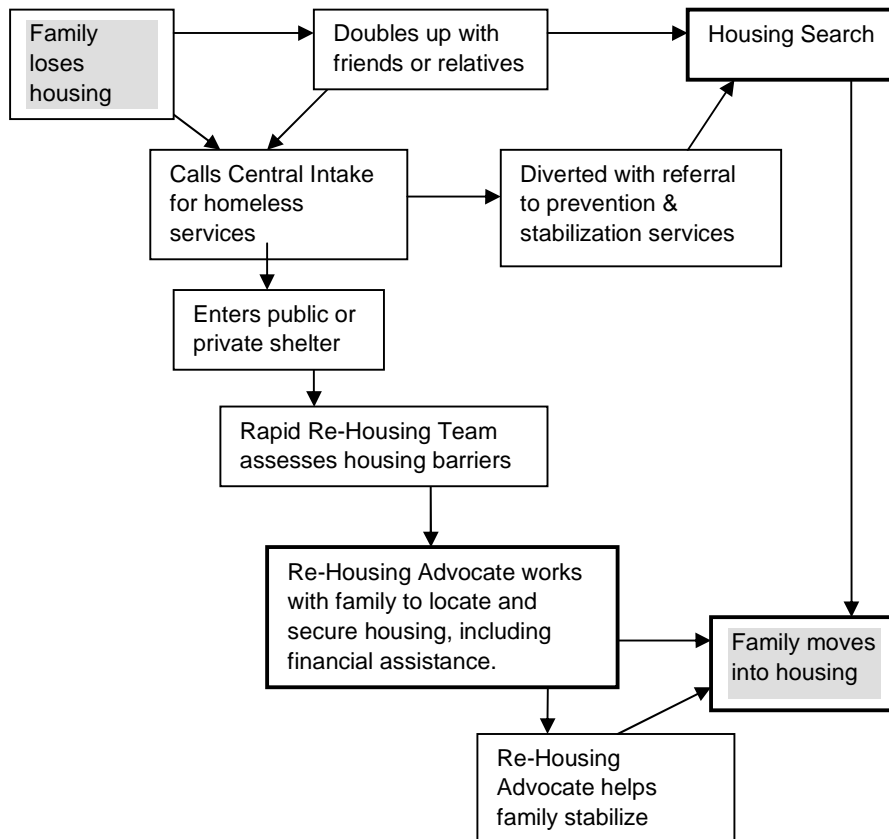
Below are two examples of what families experience in two different communities.

Community 1:



In Community 1, families must independently manage every stage of their homelessness. Each shelter is an independent agency with no formal relationship to any other agency. Families may start by doubling up or using a motel while they look for housing. If that is unsuccessful, they must call each shelter resource separately until they find a vacancy and search for housing while they are staying in shelter. Finding housing – and keeping it – is their responsibility.

Community 2:



In Community 2, it is expected that families can and should try to resolve their housing need. But once they decide to call Central Intake, the path from shelter to stable housing is automatic.

If Community 1 wants to develop a Rapid Re-Housing program, planning and development could follow either of two different tracks:

- **System Redesign.** The community could decide to modify their homelessness service system to create a single path from homelessness to housing stability. This would involve developing new or revised processes (and most likely new programs and partnerships) for client intake, screening, assessment and re-housing.

They might decide to develop a Central Intake, similar to Community 2, to track vacancies in all public and private shelters, determine homeless households' eligibility and refer each to an appropriate, available opening. In a Rapid Re-Housing model, Central Intake would also immediately provide or arrange for an assessment of the individual or family's barriers to housing and refer the family to an available, appropriate Rapid Re-Housing Advocate. The advocate would help the household secure housing and either offer follow-up directly or refer for stabilization and prevention of future

homelessness. Financial assistance could be managed centrally or by each agency offering Rapid Re-Housing.

The entire process could be managed by one agency or by several agencies, each with a well-understood partnership role.

- **Program Development**: One or more non-profit agencies in Community 1 could fill a service gap in the community by developing a Rapid Re-Housing program to help homeless households obtain and sustain stable housing. The shelter could decide to fill the gap by hiring Rapid Re-Housing staff to locate housing, resettle households and provide stabilization follow-up. Or another agency might develop a freestanding Rapid Re-Housing Program that works with households in the shelters.

Both approaches can be used within the same community. For example, if the homelessness service system for homeless youth is well-established, partnerships already exist, and the youth program directors are interested, the stakeholders could redesigning their youth homelessness system to change the path to housing by incorporating Rapid Re-Housing services and consistent referral protocols for all homeless youth providers (**system redesign**). In the same community, if the resources for homeless adults are more fragmented, it may be too challenging to suddenly coordinate the entire service delivery process. However, one shelter might add Rapid Re-Housing services for their own clients and would be willing to offer this new service to clients in other adult shelters (**program development**). The community may choose to both redesign the youth homelessness system and fill a service gap in the adult homelessness service system.

When diagramming the pathways individuals and families follow it is useful to examine the factors that influence their decisions. This includes identifying the program capacity (e.g. number of beds/units, caseload capacity), admission criteria (e.g. families with children, history of drug or alcohol use, whether other housing options or resources exist), and how service “matching” and linkage to the next step in the pathway occurs (e.g. how clients are assessed and referred). This provides a more complete picture of the various pathways and allows planners to see how and when decisions are made and where opportunities exist to change decision making as new or revised approaches are designed and implemented.

2.2 Re-Housing: *System Redesign* Decisions

A key decision is whether to centralize or decentralize all or some of the functions of Rapid Re-Housing. There are advantages and disadvantages to centralization and to decentralization, and a system can also effectively blend both by choosing to centralize some functions but not others. Centralization offers efficiency and a clear point of entry for clients, but requires more cooperation and integration among partners. Decentralization offers more flexibility, but depends upon coordination. Choices will be affected by whether the community’s current resources operate (and are funded) independently; and if so, whether they are interested in centralizing some functions they now control. Also if there are one or two primary funders, what they choose to fund (or not fund) will strongly influence decisions about centralization vs. decentralization.

The following chart displays one hypothetical city’s analysis of centralization vs. decentralization options for each Rapid Re-Housing component. **The shaded boxes indicate the arguments that the stakeholders found most compelling for their community.** Through this process, they decided to centralize some functions (intake, assessment, financial assistance, data management) and decentralize others (housing locator/landlord recruitment, stabilization supports for tenants and landlords). They also used their analysis to devise ways to minimize the disadvantages of their choices. The final plan included mobile assessments by Central Intake/Assessment staff to avoid transportation problems for homeless households.

Centralization		
	Advantages	Disadvantages
Intake for Rapid Re-Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Clear point of entry ❖ Uniform and consistent process ❖ Economy of scale ❖ Efficiency for staffing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ If households must travel some distance to Intake, transportation may be a barrier ❖ Households may have few other options if they do not like choices offered or do not comply with rules
Housing Barrier Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Reliability: ratings are likely accurate and uniform. ❖ Efficiency and expertise in accessing public databases such as criminal records or databases from other municipalities/states ❖ Single provider with an unbiased overview of all homeless household barriers, changes in trends, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ If households must travel to a centralized assessment location, transportation may be difficult ❖ Mobile assessments of households in multiple locations may be difficult to schedule within three days of shelter entry.
Financial Assistance for Re-Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Uniform criteria and process for approving financial assistance ❖ Minimizes the possibility of service duplication ❖ Ability to manage total assistance budget ❖ Can develop “backend” fiscal infrastructure with strong controls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Criteria may become rigid; documentation may become burdensome ❖ Less flexibility to respond to individual circumstances
Housing Locator/Landlord Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Single set of incentives for landlords ❖ Landlords unable to increase requirements for incentives ❖ Community-wide database and mapping of housing resources and landlords’ performance ❖ Develop effective marketing materials for landlords ❖ Single point of contact for landlords 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Locator is not directly involved in client services and may not fully understand client issues ❖ Locator is focused on recruiting and retaining landlords--may take the side of landlords, even when inappropriate ❖ Additional communication layer between family, advocate and landlord, resulting in confusing messages or slower response to problems ❖ If a client service agency fails to meet landlord expectations, that landlord may be unwilling to accept clients from the entire Rapid Re-Housing program

Centralization		
	Advantages	Disadvantages
Stabilization Supports for Tenant and Landlord	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Ability to develop high level of expertise ❖ Larger pool of staff, allowing back-up coverage ❖ Training resources are more likely to be available ❖ Larger staff complement may allow for some specializations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ If staff are located centrally, they have longer distances to travel, reduced access to families, and may have less familiarity with neighborhoods ❖ More rigidity, less flexibility in service delivery ❖ May have less continuity
Data Management, Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Staff hired for competency with data systems ❖ Ability to develop expertise in data entry, report-writing ❖ More neutrality in analyzing data on client outcomes or agency performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Direct service agencies will have less ownership of data and little ability to create their own reports or scan data for trends, issues ❖ Service agencies may dispute evaluations as not fully representing their programs' impact on clients

Decentralization		
	Advantages	Disadvantages
Intake for Rapid Re-Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The agency providing direct services makes the decision about which clients are a good fit with agency services or mission ❖ More accessible locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Potential for “creaming” – accepting households with fewer barriers ❖ Easier to turn away difficult families; no responsibility for households who are not accepted.
Housing Barrier Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The agencies providing re-housing services will have complete information about the clients they assist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Each agency may have a different assessment process with different criteria, so households may qualify for different benefits depending on where they apply ❖ Defining larger population-based and geographic trends is more difficult
Financial Assistance for Re-housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Less paperwork and coordination required to communicate when same agency provides direct client services also financial assistance ❖ Changes in a household's level of assistance can probably be made more quickly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Programs may develop different levels of assistance, leading to clients “shopping” for the best deal. ❖ More possibility of clients receiving assistance from multiple agencies ❖ Harder to develop “backend” infrastructure to manage process with strong fiscal controls
Housing Locator/Landlord Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The agency providing client assistance is also responsible for protecting the interests of landlords ❖ No additional intermediary; communication is more direct ❖ Easier to cultivate neighborhood-level landlord relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ More potential for agencies “outbidding” each other to recruit landlords ❖ Landlords could reinforce bidding—requesting more incentives to work with an agency
Stabilization Supports for Tenant and Landlord	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Generally more flexible, creative approaches to client service. ❖ Staff are likely to be better integrated into geographic area/neighborhood ❖ Individual agency may develop higher level of expertise with specific subpopulation(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Less consistency in service delivery ❖ Less back-up to cover staff caseloads ❖ Individual agency may “drift” from program model
Data Management, Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Agency may be more likely to utilize data they are responsible for entering, analyzing and evaluating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Data errors will be more common, training will be less available, system “repairs” will likely be less timely ❖ Staff with good clinical skills are not always staff with good data management skills ❖ Agency has built-in bias in measuring own performance.

2.3 Re-Housing: *Program Development Decisions*

If one or more service provider(s) plan to develop a new Rapid Re-Housing program, they will need to decide whether to add Rapid Re-Housing services within an existing shelter or to develop a program that will partner with shelters. Each of these approaches has advantages and disadvantages, as described below.

2.3.1 In-House Service Expansion

A shelter program may decide to incorporate Rapid Re-Housing services for their clients with other existing shelter services. This has several potential advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages:

- Since the same agency offers shelter and re-housing, re-housing staff has complete access to their clients and to client information.
- Staff is already on-site; clients do not have to travel to meet with staff, so service delivery is more efficient.
- The shelter can offer shelter incentives and sanctions for positive efforts or failure to make effort to meet re-housing goals.
- Clients may have developed a relationship with the shelter and can transfer that engagement to the shelter's re-housing staff.

Disadvantages:

- If Rapid Re-Housing results in a decline in shelter utilization and if the shelter is funded on the basis of occupied beds, the shelter might have to choose between the organization's fiscal needs and client interests. Organizational survival usually prevails.
- Service scope may "creep" into non housing-related goals, such as family therapy, medications clinic, parenting classes, etc. Eventually, staff may hesitate to re-house clients until they have "graduated" from in-house services. The shelter risks gradually becoming a quasi-transitional housing program with a correspondingly longer length of stay.
- Re-Housing services and the shelter are intrinsically linked. Shelter staff and clients may view the shelter as a back-up to housing, where clients with housing problems can return for "time out." Recidivism could be viewed as normal and healthy.

2.3.2 Freestanding Program Development

An agency may choose to develop freestanding Rapid Re-Housing services and offer those services to homeless households in one or more shelters operated by other agencies.

Advantages:

- No financial conflict of interest. Individuals and families are re-housed regardless of the financial impact on the shelter.

- Program is focused completely on housing and would be less likely to set non-housing goals as a precursor to housing placement.
- Program is not shelter-based. Clients are less likely to rely on the shelter organization for ongoing assistance or to see return to shelter as an option.
- A separate program can provide re-housing services to households in several shelters, developing a higher level of expertise and a broader network of landlords without the risk of “bidding wars.”

Disadvantages:

- The separate program will have only as much access to sheltered households as the shelters will allow.
- Exchange of client information may be unwieldy or limited.

Once these principal decisions have been made, it is time to start focusing on Rapid Re-Housing Components.

System & Program Planning Homework

2.1 Determine the Path from Homelessness to Housing

- ❖ Diagram the paths from homelessness to stable housing in your community. If you have separate resources for adults, families and youth who are homeless, diagram each.
 - How does a household obtain emergency housing? Is there a single or multiple points of entry? Do entry requirements vary by shelter or by population? How does a household find the “right door?”
 - Once in emergency housing, how does the household secure permanent housing?
 - Once in permanent housing, what resources can the household access if tenancy or financial problems threaten housing stability?
 - Identify community resources that are able to help (include financial assistance and assistance locating and maintaining suitable housing)

2.2 Re-Housing: System Redesign Decisions

- ❖ Assess the gaps within the pathways and identify where a missing component would increase the community’s effectiveness and efficiency in re-housing households who are homeless.
 - Where could adding a Rapid Re-Housing component within an existing homelessness service agency or a new program decrease the length of homelessness or help households obtain and maintain permanent housing?
 - Identify gaps that an integrated or freestanding program could fill

2.3 Re-Housing: Program Development Decisions

- ❖ Assess the level of interest and/or commitment among funders and service providers to change the path(s).
 - Are key stakeholders already involved in joint planning or collaborative programming? What benefits and risks would a system re-design offer to the stakeholders?
 - Would new funding overcome some barriers to re-design?
 - Brief key stakeholders on the paths persons who are homeless follow to obtain housing and where potential for improvement exists.
 - If there is not consensus around changing the design of the entire system, is there consensus around changing one part of the system (for example, publicly-funded system

CHAPTER THREE

TARGET POPULATION: WHICH SHELTERS, WHICH HOUSEHOLDS?

Prevention programs have the difficult task of finding people who are having a housing crisis who would become homeless but for the prevention assistance. Conversely, Rapid Re-Housing programs work with a much smaller and readily identifiable population: people who are already experiencing homelessness. Many are staying in one of the community's homeless or domestic violence shelters. Some are living in motels, on the streets or in campsites, but their locations are frequently well-known. There are many challenges facing Rapid Re-Housing programs, but finding clients is not the most complex problem.

3.1 Shelter-Based Rapid Re-Housing

If a shelter operates their own Re-Housing program for their own clients, the program mission and potential target population are clear. However, the organization must still make a basic choice about the target population for Rapid Re-Housing efforts. Will everyone in the shelter be considered for Rapid Re-Housing? In a family shelter, all but a few families will likely be good candidates. However, a shelter that serves chronically homeless men with disabilities (who usually need a much longer-term permanent supportive housing program) may target a subpopulation of their clients, such as men who have lived independently for at least one year out of the past five. They may also choose to use Rapid Re-Housing as a bridge until a vacancy in permanent supportive housing is available (as long as there is a realistic expectation of a timely vacancy).

3.2 Freestanding Rapid Re-Housing Programs

If the new Rapid Re-Housing Program is not attached to a shelter, it is freestanding. In most communities this means the program must develop a relationship with one or more shelters to re-house their clients, or (in communities with no shelters) with organizations that offer motel vouchers, or with organizations that provide outreach support to people in cars, camps or abandoned buildings.

It is unlikely that there will be much, if any, resistance to re-housing people who are staying in places not meant for human habitation. Organizations that shelter households in motels may likewise be very supportive of moving those households into permanent housing. Shelters, however, may have a more mixed response.

In a community where the length of stay in shelters is rising and many homeless people are being turned away, shelters will very likely embrace a program that will help their clients exit shelter so space becomes available for others.

However, some shelters operate like quasi-transitional housing programs; their mission is not temporary crisis housing but positive life change for their clients. This includes many domestic violence shelters who would naturally be concerned about exiting households before their safety is assured. Such shelters may not agree to work with a Rapid Re-Housing program unless the shelter is allowed to pre-select which households are referred to the program.

There may well be a mix of both situations within the same community—some shelters want people re-housed quickly and others believe rapid re-housing is too rapid to assure stability. In some cases, the shelter organization may also worry that a Rapid Re-Housing program will reduce their occupancy and jeopardize their financial base. These are the philosophical, political and practical realities facing a freestanding Rapid Re-Housing program.

If creating the new program is part of a system re-design, decisions will probably already have been made about which shelters and populations (or subpopulations) will become the targets for the Rapid Re-Housing program. Good re-design plans include input from all stakeholders, including the shelters, and it is likely that some level of agreement has already been reached. In some communities, shelter funding is contingent on cooperation with Re-Housing service providers and/or shelters are assessed on outcomes related to placing families back in permanent housing within specific timeframes.

On the other hand, if the new Rapid Re-Housing program is being developed to fill a service gap in the community, without a coordinated system re-design, the program may have to define its own target population. The following are some of the targeting decisions any freestanding re-housing program will have to make:

➤ **How broadly will the program define its target population?**

The Rapid Re-Housing program should start with some basic choices. In a small community with very few homeless families or individuals, a program may work with a wide variety of households. In a larger community, there are opportunities for focusing more narrowly, such as only homeless families or only homeless youth aged 17-25. In a metropolitan area with thousands of households who are homeless, it may be advantageous to have some Rapid Re-Housing programs that specialize in a subpopulation with special barriers, such as ex-offenders, survivors of domestic violence or refugees and immigrants who have been in the U.S. less than five years and have very limited English proficiency. Targeting is probably most appropriate if a subpopulation requires services from staff with special skills or sensitivities, specific types of housing or neighborhood settings, or landlords who require specialized recruitment strategies.

➤ **Will the program target one shelter or multiple shelters?**

This decision is closely related to the previous one. If a community has many shelters and the program is not targeting a subpopulation, then the program may take referrals from all programs or from all programs in a particular geographic catchment area. If the program is specializing in a very narrow population, such as young adults, they would likely target every shelter that houses any young adults. On the other hand, if a

community has only one shelter, the population in that shelter will, of necessity, become the target population for re-housing.

➤ **Should the target population be determined by the shelter(s) rather than the Re-Housing program?**

When a re-housing program must rely on cooperation with a shelter to gain access to clients, it may be necessary to work with the shelters that are most willing. It may also be necessary to work only with the households those shelters refer to re-housing. Begin where consensus is strongest. For instance, if the shelter believes only “high-functioning” families are appropriate for Rapid Re-Housing, then the Re-Housing program can start with those families. As the Re-Housing program develops expertise and shelter staff sees their clients succeed in permanent housing, they will be much more supportive and refer more clients. When newly-homeless households fill the vacancies left by re-housed clients, financial concerns may subside. Rapid Re-Housing services and shelters usually develop strong, close and mutually-supportive roles, but it can take time and effort to build and sustain the relationship.

3.3 Partnership to Serve Target Population

For free-standing Rapid Re-Housing programs, once the target shelter(s) and the target population(s) are identified a “partnership” agreement should be developed. This does not have to be a legal contract, but it should spell out, in writing if possible, the key areas where coordination, cooperation and communication are essential:

- A. **Which** shelter residents will be assessed for Rapid Re-Housing? All? Some? If not all, who decides which residents are assessed? What are the specific criteria?
- B. **When** will the assessment take place? At admission? Within 3 days? Within a week? Can assessments be conducted on evenings or weekends?
- C. **Who** will conduct the assessment? The shelter provider? The re-housing provider? How will decisions about acceptance for re-housing occur? Is there a point-of-contact for assessment and decision-making? How will decisions be communicated?
- D. **Where** will assessment occur? On-site or off? If on-site, what space is available for a private meeting with the client? If off-site, how will the client travel to the assessment?
- E. Which **records** will be shared between the shelter provider and re-housing provider? What are the client consent and data privacy requirements related to sharing information? Is a release of information required?
- F. What written or verbal client **updates**, if any, should each partner provide to the other? How often? What events should trigger an update?
- G. If **client sanctions** are contemplated by either party, how will the partner agency be involved in the decision or informed that it was made?

- H. If both organizations have individualized **Client Service Plans**, how will they assure that the plans do not conflict with each other? Can/Will they support the goals in each other's Plans? How will case coordination related to achieving goals outlined in the service plan occur?
- I. What kind of process will the two partners develop to resolve any **disputes** related to the partnership? What kind or level of conflict would trigger a dispute resolution? Who would represent each agency in resolving the dispute?

Whether the new Rapid Re-Housing program will be freestanding or shelter-based, targeting decisions are just the beginning. The next step is designing an assessment process that will guide decisions about whom to re-house and what supports will be needed to help them obtain and sustain housing.

Program Planning Homework

3.1 Shelter-Based Rapid Re-Housing

- ❖ What populations and sub-populations could benefit from Rapid Re-Housing assistance? What programs are currently working with these households?
 - Identify the numbers and characteristics of households who are homeless
 - Are there specific subpopulations that require a different approach (such as persons with limited English proficiency)?

3.2 Freestanding Rapid Re-Housing Programs

- ❖ Will Rapid Re-Housing be offered by the emergency housing providers or by a separate agency/program?
 - List the advantages and disadvantages of each option
 - Identify the capacity (willingness/expertise) of emergency housing providers and/or other homelessness service providers to implement a Rapid Re-Housing service

3.3 Partnership to Serve Target Population

- ❖ What partnerships are necessary to re-house families and individuals who are homeless?
 - How, where, when and by whom will eligible households identified?
 - How will information shared?
 - Establish communication protocols that identify how partners will communicate, how frequently, and by what methods
 - Identify how improvements will be identified and changes made

CHAPTER FOUR

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

The term “screening” usually refers to a process of determining eligibility and priority for services. “Assessment” is a more in-depth evaluation of an individual’s specific strengths and challenges and is used to design an individualized client service plan. In Rapid Re-Housing programs, every household that is homeless needs re-housing, but decisions must still be made about whether the individual or family needs longer-term services than a Rapid Re-Housing program can offer. In re-housing programs, screening and assessment are sometimes combined into one process.

Rapid Re-Housing assessments should focus on two sets of challenges: barriers to obtaining housing and barriers to retaining housing.

4.1 Barriers to Obtaining Housing: Tenant Screening Barriers

Barriers to obtaining housing are also called Tenant Screening Barriers, and they refer to any problems that cause a client’s rental application to be rejected. Client problems are only a Tenant Screening Barrier if:

- A. A prospective landlord would find the problem out during the application and screening process; AND
- B. The landlord would use the problem as a reason to deny the application.

There are clearly criteria a landlord cannot legally use to screen out tenants. In particular, landlords cannot deny housing to tenants on the basis of their membership in a protected class, as identified in federal, state and/or local laws. While some landlords do discriminate, it is illegal to deny housing to someone in a protected class *if there are no other legal criteria for refusing to approve the tenant*. For additional information on housing discrimination and protected classes, refer to HUD’s Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at:

<http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/index.cfm>.

Aside from membership in a protected class, however, landlords can and do develop their own screening criteria. The reasons for doing so are logical. Renting is a business and the consequences of unpaid rent, eviction, property damage and serious conflict between tenants and/or neighbors are very costly, in both income and time. Landlords use screening to minimize the risk that they will approve a tenant who causes these problems. Their process usually includes a background check to understand whether the prospective tenant has had past problems, particularly past problems in rental housing (evictions, late rent, lease violations, property damage), in managing their income so that rent will be paid (court judgments for unpaid debt, excessive debt, late payments) and past involvement in criminal behavior (criminal history, particularly drug crimes, and crimes against persons or property).

To determine the Tenant Screening Barriers that will impact how the Rapid Re-Housing program helps households obtain housing, it is essential to know which landlords screen and the criteria they use to make tenant selection decisions. The best way to learn this is to use a survey, focus group or advisory group of landlords who can explain their tenant screening criteria and how they use those criteria to accept or deny a tenant’s application. Every criterion landlords use to deny a rental application is a potential Tenant Screening Barrier for Re-Housing program clients. Ideally, landlord screening information will be obtained in a coordinated fashion with all Re-Housing providers and stakeholders participating or sharing the results. Otherwise, it will be up to the Rapid Re-Housing program to gather information from a sample of local landlords.

Rapid Re-Housing programs should know the Tenant Screening Barriers their clients face. Household interviews can elicit much of the information, although supplementing and/or confirming the facts with a public database or reference check is extremely helpful. Some households may be unaware that they have court judgments or may mistake a Notice to Vacate (the landlord simply will not renew the lease) for an Order to Evict (a much more serious action that could result in a court-ordered loss of housing). The accuracy and depth of information provided in interviews will also depend upon whether the individual believes that being truthful will help rather than harm their chances of getting decent housing. Staff must clarify the reason for the questions: landlords will find this information and reject the application. Bottom line: If the staff knows in advance what the landlord will see, staff can better design strategies to help clients obtain housing.

Typical barriers to obtaining housing:	
Tenant Screening Barrier	Assessment Methods
Criminal history	<p>Public Database: Many states have electronic databases of criminal charges and convictions. The information is public. To search databases requires the client’s full name and any previous names, aliases or nicknames; date of birth; and, sometimes, Social Security Number. It is also possible to search databases from other states.</p> <p>Caution: Good criminal history databases assure accuracy by including only arrest and disposition data where fingerprints are available. Databases that have not been updated may have errors. Agencies that conduct Tenant Screening for landlords often include data on all persons with the same or a similar name. When an error exists in a public database, landlords and Tenant Screening agencies are likely to continue to use erroneous information in tenant selection each time a tenant’s background is checked. Correcting this information may be difficult but is important.</p> <p>Interview/Client: Criminal history obtained by interview is less likely to be reliable. Individuals often conceal criminal history because they are afraid it will prevent them from getting housing. Some do not know what constitutes “criminal” history—i.e. whether being charged vs. arrested, vs. convicted vs. “pled down” to a lesser crime all count toward a criminal history.</p>

Typical barriers to obtaining housing:	
Tenant Screening Barrier	Assessment Methods
Housing History: Eviction and Non-Renewal of Lease	<p>Public Database: Some communities offer public access to electronic eviction records. Some may still have logs where this information is handwritten by court staff.</p> <p>Caution: Local eviction databases are less likely to have the tenant's full name, birth date or Social Security Number. Some evictions are filed by address, with only a first or last name, or even use "John Doe." Errors, unrelated evictions and even identity theft are not uncommon.</p> <p>Interview/Client: Tenants are often unsure whether or not they have been evicted. This can happen because the tenant left without notice and the landlord decided to file an eviction anyway. A very common reason for confusion is that tenants on a month-to-month lease can be asked to move with only one month's notice (see local laws concerning leases and notice to vacate). The formal or verbal Notice to Vacate is actually a refusal to renew the lease after the next month. It does not matter whether the tenant has a written month-to-month lease or a verbal one; they can still be given notice to move. Tenants often wrongly believe a formal Notice to vacate their housing unit is the same as an eviction.</p>
Housing History: Landlord References	<p>Public Database: N/A</p> <p>Interview/Landlords--Landlords or their representatives may call the tenant's previous landlords to see if there were significant problems (even if the problems did not result in an eviction). Rapid Re-Housing programs may also interview previous landlords to find the same information. Reference calls typically include the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Was the rent always paid in full and on time? ❖ Was proper notice given when the tenant moved out? (Proper notice is defined in the lease; the caller doesn't need to know the lease requirements, just whether the tenant followed the requirements) ❖ Did the tenant receive their full security or damage deposit back when she/he moved out? (This question is an indirect way of asking about damages.) ❖ Would you rent to this tenant again? (A "no" is a red flag, but may not be serious unless other problems show up in the tenant screening process.) <p>Interview/Client—Households usually are aware of conflict and problems they experienced in previous housing, and they can usually make good guesses about the kind of references prior landlords will give a caller. If possible, the Rapid Re-Housing interview should explore prior housing for the past 3-5 years. How often did they move—and why? Did the household always pay the rent on time; did the landlord ever tell them they were violating the lease or that other tenants had complained about them; did they give the landlord sufficient notice and receive the full damage deposit when they left?</p>

Typical barriers to obtaining housing:	
Tenant Screening Barrier	Assessment Methods
Credit History	<p>Public Database—Credit reporting agencies are required to provide all consumers with a free Credit Report once a year, if the consumer makes a request. Landlords, Tenant Screening agencies and Rapid Re-Housing programs would need a signed authorization to obtain a Credit Report on a client/tenant and will have to pay a fee. The three national credit reporting companies are Experian, TransUnion and Equifax. These reports will include everything a landlord would see; debts, late payments, etc.</p> <p>Interview/Client—While households often have a general awareness of late payments, judgments, closed bank accounts, etc., many do not have a full picture of their credit situation. Obtaining a Credit Report helps a household not only understand what a landlord would see, but provides an opportunity to address errors, which is not uncommon. Households that believe their Credit Report contains incorrect information should contact the credit reporting agency and request a correction.</p>

4.2 Barriers to Keeping Housing: Retention Barriers

Barriers to keeping housing do not include every problem that could indirectly contribute to housing loss. Barriers are defined primarily by the direct impact they have had on the household’s previous housing history—and the potential for affecting future housing.

If a woman has lost her housing multiple times because her boyfriend moved in without the landlord’s approval, the possibility of repeating that mistake is probably the most significant Retention Barrier for her future housing stability. An extremely low-income family on public assistance who became homeless due to a financial crisis and subsequent inability to pay the rent automatically has an income barrier and may also have a budgeting problem that is also a barrier to housing stability. A household may have become homeless multiple times due to several co-occurring problems, such as lease violations, complaints by other tenants, property damage and late rent payments. This household may have several Retention Barriers: understanding their lease and landlord-tenant rights/responsibilities; conflict/anger management issues; budgeting and/or income problems; and setting behavioral expectations for guests or children. The critical factor in assessing Retention Barriers to housing stability is the effect of a problem on housing.

This is a very different type of assessment than clinicians would develop to create traditional social service plans for people with disabilities or other long-term service needs. A Rapid Re-Housing program’s assessment is much more limited and much more focused: what problems interfered with housing to the extent that the household became homeless? How likely is the household to experience similar problems after re-housing?

A person's disability may or may not contribute to housing instability. As an example, a Re-Housing client with schizophrenia is fairly stable on her medications but under moderate stress she will sometimes decompensate and experience auditory hallucinations. If she routinely manages these periods by hiding in her bedroom for two days with the shades drawn, her mental illness is not a housing retention barrier. However, if her reaction is to turn up her stereo full blast, day and night, to drown out the voices-- that is clearly a housing barrier. The issue is not her diagnosis, it is her behavior. If she can fulfill the terms of her lease, pay the rent, maintain the property and positively interact with landlords and other tenants, her mental illness is not a focus for Rapid Re-Housing. The function of a Rapid Re-Housing program is to address the barriers that contribute to housing instability, while referring people to mainstream service systems for other service needs.

Based upon the household's rental history, staff can construct a list of Retention Barriers which can be addressed in the client's Housing Plan. The following are some common scenarios for housing loss and the barriers that might be causing the housing problems:

Examples of Past Housing Problems	Possible Causes of Past & Future Problem (Housing Retention Barriers)—confirmed through assessment
Lost housing twice due to non-payment of rent	<p>Lacks sufficient income to afford rent (e.g., rent exceeds 50% of income)</p> <p>Lack of emergency reserves to cover unexpected financial demands</p> <p>Friends/relatives/others borrow or take money that should be used for rent</p> <p>Has no budget to control spending</p> <p>Spends income on alcohol/drugs</p>
Lost housing due to “unauthorized tenant” moving into apartment: landlord issued warning and initiated eviction	<p>Lacks understanding of lease requirements and legal options for allowing boyfriend/relative to move in</p> <p>Lacks communication/assertiveness to approach landlord regarding adding guest to lease as other tenant; or, if not possible, tell guest s/he cannot live there (and enforce decision)</p>

Examples of Past Housing Problems	Possible Causes of Past & Future Problem (Housing Retention Barriers)—confirmed through assessment
Evicted due to multiple tenant complaints about loud noise, persistent bad odors from apartment	<p>Lacks basic housekeeping skills</p> <p>Lacks awareness of landlord-tenant rights/responsibilities</p> <p>Unable to control children (teens) and/or their friends' behavior in apartment</p> <p>Has frequent conflict with other household member</p>
Eviction due to “excessive traffic”—alleged drug-dealing or commercial sexual activity in unit	<p>Lacks assertiveness and ability to set limits with other household members or friends</p> <p>Lacks awareness of landlord-tenant rights/responsibilities</p> <p>Lacks alternative, legal means for securing income</p>

4.3 Using Barrier Information

Obtaining information related to Tenant Screening and Retention Barriers serves three critical functions:

- To decide whether to offer Rapid Re-Housing to the household. Some combinations of serious housing barriers will require longer-term services or more expertise than the program can offer. The household may need to be referred to other resources that better meet their needs such as permanent supportive housing or long-term, intensive case management.
- To determine how difficult it will be to find a landlord who will rent to the tenant—and the level of incentives the program may have to offer the landlord.
- To develop the client's Housing Plan. Minimizing or eliminating barriers, especially Retention Barriers, is the focus of the Housing Plan. The Housing Plan outlines the level and intensity of Rapid Re-Housing assistance required to obtain and retain housing.

It is very helpful to use a Housing Barrier Rating Scale to help guide planning and program implementation.

4.4 Constructing and Using Barrier Ratings

4.4.1 Tenant Screening Barriers (barriers to obtaining housing):

A survey or focus group of landlords can contribute information about how they select tenants, especially the Tenant Screening Barriers that would cause them to screen out a tenant. They can also suggest or agree with conditions under which they would accept tenants, despite their negative Tenant Screening Barrier profile. These can be used to adapt a barrier rating scale to local housing market conditions.

Rapid Re-Housing programs use a household’s Tenant Screening Barriers to match a household with the landlords most likely to approve their application. The rating can suggest the extra incentives the program may have to offer a landlord when a client’s rating is very high relative to assessed barriers.

4.4.2 Retention Barriers (barriers to maintaining housing):

Barriers to sustaining housing (Retention Barriers) are for program use only. Landlords are not permitted to consider personal information such as disability status in making a rental decision. Ratings can be constructed to fit the program’s specific criteria and available services.

Rapid Re-Housing Programs will use a household’s Retention Barrier Rating to determine whether the program is likely to be able to offer adequate services or should refer the household to a longer-term program. Retention barriers are also the focus when working with the household on a Housing Plan. The Housing Plan includes steps to minimize or eliminate Retention Barriers, so households can retain their housing after services end.

The following format can be adapted to the program’s service design and to the local rental market.

	Tenant Screening Barriers (Barriers to Obtaining Housing)	Retention Barriers (Barriers to Sustaining Housing)
<p>Level 1— The household will need minimal assistance to obtain and retain housing. The Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) program offers the following for most Level 1 households:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Financial assistance for housing start-up (e.g. first month’s rent, security deposit, utility deposit) ❖ Initial consultation related to housing search (e.g. where to find rental information, how to complete housing applications, documentation needed) ❖ Time-limited rental assistance, per client Housing Plan 	<p>Household has no criminal history</p> <p>Rental history: an established local rental history. No evictions, landlord references are good to fair</p> <p>Credit history is good, with the exception of a few late utility and credit card payments</p>	<p>No significant barriers except financial: very low income, insufficient emergency reserves</p>

	Tenant Screening Barriers (Barriers to Obtaining Housing)	Retention Barriers (Barriers to Sustaining Housing)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Home visit/check-in after move-in ❖ Offer of services (at tenant request) for up to 3 months. <p>Landlord assistance will likely include only program contact information for tenancy concerns</p>		
<p>Level 2— The household will need routine assistance to obtain and retain housing. The RRH program offers the following for most Level 2 households:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Financial assistance for housing start-up ❖ Time-limited rental assistance, per client Housing Plan ❖ Initial consultation and ongoing assistance with housing search, including bus tokens as needed ❖ Development of Housing Plan to work on any identified retention barriers ❖ Weekly home visits for first two months; then reduce to bi-weekly or monthly as most Housing Plan goals are met. ❖ Services available for up to 6 months, depending on housing problems and progress toward Housing Plan goals. <p>Landlord assistance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ 6 month availability: landlord can call with tenancy issues and program will respond. ❖ Program will check in with landlord periodically for updates. ❖ RRH program will relocate household if landlord is considering eviction. 	<p>Household has no serious criminal history, but may have a few minor offenses such as moving violations, a DUI, or a misdemeanor</p> <p>Rental history is limited or out-of-state. May have 1-2 explainable evictions for non-payment. Prior landlords may report a problem with timely rent.</p> <p>Credit history shows pattern of late or missed payments</p>	<p>Financial barriers include very low income, may have inconsistent employment, poor budgeting skills</p> <p>No serious mental illness or chemical dependency that affects housing retention. May have some level of depression or anxiety or problems responding to conflict</p> <p>May lack awareness of landlord-tenant rights/responsibilities.</p> <p>May have minor problems meeting basic household care/cleaning.</p> <p>May have been homeless once before.</p>
<p>Level 3— The household will need more intensive and/or longer assistance to obtain and retain housing. The RRH program offers the following for most Level 3 households:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Financial assistance for housing start-up ❖ Time-limited rental assistance, per client Housing Plan ❖ Initial consultation and ongoing assistance 	<p>Household may have some criminal history, but none involving drugs or serious crimes against persons or property</p> <p>Rental history includes up to 3 evictions for non-payment. Prior landlord references fair to poor.</p>	<p>Household is very low income, has periods of unemployment, no emergency reserves, lacks budgeting skills</p> <p>Problems with mental health or alcohol/substance use that somewhat impacts</p>

	Tenant Screening Barriers (Barriers to Obtaining Housing)	Retention Barriers (Barriers to Sustaining Housing)
<p>with housing search, including bus tokens as needed. Staff may accompany client to the landlord interview.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Development of Housing Plan to work on any identified retention barriers ❖ Weekly home visits for first two months; then reduce to bi-weekly or monthly as most Housing Plan goals are met. Include unannounced drop-in visits. ❖ Services available for up to 9 months, depending on housing problems and progress toward Housing Plan goals. <p>Landlord assistance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ 9 month availability; landlord can call with tenancy issues and program will respond even after services end. ❖ Program will check in with landlord periodically for updates. ❖ RRH program will relocate if an eviction is being considered. If household will not leave, program may pay court costs. ❖ Program may pay or repair damages. 	<p>Partial damage deposit returned. Some complaints by other tenants for noise</p> <p>Credit history includes late payments and possible court judgments for debt, closed accounts</p>	<p>compliance with tenancy requirements.</p> <p>May have deficits in care of apartment, landlord-tenant rights/responsibilities, communications skills with landlord and/or other tenants</p> <p>Conflict may exist in household</p> <p>May have lost housing and been homeless several times in past</p>
<p>Level 4— The household will need more intensive and longer assistance to obtain and retain housing. The RRH program offers the following for most Level 4 households:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Financial assistance for housing start-up ❖ Time-limited rental assistance, per client Housing Plan ❖ Initial consultation and ongoing assistance with housing search, including bus tokens as needed. Staff may accompany client to the landlord interview. ❖ Development of Housing Plan to work on any identified retention barriers ❖ Weekly home visits for first two months; then reduce to bi-weekly or monthly as most Housing Plan goals are met. Include unannounced drop-in visits. ❖ Services available for up to 12 months, depending on housing problems and progress toward Housing Plan goals. 	<p>Criminal history, violations may include drug offense or crime against persons or property</p> <p>Rental history includes up to five evictions for non-payment and/or lease violations. Landlord references poor. Security deposit may have been kept due to damage to unit.</p> <p>Credit history is poor, late payments, may include judgment for debt to a landlord, closed accounts</p>	<p>Extremely low income, no emergency reserves, bank accounts closed, lacks budgeting skills.</p> <p>May be using drugs/alcohol and/or has mental health problems. May have conflict with child/ren or partner. May lack ability to care for apartment or communicate appropriately with landlord and other tenants.</p> <p>Has likely been homeless multiple times or for more extended periods</p>

	Tenant Screening Barriers (Barriers to Obtaining Housing)	Retention Barriers (Barriers to Sustaining Housing)
<p>Landlord assistance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ 12 month availability; landlord can call with tenancy issues and program will respond; ongoing option to call even after Rapid Re-Housing services are ended can be offered or negotiated on a case-by-case basis. ❖ Program will check in with landlord monthly (or more often if landlord prefers) for updates/issues. ❖ May pay an additional damage deposit and/or last month's rent in addition to normal start-up costs. ❖ RRH program will relocate household if an eviction is being considered. If household will not leave, program may pay court costs of eviction. ❖ Program may pay or repair damages. 		
<p>Level 5— Household needs longer or more intensive services; may need staff with more professional training. RRH program refers household to appropriate program, such as intensive case management, permanent supportive housing or other local resources.</p>	<p>Extensive criminal background</p> <p>Extremely poor rental history, multiple evictions, serious damage to apartment, complaints</p> <p>Credit history includes multiple judgments, unpaid debts to landlords, closed accounts</p>	<p>Active and serious chemical dependency or mental illness</p> <p>Unable to comply with lease requirements or interact positively with landlord/tenants; poor apartment management skills, out-of-control behaviors by adult or child/ren</p> <p>May have experienced chronic homelessness (multiple and/or extended periods of homelessness)</p>

Case Examples: Practitioners to Practitioners

I do a detailed housing intake with each household to gauge their strengths and skill levels before they move into housing. This helps me predict areas that may be of concern and I try to offer them education, training or support in those areas before it becomes a problem.

I explained to the client that we understand that they may have many people to work with including Social Workers/probation officers, job coaches, etc. and that I don't want them to feel that it's a waste of time meeting with me also. So we made a detailed list of specific things that I could help with that no one else was helping them with. This made our time together effective, efficient and beneficial to the client.

With 17 year olds, youth with no credit or rent history, we always offer a guarantee of rent. We decline to give specific information about the youth, we sell the program not the youth.

Program Planning Homework

4.1 Barriers to Obtaining Housing: Tenant Screening Barriers

- ❖ In the local private housing market, what are the critical tenant screening barriers that determine whether a tenant's rental application is rejected by most landlords?
 - Ask landlords and/or tenant screening agencies
 - Identify the screening barriers most likely to stop the target population from obtaining housing

4.2 Barriers to Keeping Housing: Retention Barriers

- ❖ How will tenant screening barriers be assessed?
 - Develop a list of public databases that include criminal history, evictions, etc. and how to access them
 - Discuss contracting with tenant screening agencies to purchase the same screening reports landlords use
 - Develop an interview form that includes questions related to tenant screening barriers
 - Train staff in how to use the interview form and engage clients in the interview process

4.3 Using Barrier Information

- ❖ How will housing retention barriers be assessed?
 - Develop an interview guide to obtain information about housing history, the reasons for housing loss, and patterns of housing retention barriers.
 - Train staff in how to use the interview form and engage clients in the interview process

4.4 Constructing and Using Barrier Ratings

- ❖ How will the information about a household's tenant screening barriers and housing retention barriers be used?
 - To determine eligibility for Rapid Re-Housing vs other housing and program options? Which households are screened out and what happens to them?
 - Establish clear and simple criteria for triaging and matching households to the most appropriate Rapid Re-Housing or other options
 - To develop a Housing Stability Plan? Will the Plan format match the assessment?

CHAPTER FIVE

RAPID RE-HOUSING PLAN

Homeless households have not only exhausted their financial resources, they have often exhausted their personal support networks. There are no people left to loan them money, there are no spare bedrooms or couches left for doubling up while they get on their feet. Yet some households need little assistance to obtain and retain housing. They have a good record of handling their limited incomes; they understand tenant responsibilities. They may have very limited support and a lack of emergency reserve funds for exiting shelter and managing future financial crises. But they are ready, willing and able to obtain housing and it is likely they will keep that housing. Their Rapid Re-Housing Plan will be simple: what help does the household need to find and secure housing? And since all households will be very poor, what optional services, education or training might help the family increase their income or reduce expenses?

Many households, however, need a moderate level of support to overcome Tenant Screening Barriers to obtaining housing. Landlords are likely to screen them out unless the Rapid Re-Housing program offers to act as an intermediary for the household. Staff monitoring of the household's living situation and intentional landlord communication is designed to assure the landlord will not screen the household out. And once a particular level of support is promised to a landlord, the program must fulfill its obligation.

5.1 The Rapid Re-Housing Plan:

The Rapid Re-Housing Plan should be developed collaboratively with the client and focuses on what has to happen to assure barriers to securing and maintaining new housing are addressed and overcome. The degree to which those barriers are likely to impede obtaining housing or undermine housing stability will determine the action steps and frequency of contact in the Plan. Goals identified in the plan should be concrete, achievable and, where appropriate, tied to a specific timeframe. The family and program staff should each have specific assignments (action steps). To the maximum extent possible, the Plan should identify and utilize community resources to address financial and personal housing problems. The Plan should also include the length of time the agency has promised to be available to the household and the landlord for problem-solving.

The Plan can be a simple list of steps that will be taken before the next client-staff meeting. Or it can be written as a longer-term plan covering all of the goals and steps to be taken to obtain housing and improve housing stability during the projected time the household will participate in the program. In either the case, the Plan should be frequently revisited and updated as it serves as the agreed upon 'road map' to housing stability.

The Rapid Re-Housing Plan should focus on the following barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing:

Barriers to Obtaining Housing:

Most homeless households have two major barriers to securing housing:

1. Financial Barriers. They have very low incomes and little savings. This makes it difficult or impossible to pay housing start-up costs such as first month's rent, security deposit, application fees, moving costs, and so forth. A household who became homeless because they were unable to pay \$300 of the monthly rent is unlikely to have \$1500 or more to pay for the housing start-up costs needed to secure a modest one-bedroom apartment.

2. Tenant Screening Barriers. Poor households, especially those who have experienced homelessness, often have Tenant Screening Barriers that cause landlords to deny their applications for rental units. Poor credit histories, unpaid debt, late payments, and eviction for non-payment are common reasons landlords deny rental applications. Any additional barriers, such as a criminal history, further reduce a tenant's chances of securing decent housing.

The Rapid Re-Housing Plan must include actions to overcome or minimize these two critical barriers to obtaining housing.

Financial barriers can be overcome by assuring that funds are available to pay housing start-up costs that are beyond the reach of the homeless household. Sources of assistance can include mainstream public benefits, such as TANF Emergency Assistance, or any other source of public or private funding. To assure the unit is not lost, funds must be immediately available when a household's tenant application is accepted.

Tenant Screening Barriers are more complex but rarely impossible to overcome. Ideally, a household would work on repairing their credit history, establish a new history of timely payments, and avoid any criminal behavior. But these are steps that take considerable time – steps that can be better achieved from a stable living situation. The household needs to convince a landlord to rent to them. This is the role of the Rapid Re-Housing provider. Landlords screen to minimize the risks of unpaid rent, property damage, police calls and conflict with other tenants. Rapid Re-Housing providers make the landlord an even better offer: they promise to identify rental problems and resolve them, and to respond to landlord concerns (such as late rent or apparent lease violations). Thus, there is less risk renting to Rapid Re-Housing households than renting to other applicants who may look better on paper but later have many tenancy problems – and no program to help resolve those problems for the landlord.

Barriers to Maintaining Housing.

Based upon their housing histories, Rapid Re-Housing staff can identify recurring issues that have resulted in housing loss in the past. These situations may present a risk to maintaining housing in the future. Barriers often include:

- **Financial problems.** A lack of any emergency reserves to meet unexpected financial demands is common and often results in non-payment of rent. Lack of sufficient income, excess debt, a poorly-managed budget: all are frequent barriers to maintaining housing.
- **Lack of information about tenant responsibilities and expectations.** This includes lack of understanding regarding legal requirements in the lease, and failure to meet basic expectations for noise, care of the unit, and other behavioral norms.
- **Relationship problems.** Common problems include the behavior of guests (who may cause noise or damage), including friends or relatives who move in without the landlord's permission or "borrow" the rent money.
- **Other personal problems that result in failure to pay the rent, care for the unit and interact positively with other tenants or the landlord.** A person with a developmental disability or traumatic brain injury, for example, may have special difficulty organizing and scheduling bill-paying or setting limits on guests' behaviors. A person experiencing domestic violence may have particular safety issues that must be addressed in her housing plan. Someone who uses alcohol or drugs may then have difficulty paying the rent or may be evicted if the landlord learns of illegal behavior or problems with conflict or unit damage due to chemical use.

The Rapid Re-Housing Plan must include actions to overcome or minimize recurrent, significant barriers to retaining housing. Financial barriers can be addressed via employment and/or credit repair and budgeting services. General landlord-tenant information, a specific review of the household's lease, and coaching about behavioral expectations can help overcome lack of information about tenant responsibilities and expectations. Relationship problems may require referral to a domestic violence program, counseling, communications skills training and/or coaching. Other problems may require professional assessment and/or professional services if the personal issues are affecting housing.

The following is a sample Rapid Re-Housing Plan for a homeless mother with two elementary school-aged children. The Plan separately addresses Tenant Screening Barriers to obtaining housing and Housing Retention Barriers to maintaining housing.

RAPID RE-HOUSING PLAN FOR EMILY

Part One: Plan to Get Housing

Assessment of Tenant Screening Barriers:

- **Housing History:** Public records check of eviction court filings; interview with Emily. Emily has been evicted twice for non-payment of rent. She knows that other tenants in her last two apartment buildings complained about her and her children, because the landlord told her. She didn't get all her damage deposit back because her children broke a window and used markers on the walls. She doesn't think her landlord would give her a good reference.
- **Criminal History:** Public records check of criminal history database; interview with Emily. Emily had two Driving Under the Influence charges in 2006 and has a suspended driver's license.
- **Credit History:** Interview with Emily; supplemented with free Credit Report from TransUnion—requested 8/13. Emily knows her credit report will show late or missing debt payments and too much debt.
- **Employment/Income:** Interview with Emily, who also provided check stubs and a public assistance benefits award letter. Her income is about \$1,200/month from public assistance and part-time employment. She has no savings to pay for housing start-up costs.

Plan: Housing Search

- **Goal:** Emily will review housing listings and investigate acceptable units on a daily basis. An acceptable unit for Emily is one within the same school district her children have been attending, so they don't have to change schools again. She believes she can afford \$600/month rent and utilities, which is sufficient for some one-bedroom apartments. If she has to pay higher rent, she will need to increase her income and will require a subsidy until she gets a better job or more hours.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Rapid Re-Housing program will provide Emily with a list of properties whose landlords are cooperating with the Rapid Re-Housing program.
 - Emily will call for vacancy information, location, rent and amenities and will indicate that she is partnering with the program.
 - Emily will make an appointment to visit any vacancy that is acceptable.

Plan: Application, Landlord Interview, and Leasing

- **Goal:** Emily will apply for available units that meet her criteria and budget and secure housing by September 1.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Emily will prepare for landlord interview by filling out a sample application so she will have all the necessary information available.
 - Emily will practice a landlord-tenant interview with Shirley from the Rapid Re-Housing program.
 - Emily will also sign a Release of Information so Shirley can talk to prospective landlord(s), but Shirley will not disclose any information about any of Emily's

- o personal issues to the landlord.
- o Shirley will accompany Emily to landlord interview(s) and will promise the landlord the standard Rapid Re-Housing follow-up services of six months, with home visits to Emily, response to landlord calls within one business day, and follow up to work with Emily and resolve any issues related to rent, lease requirements or complaints.

Plan: Financial Assistance for Housing Start-Up

- Goal: Emily will pay \$600 toward the cost of first month’s rent, security deposit, application fees, moving costs, etc. The remainder of housing costs will be paid by a combination of public assistance benefits and other public and private resources.
- Action Steps:
 - o Shirley will provide Emily with financial assistance application information and assist Emily in completing application forms.
 - o Emily will submit an application for financial assistance.
 - o When Emily has completed the application for assistance and been approved—funds will be available as soon as she has a signed lease.

Part Two: Plan to Keep Housing

Housing Retention Barriers:

- **Financial:** Emily’s income is too low and she has no emergency reserves.
- **Tenancy information:** Emily has never read a lease and doesn’t know what the lease requires. At her previous apartment, she got into trouble and didn’t understand why the landlord and other tenants were upset with her.
- **Relationships:** Emily has had trouble saying “no” when her sister wants to borrow money and this has left Emily without enough money to pay the rent.
- **Other Issues:** Emily used to drink heavily and thinks she lost control over her children during those years. She knows her children have caused damage and that they are so loud people complain about them, but she doesn’t know how to respond to them.

Plan: Financial

- **Goal:** Emily will immediately seek to increase her income by increasing her earned income from work. Emily’s goal is to increase her income by \$300/month.
- **Action Steps:**
 - o Emily will request more hours at work
 - o Emily will ask her sister to watch the children after school if necessary (at least until she can find daycare).
 - o Shirley will make a referral so Emily can meet with a financial counselor to look at ways to cut costs, make lower monthly payments and apply for the Earned Income Tax Credit.
 - o Emily will begin saving \$10 from her paycheck every week and will open a savings account so she has money for emergencies.
 - o Emily will review her new lease with Shirley and make a list of the things that could get her evicted. She will also enroll in Tenant Education Classes offered by ABC Social Services.

- Rapid Re-Housing program will pay up to \$200/month towards Emily's rent if the apartment costs more than \$600. The rent subsidy is temporary, until Emily can increase her job income.
- Emily will meet with Shirley every month to discuss progress toward increasing her income.

Plan: Relationships

- **Goal:** Emily will seek to improve her relationship with her sister so that relationship issues don't interfere with her ability to keep her housing.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Shirley will help Emily practice what to say when her sister asks for a loan so Emily can keep her rent money.
 - If Emily's sister gets mad, Shirley will mediate (if Emily wants her to) and explain why Emily has to say no.
 - Emily, with Shirley's advice, will try to find ways her sister can get help with her budgeting, so she doesn't have to ask Emily for money.

Plan: Other Issues

- **Goal:** Emily will work to address other issues that have affected her ability to keep her housing.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Shirley will help Emily find an AA support group in her new neighborhood
 - Emily will attend AA once a week and ask her sister to babysit while she attends.
 - Shirley will make a referral to the Community Child Guidance Center to get some help with managing her children's behavior.

I agree:

- To allow Shirley to visit my apartment every week the first month, then every two weeks for six months. I understand that the landlord is likely to approve my rental application because Shirley promised to help me and the landlord get along.
- To work on these goals and to discuss my progress when Shirley visits.
- To call Shirley whenever I'm having trouble with my apartment, landlord or other tenants.

Emily Barr

Emily Barr

Date

Each Re-Housing program should develop the Plan format that works best for their clients and for their staff. As long as the Plan addresses the client's Retention Barriers and includes both a goal and action steps for each Retention Barrier area, the Plan will be useful in guiding assistance toward stabilization.

Case Examples: Practitioners to Practitioners

A common theme is a client feels disconnected and isolated when moving into his or her own place. You must be proactive and connect them to other community supports and outlets. Also increase home visits and assist them with creating their space to make it feel like home.

One family came out of shelter and into housing. They were unable to maintain any kind of housing as the husband is ill with cancer and mental health issues. The wife wanted to look after her husband and care for him and keep the family intact. Kids are now doing well in school and we helped the mother take a job as a part-time personal care attendant for her own husband! The housing was essential to the family's stability.

If my client has had several evictions, I guarantee to pay the court filing fee if this landlord ultimately has to evict my client. I also suggest a month-to-month lease; if things don't work out, the landlord is not locked into a year-long lease.

Program Planning Homework

5 Client Housing Plan

- ❖ Develop or select a format for the Housing Plan
 - How will housing screening and retention barriers be addressed in the Plan?
 - Ensure that Plans identify the barriers—financial, understanding landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities, relationships that threaten housing, etc.
 - Ensure Plans include specific, achievable action steps to address the barriers
 - Train staff in how to develop and use the Plan in a collaborative approach with clients and with a focus on screening and retention barriers.
 - Ensure staff and client's understand the purpose of the Plan and that referrals for optional life goals not directly related to obtaining or retaining housing are optional and included upon client request.

CHAPTER SIX

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

6.1 Housing Start-Up Costs

It is expensive to secure new housing. First month's rent and security deposit alone can be well over a thousand dollars. If the individual's Tenant Screening Barriers are very high, the program may have to offer a larger security deposit and/or last month's rent as an extra incentive to the landlord. Additional costs include paying to move the household's belongings from storage, application fees (if required by landlords), transportation for housing search, and utility connection fees. Household start-up costs should be budgeted at an average of three times the amount a program expects the household will have to pay in monthly rent.

If the household is receiving public assistance they may qualify for one-time emergency assistance to pay some or all of these costs. Emergency assistance availability and eligibility requirements vary widely from state to state and community to community. Rapid Re-Housing programs should become familiar with their state and local policies and know how and when a household should apply. It is particularly important that start-up funds be available as soon as an appropriate rental unit is located. A close working relationship with the local public assistance office and other financial assistance providers will help the program access funds quickly. Government staff may even design an expedited process for homeless households—especially if the public agency is paying some or all of the costs of sheltering the household.

6.2 Rental Assistance

Rental assistance is an essential tool for helping homeless families and individuals retain their housing. But not all households will require ongoing assistance and not all should receive it just because they are rent-burdened. Ideally, a household should pay no more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities. However, if a Rapid Re-Housing program chooses to provide rental assistance to every participant who spends more than 30% of his or her income on rent, the program's entire budget will soon be exhausted—and households who may be even more needy will lose access to assistance. In order to ensure the most efficient use of resources, programs must carefully assess the level of assistance each household they serve needs to retain their housing.

Deep subsidies may be the only possible way to secure or maintain housing for someone with zero income while they apply for benefits or seek employment. But deep subsidies have serious risks, especially when they are time-limited. A mother who receives a subsidy of \$900 dollars per month may be overwhelmed and virtually paralyzed by a Housing Plan goal to increase her income by such a large amount. She may just wait and hope something will happen before the money runs out. When the subsidy does end, she is probably going to be unable to pay the rent—and lose her housing. This is called the “cliff effect;” falling into homelessness after a deep subsidy ends.

Rapid Re-Housing programs should develop guidelines for the length and depth of assistance. This assures households are treated fairly and funds are used efficiently. There are a variety of structures for subsidy programs; an agency can decide to use one or several. Regardless of the structure, good policy requires that ***the subsidy should be as short and as shallow as possible, so the program can assist as many households as possible.***

Decisions about structure should assure that the subsidy is both shallow enough to avoid the cliff effect and deep enough that housing is not lost. Subsidies should be short-term enough that households feel some urgency about improving their incomes, but flexible enough to permit extensions if best efforts fail or another crisis occurs. Whenever the household may need a long-term subsidy, they should be assisted to apply for public benefits and/or subsidized housing. Although the wait for publicly funded rental subsidies (e.g. Housing Choice Vouchers or “Section 8”) can be long, if the household is not in the queue there is no chance of obtaining resources.

Finally, programs should define the expectations households must meet to keep their subsidy and the process for terminating a subsidy. Staff should judge progress within the context of client and environmental limitations. If the failure to successfully complete action steps is due to a lack of viable opportunities in the local job market or a relapse from sobriety, the program’s response should be quite different than failure without any mitigating circumstances. When and if assistance to a household must be terminated, an agency should know exactly how it will be done: written grounds for termination; warnings; supervisory review of termination recommendations; adequate notice to the participant; appeal process; and reinstatement criteria/process. Loss of a subsidy can mean loss of housing; great care must be taken with such decisions.

Some Options for Designing a Rental subsidy Program		
Subsidy Model	Benefits	Risks
<p>Income-based subsidy: household pays a fixed percentage of their income for rent (e.g. 40% or 50% or 60%, etc.)</p>	<p>Household will be able to pay rent even if their income drops because the subsidy will increase. Household has more discretionary money if income increases. Increase in family's share of rent occurs only when/if income also increases.</p>	<p>As income increases, rent increases, which many people perceive as a disincentive to work. The deeper the subsidy, the greater the cliff effect. Income-based subsidies offer little incentive to secure smaller units or less expensive housing. Income-based subsidies are more difficult for program budgeting.</p>
<p>Flat subsidy: Subsidy is based on individual's rent or on apartment size (e.g. \$300 for a two-bedroom apartment, \$400 for a three-bedroom unit, etc.); the subsidy is fixed. Subsidy can be deep or shallow.</p>	<p>If the subsidy is shallow, the cliff effect is small. Household can see exactly how much more income is needed to replace subsidy. As income increases, rental assistance stays the same, creating an incentive for work. Flat subsidies offer some incentive for obtaining smaller, less expensive housing. Flat subsidies are easier to use in program budget planning.</p>	<p>If income decreases due to job layoff or cut in hours/benefits, or if rents increase, the flat subsidy may not be enough to assure housing retention. Re-evaluation of the subsidy amount would be necessary.</p>
<p>Declining subsidy: Whether income-based or flat, the subsidy would decline in "steps," based upon a fixed timeline or when the individual has reached specific goals.</p>	<p>The steps are known in advance and act as deadlines for progressive increases in income. Reduces cliff effect because rental assistance is fairly low by the end of the subsidy period.</p>	<p>Due to the local job market or the individual's limited employability, income increases may not be possible or may not occur in the amounts and according to the timelines the subsidy program has set.</p>

6.3 Utility Assistance

A household may be able to maintain housing with *only* a utility subsidy. Or they may benefit from a shallow rent subsidy combined with utility assistance. When utility assistance and rental assistance are provided simultaneously, the overall impact on a household can be significant and the combined assistance may result in a larger "cliff effect" once assistance ends. A good approach to avoid this is to calculate the total assistance provided and the household's ability to increase income or decrease expenses enough to transition off subsidy.

In all cases, households should be encouraged and assisted, as needed, to apply for utility assistance offered through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and other utility assistance programs for which they may be eligible. Utilities in some communities have an energy assistance program for low-income customers or a “cold weather rule” that prohibits terminating utilities during specific winter months. However, there are strict rules governing these programs. A household may have to sign up for the program by a specific date, may need to be up-to-date on their payments at the time they apply, and/or they might be required to make a fixed partial payment each month during a given season or period of time. On a particular date the total unpaid balance may be due and utilities can be shut off at that point if payment is not received. Utility companies sometimes have “budget plans” to allow averaging heat costs over twelve months so that payments are predictable. Some budget plans also offer a discount if the household is willing to restrict use of electricity during peak hours. These mainstream programs can reduce or eliminate the need for special utility assistance.

6.4 Program Rules and Expectations

Before considering and deciding the type of financial assistance a Rapid Re-Housing program may offer, programs must first develop basic rules and requirements for clients and staff to follow. Rules and requirements are often developed on an ad hoc basis. Something bad happens and the program creates a rule to assure it never happens again. Something else happens; a new rule is born. This is often inevitable. But, unfortunately, rules are cumulative. More are added, none are ever subtracted. The loss of flexibility can be subtle, but over time rigid rules have profound effects on both staff and clients. Rules are an attempt to assure fairness, to avoid arbitrary decisions that may vary from client to client or staff to staff. But they can also result in a punitive environment that is a barrier to client access and client success. Balance is critical.

It is reasonable, even necessary, to have some expectations for client effort or progress when time-limited rental assistance is provided. After all, the household will have to transition off the subsidy without losing housing when funding ends. The challenges are:

1. Taking a fair, unbiased look at the individual’s abilities and barriers or vulnerabilities;
2. Knowing the environmental constraints of the local job and housing markets, and
3. Developing, with the individual, actions and tasks that are challenging but not overwhelming or impossible.

These actions and tasks are spelled out in the Housing Plan.

Rules should not only specify what the program expects from clients but what staff will do if expectations for clients are not met. Loss of housing or loss of the subsidy that sustains housing is serious. Good practice and due process rights for clients should include the following in all cases except where physical harm has occurred or is clearly imminent.

- Staff assessment of the household’s situation and reasons for failing to meet expectations;

- Modification of the person's Housing Plan if expectations were unrealistic;
- Soliciting feedback from the household on problems earlier, before the problem escalates;
- Providing individuals with ongoing feedback, including "warnings" for serious problems;
- Review and approval by supervisors or managers before any decision to terminate;
- Creating and using an appeal process where a different program decision-maker or internal staff group hears the client's appeal;
- Timely feedback to the client on the result of the appeal;
- Clarifying any option for a "second chance:" exactly what is required for reinstatement of the subsidy or services.

When designing a Rapid Re-Housing program, it is important to set "ground rules" for the kinds of expectations staff cannot impose. Program expectations often expand over time, with progressively more intrusive requirements for personal information or increased mandates for participation in services that staff believes the individual "needs" but which are not directly related to housing.

A typical example: a client casually mentions that she smokes marijuana almost every day. She is making progress on increasing her income and has no problems with her landlord or other tenants. What does the program expect – or allow – a staff to do? Staff shouldn't add new expectations for participation in chemical dependency treatment. Offering information or referrals could be useful, but terminating services or a subsidy on the basis of a client's refusal to utilize treatment is not appropriate. This kind of scenario should be anticipated and staff should be trained about how to handle the situation when it arises.

It is a good idea to periodically revisit program expectations, not to find reasons why they **should** be kept but to look for reasons why they **may not be necessary**.

Case Examples: Practitioners to Practitioners

We received a referral of a mother, father, and 6 children who lost their last housing due to lack of income. Dad worked at Burger King the whole time, even while homeless and staying at the shelter. We connected dad to a better paying job which he always neglected to follow through on. Finally when asked why he wanted to stay at Burger King dad admitted that it was the only job he felt comfortable doing, and he knew it well. This family has been in their new housing the last five years with dad still working at Burger King.

The youth was hanging around negative family influences and not working regularly. Since being in his new apartment he is working on getting a second job and has increased his visitation with his child because he has stable housing.

A landlord wanted to play “case worker” and began to make side deals with the client so the total rent didn’t have to be paid. Then he wanted us to repay everything the client owed. We shared with him that we were not part of this agreement, and a payment plan between him and the client could work if we are included. There was no more exclusion of us in our 6 months case management and the tenant kept his housing. He learned to pay on time, and the landlord kept us up-to-date.

Program Planning Homework

6.1 Housing Start-Up Costs

- ❖ Develop a method of assuring immediate access to financial assistance for housing start-up costs when a household locates housing.
 - Identify financial assistance resources and related eligibility criteria for housing start-up costs that are currently available in the community
 - How will households be rapidly assessed for eligibility to obtain publicly or privately funded assistance for damage/security deposit, first month’s rent, etc.?
 - Train staff on available community resources for housing start-up, including eligibility criteria and referral/linkage procedures
 - Establish formal or informal partnerships to ensure efficient and effective access to assistance
 - Identify alternative resources and options if households fail to qualify for assistance

6.2 Rental Assistance

- ❖ Develop a rental subsidy program for households who do not have sufficient income to pay for rent and utilities in even the most modest housing.
 - Investigate and select one or more subsidy models—income-based, unit based, declining
 - Develop criteria for deciding which households will qualify and which will receive priority
 - Define the expectations that will accompany subsidy, including frequency of re-assessing need/eligibility.
 - Define the criteria and process for terminating a subsidy, including appeal rights and procedures.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LANDLORD RECRUITMENT

Landlords are the primary partners of every Rapid Re-Housing program. Without landlords who are willing to accept tenants with poor rental, income, credit and/or criminal histories, households who are homeless remain homeless. At best, they would likely obtain very substandard housing.

Re-Housing staff can find housing for tenants with multiple evictions and serious criminal histories. An experienced Rapid Re-Housing program in a large metropolitan area has more than two hundred landlords willing to rent to homeless households. How do they do it? Basically, they make the landlord an offer she or he cannot refuse. And they scrupulously keep their promises.

Landlords screen to reduce their risks of late rent, damage, criminal behaviors and dealing with complaints from other tenants. All landlords know that while screening is helpful, it does not eliminate risk. Every landlord has been “burned” by a tenant who looked good on paper but turned out to be a catastrophe once accepted. Rapid Re-Housing programs are able to offer landlords a better deal than the applicants they are already accepting into housing, because clients enrolled in re-housing programs come with back-up—a highly credible intermediary who can be called and will step in if/when trouble occurs. Here are examples of how Rapid Re-Housing staff can help resolve landlord problems:

- For a defined period of time, they can be called for any tenancy problem.
- If the rent is late, the landlord can call the program rather than, or in addition to notifying the tenant.
- If the landlord receives complaints from other tenants about parties, noise or out-of-control children, if damage occurs to the unit or other lease violations occur they can call the program.
- If problems continue or cannot be worked out, landlords can turn to the program to work with the household and figure out a solution to avoid filing an eviction.
- As a last resort, landlords can call the program and staff will help the tenant find alternative housing.

Rapid Re-Housing programs offer a better risk-reduction plan than tenant screening, so it is a win-win for everyone.

The following is a tool posted on the HUDHRE website (www.hudhre.info) to help agencies recruit landlords. A new program can mail a marketing letter such as this to local landlords. Recruitment is often more successful, however, with a personal contact. Program staff, agency board members and other community members can identify potential landlords and make the first contact to introduce and recommend Rapid Re-Housing. It can take time to recruit landlords for a new program, but once credibility has been established, the program’s landlords will tell other landlords and the network will grow.

LANDLORD BENEFITS CHECKLIST

Why do landlords like working with [organization name]?

About this Tool: This checklist is a tool to advertise your program to potential landlords. The benefits listed are just examples of services provided by housing search agencies based on interviews with providers around the country. Be sure to modify the list so that it represents your program accurately.

User Tips: As part of your marketing materials, it is important that the piece looks professional and catches people's attention. You may want to customize the checklist by including your organization's name and logo. Similarly, you could use graphics, photos (e.g., a photo of one of your program participants talking to one of your participating landlords), and/or colored paper to give it more of a polished look. This checklist could be mailed out to landlords in your community along with other program materials (e.g., a program brochure, newsletter, or annual report). Or, program staff can use it as a "leave behind" piece when they meet with prospective landlords. Finally, send copies over to your local landlord or apartment association to distribute at their next meeting. Even better, see if you can do a short presentation at their next meeting.

[INSERT 2-3 SENTENCE INTRODUCTION ABOUT YOUR PROGRAM.]

Landlords gain several benefits from participating in our program. Consider the following advantages:

- ✓ Eliminate advertising costs. Working with our program gives you access to a pool of ready-to-rent tenants. Just call us up when you have a vacant unit, and we'll immediately match you with a client that is looking for housing.
- ✓ "Smart" renters. Our clients have attended training on such topics as personal budgeting, understanding rental agreements, housekeeping and general apartment maintenance, being a good neighbor, etc.
- ✓ Damage/security deposits. Our organization aims to help individuals get back up on their feet. We have found that many low-income clients can afford the monthly rent, but have difficulty saving enough money for their security deposit. As a result, we help clients put together this one-time payment.
- ✓ Clients have access to time-limited subsidies. Again, our organization aims to help individuals get back up on their feet. As a result, eligible clients receive a subsidy to help them cover the first three months of their rent. This allows clients some time to stabilize and build an emergency fund for the future.
- ✓ Guaranteed rent payments. Our clients are pre-screened and have a stable source of income. However, should one of our clients run into a problem, we have a pool of funds set aside to help get clients through those rough spots. We will also co-sign leases in some situations to help eliminate risk to landlords.

- ✓ Clients are attached to needed services. Some of our clients have special needs, but we work with our clients on an ongoing basis to make sure they have the support they need to succeed. We work with clients to correct past mistakes and prevent future problems, and through our network of partners, clients have access to an array of supportive services.
- ✓ Problem prevention through regular home visits. Our case managers conduct regular home visits to ensure that clients are stabilized in their new environments, that their jobs are going well, and that they are getting the support they need. Regular follow up with clients allows us to identify and address problems early before they become irreparable.
- ✓ Neutral party to mediate problems. Despite best efforts, problems are sometimes inevitable. However, when problems arise, it can be reassuring to know that there is someone to call. We care as much about our relationship with our landlords as we do our clients. We need everyone to make our program work. The job of a case manager is to be a neutral party, ensuring that everyone is treated fairly and that problems are resolved quickly and impartially.
- ✓ Satisfaction from helping others. Everyone deserves a safe and affordable place to live. Some people make mistakes, but everyone deserves a second chance. By helping house our clients, you are playing an integral role not only in helping individuals take charge of their lives, but also in making your community a better place to live.

Interested but still unsure? Why don't you give one of our participating landlords a call:

- [NAME, NUMBER]
- [NAME, NUMBER]

[Note: Remember to ask for permission before listing someone's name. And, make sure they will give your program a good reference!]

And, of course, feel free to call us at anytime. We'd love to hear from you!

- [PROVIDE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION]

The letter summarizes the benefits most Rapid Re-Housing programs offer to most landlords for most homeless households. However, there are times when a program may have to offer more:

- **The program is new.** New programs may have to be literally “on call” to the landlord until they develop credibility and prove themselves.
- **The housing market is extremely tight.** When landlords can afford to be very selective, a program may have to offer extra incentives. Depending on the community or the landlord, the program might, for example, have to offer first AND last month’s rent.
- **The household has an unusually troubled history.** For an individual with an extensive criminal history, possibly combined with multiple evictions, the program may have to barter. A double damage deposit is often required, perhaps with first and last month’s rent. However, even with this initial expense, stable housing is better (and less expensive) than homelessness.

Rapid Re-Housing staff will become accustomed to the level of incentives that must be offered to get and keep a good landlord and to house a household with significant barriers. And programs will need to cultivate a range of landlords and types of properties in which to place clients. Once the program is well-established, with a good reputation and a network of landlords, the bartering may reverse. Landlords may require fewer incentives in order to compete with other landlords for referrals from the program! Working with a good Rapid Re-Housing program is always a good business decision.

Assume that landlords never forget. If the program makes a landlord’s life easier, the landlord will remember. Likewise, the program will find that if they make a promise to the landlord and fail to keep that promise during a crisis, the landlord will remember. Without sincere apologies and significantly changed behavior by program staff, that episode may be the end of the program’s relationship with that landlord.

A note about data privacy. Some landlords will become interested in the household’s problems and progress. The Rapid Re-Housing program should not share information about the personal problems or services received by clients. It is helpful to develop a generic statement to respond to inappropriate (although usually well-meaning) questions from landlords. For example: “Mary is working with our program to be sure she can be a good tenant. That is our goal and we need you to let us know if there are problems so she can address them.”

A Rapid Re-Housing program should have a Release of Information form signed by the client, allowing the program to talk about tenancy problems with the landlord. Likewise, the program should let the landlord know what information should be communicated to the program. Re-Housing staff do not want the landlord to wait until the rent has not been paid for three months. Problems addressed early are less expensive to resolve. Communication when a problem occurs is better than no communication, followed by a simmering disagreement, and eventually a big blow-up. Here is a sample tool developed by Hennepin County, Minnesota, and posted on the HUDHRE website for defining communication expectations.

LANDLORD-TENANT-CASE MANAGER COMMUNICATION AGREEMENT

About this tool: This communication agreement should be filled out and signed by the tenant and then provided to the landlord to promote open communication between the landlord, tenant, and case manager. The form can easily be modified, but includes those issues most frequently cited by landlords as “red flags.” The important thing is to identify and address problems before they lead to lease non-compliance and possible eviction. Note that before this agreement is used, you may want to have your client sign an information release authorization form.

Dear [NAME OF LANDLORD]:

My goal is to pay my rent on time, follow the provisions of my lease, keep my apartment in good condition, and get along with my neighbors. I am working with a program that will help me do this, but I need your help. I am asking you to inform both my case manager and me if any of the following occur. You can fill out the form and send it to the addresses below or contact us by telephone. We appreciate your cooperation.

_____ Landlord has not received full rent by the 3rd day of the month.

_____ Landlord has received a complaint that there is too much noise from the tenant’s apartment.

_____ Landlord has significant concerns about the condition of the tenant’s unit. (Examples: Landlord has seen damage or received complaints about bad smells that could be related to garbage.)

_____ Landlord thinks someone is living in the tenant’s unit who is not named on the lease.

_____ Landlord thinks someone in the tenant’s unit may be doing something illegal.

_____ The behavior of someone living in or visiting the tenant’s unit is causing other tenants to complain.

_____ Landlord has seen something that is a violation of the lease. Describe: _____

_____ Other: _____

Please contact me in writing at the following address: _____
or call me at this number: _____

Please also contact my case manager (name): _____
at (agency/address) _____
or call at this number (phone/cell/pager): _____

Finally, be sure to recognize landlords who house program clients. An Appreciation Breakfast, Certificates of Appreciation, Thank You cards from program staff or clients—these are meaningful ways to show gratitude to landlords who took a chance on the credibility of the program and the commitment of your clients to improve their stability.

Case Examples: Practitioners to Practitioners

We pursue every rental advertisement, yard signs, and our landlord contacts-- sharing what our program offers to reduce a landlord's risk in accepting our clients e.g. we offer mediation, case management, guarantee payment of eviction cost (which doesn't happen often,) and a constant source of prospective tenants.

Let landlord know that by housing the youth they are not giving up any of their rights as a landlord. Clearly relay the supportive services attached and explain the role of the case manager.

I always introduce myself in person (not just over the phone) and bring information about our program along to show them. I answer any questions they have and assure them that we will work with the youth to ensure that the rent is paid and that they are abiding by the terms of their lease. Assure the landlord that there will be several staff checking in on youth on a regular basis to be an extra set of eyes in the apartment and also additional contacts for the landlord if there are any concerns. We will not co-sign a lease. We try to do 6- month leases or month-to-month whenever possible.

There was a situation where a client was having an under-age girl staying with him. The landlord contacted me and I called both persons and talked with them separately regarding the consequences of their actions. I then called the landlord back and told them I spoke to each of them and if there were any more problems to call me right away. I also increased home visits for the next couple weeks including drop-in visits. The problem was resolved.

I had a meeting separately with the landlord to get a list of all grievances and offenses. Then I sat down with the client to review the issues. Discussed each occurrence and what they believed to be appropriate future responses. Discussed pro and cons of each response.

Our position is to mediate all problems during our six months of case management. We have seen personality conflicts where landlord and tenant cannot talk to each other, so we advise them both to talk to us instead. We will work out a win-win situation for all parties even if we may have to relocate our client.

You have an honest conversation with the landlord about what needs to happen. Remind them that this is a housing program and we cannot pay the rent if the apartment doesn't meet certain standards. We send "Thank You" notes when issues of concern are satisfactorily resolved. Thanking and acknowledging the landlord is huge piece of getting them to work with our clients.

Program Planning Homework

- ❖ Determine what programmatic “incentives” would reduce the risk to landlords of renting to households with tenant screening barriers
 - List potential incentives from least to most expensive
 - Consult one or more trustworthy landlords about what type and how many incentives would be needed to convince a landlord to rent to a household with minor, moderate or significant tenant screening barriers
 - Develop a list of core incentives that will be offered to all landlords who work with program clients—i.e. “benefits” for landlord partners
 - Develop a list of additional incentives that will be offered on a case-by-case basis for households with more serious screening barriers
 - Identify and obtain funding to pay for landlord incentive costs

- ❖ Develop a plan to recruit landlords to work with program clients
 - Identify a “prospect list” of local landlords. Check with staff, agency board members, clients, local realtors, and apartment association, among others.
 - Identify the best ways to reach-out to and recruit landlords: mailings, meetings, door-knocking, cold-calling, etc.
 - Develop or adapt from existing examples a flyer or brochure for landlords explaining benefits of working with program.
 - Collect basic information on housing available to program clients including location, unit sizes, rent amount, utilities, amenities, etc., or find out where such information is readily available (e.g., on-line rental housing list)
 - Assure staff are trained and assigned to respond to landlord issues (complaints about tenants, late rent, lease violations, etc.)
 - Develop a practice of acknowledging landlord cooperation and responsiveness through thank you events, mailings, certificates and/or other means.
 - Create a list of landlords you should not work with because they have substandard units, or a track record that includes failure to uphold tenant rights or landlord responsibilities.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HOUSING OPTIONS

Homeless households may have limited options, but within the constraints of their incomes the choice should be theirs.

8.1 Rejoining Relatives/Partners or Other Co-Housing Arrangements

Many people enter homelessness as the result of conflict in their household: parent-youth conflict, spouse-spouse or partner-partner, and host-guest. Disagreements may end with one member (or a parent with her children) being expelled or abandoning the housing unit. Likewise, many people leaving homelessness want to reunite with their relatives, partners or friends. Sharing housing is probably the least costly option for people with extremely low incomes. If the joined household has two wage-earners, the combined income may be the best possible safety net against future homelessness.

It is good practice to help a homeless household negotiate the details of home-sharing, especially if the prior arrangement resulted in homelessness. A neutral facilitator can help the household develop “house rules” for behaviors that have caused conflict in the past and may reoccur. When abuse or neglect to a child or domestic violence are issues, a trained practitioner should guide the process of deciding whether to live together again, and under what circumstances and assess service needs. Written approval of the landlord is also required to add the new tenant to the lease.

Young people with little experience living independently who want a roommate for financial reasons or companionship should develop a written agreement listing expectations. Youth are unlikely to anticipate potential disagreements. Once the situation has escalated, one may move out; the roommate left behind is frequently unable to pay the rent or find a suitable roommate in time to prevent housing loss.

A roommate agreement should include the items that most often lead to arguments and, ultimately, housing loss:

- **How is the rent paid?** What is each roommate’s share and who takes the full amount to the landlord? Landlords rarely evict only the person whose share is missing, so one roommate’s failure to pay risks everyone’s housing. What happens if someone loses a job? Will roommates provide each other with short-term loans or should each roommate have a relative or friend who can act as back-up in an emergency?
- **Who gets which bedroom?** All bedrooms are not alike; some are larger or better situated than others. Do roommates pick rooms by lottery? Or does the person with the best room pay a higher rent?

- **Is food handled jointly or individually?** Will each renter buy his or her own food? Will “staples” be shared? How and where will each store his or her food? Or if groceries and household supplies are purchased jointly, how and when are the costs divided?
- **Who does what chores? How often?** Are chores the same every month or will they be rotated so no one has to clean the bathroom for the next year? It is usually assumed that each person cleans (or fails to clean) their own bedroom. Does each tenant wash his or her own dishes and utensils? Or will the kitchen be one person’s daily job? Chores are a major source of disagreement within households, particularly when housemates have different standards of cleanliness!
- **How will everyone share the bathroom, entertainment center, kitchen, etc.?** Will they use a sign-up sheet? Schedule who gets the bathroom first based on job hours? If no one wants rules, how will they handle one roommate’s excessive use/misuse?
- **How will co-tenants handle overnight guests or frequent visitors?** Often one roommate ends up with a “guest” who practically lives in the apartment, using the household TV and eating the household food. What limits are fair? What if a roommate objects to a particular guest’s behavior?
- **What if one co-tenant causes damage?** If the landlord takes the group’s security deposit, what does the offending roommate do to reimburse the other roommate(s)? What if there is no agreement about who caused the damage?
- **What if one co-tenant violates the agreement or simply cannot get along with the other(s)?** How will the group decide who leaves? How much notice will be given? What will the remaining tenants do to fill the “vacancy”?
- **What if one roommate wants to leave and the others cannot afford the rent?** How much notice does the roommate have to give? Is the roommate responsible for finding a replacement? How will the tenant(s) decide if they want the new roommate? What happens if none of the possible roommates are acceptable? Does the entire group give notice to the landlord to move out?
- **How will utilities be shared?** How will the cost of utilities be split? How will temperature for heat and air conditioning be set?

Young adults may not be particularly fond of rules! Likewise, persons who share living arrangements may not feel the need to establish an agreement given the informal nature of the arrangement. However, unless some agreements are worked out in advance, roommate conflict can lead directly to homelessness.

8.2 Private Market Housing

Most households will have to select unsubsidized housing in the private market. Their choices will be limited by the income they can spend on rent. Nearly all extremely low-income households will be severely rent-burdened, often paying more than half their income on rent and

utilities. For such households, searching for a unit that requires only thirty percent of their income (i.e. affordable housing) is rarely realistic. Selection is much more likely to focus on:

- **Safety:** Is the housing safe? Is the neighborhood safe? In fact, people who are extremely low income usually have few choices—and those choices may be far from ideal. By having **connections with good landlords, the Rapid Re-Housing program can maximize the quality of the choices available.**
- **Children:** **If the household has minor children, can they continue to attend the school where they were enrolled prior to homelessness?** Children who change schools may find they have missed important lessons or must repeat work already mastered. Positive relationships with their teacher or peers are lost. But if the children must change schools, can they select housing where the new school is as good—or better? Rapid Re-Housing programs can mitigate the effects of homelessness and moving to a new school by collaborating with the local school system(s), which is required under federal law to provide assistance for children who are homeless.
- **Support:** Can the household be re-housed in an area where they already have positive supports—relatives, friends, a church, familiar surroundings? If not, the Rapid Re-Housing program can help the household establish new “roots” by helping orient to their new neighborhood, know where the bus line is, and figure out ways to stay connected to family and friends who provide positive support.

If a household can achieve this, the move is much more likely to be successful.

The household’s choice of location will affect the program’s work with landlords. If many households choose one or two neighborhoods (because of affordability and/or prior connections), the program can recruit landlords primarily in that area. Then, when a household is ready for re-housing, the program may be able to quickly locate a vacancy with a partner landlord. But if the household wants a different area, the program should be prepared to help the individual or family search for housing in that area and approach landlords accordingly.

8.3 Subsidies and Subsidized Housing

Deep, long-term, tenant or project-based subsidies are difficult to obtain. In some communities, the waiting list for Section 8 subsidies is rarely open for new applications. The wait for the waiting list to open, combined with the actual waiting list, can add up to multiple years. But households who meet program eligibility requirements should apply.

Subsidized privately-owned buildings are worth serious consideration, even if the housing does not meet all the household’s preferred amenities or location criteria. Most communities have listings of subsidized rental housing. HUD also provides a listing, searchable by location and apartment type, at: www.hud.gov/apps/section8/.

Public Housing often has vacancies. The subsidy may allow a household to finish employment training and gradually build income. Very low-income persons with disabilities who are unable

to achieve sufficient income through employment should consider public housing as a longer-term strategy to avoid homelessness.

8.4 Permanent Supportive Housing Programs

Permanent supportive housing programs subsidize rent and offer services that can assist an individual or family to develop skills and resolve tenancy problems.

Supportive housing can be extremely helpful for people who need ongoing support to remain stably housed, but it is important to ensure that clients need and want such intensive supports before making a referral.

Program Planning Homework

8.1 Rejoining Relatives/Partners or Other Co-Housing Arrangements

- ❖ Develop strategies and tools for co-housing arrangements
 - Develop an assessment and decision protocol (including referral or consultation with experts) for situations that may involve domestic violence or child protection.
 - Design or adopt a roommate agreement for youth and others who will share housing.

8.2 Private Market Housing

- ❖ Develop a protocol for assessing the adequacy of private market housing
 - Develop or adopt habitability and lead-based paint standards that all units must meet (these may be based on funder requirements)

8.3 Subsidies and Subsidized Housing

- ❖ Know how to access tenant-based rent subsidy programs and subsidized rental housing buildings.
 - List resources, locations and eligibility requirements. Know requirements for making a referral—information required, forms, applications, and what to expect
 - Obtain and regularly update information on vacancies and waiting lists
 - Train staff on available resources, criteria and procedures
 - Establish partnerships—either formal or informal—to facilitate access for households who qualify

8.4 Permanent Supportive Housing Programs

- ❖ Know how to access transitional and permanent housing programs.
 - List resources, locations and eligibility requirements. Know requirements for making a referral—information required, forms, applications and what to expect.
 - List program rules and expectations and criteria for termination
 - Obtain and regularly update information on vacancies and waiting lists
 - Train staff on available resources, criteria and procedures
 - Establish partnerships—either formal or informal—to facilitate access for households who qualify

CHAPTER NINE

HOUSING STABILIZATION: PREVENTION OF FUTURE HOMELESSNESS

Once re-housed, the individual or family begins to reconnect to their community supports. Households with fairly strong support networks will re-establish connections quickly, with little help from program staff. However, some households will need more support.

9.1 What is the Difference Between Housing Stabilization and Case Management?

Generally, staff who offer housing stabilization are dealing solely with the household's housing issues and are offering services to the landlord as well as the tenant. Case managers are more often involved in finding specific community resources to meet other related needs, such as employment/income, therapy, etc. Case managers are expected to have in-depth information about programs, program eligibility requirements and referral requirements. In practice, these roles are not necessarily separate. There are many staff who offer both direct housing stabilization services AND make referrals to needed services.

9.2 Who Needs Housing Stabilization and Home-Based Case Management?

There are two primary factors that contribute to decisions about the intensity and duration of stabilization and/or case management services provided to households exiting homelessness:

➤ **What promises were made to the landlord?**

The primary reason Rapid Re-Housing programs are able to obtain housing for households with Tenant Screening Barriers is because they promise landlords that program staff will be available to resolve tenancy problems for a specific period of time. If a program promises staff will make home visits and respond to landlord concerns for six months, housing stabilization must be provided for six months. The frequency of home visits and landlord "check-ins" can vary, based upon the household's overall housing history, but some level of stabilization support must be offered as promised.

➤ **What assistance does the household want?**

Sometimes, an individual or family wants and needs very little help after they find housing. However, the program-required monitoring and stabilization home visits offer an opportunity for staff to develop a strong relationship with the household. This allows staff to better help the household mediate and resolve issues with their landlord when necessary. Frequently, this level of trust also enables a client to request help with other life concerns. For example, after the staff has proven s/he can find daycare for the parent, that parent might broach the subject of her child's behavior problems and ask for help finding a good pediatrician.

9.3 Caseload Size, Frequency and Duration of Contact

Rapid Re-Housing is an effective strategy for people with many kinds of barriers to getting and keeping housing. Some households may need only infrequent home visits; others may require regular contact to help them acquire the skills needed to meet their obligations as tenants. Rapid Re-Housing practitioners who work with a mixed caseload of families with moderate to moderately high barriers may carry up to forty cases at any point in time. If the duration of services is about six months, this means staff would close—and open—about 6-8 cases per month. A program that provides longer-term services could carry a similar caseload but with somewhat fewer openings and closings per month. Note: longer-term services do not necessarily translate into more intensive services. A household that recently experienced a job loss may need months of rental assistance while the wage-earner(s) attempts to secure employment, but if they have a history of housing stability, the frequency of contact for housing-related supports could be quite low.

9.4 Services That Contribute to housing Stability

9.4.1 Understanding Expectations for Tenant Behavior

Being a successful tenant includes a certain level of conformity with the explicit expectations found in a lease, but also the unwritten, implicit expectations of the building's landlord/manager and tenants. Some individuals, due to their youth, inexperience, recent immigration, and/or poor role models have very little understanding of the social norms of renting. These tenants are at high risk of future problems, such as lease violations and even eviction. Unfortunately, the most effective way to discover social norms is to violate them and learn from the consequences. And that is exactly what Rapid Re-Housing programs prefer to prevent.

Good Rapid Re-Housing programs do not assume that tenants understand either their leases or the “unwritten rules” in new housing. Clients should be routinely given a short quiz near the time of intake to assess their familiarity with landlord-tenant rights/responsibilities and also expected tenant behavioral standards. If the client fails the quiz, formal or informal training is included as a part of housing stabilization. The most common “behavioral” problem areas:

- **Noise.** A common source of complaints is music, television, or conversation that is too loud and/or too late at night. Domestic arguments can result in 911 calls to the police if the noise is too loud or long. Leases often prohibit disturbing the “peaceful enjoyment” of the other tenants.
- **“Unauthorized tenant.”** Tenants often feel that paying the rent means they have total control over what happens inside their unit. They often do not realize that a long-term guest is usually a violation of their lease.
- **“Excessive traffic.”** Landlords often use this term to indicate suspected drug-selling or buying. Whether drugs are involved or simply a lot of parties, leases may have a prohibition against “excessive traffic.”

- **Unsupervised children.** Children at play in the hallways are likely to be loud, and other tenants are likely to object.

Staff should help households to assess the behavioral expectations of their new building. If the other tenants are loud, the Rapid Re-Housing household's noise is not likely to be considered very problematic. If all the children run in the halls, their behavior is probably tolerated in that building. But if the only noise in the hallway comes from the program client's television and the only children screaming and running in the halls belong to the tenant, behavior changes are probably necessary. Observing problem behaviors and coaching improvements are a primary focus of the Rapid Re-Housing program. A good rule of thumb: a tenant's unit should look, smell and sound similar to everyone else's apartment.

Because some individuals and families are less aware of the impact of their behavior on others, Re-Housing staff look for "red flags" when they make home visits. Can staff smell the garbage or hear the television from outside the apartment unit? Does it appear that someone has moved into the unit? Staff has a responsibility to point out problems that could threaten housing retention. No one should expect perfect housekeeping or perfect behavior. But when lifestyle obviously violates basic expectations, trouble of some kind is likely.

Understanding lease requirements and landlord-tenant rights/responsibilities is equally important. It is often helpful for a household to sit down with a staff who has legal training or extensive experience with leases and talk through the entire lease, jotting down, in plain language, the things the household can and can not do. Reading the lease is the most important place to start. To guard their rights and fulfill their responsibilities, the tenant requires knowledge.

9.4.2 Orientation

Many households will be very willing and able to independently learn the resources in their new neighborhood, but more youthful or stressed households benefit from assistance locating bus routes, 24-hour pharmacies, daycare and grocery stores. They will appreciate help enrolling their child in a new school. This can be part of a routine orientation just before or soon after moving. The goal is to help the household get a good fresh start. Orientation "welcome" activities can include:

- A **drive-around**, to get some idea of the location and distances to key amenities, such as groceries, etc. **This can be combined with a grocery-shopping trip to obtain household grocery staples.**
- **A map of the area, with locations of community resources (school, parks, etc.) marked.**
- **An attractive wall-hung calendar the household can use to keep track of appointments while they are getting accustomed to new routines.**
- **Bus routes and schedules**

- **A notebook or storage bin for important papers, including the lease. A big, colorful plastic notebook** is less likely to be lost in a pile of papers or put into a drawer and forgotten. Include a welcome letter, checklist of the condition of the apartment (helpful to later obtain the security deposit), contact information for the program, etc.
- Visiting a **second-hand and/or inexpensive store** to buy things the household lacks, whether furniture, **towels**, bedding or groceries. Some non-profits offer free furniture to extremely low-income households.
- A visit soon after move-in to help the household properly hang and display personal **pictures**, art or other objects. The household could spend time in advance verifying landlord/lease rules **regarding** attaching objects to walls, ceilings and/or woodwork. This demonstrates the importance of the lease and assures the tenant will not be charged for damage. Feelings of “ownership” can promote care of the unit and may reduce mobility; it should be a goal of the early stages of re-housing.
- A small **gift** the tenant **might** enjoy--such as a plant, baked goods, treats for the children or gift card. These gifts strengthen the client’s engagement with the program and make drop-in visits (announced and unannounced) something to look forward to rather than something to dread. Otherwise, some tenants may assume every home visit will focus exclusively on criticism.
- Connect new **tenants** with peers in the same building or nearby.

9.4.3 Budgeting and Credit Repair

All Housing Plans should include a budget review, so households can (1) reduce expenses as much as possible, (2) increase or supplement their incomes with free in-kind commodities and services, and, if at all possible, (3) set aside a small amount of money every month for an emergency reserve to manage unexpected expenses that could prevent the household from paying the rent.

9.4.4 Moving Beyond Moving In—Other Goals and Community Resources

Many families and individuals require some time to settle into a new routine, and that routine will be their primary concern for at least a few weeks. Eventually, the apartment is organized, the refrigerator filled, and everyone in the household has re-established their everyday habits. At some point, once a certain level of normalcy has been achieved, the parent, adult or youth is ready for more. Many Re-Housing program staff report that after their clients feel “ownership” of their living space and develop confidence in their personal control, they often ask for help improving their lives. Increasing their income, connecting with their children’s teachers, and rebuilding relationships with significant people in their lives are their most frequent goals. Referrals for health, mental health and chemical use are not uncommon requests.

The importance of allowing the household to determine new life goals for themselves, at the time and in the sequence they choose cannot be over-stated. Re-Housing staff who have good working relationships with their clients can certainly observe, advise and recommend life changes. But if the person is unwilling or unable to recognize the need, services may be a

waste of time and money. Using coercion to enforce participation in services may succeed only in achieving participation—without real investment in change. Sanctions certainly can threaten the working relationship.

Most people have dreams and aspirations. Those hopes may have been deferred for so long that it takes time to even remember them. When people's survival and safety needs are met, they often begin to remember or to create dreams of a better life--or at least a reduction in the pain or stress in their current lives. It does not happen for everyone. But when people decide to pursue their own goals, they will often ask a trusted Rapid Re-Housing staff member to help them.

Because it is so common for people who have been homeless to want (and need) additional resources after they have obtained housing, staff should be knowledgeable about mainstream programs and services in the community so they can respond to requests and even proactively offer help with the following:

- **Education, Employment and Training** resources; job search centers offer help with resumes and on-line employment searches. Income is obviously essential to housing stability. Any household receiving rental assistance must increase their income by at least the amount of the subsidy. Otherwise, they cannot successfully transition off the subsidy and maintain their current housing once assistance ends.
- **Schools and Enrichment Programs** where children can enroll or participate in childcare or after school activities.
- **Healthcare and Dental Clinics** where the household can enroll. Helping the household keep or find a primary healthcare provider reduces the use of expensive emergency and urgent care resources and improves health maintenance. Since many households will be using public assistance healthcare insurance, such as Medicaid, staff should know which clinics and dentists accept this coverage. Waiting until a healthcare or dental emergency occurs is not the optimum time to search for help.
- **Mental Health Resources.** Re-Housing staff should know about providers who are likely to treat very low-income, public assistance or uninsured adults and minors. Specializations that will be most helpful: professional assessments for medications (especially for depression and anxiety); counselors or therapists for resolving traumatic events, domestic violence and family conflict. A cooperative agreement for expedited referrals is very helpful.
- **Chemical Dependency Assessments and Treatment** resources for low-income, public assistance or uninsured adults and youth. If more than one provider is available, it is helpful to know which service providers treat which addictions and some basic information about their specialization (such as adolescents or cocaine) or methods (motivational interviewing, behavioral approaches, etc.). It is easier to link an individual with the right provider at the right time when staff can offer reassurance that the referral is a good match. A cooperative agreement with providers for expedited referrals is very helpful.

- **Legal Services.** Households may or may not have unresolved legal issues when they move into housing, but they may also face legal problems after move-in. When legal services are helpful or essential, staff should know which organizations offer pro bono (free) or very low-cost legal assistance, particularly with housing law.
- **Budgeting and Credit Repair.** All households should receive at least a review of their income and expenses. All Re-Housing staff should be able to offer ideas for reducing expenses, supplementing income with in-kind resources, and accessing assistance programs such as lower-payment utility programs. By connecting the client to more specialized Consumer Credit Counseling Services (CCCS) agencies, the household may obtain a lower interest rate on consumer debt, negotiate partial payments for larger debts, or consolidate loans. In many cases, this can substantially reduce a household's monthly expenses, making it possible to pay the rent—and perhaps even save for an emergency fund. Consumer Credit Counseling Services are accredited agencies that can be trusted to truly resolve credit problems. Services that advertise extensively but are not accredited by the National Foundation for Credit Counseling (www.nfcc.org) as CCCS should be used only when the person or organization's reputation is known and is very solid. Some agencies simply charge fees and deliver little or nothing in return.

9.4.5 Preventing Future Homelessness.

Although most households who experience homelessness never return to homelessness, some do. Staff should work with households to identify the problems that have resulted in housing loss in the past and set up steps to prevent these from recurring. The Housing Plan then becomes the household's step-by-step blueprint for reducing or eliminating Retention Barriers to housing stability.

Some households need very little help to re-establish their support networks. Other clients may never have had a network that was broad enough and strong enough to support them through crises. The Housing Plan must include any assistance a household needs to bring new resources into their safety net. This can include formal programs such as public assistance and government-funded services. It can and should also include actions steps the household might take to find a church or an AA group, a primary care physician or pediatrician, a volunteer tutoring program for children who have fallen behind on their schoolwork or a support group for survivors of domestic violence.

Program staff must acknowledge that housing stability does not mean the individual or family will remain in the *same* housing. Mobility rates among all renters of all incomes are relatively high. There are many reasons for moving. Sometimes, the move is positive. The household has found safer housing, wants to be closer to family or employment or has successfully obtained a subsidized unit. Other times, the household moves because the landlord raised the rent more than the household could afford. Perhaps their housing must be vacated for foreclosure or renovation or abatement of lead-based paint. If any of these events occurs and the household is unable to afford the costs of obtaining a new unit, the Re-Housing program should be prepared to offer financial assistance to help the household relocate without experiencing homelessness.

To some extent, every Rapid Re-Housing program must also be a Homelessness Prevention program. Financial crises will still occur, relocations will be required. If there is a history of household conflict, disputes may arise again. The program must be able to help the family quickly obtain mainstream or specialized resources when and if they are needed:

- **Financial assistance:** help with rental or utility arrears, one-time assistance or even short-term rental assistance (if the household still qualifies). Re-Housing staff must know the public **assistance resources available to help eligible individuals and families resolve the predictable and unpredictable problems that will arise. A close relationship with staff who administer or manage public assistance programs can help.**
- **A negotiator or mediator to resolve disputes between the tenant and landlord or between household members.**
- **Legal services** when the household is facing possible eviction.

Case Examples: Practitioners to Practitioners

Another common theme – youth do not have adequate independent living skills. While looking for an apartment and when they become housed, this is a constant area of focus. Ways to assist – taking them grocery shopping, creating a schedule for cleaning tasks, make a budget with them, etc. Also connecting them to ILS classes in the community if needed.

When I do a home visit or take them to pick up furniture and find that a boyfriend or other adult who wasn't in shelter looks like they are staying there, I talk to the lease holder and explain that they are in violation of their lease and can be evicted for having additional people living there.

Our home visits are once a week when a client move into a unit and this provides an opportunity to observe who else has moved into the unit, cleaning habits, and family dynamics. During a home visit we noticed other people who appeared to have moved in and were playing loud music during the day at a time when our client was at work. So we sat our client down and shared with her that her housing is in jeopardy, because the manager had received a few complaints regarding the music and other tenants staying in her unit who are not on the lease. If she really wanted to keep her housing then some important steps are needed from her – one: move others who are not on the lease out or put them on the lease, and two: insure there isn't anyone playing their music too loud from her apartment (even if it's a friend providing daycare).

Spoke with landlord to get detailed report of concerns and met with youth, Life Coach and Probation Officer to explain to the youth the consequences of potentially being evicted. Followed up with the landlord after that meeting and assured him that any concerns would be immediately addressed. We wanted him to continue to call if he had concerns. Landlord was provided with contact information for three staff that he could call if he had concerns. We have not had any problems since.

Stay open and available and consistently welcoming. Make repeated attempts to contact client – notes on door, letters in the mail, messages – sending the message that you are available and want to know if they need anything and that you would like to hear how things are. Whenever possible reinforce the message that you are a supportive person in their life and not just a source of housing. A lot of relationship building, you have to tap into their interests. These tactics have worked with several clients.

We usually provide a short subsidy which supports most clients wanting to maintain the relationship, but we have had a few who had other plans e.g. drug use, domestic abuse issues, and mental illness. Then we coach/connect to other resources, and at times offer incentives to meet the needs of a given situation.

There were some problems between a few of my clients and the housing managers. I called the manager and addressed the concerns I had as well as the concerns of my clients. We talked for a while and I recommended we have a round table talk to come to a conflict resolution with the housing managers and my clients. I also wrote a letter to the manager stating all of the concerns and to recap the conversation and agreements made during the phone call. I had the clients write a letter as well, addressing their concerns and their resolution recommendations. The landlord is happy that the situation was addressed and the tenants are happy that their voices were heard and resolution could be made.

Program Planning Homework

9.1 What is the Difference Between Housing Stabilization and Case Management?

- ❖ Assure households understand the basic requirements and expectations of tenancy
 - Develop a quiz and/or class about tenant/landlord rights and responsibilities (with an emphasis on tenant responsibilities—as these are the most likely to threaten housing stability).
 - Develop a protocol for assuring every household receives a basic explanation of their lease when they obtain housing

9.2 Who Needs Housing Stabilization and Home-Based Case Management?

- ❖ Develop an orientation protocol for helping households take “ownership” of their housing and learn the resources and locations of amenities in their new neighborhood.
 - Establish a process for informing households of nearby resources and amenities, such as furnishings, household items, public transportation, grocery stores, pharmacies, hospitals/clinics, schools, libraries, etc.
 - Develop a list or identify where households may obtain information on organizations a households may join if interested: AA, parenting groups, clubs, exercise groups, etc.

9.3 Caseload Size, Frequency and Duration of Contact

- ❖ Develop a list of resources (or create resources) for budgeting and credit repair.
 - Identify education, job-training and employment services that work with very low-income households
 - Identify or create a service that would help households budget their income by setting aside small amounts of savings for financial emergencies
 - Establish a working relationship with a certified, non-profit Consumer Credit Counseling Service to refer households for debt consolidation and repayment agreements.

9.4 Services That Contribute to housing Stability

- ❖ Develop protocols for interventions and referrals to prevent homelessness.
 - Train staff on how to identify and address tenancy problems in home visits—red flags of unacceptable behavior, communication problems with other tenants or the landlord, lease violations, etc.
 - Develop resources and protocols for providing and/or accessing emergency financial assistance to avoid housing loss.
 - Develop the capacity to provide mediation or negotiations with landlords to preserve housing. Train staff in effective mediation skills and/or partner with a local mediation provider.
 - Identify legal resources that can assist tenants with tenant rights, leases, and evictions

CHAPTER TEN

DATA AND EVALUATION

There are two kinds of data programs must collect: data required by funders as a condition of funding; and data that will be used by the program to monitor and improve service access, quality and outcomes.

Data required by funders is defined by funders. Compliance is not negotiable. The program must then determine what hardware or software may be needed; who collects the necessary data; in what form and at what points in time; who enters the data; and the reporting format and timelines. These decisions require a few considerations:

- Sometimes the staff who are most skilled at engaging with clients are the least competent at mastering electronic data reporting. If so, can direct service staff use paper forms? Can more technologically capable office staff enter data into the database?
- Entering data while interviewing a program participant can distract both staff and client from the interview. It can also lead to data entry errors and omissions that cannot be corrected during the interview. If the database will not proceed until an error is corrected or missing data supplied, the interview will suffer. And unless all client interviews are conducted in an office, staff would require a laptop—which presents both additional costs and security risks. Use of paper forms during the interview (with data entry to follow later) may be the most workable compromise.

Whenever possible, the same data required by funders should also be used by programs. For example, even when the program would prefer different data choices for race/ethnicity, it is much less expensive, time-consuming and confusing to accept the funder's classification rather than create a second set of classifications and track both. If the funder sets outcomes for client income increases, does it make sense for the program to establish a different income objective--and have to use both?

Programs should use data for program improvement. This includes measures of effectiveness, efficiency, quality and access.

Purpose of Data	How to Use Data
<p>Effectiveness of services. Are consumer outcomes good enough? Can they be improved?</p>	<p>Set measurable outcomes for clients. Establish program performance targets based upon similar services for similar populations (e.g. 90% of households with serious barriers who receive tenancy supports will not be evicted during services). This requires data on <u>relevant</u> target population characteristics. Track and review outcomes at regular intervals and identify trends. If results are not satisfactory, review outcomes by client subpopulation, by service type, and/or by program staff to identify possible problem areas and actions that might improve results.</p>
<p>Efficiency of services. Did the program use the lowest level of service for the shortest time necessary to resolve the problem? Are caseload sizes appropriate for the level of assistance provided?</p>	<p>If rules have been developed for approval of expenditures, were rules followed? What is the average length of assistance? Is length of service increasing—why? Has the population receiving assistance changed over time and how has this change affected costs? Measuring efficiency does not require caps on assistance or length of service (although these may be utilized by some programs). It does require monitoring trends and assessing whether the variance is related to client barriers, differences in staff approach, or environmental factors such as changes in the job or housing market.</p>
<p>Quality of services. Did staff meet agency expectations for service delivery? Were clients satisfied with staff and agency responsiveness, respect, and effectiveness? Were landlords satisfied with agency follow-through on tenancy problems?</p>	<p>Define the most important expectations for quality. This could include measurable factors such as how quickly staff should respond to landlord or tenant calls or whether clients are given a brochure on landlord-tenant rights and responsibilities at the first staff interview. It should also include assessing whether clients feel they were treated with respect and whether the services resolved their problem. Programs can use a variety of methods to measure quality, from peer or supervisory review of case files, to random observation of staff-client interviews, to interviews or satisfaction surveys given to each client at service mid-point or conclusion, and to surveying landlords on a regular basis.</p>
<p>Access to services. Does the program reach its intended target population? Are there any barriers that prevent the target population from obtaining services?</p>	<p>Service access requires obtaining information about those who received services and those who did not. Service capacity can be assessed by tracking program turnaways. Physical access, such as the adequacy of ramps or need for Braille signage can be reviewed by a specialized consultant. Agencies that refer clients can identify barriers their clients reported after using the program. After service completion, clients can be contacted for information on any barriers they perceived.</p>

The best rule is: Collect only data that is essential. ***Do not collect data that is “nice to know” – until and unless it becomes essential.*** If there is a specific use for more data, collect it on a one-time or periodic basis and be clear about when and how it will be used. Often data from reviewing sample cases or conducting random surveys is just as accurate and representative as collecting all information on all clients, all the time. Once data is added to agency forms, it will be dutifully collected forever, whether or not it is ever used.

Program Planning Homework

- ❖ Identify the data elements required by funders and the hardware, software and staff training necessary to provide the data in the mandated format.
- ❖ Identify additional data, collection methods, report formats and timetables for reviewing program effectiveness, efficiency, quality and access.
- ❖ At least annually, review and analyze data to assess changes in target population, outcomes, costs, and satisfaction—then use the results to develop a program improvement plan.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

STAFFING ISSUES

When designing a new Rapid Re-Housing program, a number of staffing decisions must be made. Will the new program utilize existing staff, asking them to take on new roles? If so, what additional training will they need? Or will new staff be hired—and what education or experience should they have? Should staff specialize in one particular target population or one type of housing intervention? Or should all staff be able to respond to any situation?

11.1 Designing Staffing Plans

Many Rapid Re-Housing programs will be relatively small, with staff fulfilling multiple roles. A program that exits 400 households per year may have only five staff, each carrying a caseload of 40 for an average of six months. Unless this program has a specialization (for example, youth or households who have experienced serious domestic violence), staff will likely be expected to be able to work with a very diverse population. They will all have to know about the local housing market, individual landlords, the barriers faced by homeless households, and local resources that would accept program referrals for employment, medical care, childcare, credit repair and treatment. Staff may be expected to manage landlord recruitment, housing stabilization and the case management role.

Other programs may need and want more specialized staffing roles. Staff may carry higher caseloads and have less time to meet with landlords. A staff person may be specifically designated to work solely with landlords—acting as an intermediary not only between clients and landlord but also between direct services staff and landlords. Similarly, an agency may have a very specialized clientele, such as only households who have a serious mental illness. Such a program may need one or more staff with more professional credentials and a high level of experience dealing with mental illness.

Each of these models can be effective, as long as staff roles do not conflict or over-lap and communication and coordination are effectively managed.

11.2 Staff Skills and Experience

When a Rapid Re-Housing program is covering a number of homeless populations across a geographic area, it is usually better to have generalist staff who can assess a variety of situations and creatively intervene in all. Conversely, when the program specializes in a population that requires specialized service delivery methods, such as families in conflict, or refugees with limited English proficiency, staff will have to have specific conflict resolution or foreign language skills to be effective.

There are fundamental aspects of every Rapid Re-Housing program that inform staffing decisions and development. All staff should be able to negotiate with landlords, to assess and verify households' need for financial assistance, and to maintain a problem-solving focus on

tenancy problems. All should know when and where to report suspected abuse or neglect or domestic violence. All should be comfortable working in either the office or a client's home and have a firm understanding of professional ethics and boundaries.

Ultimately, program management should ensure staff has the requisite skills and experience to effectively meet the needs of persons served. A Rapid Re-Housing program can be a difficult setting for “on-the-job” training for entry-level staff. Providing opportunities for ongoing staff development and fostering an atmosphere of continual learning are important and should be an integral aspect of the program. But working with clients with multiple, sometimes widely varying barriers, in various settings—including their home—requires good boundaries, good supervision and an agency emphasis on both best practice methods and acceptable results. Rapid Re-Housing program staff should be prepared to apply their skills and experience creatively and proactively in order to practice the “art” of engagement with the aim of meeting client and program goals.

11.3 Rapid Engagement and Cultural Competency

Rapid Re-Housing requires a rapid engagement between program staff and families and individuals who are homeless. Rapid Re-Housing program staff will have to assess barriers to obtaining and retaining housing. They will have to discuss difficult issues-- evictions, criminal history or chemical use. Once the client is housed, there may be conflict with household members, landlords or other tenants that must be immediately resolved to prevent housing loss. These can, at times, be highly emotional situations. Client trust in the Re-Housing staff will translate into a willingness to accept advice and try new behaviors.

In many communities, individuals and families who experience homelessness are disproportionately very low-income and people of color. Many have had to live on public assistance benefits; as parents, they often raise their children alone. And, like housed families, some have had chronic health problems, survived domestic violence, struggled with mental or chemical health problems.

Staff diversity and cultural competency help foster an environment where rapid engagement is likely. The longer the services will continue and the more stressful the housing situations that may arise, the more a program should prioritize cultural competency in staff hiring and training. Programs that intervene in the midst of relatively intense and private family disputes will need a very high level of cultural competency and relevant skills.

Cultural competency simply means effectiveness with people from various cultures. Ongoing training is essential for staff to be aware of the experiences and responses of the diverse clients they will serve. Cultural competency is particularly powerful when the staff has some obvious commonality with their clients. The commonality may be race, gender, language, sexual orientation or age. It often includes a shared experience such as single parenthood, extreme poverty, problems with mental health or chemical dependency, or a personal history of family conflict. Staff who have faced similar life challenges and overcome them can offer a wealth of practical advice and a unique level of empathy. They also become role models, inspiring people with the unspoken or spoken message, “I did it and so can you.”

Sample Job Description for a Rapid Re-Housing Staff Position

Personal Qualifications: High school education or GED; excellent communication skills, including written and spoken English; effective problem-solving and negotiation skills; ability to see both sides in a dispute and help parties develop compromise situations, ability to remain calm and focused in situations where clients or landlords may be angry or anxious; basic math skills; attention to detail in follow-up and case notes; ability to interact respectfully with people of diverse ages, races and household composition.

Preferred: Experience with household budgeting. Knowledge of public assistance benefit programs and landlord-tenant laws. Intermediate (or higher) Spanish language skills would be helpful. Persons of color and applicants with a history of poverty or homelessness are particularly encouraged to apply.

Duties: Interview individuals who are homeless; Review past housing history and identify possible barriers to obtaining and retaining housing; Negotiation with landlords to “sell” program and convince landlords to accept tenants they would normally screen out; Assess tenancy problems such as late payments, damage or lease violations, income, and financial assistance needs; Consult with legal services staff regarding actions to prevent evictions; Negotiate with host-guest households and families/partners experiencing conflict to find compromise solutions to domestic problems; With client permission, request mediation services for more serious conflict; Help family connect with employment services and/or obtain financial assistance from government or private sources; Recommend for supervisory approval the financial assistance and services needed to resolve current tenancy problems; With household, develop a Housing Plan with goals for successful case closing; Implement Plan; Provide information to individuals regarding additional community resources they may need and want and make referrals as the family chooses; Maintain required data on all cases.

CHAPTER TWELVE

PROGRAM EVOLUTION

Designing and implementing a new program can be a daunting experience. There are so many decisions to make, and each decision has ramifications for all the other decisions. If the agency targets youth leaving foster care, that decision has implications for staffing, financial assistance and services. But what if, after tying all those decisions together, the bottom line costs are more than the agency has available? How many earlier decisions must now be modified to achieve a balanced budget? The initial planning effort is worth every hour spent on writing, re-writing, discussing and revising. A well-designed program avoids many, many pitfalls.

However, planning cannot substitute for action. Many decisions will be modified as experience dictates; eventually, the program must simply begin to operate. The program must be flexible but not arbitrary in responding to actual experience. Changes should be made thoughtfully, based on fairly clear evidence: constant change increases staff stress without necessarily improving client outcomes.

Rapid Re-Housing programs make an enormous impact upon people's lives. This is an awe-inspiring responsibility but also a very rewarding one. It is impossible to completely fail and equally impossible to always succeed.

Programs that flourish and become more effective over time are programs that are well-connected to their community resources, listen to their clients, and use their data to monitor results, to increase program effectiveness, and to communicate their successes to others. A Rapid Re-Housing program that periodically does the following will become more and more successful over time.

Evaluate Data

- Do the people you serve successfully obtain and maintain housing?
- What barriers are most often inhibiting persons from obtaining housing? Maintaining housing?
- How do clients served compare to those not served? Are the right clients being targeted and served?
- How much does your program cost per client? Can you successfully serve more people by providing less assistance to some clients?
- How long do clients remain active in the program? Are clients exiting when program and client goals are met?

Talk to Clients

- What about your program works for clients? What does not work?
- Where do clients think improvements can be made?
- If your program is not providing a service well, is there somebody else that can provide it better?

Talk to Landlords

- What about your program works for landlords? What does not work?
- Where do landlords think improvements can be made?

Talk to Staff and Other Partners in the Community

- What about the program is working or not, from their perspective?
- Where do they think improvements can be made?

Revisit program rules and procedures

- What rules and procedures work well? Which do not?
- Programs generally accumulate rules and procedures. Eliminate those with little or no benefit.

Rethink Program Design

- Think about the decisions made when the program was designed. Should they be adjusted?
- Are the right things being measured and evaluated?
- How have other Rapid Re-Housing programs evolved and adjusted their approach over time? What did they learn and what did they do about it?