

Chapter 3: Creating a Culture of Moving On

In order to build successful Moving On programs that become an integral and ongoing part of a community's plan to address the needs of its most vulnerable people, we need to look at supportive housing in a new light - not as the end game or final destination for all tenants, but as a foundation for promoting continual growth and recovery. While recognizing that people with histories of trauma must first experience the safety and security of stable housing, which may require significant services and supports for months or even years, providers also need to help tenants understand that they can successfully recover and move on if they choose to do so. A core value of supportive housing is that all tenants have strengths and are entitled to be helped to maximize those strengths. In order to do so, creating a culture that supports, believes in, and reinforces growth is critical.

Service Philosophy and Key Components

To actualize such a culture, programs should have a strength-based philosophy. Empowering tenants to grow beyond their current circumstances would be the underpinning of the program. These goals should be reflected in the overall program structure, service planning processes, staff trainings, performance measures and evaluations. All services should be geared toward increasing self-sufficiency, tailored to meet the unique needs and preferences of each individual. Tenant service plans and goals should emphasize not only connection to services and stabilization but activation, economic advancement, recovery and self-direction of care. The language used by staff during client interactions should be strengths-based and recovery-focused, using words that demonstrate the belief that people can recover from mental illness, homelessness, addiction, trauma or other challenges they may be facing. Programs committed to these goals should emphasize the following key service components:

1. **Independent Living-Skills Training:** Program services should contain a strong focus on helping tenants develop the skills needed to live outside of supportive housing. Case managers should focus on coaching tenants to perform the daily tasks essential for such living rather than performing these tasks for them. Critical life skills include the following: household budgeting and financial management; utilizing public transportation; setting healthy boundaries and limits with friends and neighbors; self-advocacy with landlords or other service providers; navigating through the social services system; problem-solving techniques; personal safety; becoming a proactive consumer of health care (understanding medications, questions to ask, and choosing a physician and specialists).

[Central City Concern](#), a nonprofit agency serving individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Portland, provides supportive housing connected to a robust array of employment services including a co-located one-stop job center, transitional jobs, supported employment and in-house employment. Their workforce program served 757 homeless jobseekers in 2014 and over 60 percent found employment. In addition, half of their own employees, or about 750 individuals, self-identify as people in recovery and 25 percent have first-hand experience with Central City Concern's programs.

[Jericho Project](#), a non-profit agency serving individuals and families experiencing homelessness in New York City, employs a team of Career Counselors and Employment Specialists that help place residents into meaningful employment opportunities. Over 80 percent of Jericho's housing residents participate in their Workforce Opportunities Initiative and employed residents have an average wage of more than \$12 per hour.

2. Wellness/Illness Self-Management: Services should be recovery-focused, helping tenants with addictions or mental illnesses build knowledge about their illnesses and assumption of primary responsibility for alleviating or managing the symptoms and limitations that result from them. Such self-education and self-management shifts the focal point in disease management from the expert caregiver to the person with the illness. Self-management interventions like [Illness Management and Recovery](#) and [Wellness Recovery Action Planning](#) encourage consumers to take as much responsibility as possible in making decisions about treatment and in carrying out treatment objectives. Building illness self-management skills are critical for sustaining long-term recovery.

3. Community-Based Services: Use of community-based services is integral to this culture. Additionally, this is necessary if one is to carry out a satisfactory after-care plan. Programs need to build a broad network and strong relationships with many outside providers. Tenants should be encouraged and coached to use community based services, not just "in-house" programs to meet their service needs. Such self-sufficiency goals should be included in tenant action plans with a focus on helping people stabilize and grow and then transfer skills to outside living.

4. Employment Supports: Moving On initiatives should be tied to robust employment and job training supports for tenants who are able and interested in working. Programs need to build strong relationships with local employers and public workforce agencies and should have *dedicated staff* working to support tenants to secure and maintain employment. Particularly for tenants without Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Disability Income, Social Security Retirement Income or other such supports, helping them find and maintain employment are key to a successful transition and the surest defense against future homelessness. Employment is also more than a paycheck; it is a way for individuals to meaningfully engage in their communities and to socially connect through productive activity. It builds a sense of self-direction and belonging that paves the way to long-term recovery and success.

Moving On is not just about finding a new home; it is also about economic mobility.

5. **Peer supports:** A peer support specialist is a person who uses his or her lived experience of recovery (from mental illness, addiction, homelessness or other challenges) plus skills learned in formal training, to deliver services in supportive housing. Peers can offer a culture of “health and ability” as opposed to a culture of “illness and disability.” Peers serve as living proof that people can successfully address and overcome the challenges of their illness or past traumatic experiences to live healthier, more fulfilling lives. Programs should also consider employing Moving On peers – individuals who have successfully moved on from supportive housing – to talk about their experience and engage tenants in the process.
6. **A programmatic reward/incentive structure for Moving on:** Providers can assist in further promoting a culture of independence and self-sufficiency by creating a reward or incentive structure that celebrates Moving On. Programs can host Moving On or Farewell celebrations where tenants get a chance to share their journey with other tenants and say their final goodbyes to neighbors. Moving On alumni could also be invited back to join these celebrations and talk to residents about their experiences. These events are meant to celebrate tenant success and highlight what is possible for other tenants and should not in any way signal that remaining in supportive housing is a negative outcome.

These efforts should be combined with creative economic incentive programs, like Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) administered through public housing agencies. FSS creates an incentive for public housing residents and Housing Choice Voucher beneficiaries to increase their earnings by removing the negative consequence of losing housing assistance as income increases. As rental contributions increase as a result of increased earnings, the rent increases paid by the tenant are placed into an escrow account held for the participant to receive upon completion of the FSS program. In a similar fashion, providers could create individual “Moving On” accounts that encourage tenants to save money by matching any contributions to the account made by tenants up to a certain amount. These funds could then be made available to tenants when they move on.

Finally, when evaluating program success, organizations should also develop performance measures that reflect the degree to which services move tenants beyond stability and promote increased growth. For example, in addition to housing tenure, programs should track successful exits to other housing and develop benchmarks for optimal (rather than just low) turnover rates. For tenants remaining in supportive housing, programs can track employment rates, asset building activities and the proportion that move from needing intensive services to moderate or light-touch services. These data points can help inform decisions around how to develop and target Moving On efforts.

[Chapter 4: Outreach, Engagement and Assessment](#)