

Chapter 5: Preparing Tenants to Move On

Once a tenant has decided to move on from supportive housing, the hard work of preparing him or her for a successful transition should begin immediately. Several key steps and supports in this process are outlined below.

Setting Expectations and Addressing Fears

For many tenants of supportive housing, this setting has been the safest environment they have had in a long time. For others, it may represent the only safe and nurturing place they have ever known. Some may have become homeless while previously living in housing. The idea of leaving supportive housing can conjure up many feelings. An important role for program staff includes



helping tenants manage feelings and handle the stress of the transition. Staff need to have frequent and honest conversations with tenants about the realities of living outside of supportive housing and help tenants talk openly about their sadness or grief over leaving staff, friends, or the community to which they have become attached, and their fears or anxiety about moving from a setting that felt safe to an unknown place where everything is new.

The staff must be alert to the process of leaving and anticipate negative feelings such as sadness and anger, as well as uncertainty and indecisiveness in the face of a major life change. Common fears around leaving supportive housing include isolation, losing a job/income supports, loss of support services and community, increased financial responsibility and becoming homeless again. Some tenants that initially express interest in Moving On may consistently waver in their decision and as the time nears, may intentionally or unintentionally sabotage their transition by relapsing into their addiction, failing to pay rent, quitting a job, avoiding the housing search, or otherwise creating obstacles to moving out.

Program staff should be prepared for a variety of emotional responses and bouts of uncertainty and trained to continually reassure, motivate and keep tenants focused on the goal. By prioritizing choice and stressing the voluntary nature of Moving On, tenants should be given the space to consider their decision or take more time if that is truly what they need and want. Some practical strategies or policies that may help staff assist and reassure tenants in the pre-transition process include:

- **Consistent communication:** Program staff should schedule regular and frequent meetings with tenants specifically focused on transition planning, setting expectations and addressing fears.
- **Practice readiness:** Work with the tenants to gradually decrease services and supports or create trial scenarios so that tenants can practice readiness while still in housing (i.e., using community services, handling conflicts with neighbors/landlords independently, creating a budget and managing finances, managing medications, etc.). Because many services in supportive housing are informal and moving, tenants may not clearly grasp how the loss of services would affect their day-to-day living without actually experiencing the loss. Case managers should also work with tenants to set realistic expectations about what life will be like in their new home and neighborhood. If they will be living alone, it is important to talk about the potential for isolation and loneliness and strategies to deal with those feelings. If they are reuniting with family or friends, they should have candid discussions about how any prior tensions will be addressed and how to set appropriate boundaries.
- **Run a Moving On group:** Create a Moving On group that includes tenants interested in or preparing to move on from supportive housing. In New York, one provider developed a Moving-On Bootcamp for program participants, creating an opportunity for movers to prepare together and develop a sense of camaraderie. These groups can be used to educate and build greater awareness about the program, help tenants build community, hone their living skills, and provide a forum for tenants to raise questions, express their fears and find support from their peers. Guest speakers can include former tenants who moved on.
- **Develop Individualized Transition Plans:** Program staff should work with tenants to create a formal and comprehensive transition plan that identifies tenant strengths, living skills and the supports necessary to help them meet transition goals. It is important that this planning process include the perspective of both the resident and case manager. This document should guide the pre-transition planning process and hold both tenants and case managers accountable for their respective roles in the process. See Box 5A (below) for key components of a strong transition plan.

Box 5a.

Characteristics of an Individualized Transition Plan

É PROVIDES AN ASSESSMENT: A thorough assessment will help clarify the tenant's housing preferences including area, size of apartment, proximity to public transportation and other relevant issues. Additionally, it will offer staff a better understanding of a person's housing history and the impact the tenant's special needs may have on maintaining housing. Both the worker and tenant can assess what skills will assist with moving on.

É SETS CLEAR GOALS: A housing plan allows the worker and tenant to have candid dialogues about setting goals and the steps needed to assist the tenant to move on to other housing. They can work as a team to identify and document each of the steps needed to meet the goal of securing housing.

É IDENTIFIES RESOURCES NEEDED: A good housing plan helps both the tenant and worker identify the [resources needed to make the transition](#). This may include, but is not limited to, activities of daily living, budgeting, advocacy, income or entitlements, Section 8 voucher, clean credit report, medication and symptom management and aftercare.

É CLARIFIES ROLE OF TENANT AND WORKER: The housing plan helps establish what tasks will be assigned to the tenant and which will be the responsibility of the worker.

É CREATES A TIME FRAME: A housing plan takes into account the time goals as well. Benchmarks can be set for meeting objectives that will lead to moving on for the tenant and assist the worker in establishing time frames for his/her role in supporting the move.

É MEASURES SUCCESS: By creating benchmarks and documenting steps and objectives, both the worker and the tenant are able to measure success toward moving on.

Source: Center for Urban Community Services Moving On: Supporting Persons through Transition Training Manual

- **Right of Return policy:** If possible, some programs may consider allowing tenants a trial period in a less service-intensive form of supported housing where their supportive housing unit is held for them for up to a specified number of days or they can be prioritized for a unit should they decide they cannot move on. Knowing that this safety net exists may help encourage more tenants to explore this option.
- **Set clear expectations for aftercare services:** Programs should provide individualized post-transition supports to ensure that individuals make a successful transition. Workers should make sure tenants understand that services will not stop the minute they leave supportive housing and clearly communicate the kind of supports available to them, at what frequency and for how long. In cases where tenants are moving from supportive housing to a less intensive service environment (e.g., senior living, enhanced resident services, single site to scattered site

transition), tenants should be well-informed about what those services will look like and how to access them.

Pre-Transition Supports

Pre-transition plans should be individualized to meet the specific needs of each household. Some common resources or supports tenants often need include:

- **Employment supports:** Ensuring that tenants have and can maintain a stable and adequate source of income ó whether through employment, SSI/SSDI, pensions or other sources ó is one of the most critical factors for preparing tenants to make a successful transition. Tenants who are currently employed may need or want support in finding a job with higher wages, working more hours, connecting to a job coach, or accessing public workforce services and job trainings. Those that receive SSI/SSDI who are interested and able to work should be educated about how their earnings may impact their income and Medicaid/Medicare benefits and how to take advantage of federal work incentive programs, like Ticket to Work, that help beneficiaries return to work without immediately losing their benefits.
- **Benefits counseling:** Tenants who receive public benefits ó TANF, SNAP, SSI/SSDI, Social Security, Medicaid/Medicare, public housing assistance ó will need support around how to manage and maintain those benefits and how to access additional supports (emergency cash/utility assistance, child care supports, public transportation programs) when necessary.
- **Activities of daily living skills:** From grocery shopping to medication management to paying rent, many tenants in supportive housing depend on staff to guide them as they manage various activities of daily living. While tenants identified for Moving On should be capable of performing most activities of daily living, many will require coaching and support to master these tasks on their own. Staff can offer to tour the new neighborhood with the tenant ahead of time to learn where to shop, do laundry or pick up medications and help them locate area resources - clinics, hospitals, day programs, clubhouses, schools, AA/NA groups, etc. Tenants may need support in developing some of the following key skills:
 - o Financial management (budgeting, paying rent, creating a bank account)
 - o Housekeeping skills
 - o Grocery shopping and cooking
 - o Health/behavioral health management (scheduling/attending medical appts, finding a primary care doc, medication management, symptom management, relapse prevention)
 - o Accessing public transportation

- Navigating community/public services/schools/child care
 - Safety skills (calling 911, how to operate fire extinguishers, smoke detectors)
 - Personal hygiene
 - Communication and self-advocacy
- **Community living skills:** Tenants that have moved on from supportive housing are often surprised by the isolation and loneliness they feel once they are in their new environment. To preempt this, tenants need to build strong community living skills that will help them be a good neighbor, set clear boundaries with predatory acquaintances or neighbors that may put their tenancy at risk, create new friendships, reunify with family members, participate in community activities, and integrate into another community. Many programs also invite tenants to return to their supportive housing community to attend group dinners or events for a limited time after they have left while they build connections in their new community.
- **Connection to Community Based Services:** Staff should begin linking tenants to services and resources in the community a couple of months prior to the move to ease transition and acclimate tenant to the new area. Ensuring continuity of care throughout the transition, especially for those who are managing health and/or behavioral health issues, is critical. If transfers or connections are needed to a new medical home, mental health provider, addiction services, pharmacy or other health provider, those connections should be made well in advance of the move. In addition, for families with young children, relocating to a new community and being uprooted from their schools, friends and familiar surroundings can be traumatic. Case managers should make every effort to help families find housing located near good schools and safe neighborhoods and assist children, as well as parents, with the transition process.

Transitional Supports

In addition to these pre-transition services that help tenants build skills and resources, tenants often need support with the various activities and costs related to the process of moving, which include:

- **Identifying housing and rent supports:** Most tenants will need help finding a new home and, when available, connecting to rental supports. (Chapters 6 and 7 in this toolkit provide greater detail on these two topics.)
- **Financial assistance:** There are significant up-front costs related to acquiring and moving in to a new unit that may be prohibitive for a tenant in supportive housing. These costs include security deposits, utility deposits, broker fees, first month rent and moving van rentals. In addition, tenants may need to purchase some furniture or other household items for their new unit.

Supportive housing programs frequently provide tenants with basic household items when needed ó toiletries, person hygiene products, first-aid items, cleaning products/equipment, etc.

Without this support, tenants will need to purchase these goods for themselves. Using grant funds or other sources, most Moving On projects provide tenants with some financial assistance (usually between \$2000 - \$2500, to help defray some of these costs).

[Chapter 6: Identification of Rental Supports](#)

