



Enhancing MFP Tenants’ Success in Housing: *Lessons from Working with Formerly Homeless Persons*

A Toolkit for MFP Programs for
Tenancy Support/Housing Stabilization
Services Based on Services for Persons
With Chronic Homelessness

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The purpose of this Toolkit is to provide examples and tools to assist individuals transitioning under the Money Follows the Person (MFP) programⁱ in sustaining housing and succeeding as a tenant. The experience from the field of preventing and ending homelessness offers many relevant strategies, particularly for individuals that might have significant challenges in sustaining tenancy due to prior housing experiences, criminal histories, co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, and/or other chronic conditions. These issues often result in the individuals losing their homes, and with repeated institutionalization, these individuals often suffer chronic homelessness. Homeless MFP participants, and MFP participants at risk of homelessness, may need, and benefit from, tenancy support and housing stabilization.

Specifically, we will look at the following four topics:

- Help with developing good renter attributes and behaviors
- Managing issues with other tenants and property management staff
- Keys to maintaining housing stability
- Preventing loss of housing and “Plan B” in worst-case scenarios.

Practitioners and Tenants. This Toolkit can be used by housing transition coordinators, housing specialists, care coordinators, case managers, and other professionals who work with MFP participants throughout the transition and housing process and in the community. Because different programs refer to these professionals with different titles, for the purpose of this Toolkit, we will refer to them broadly as “**practitioners.**” We will refer to the individuals transitioning as “**tenants.**” Practitioners can use this Toolkit to plan for transition and tenancy services and to review periodically with the tenants as part of their ongoing training and support.

What Contributes to a Successful Transition?

It is crucial to remember that successful transition is much more than someone changing where they live. The move from a nursing home to a residence in the community is much more than a physical change. It includes an increasing sense of self-direction and decision-making on the part of the individual who is transitioning. It often means not only living where one chooses, but also becoming a full participant in community activities. Living in the community also means developing and using informal supports as well as the more formal supports and services. As a transition facilitator, you are not solely responsible for the success of the transition. You do have a critical role, but success is also dependent on the transitioning individuals themselves and their willingness to take a proactive role in the process and commitment to change.ⁱⁱ

“A house is made of walls and beams; a home is built with love and dreams.”

~ Dr. William A. Ward

Critical Time Intervention

The evidence-based practice called “Critical Time Intervention” (CTI) could be useful for MFP program participants.ⁱⁱⁱ CTI was developed in the early 2000’s by researchers and clinicians at Columbia University and the New York State Psychiatric Institute, as a time-limited case management model designed to prevent homelessness and other adverse outcomes in people with mental illnesses during the transition period following discharge from hospitals, shelters, prisons and other institutions or through what’s called “rapid re-housing,” coming directly from life on the streets. This transitional period is one in which people often have difficulty re-establishing themselves in satisfactory living arrangements and accessing and maintaining the supports they need from their informal networks and community-based providers.

The principal goal of CTI is to prevent loss of housing and other adverse outcomes during the period immediately following community placement. It does this in two main ways: by strengthening the individual’s long-term ties to services, family, and friends; and by providing emotional and practical support during the critical time of transition. An important aspect of the CTI approach is that post-discharge services are delivered initially by CTI practitioners who have made the effort to establish relationships with the patients during their institutional stay. The best CTI practitioners are flexible and creative, as well as comfortable working primarily in the community. At the same time, they must be committed to following a rather focused model of care.

Once the CTI practitioner has established a relationship with the client and begun to organize his or her support plan, the post-discharge phases of the intervention, which typically span a nine-month period, are organized as follows – Phase 1: Transition to the Community, Phase 2: Try-out, and Phase 3: Transfer of Care. The table below outlines CTI’s phases, goals and typical activities.

The Primary Activities and Phasing of the Critical Time Intervention Model

Phase	Transition	Try-Out	Transfer of Care
Timing	Months 1 – 3	Months 4 – 7	Months 8 – 9
Purpose	Provides specialized support and implements transition plan	Facilitates and tests client’s problem-solving skills	Ends CTI services with community support networks safely in place
CTI Case Worker Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops trust with client Makes home visits Accompanies clients to appointments with community-based providers Meets with caregivers & assures initial provision of services Helps tenant (re-)build connections to social networks Substitutes for caregivers when necessary Gives support and advice to client, network and caregivers Mediates conflicts between client and caregivers, fellow residents and property management, as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observes operation of support network Helps to modify the network as necessary Checks-in regarding tenancy issues Monitors any changes related to housing stability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reaffirms roles of support network members Develops and begins to set in motion a plan for long-term goals, e.g. education, employment, family reunification, etc. Remains available as consultant but no longer plays an active role in care Holds a party to symbolize transfer of responsibility of care to client

The goals and practices of CTI are very similar to those of the MFP program. For more about CTI and how it’s being applied: www.criticaltime.org.

Being a Good Tenant^{iv}

Most landlords try their best to find “good” tenants to occupy their rental properties. In order to be a good tenant, we need to first understand the qualities that a landlord is looking for when he or she thinks of a good tenant. The following list was compiled by landlords and posted for prospective tenants to see. [See Appendix 1.1 for the full list with descriptions.]^v

- Integrity and reliability
- Ability to pay rent
- Cleanliness
- Respect for fellow tenants and property
- Good communications skills.

The most important part of being a good tenant is paying the rent on time, yet getting along with neighbors and treating the landlord’s property with respect are equally essential to tenants’ housing success. There are many excellent tip sheets and “rules to remember” lists for good tenancy. [See Appendix 1.2 for Checklists Related to Pre-leasing and Unit Maintenance.]

The ‘Good Tenant’ tips that follow are excerpted from *Choose, Get, Keep Integrated Community Housing*^{vi} and the Center Mental Health Services’ tool kit for permanent supportive housing, an evidence-based practice for housing chronically homeless persons.^{vii} Individuals transitioning under the MFP program could benefit from training and support to understand these guidelines. Practitioners should share these lists and materials with the person prior to their transition and discuss how the guidelines apply, and how to follow them.

Essential Good Tenant Guidelines

- Know and honor with the conditions of your lease or rental agreement.
- Become familiar with your rights as a tenant. Every state and most localities have landlord-tenant laws. Get a copy.
- Submit requests to your landlord in writing to avoid disputes and misunderstandings; keep copies of all correspondence.
- Refrain from damaging the premises or allowing guests to cause damage.
- Keep your rental unit clean, and properly dispose of garbage.
- Notify your landlord in writing of needed repairs to keep components in good working order.
- Allow your landlord to enter your rental unit for safety or maintenance reasons, with proper advance notice.
- Purchase renter’s insurance to cover your personal property in the event of loss.
- Move out respectfully.

If the individual has physical, mental health, behavioral or other issues that may make it difficult for them to fulfill these guidelines, their transition and ongoing care plans should include treatment and/or services to address these issues, including periodic visits to the tenant’s home, re-assessments, and interventions. For example, it is possible that the practitioner may not be aware of previous behaviors that could affect tenancy, such as hoarding, which should be addressed before becoming critical to an otherwise successful tenancy.

What is ‘Ordinary Wear and Tear’?^{viii}

Landlords are permitted to deduct from security deposits for damage or excessive filth, but not for ordinary wear and tear. So good tenants should set aside time on a regular schedule for needed cleaning and routine household tasks. Usually, if something fails on its own, like a leaky roof or a broken furnace, it’s the landlord’s job to fix it. But it’s the tenant’s responsibility to keep up the place and prevent damage. You are responsible for any damage you cause. You are also responsible for any damage your guests cause, so think about whom you invite over.

What about the inevitable marks on walls and baseboards from wheelchairs? Are they considered “ordinary wear and tear”? Typically, yes, but you should discuss and negotiate with your landlord about how ADA regulations may affect “normal wear and tear” definitions and expectations. What is generally considered ordinary wear and tear? The table below shows some examples:

Ordinary Wear and Tear – the Landlord’s Responsibility	Damage or Excessive Filth – the Tenant’s Responsibility
Curtains faded by the sun	Cigarette burns in curtains or carpets
Water-stained linoleum by the shower or tub	Broken tiles in the bathroom or kitchen
Minor marks on or nicks in walls	Large marks on or holes in wall
Dents in the wall where a door handle bumped it	Doors off their hinges
Moderate dirt or spotting on the carpeting	Rips in carpeting, or urine stains from pets
A few small tack or nail holes in walls	Lots of picture holes or gouges in walls that require patching as well as repainting
A rug worn thin by normal use	Stains in rug caused by a leaking fish tank
Faded paint on walls	Water damage on walls or floor from hanging plants
Dark patches of ingrained soil on hardwood floors that have lost their finish and have been worn down to bare wood	Water stains on wood floors and windowsills caused by windows being left open during rainstorms
Warped cabinet doors that won’t close	Sticky cabinets and interiors
Stains on old porcelain fixtures that have lost their protective coating	Grime-coated bathtub and toilet
Clothes dryer that delivers cold air because the thermostat has given out	Dryer that won’t turn at all because it’s been over-loaded
Toilet flushes inadequately because mineral deposits have clogged the jets	Toilet won’t flush properly because it’s stopped up with a diaper

Getting Along With Others: How to Be a Good Neighbor

Part of community integration for the individual transitioning includes making an effort to be a good neighbor. Prior to transition, practitioners should discuss these concepts with the individual. Being a good neighbor means first not doing things that disturb others around you. But there are benefits to being a good neighbor, including increased security and comfort for everyone. Here are a few tips:

- Introduce yourself to your nearest neighbors. Knowing people by name is always a good policy.

- Respect privacy. Do not assume upfront that it is OK to “pop” in to a neighbor’s place uninvited.
- Get off to a good start. Say hello and be friendly when you run into neighbors in the hallway, in common areas, or on the sidewalk. In times of difficulty, neighbors are often your first resource.
- Be polite. If you don’t want to talk, a quick “hello” helps keep things civil.
- Following the Golden Rule, ‘Do to others as you would have them do to you,’ is always the best policy. It is hard to complain about neighbors if you are guilty of the same attitudes or behavior.
- To the degree that you can, be helpful to others. You never know when you might need help from one of your neighbors!
- Respect common areas (like laundry rooms or lobbies). Be quiet, don’t smoke or drink alcohol, and keep the area clean.
- Maintain the area around your home or apartment so that it’s neat and attractive.
- Be considerate about noises that might disturb your neighbors, such as vacuum cleaners, loud talk and barking dogs. Keep your music or TV volume down, especially when neighbors are home.

Don’t let problems get out of control

- Respond to neighbors’ concerns promptly and deal with difficulties proactively.
- Likewise, politely mention any issues you have with neighbors (like someone playing loud music).
- Don’t let people take advantage of you (frequently borrowing or asking for favors). It’s natural to want to help, but there are limits.
- Remember, if your name is on the lease, you are the one who is responsible for paying the rent. If you have roommates, all of the rent is due, not just “your share.”
- If problems continue, tell your landlord about any problems right away – before they have a chance to get worse! Property management staff might be able to help.

Successfully Housing People with Substance Use Issues

Many MFP programs have noted that a number of individuals seeking to transition have underlying substance abuse histories that might be masked by the enforced sobriety of institutional settings. As noted in the Critical Time Intervention model described above, when a transitioning client enters housing, he or she is entering a new environment. The tenant may be leaving a collection of people and places that provide a social network, social support, companionship, predictability, and familiarity. The destination housing will likely be in a different neighborhood...or even a different city or state. The tenant will thus be removed from the people and places with which he or she is familiar. This can create stress and a sense of loss. Without a support system to fill the void, a tenant’s housing stability may be immediately compromised.

Tenants also bring their prior (or current) status in the drug world with them into housing. Until tenants are able to create a new role for themselves in a new housing environment, they will continue to relate to the status and culture with which they are familiar. Practitioners should not expect tenants to automatically drop the structures they are accustomed to as they move into the new housing environment. The following steps have been used successfully by programs serving persons with chronic homelessness

and substance use issues and should be considered in assisting MFP participants with co-occurring substance use issues to transition to and maintain housing.

[See Appendices 1.3 – 1.8 for tools related to overcoming issues with credit, rental and criminal histories, as well as tips for Section 8 renter acceptance and supporting housing stability.]

Step One – Preparing to Work with Clients with Histories of Substance Abuse

The following questions will help practitioners differentiate between their own hopes and prejudices and clients' hopes, needs and goals specifically related to transitioning individuals with a history of or co-occurring substance abuse. Do this prior to the transition and as early in the process of working with prospective tenants as possible.

i. What are the issues you know the transitioning tenant is facing?

This question provides an opportunity for practitioners to identify the various life challenges or issues presented in the tenant's personal history in order to begin to build the bridge between assessment and service planning.

ii. What are other possible issues/challenges the tenant may face or confront in the near future?

Not all challenges the tenant is facing will be clearly exhibited. Through a process of ongoing assessment, practitioners will learn to anticipate issues that may pose a threat to the transition and continuing housing stability.

iii. What strengths does the tenant exhibit?

This question provides the opportunity for practitioners to recognize and acknowledge what tenants have survived. All tenants bring a set of survival skills to the housing environment. The importance of working from tenant strengths cannot be overemphasized and forms the basis of Motivational Interviewing (MI). If you are not familiar with MI as a tool for working with clients, visit: www.motivationalinterviewing.org.

iv. What are your behavioral and housing success expectations of this tenant?

This question provides practitioners with the opportunity to identify their own biases and expectations about tenant behaviors and success. Further, practitioners are encouraged to seek out information regarding tenants' existing (or past) linkages to behavioral health resources and think about how behaviors associated with their prior drug use, and recovery efforts, may affect their upcoming tenancy.

v. What are your hopes for this client? What are your goals for them as a tenant?

Practitioners should take the time to acknowledge their own hopes and goals for each tenant, which are not necessarily the same as the tenant's. Do you understand the tenant's choices? Do you feel that the tenant could do more and should try to reach higher? Or, do you feel that their goals are too aspirational or too impractical to achieve? How will you put aside your own perspectives to support and promote the hopes and goals and choices of the tenant?

Practitioners should also be able to differentiate between housing-related transition and sustainability goals and treatment goals.

Key Considerations for Service Effectiveness in Supporting Clients' Housing Stability:

- Emphasis on engagement and rapport building
- Goal of services should be to help individuals remain housed through problem-solving approaches
 - Help them retain housing at least long enough to help them rebuild attachment and develop a healthy fear of losing housing again
- Place tenant in the driver's seat of goal setting
- Non-judgmental attitudes increase open communication and ability to anticipate problems
- Allow for incremental change
- Cultivate a sense of self-care and wellness through compassion not condescension or coercion

Step Two – Engagement

Engagement is all about relationship building. It involves working to connect transitioning tenants to services that will meet their immediate needs, services that they might not know about or have been reluctant to use in the past. Engagement focuses on determining with the tenant what his or her immediate needs are, keeping in mind that what a tenant perceives to be an immediate need may not be what a practitioner might see as one. In building trust with the tenant, it is critical to listen to and accept the tenant's expectations, perceptions, and fears as the starting point in service planning. This approach can be applied to tenants transitioning under the MFP program.

Every encounter with a tenant is a teachable moment. There are no interactions with tenants that are meaningless. Start with something the tenant wants to talk about. For example, many tenants want to get jobs. The issue is not whether the tenant is actually employable; it is that employment is an interesting topic that the tenant wants to talk about.

As a trusting relationship builds, practitioners can develop a sense of tenant needs through informal interaction. As tenant needs are identified, practitioners can help link them to services that meet the tenant's most immediate needs. Consistency in approach, manner, and form when interacting with tenants is key. Since they are building new relationships, they must want them.

Focusing on behaviors is one of the more important skills in engagement. In keeping the tenant housed, it is not who the tenant is that poses a threat to housing stability. It is his or her behaviors that jeopardize housing stability. When a tenant starts having problems in their housing, practitioners should focus on and document the tenant's behaviors before speaking with the tenant. You may need to consult the property manager to get their perspective. Behaviors are what present the threat to housing stability. The focus of the remedial action and service planning needs to be on those specific behaviors. And practitioners should document steps taken to ameliorate those behaviors in the event that the landlord or property manager initiates an eviction.

For clients who transitioned to community housing without losing their housing, the following factors supported their success:

- Clients' ability to ask for help before a small problem or situation becomes a crisis.
- Received assistance with finding the housing, finding a roommate where necessary and then physically moving into that housing.
- Living at one place for a long enough period of time so that they can get a rental reference that allows them to move somewhere else, typically to a better housing situation.
- Clients had social connections to find new roommates, or skills to look for another place.
- Achieving some stability in initial housing helps clients to make another successful move.
- Having access to resources to do a housing search and the transportation to help them to get around to look at new places. Other logistical issues include having help in covering the damage deposit, help with moving or storing belongings, etc.

Clients' social networks were also identified as very important in helping them to stay successfully housed. Caseworkers made the following comments on social networks:

- They can have a positive or a negative influence on the client's wellbeing.
- For those who lose their housing, often it is reported to be because of the influence of their friends. In other words, having friends who come over and bring drugs and alcohol can cause a disturbance or break house rules to the detriment of the client.
- For those who keep their housing, it is often said to be because they were able to establish a more positive supportive network.
- Having positive connections in the community or close friends and family was noted to be an important aspect of maintaining stable housing. Outreach workers have worked to help clients to find places where they can more easily connect with people who provide positive support. Having consistent support was also noted to be important. For example, regular access to a clubhouse or drop-in center where a client can connect with others can provide a consistent and stable support network.
- Several clients were reported to have been doing volunteer work at a local agency as one way to begin building a positive social network.

Step Three – Building Community:

How a transitioning tenant is introduced to a new building or a new housing unit sets the stage for the tenant's relationship to the building and the other tenants. Moving into new housing can be very stressful. The orientation process can pave the road to success or present yet another obstacle in the tenant's path. It is important for tenants to know

what to expect before move-in day. Practitioners might make sure that the tenant's basic needs are provided for on move-in day, and the MFP program can support many of these one-time needs.

It is best if tenants do not enter housing with an initial feeling of isolation. Practitioners should remember that, for tenants with co-occurring substance abuse recovery issues, moving into a new housing unit may trigger a relapse. For those who have reduced their use, they might view secure independent housing as a safe place to resume chaotic drug-use habits. Practitioners should not expect that once a tenant is housed he or she is on the road to stability. The model of case management in Critical Time Intervention is useful in any such period of transition and could be applied to MFP transitions.

Practitioners should assist all tenants to understand applicable policies and procedures and expectations for acceptable behavior. Likewise, policies and procedures should be consistently applied and enforced with all tenants, by both service and property management staff. Predictability and consistency are key qualities that should be practiced by all staff.

What Tenants Might Think About and Do in the Days after They Move to a New Place

- Purchase or acquire needed “stuff” such as cleaning supplies, chair, equipment.
- Place nightlights so they don't get confused looking in the dark for the bathroom or kitchen.
- Anticipate different sounds, lights and furniture arrangements in the new place.
- Make sure adaptive equipment is set up correctly and working.
- Settle in: unpack and put away all their belongings. Recycle/discard packing materials.
- Notify medical and other service providers about the new address and telephone number.
- Address any problems in attendant care.

Step Four – Action Steps to Building Housing Stability

Establishing Home Visit Protocols: Practitioners and tenant should determine the duration and frequency of home visits needed to support the person in achieving housing stability. Home visits may be more frequent during the first few months of a person's tenancy and some persons, particularly MFP participants, may need considerably more time and support during the first several months in the community.

Supporting Personal Skill Development: In addition to other personal development goals, practitioners should support a person in gaining the skills aimed at achieving housing stability. These skills include building good communication practices, and basic home maintenance, including cleanliness and keeping a home free of safety/fire hazards.

Supporting Relationship Skill Development: Practitioners should support the person’s relationship building during the first several months of tenancy in a unit to include facilitating connections to friends and family and the development of positive interactions with new neighbors.

Linking to Community Resources: Practitioners should conduct ongoing evaluations to help the person build and maintain connections to community resources to support housing stability, adapting to the tenant’s changing needs and preferences. New concerns, challenges, or unanticipated needs may surface after a few months of tenancy. Resource linkages can include continuing health, community, and recreational interests, or may address an immediate issue area.

“Having good people in a client’s life is very important. Good clean people provide support, a negative social network leads to money being spent on things other than rent (e.g. drugs) and the need to engage in illegal activities or prostitution to get money.”^x

Step Five – Creating a Back-up Housing Plan

One important step is the creation of a back-up housing plan, sometimes called ‘Plan B.’ This should be part of the individual’s overall transition and community living plan, and should include housing contact information and steps to follow should a health crisis cause the individual to be hospitalized, or trigger other special circumstances that might affect their housing situation or lease. Ideally this plan will be developed with a new tenant as part of their transition planning, and within their first 60 days of tenancy. A back-up housing plan also should articulate an alternative housing option in case an unanticipated lease termination occurs.

Creating a back-up housing plan for alternative housing could include the following activities:

1. Educating, informing and providing resources to help the individual determine alternative affordable housing options in a community of their choice.
2. If the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) wait list is open in the jurisdiction of residence, placing a person’s name on the list and monitoring movement on the list.
3. If a person’s name comes to the top of the HCVP wait list while they are still residing in unit, the tenant should pursue HCVP eligibility and use the voucher in the current unit of residence. The tenant will take the subsidy with them if forced to move to a new unit.
4. Assisting the individual in determining one or two other alternative affordable housing options, submitting application for the wait lists and monitoring the application’s status.

Time to Move On?

People move. It’s a part of life. If the tenant moves out, it’s best to do it the right way. References from past landlords can be helpful and important in future rental situations.

- Find out how much “notice” is required. That is, how long before moving out does the tenant have to tell the landlord? Send a letter stating the planned move-out date.
- Tenants should repair any damage they or their guests have caused. If the tenant or caseworker kept the checklist from moving in, referring to it might help determine the amount of repair work the tenant needs to undertake. In

some cases, meeting jointly with the landlord or property manager to discuss questionable areas will be helpful.

- If the unit was modified to make it accessible to the tenant, then the landlord should be consulted regarding whether the unit must be restored, the modifications removed, and if so, how and when.
- Everything should be cleaned, including the insides of cupboards, oven and refrigerator.
- Walk through the house or apartment with the landlord when you think the work has been completed. This helps prevent surprise charges for cleaning or repairs.
- Make sure the landlord has a forwarding address for the tenant.

Early intervention can prevent conflicts and crises that can disrupt a person's ability to achieve and maintain housing stability. Embedding housing retention efforts into normal case management practices and thinking includes:

- Identifying potential stress areas of housing stability
 - Is a person consistently stressed during the end of the month when funds are low?
 - Is a person having difficulty interacting informally with other tenants in common areas such as hallways, laundry rooms, or community room spaces?
 - Is a person's unit experiencing a change in condition: excessive clutter, unclean surfaces, exposed trash/debris, general decline in cleanliness?
- Identifying changes in behavior that may affect housing stability
 - Sometimes recognized by property manager and maintenance staff
 - Is a person neglecting his or her personal hygiene?
 - Is a person staying inside his or her apartment for prolonged periods?
 - Has a person's daily routines or habits significantly changed?
- Intervening sooner rather than later
 - Early recognition of potential issues or problem areas coupled with immediate intervention increases the potential for preventing an escalation leading to a crisis.
- Assessing Interventions
 - Learning why a problem surfaced, identifying the warning sign(s), and evaluating what interventions worked and what ones did not will help case managers to improve housing retention efforts that achieve and maintain stable housing.

Step Six – Handling Housing Crisis Situations and the Risk of Eviction

A key lesson learned from programs serving others transitioning to housing is the importance of prevention. Practitioners can play an important role in helping a person resolve tenancy issues before they have a chance to escalate into a crisis. Practitioners can

assist by helping a person to understand the consequences of their behavior or actions and by following up to monitor progress. In those situations in which a tenant has acted out in some way, practitioners should engage in these follow-up actions:

- Help the person understand the consequences of continuing the behavior/actions that are placing tenancy at risk
- Help them to determine a timeline for changing the behavior/action that is in violation of the lease
- Encourage the tenant to access supports, including family/friends and community resources and supports offered through a person’s plan of service
- Work with them to set up an inspection/home visit schedule to help with determining progress or the need for additional supports
- Provide a written form of agreement to include:
 - Proposed actions
 - Supports offered
 - Suggested timeframes/deadlines
 - Any agreements
 - Date of the next scheduled visit.

Practitioners should check in with the tenant regularly to monitor progress toward resolving any tenancy issues. If a tenant has resolved the issue, be sure to discuss with the person what they found to be most useful to them. Learning what worked for them may be valuable information if the issue recurs or it may be a useful strategy or resource for another tenant. If a tenant is making progress but is still in violation of the lease, note what has been accomplished and continue to help them understand the obligations that need to be met. If they have not made any changes, ask them what they think is stopping them from fixing the problem.

If you are in a difficult situation with a tenant, here are some tips for protecting yourself:

Keep emergency numbers at hand	Using slow body movements and a quiet voice can sometimes defuse a crisis situation.
Calm the tenant	Do not rely upon humor or sarcasm to lighten a crisis situation; it may be misinterpreted.
Maintain personal safety	Do not be argumentative. Do not try to take issue with a tenant’s perceptions or concerns.
Listen carefully	Listen carefully and reflect the tenant’s concerns back to him/her. Let the tenant know that he/she has been heard.
After the situation is defused: Review what happened and your response. Debrief with supervisor Discuss the situation thinking of ways the situation might be better handled in then future Receive additional training	Avoid anything that could potentially be used as a weapon against you. In a crisis situation, however, you should not try to physically take weapons away from a tenant. Practitioners should always place themselves in the room in such a way that no obstacles (including the tenant) are between the staff member and an exit. It is also important to maintain a clear path for the tenant to exit, so that the tenant does not feel trapped

In Cases of Eviction

If a tenant appears to be moving towards losing their unit, practitioners may still have a chance to work with them intensively to stabilize their housing. It is an opportunity to bring all the resources at a staff member's disposal to bear on behalf of the tenant. This might mean linkages to resources, case consults, behavioral contracts or plans, meetings with housing supervisory staff – anything to help the tenant recognize the problematic behaviors at issue and to address them.

If eviction is inevitable, practitioners can engage with external housing partners to try to find a new housing placement for the tenant. Practitioners should also clearly communicate to the tenant the consequences of eviction. Every tenant should be aware of what is at stake. If eviction is imminent, caseworkers can consider encouraging the tenant to leave voluntarily in order to avoid having an eviction proceeding on his or her rental history. It can negatively impact their future housing options, even if the court finds in their favor. Just the fact that the landlord moved against them can be damaging, and it is difficult to expunge it from their record.

When eviction becomes unavoidable, practitioners should ensure that the landlord has followed proper eviction procedures, as governed by state and local landlord-tenant laws.

- Make sure that the grounds for eviction are behavior-based and clearly documented.
- Ensure that no tenant rights, such as reasonable accommodation, have been violated.
- The landlord will likely need to go to court to enforce an eviction proceeding. There may be an opportunity to fight, or appeal, the eviction; but tenants rarely choose to do so. And as stated above, even if they win, it can negatively impact future rental opportunities.

Resources for Housing Stabilization and Crisis Management Services

Practitioners serving as housing transition coordinators, housing specialists, care coordinators, case managers, and other professionals who work with MFP participants throughout the transition process and in the community can be supported under various federal, state and local programs.

Medicaid funding and other resources that support housing stabilization services for persons with chronic homelessness may be useful for individuals transitioning under MFP, particularly those MFP participants who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless, and/or have similar housing support needs. One example is the *Primer on Using Medicaid for People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness and Tenants in Permanent Supportive Housing*, published by the HHS Office of Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.^{xi} A companion publication, *Medicaid and Permanent Supportive Housing for Chronically Homeless Individuals: Emerging Practices From the Field*^{xii}, provides case studies on how six states provide these services, including how they compile a mix of federal, state and local resources to promote housing stability and crisis management.

A report on maintaining housing stability by the University of Massachusetts-Boston, Center for Social Policy, commented:

“As part of stabilization, program funds could be used for services targeted to assist participants with critical skills related to household budgeting, money management, credit repair, landlord outreach and mediation, and other activities that can assist in securing long-term housing affordability. Especially important during tenancy was the role that

agencies played if trouble arose that could threaten housing stability. Case managers negotiated with landlords and tenants to develop plans for eliminating rent arrears to forestall eviction. They also assisted participants to deal with utility arrearages. . . . Four agencies thought that 25 percent of clients avoided eviction because of their help, while one indicated that this was the case for close to 50 percent of participants.”

Tools and Examples to Assist in Successful Housing Transitions and Sustaining Tenancy

The Attachments provide tools and examples to assist individuals transitioning under the Money Follows the Person (MFP) program in sustaining housing and succeeding as a tenant. These have been developed and used by practitioners in the field of preventing and ending homelessness, particularly for individuals that might have significant challenges in sustaining tenancy due to prior housing experiences, criminal histories, a history of homelessness, co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, and/or other chronic conditions. These include:

Attachment 1: Six Key Attributes Associated with Good Tenants

Attachment 2: Checklists Related to Pre-leasing and Unit Cleanliness

1. Renter’s Checklist of Questions to Answer Prior to Signing a Lease
2. Things to look for when conducting a physical inspection of the property
3. How to Prepare for an Annual Unit Inspection by a Public Housing Authority
4. Standards for Wear and Tear: Serious Violations

Attachment 3: Housing Stability Questionnaire

Attachment 4: Housing Stability Case Manager Job Description

Attachment 5: Action Steps to Overcome Credit Issues

Attachment 6: Action Steps to Overcome Challenges to a Person’s Rental History

Attachment 7: Action Steps to Overcome Criminal Background Issues

Attachment 8: Tips for Section 8 Renter Approval

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ Officially known as the Money Follows the Person Rebalancing Demonstration Program, there are 45 MFP grantee states and the District of Columbia that provide services to seniors and persons with disabilities who wish to move from institutions where they have resided for 90 days or more into community life.

ⁱⁱ ABCs of Nursing Home Transition: An Orientation Manual for New Transition Facilitators, IL Net, Feb. 2006.

ⁱⁱⁱ For details, see the Center for the Advancement of Critical Time Intervention at: <http://sssw.hunter.cuny.edu/cti/>

^{iv} Tools for Tenants: Permanent Supportive Housing, Evidence-Based Practices KITs, Center for Mental Health Services, 2010.

^v Adapted from: http://www.thelpa.com/lpa/what/5tenant_ingredients.html and <http://blog.rentapplication.net/3-qualities-that-landlords-love-why-being-a-good-tenant-matters/>

^{vi} Choose, Get, Keep Integrated Community Housing, CIL-NET, 2008

^{vii} Tools for Tenants: Permanent Supportive Housing, Evidence-Based Practices KITs, Center for Mental Health Services, 2010.

^{viii} Adapted from: <http://www.nolo.com>.

^{ix} Pathways Out Of Homelessness: Regional Study, 2011. <http://www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness/ResourcesPage/PathwaysOutofHomelessness110503.pdf>

^x Pathways Out Of Homelessness: Regional Study, 2011

^{xi} A Primer on Using Medicaid for People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness and Tenants in Permanent Supportive Housing, Abt Associates, US. Dept of HHS/ASPE, August 20, 2014, accessed at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/daltcp/reports/2014/PSHPrimer.cfm>

^{xii} Medicaid and Permanent Supportive Housing for Chronically Homeless Individuals: Emerging Practices From the Field, Abt Associates, US. Dept of HHS/ASPE, July 23, 2014, accessed at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/daltcp/reports/2014/EmergPrac.cfm>

^{xiii} Rapid Re-Housing Of Families Experiencing Homelessness In Massachusetts: Maintaining Housing Stability, Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership, 2012, p. 12, accessed at: http://www.umb.edu/editor_uploads/images/centers_institutes/center_social_policy/CSP-HPRP_Report_2012_final.pdf.

^{xiv} Officially known as the Money Follows the Person Rebalancing Demonstration Program, there are 45 MFP grantee states and the District of Columbia that provide services to seniors and persons with disabilities who wish to move from institutions where they have resided for 90 days or more into community life.

A1.1 Six Key Attributes Associated with Good Tenants

Most landlords try their best to find “good” tenants to occupy their rental properties. In order to be a good tenant, we need to first understand the qualities that a landlord is looking for when he or she thinks of a good tenant:

- 1. Integrity:** Honesty, trust, reliability and common decency are qualities that come to mind when a landlord thinks of a top-quality tenant. He/she wants tenants who will do what they agree to do. They want someone who will always choose to do the right thing – whose signature on the rental agreement signifies a binding promise they will keep.
- 2. Creditworthiness:** If landlords are going to give legal possession of valuable property to a tenant, they first want to make sure they’re dealing with someone with the ability to pay their rent each month. They will typically run a credit report to find out the prospective tenant’s credit history. If the record is out of date (due to a long stay in an institution) or has “issues,” then they will expect a clear explanation and maybe a recommendation from a caseworker or other trusted party.
- 3. Ability to Pay:** Does the tenant have sufficient income or other resources to pay the rent as well as their other living expenses every month? Does the tenant have employment income, rental subsidy, family assistance, and/or public benefits? The answers to these questions give the landlord a sense of how secure this tenancy will be. Again, tenants’ affiliation with a known case management or rental assistance provider may help allay the landlords’ fears.
- 4. Cleanliness:** Landlords expect tenants to keep their units clean. Thus, first impressions matter, because the landlord or management agent is likely to judge the tenant’s cleanliness standards based on how they look at their interview/site inspection. It is a common belief that a clean and well-dressed tenant will care for the rental property better than a dirty-looking or unkempt tenant.
- 5. Respect:** Mutual respect is an essential element of the landlord-tenant relationship. Tenants should always demonstrate respect in regards to the rental property, both inside and out, as that is typically what the landlord cares most about. Care for the physical environment and timely payment of rent demonstrate respect for the landlord. At the same time, tenants should also respect each other – and their differences. This helps build community. If a tenant can maintain peaceful relations with their neighbors and tranquility with the landlord/managing agent, then the stage is set for a long-term and happy tenancy.
- 6. Reporting Maintenance Issues Right Away:** Tenants must use their best judgment when it comes to reporting maintenance issues. The rental property itself, whether a house or apartment building, represents a large investment for the owner. Although it may not be a big problem at the moment, a small water leak can cause thousands of dollars worth of damage if left unattended. Thus, clear and early communication of maintenance issues will give the landlord/managing agent the information they need to keep the property well maintained, and it will also help increase their

respect for tenants when they can see that tenants are looking out for the landlord's interests as well as their own. well as their own.

ⁱ Adapted from: http://www.thelpa.com/lpa/what/5tenant_ingredients.html and <http://blog.rentapplication.net/3-qualities-that-landlords-love-why-being-a-good-tenant-matters/>

A1.2 Checklists Related to Pre-leasing and Unit Cleanliness

1. Renter's Checklist of Questions to Answer Prior to Signing a Lease¹

- Have you conducted an inventory of the premises with your landlord?
- Do you know what constitutes a full refund of your security deposit?
- Can you speak to previous renters of the property or individuals/families who have rented before from the landlord? Can you check other references that the landlord can provide?
- Will you handle any renter's issues through a management company or work directly through telephoning the landlord?
- Does the landlord live in in the area? Does the landlord live in another state, or overseas? If you will pay rent through a management company, is the management company local?
- If you must handle renters' issues through a management company, then what authority does the management company have to act on behalf of the landlord to remedy problems? If the management company must go-through the landlord on issues affecting renters, then will the landlord be easily accessible to the management company?
- What about property maintenance issues? Does a maintenance person live nearby?
- Who do you call for emergencies or repairs? Is there someone on call at all times?
- Are outlets and jacks available for both cable TV and telephone?
- Has the residence been exterminated since previous tenants moved?
- Does the residence have a security system?
- Are hallways and/or exterior well lit? Is the street well lit?
- What is the location of the nearest fire extinguisher?
- Does the residence have smoke detectors?
- Where is the nearest emergency exit?
- Does the residence have adequate locks (dead bolts)?
- What will you do if you lose your residence keys?
- Are there laundry facilities in the residence? If not, are facilities nearby?
- Is there adequate storage space?
- How close are grocery and convenience stores? What about other shops, restaurants, entertainment, etc.? Can you get there on public transportation?
- How, where, and when do you dispose of recycling and trash?

- Do you have information to estimate what your average electricity cost will be?
- Who pays for water and/or trash? You or the landlord?
- Are there adequate electrical outlets?
- Are pets allowed? If so, is there an additional charge?
- Talk to other renters if possible.

2. Things to look for when conducting a physical inspection of the property

Exterior

Sidewalks/Driveways/Lots/Lawns

- Unbroken pavement, grass and shrubs trimmed, no trash

Trash Area

- Containers adequate to building occupancy
- Clean; each can covered
- Screened if visible from street

Street & Mailing Address

- Number visible and readable from street
- Mailbox provided for each apartment

Exterior surfaces of structure

- No missing bricks, blocks, siding, gutters, or downspouts
- No cracks in foundation wider than a quarter-inch
- Reasonable paint or finish
- No broken windows, glass or screens

Access/Entrance

- Clear access to porch/stoop/doorways
- Stairs, treads, ramps, porch flooring, and railings intact and sturdy
- Sturdy exterior door with functioning lock

Interior

- Insect and rodent free

Apartment Doors

- Fit, finish, and functional hardware (lock and latch)
- Fire-resistant doors required in multifamily buildings more than three stories

Hallway/Entryway/Stairway

- Clear passage (no storage or clutter)
- Lighted

- Handrail on all stairways
- Carpet intact if provided

Structural

- Walls/floor/ceiling
- No holes
- Reasonable finish/paint
- No leakage, dampness, or water spots

Windows

- Glass intact
- Opens and closes tightly; lockable

Kitchen

- Sink
 - Hot and cold water
 - No leaks or drips
 - Drains quickly
- Appliances
 - Electrical connections are voltage appropriate
 - In good repair and cleaned after prior tenant
 - Good door seals on all appliances
- Sleeping Areas
 - Minimum: 7'x 10' for one person
 - Minimum: 10' x 10' for two people
 - Must have window to exterior

Bathrooms

- Privacy
- Door with functional hardware
- Toilet
 - Strong flush and refill
 - No leaks
- Sink
 - Hot and cold water
 - No leaks or drips
 - Drains quickly
- Tub and/or shower
 - Hot and cold water

- No leaks or drips
- Drains quickly

Utilities

- Heating
 - Working system and thermostat (65+ degrees during heating season)
 - Properly vented
- Electrical
 - 110-volt/60-amp/3-wire (grounded) service
 - All outlets and switches work.
 - At least two outlets in every room
 - At least one grounded outlet in every bathroom and laundry room
 - At least one light fixture in hallway, stairwell, bathroom, laundry, and furnace room

3. How to Prepare for an Annual Unit Inspection by a Public Housing Authority:ⁱⁱ

To ensure the quality of Section 8 rentals, Public Housing Authorities will typically conduct an thorough inspection before you move in, and once every year or two years after that. The Housing Authority's goal is to provide decent, safe and sanitary housing to all residents. The simple housekeeping practices listed below will help you be prepared for these inspections, and create a clean and safe home for you and your family:

- Check your smoke alarms and replace batteries as needed. For your protection smoke detectors must be hooked-up and working properly at all times.
- Report all maintenance items to the landlord or manager prior to the inspection. The items may be able to be repaired before the annual inspection takes place.
- Thoroughly clean your cooking range, range hood and filter - inside and out - as often as necessary.
- Defrost and clean your refrigerator at least once a month or as needed. Never use a knife or a sharp tool to chip off ice! A pan of hot water or fan work best in speeding up the defrosting process.
- Clean both sides of all windows regularly, as you are able.
- Thoroughly clean and sanitize the kitchen sink, bathroom sink, tub and toilet, and remove hard-water stains on a regular basis.
- Wash and clean walls and all painted woodwork on a regular basis.
- Vacuum or sweep, and mop all floors on a regular basis.
- To help prevent infestation by cockroaches, fleas, mice, rats and other disease-carriers, remove all boxes, paper, garbage and other rubbish to proper garbage and recycling containers on a regular basis. Also remember to properly dispose of discarded furniture, appliances, bulky rubbish and junked automobiles.
- Maintain all sidewalks, lawns, shrubbery, and grounds (front, sides, flowerbeds and rear of the house/apartment) in a decent clean condition by keeping the lawn mowed, shrubbery trimmed, and free of garbage and debris.

- Be certain that all rooms are accessible to the inspector.
- Please have your pet contained/restrained for the time period of your inspection.

4. Standards for Wear and Tear: Serious Violations

If the condition of your apartment or house has deteriorated beyond normal wear and tear due to neglect or damage that you or your guests have caused, we may propose termination of your Section 8 voucher benefit. Below are items that a housing authority or management company would consider serious violations of the tenants' obligations section of the rental agreement:

- Destroyed walls – large holes; mold due to tenant neglect; excessive grease; graffiti
- Destroyed floors – serious carpet stains that cannot be removed with a good cleaning (bleach, dye, paint, burns, etc.); torn tile; badly stained wood floors (holes, punctures, burns, etc.)
- Broken light fixtures due to tenant abuse or neglect
- Broken doors or doorjambs (holes, large gouges, etc.)
- Broken windows due to tenant abuse
- Overly dirty or broken appliances due to tenant abuse or neglect (stoves, refrigerators)
- Excessive garbage and trash storage, which could cause infestation (cannot be picked up by one individual within one or two hours)
- Turned-off utilities for which the participant is responsible
- Broken bathroom fixtures (removed or broken tank covers, faucets, shower doors/ rods)
- Holes or stains in a ceiling due to tenant abuse or neglect
- Flea-infestation from pets, etc., due to tenant neglect
- Burnt countertops due to tenant abuse
- Neglected landscape (if tenant is responsible for yard up-keep)
- General abuse and/or neglect of rental unit by participant family
- Any other failures of health and safety standards that are tenant-cause

ⁱ Adapted from: Renter's Education Program Guide, U.S. Army Garrison, Miami, FL
[http://www.southcom.mil/militaryfamilyservices/Documents/Renter's Education briefing.pdf?Mobile=1&Source=/militaryfamilyservices/_layouts/mobile/view.aspx?List=7ead8096-d575-4a30-8a91-7060864a7bc9&View=fd10f9b-df31-4712-9762-ddaabb25cb3e&CurrentPage=1](http://www.southcom.mil/militaryfamilyservices/Documents/Renter's%20Education%20briefing.pdf?Mobile=1&Source=/militaryfamilyservices/_layouts/mobile/view.aspx?List=7ead8096-d575-4a30-8a91-7060864a7bc9&View=fd10f9b-df31-4712-9762-ddaabb25cb3e&CurrentPage=1)

ⁱⁱ <http://www.homeforward.org/residents/section-8-handbook/home-inspections>

A1.3 Housing Stability Questionnaireⁱ



Client Name _____ Service Coordinator: _____

Address: _____ Date: _____

Rent Payments	Yes	No	Comments/Actions
Are you paying your rent on time every month?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Have you had to pay any late fees?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Has your income changed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Have you paid your utility bills?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Have you received any turn-off notices?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Unit Health			
Does the unit appear to have excessive clutter?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is the unit showing signs of excessive distress?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Does the kitchen area have unclean surfaces?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Any evidence of rodent/vermin infestation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Any visible fire/safety hazards?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Any new household members?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Tenant Health and Safety			
Have you had any negative interactions with neighbors, other tenants, or property management staff such as complaints?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Any changes in behavior affecting risk of housing stability?			
• Substance Abuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Physical Illness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Personal Appearance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Medication Changes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Stress/Life Event	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Tenant Satisfaction			
Are you satisfied with your home?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you enjoy your community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Service Coordinator: _____ Date: _____

ⁱ Housing Stability Questionnaire <http://www.coordinatingcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Housing-Stability-Questionnaire.docx>

A1.4 Housing Stability Case Manager Job Description

Housing Stability Case Managers have primary responsibility to secure and stabilize housing for homeless, formerly homeless and at-risk of becoming homeless clients who are currently engaged in intensive job development and job search activities with Employment Specialists. These services include, but are not limited to: housing relocation, eviction prevention, housing search, landlord liaison activities, financial coaching, and housing counseling.

This position will work closely with the Housing Stability Manager and Employment and Housing Coordinator to implement new housing and employment strategies aimed at linking housing case management and employment services with the goal of making rapid client progress toward living-wage employment and housing stability. This position will take a vital role in fulfilling one of our agency's mission goals 'self-sufficiency' through housing stability. Neighborhood House Housing Stability Case Managers work in diverse communities where the majority of clients may have Limited English Proficiency. The ideal candidate will have the ability to speak fluent Spanish or at least have strong intercultural communication skills.

Responsibilities:

- Conduct community outreach and recruitment to low income individuals and families in need of housing assistance.
- Conduct strengths-based assessment of housing placement barriers, and work in partnership with clients to develop plans for obtaining and maintaining permanent housing.
- Work closely with clients to address and resolve financial barriers to housing stability such as credit repair, debt reduction and other financial services.
- Work in partnership with clients and Employment Specialists to develop strategies and short- and long-term goals for obtaining and maintaining employment.
- Provide support to Housing Stability team for housing search and landlord communication.
- Provide advocacy-based case-management to clients to support forward progress on goals aligned with their individualized Self-Sufficiency Action plans.
- Conduct financial coaching sessions with clients that includes helping them to understand housing requirements, create and adhere to budgets and build other skills needed for independent living.
- Conduct exit coaching activities and retention services for clients upon their completion of the program.
- Evaluate and assess level of financial and other support for clients on a regular basis to determine level of interventions.
- Whenever necessary, facilitate and conduct housing search with each client per individual needs, including attending site visits, assisting with application completion, sharing landlord connections.
- Assess for need and provide rental, utility or move-in assistance which includes inspection of housing units for HUD habitability standards.
- Outreach, collaborate, build and maintain relationships with landlords, housing programs and other community agencies.

- In collaboration with the Employment & Housing Coordinator, research, develop and maintain knowledge of landlord/tenant laws, support client adherence to these laws, and assist in addressing landlord compliance issues.
- Maintain knowledge of King County resources and provide appropriate referrals to address barriers to stable housing and employment, i.e: medical, mental health, chemical dependency, domestic violence, education, immigration, children's issues.
- Coordinate services with other NH staff, including employment case managers, for complementary services or in a co-case management model.
- Participate in clinical case reviews, training, and case consultations.
- Track participant activities and ensure timely and accurate collection of program data as outlined by management team.
- Collect and input client data into the "Safe Harbors" Homeless Management Information Systems database.
- Assist team members with ongoing continuous quality improvement to enhance program operations, including problem solving, helping to develop program systems or procedures, or participating in team workgroups.

ⁱhttp://www.nhwa.org/makeadifference/employment_positions.php?job=347

A1.5 Action Steps to Overcome Credit Issuesⁱ

Step 1: Help a person to obtain a free copy of his/her credit report.

Step 2: Help a person to understand credit information contained in his/her credit report.

- Is the information accurate?
- Is identity theft a possibility?
- What types of credit issues exist?
 - Medical bills in collection
 - Overdue credit card accounts exceeding 90 days
 - Open judgments for past due rent
 - Late/inactive loan payments –student, car, mortgage

Step 3: Help a person to determine if any of the credit issues require legal assistance or a referral to the Consumer Credit Counseling Service.

Step 4: Help a person understand what credit issues might impact a person's ability to access affordable housing.

- Outstanding utility bill
- Open judgment for past due rent

Step 5: Help a person to set up a payment plan, even if the amount is minimal.

Step 6: Help a person to identify community funding resources to assist with paying outstanding utility bills or past due rent.

Step 7: Help a person to contact his/her previous landlord to negotiate a waiver or reduction in outstanding rent.

Step 8: Determine if a person's disability or medical setback had a relationship to a person's ability to maintain timely rent payments. If so, help a person to write a letter explaining the circumstances.

ⁱThe 811 Project Rental Assistance Program: A Training Guide for Case Managers Working with Non-elderly Persons with Disabilities, by Martha Egan, The Coordinating Center, on behalf of The Maryland Partnership for Affordable Housing, 2013

A1.6 Action Steps to Overcome Challenges to a Person's Rental Historyⁱ

Step 1: Identify challenges to a person's rental history.

- Does a person have an eviction record?
- Did a person have trouble with paying rent on time?
- Did a person experience difficulty getting along with neighbors?
- Did a person maintain a safe living environment, void of:
 - Excessive clutter
 - Fire hazards
 - Pest/bug infestation
- Did a person understand his/her tenant obligations or did they have trouble with guest/visitor policies, noise level rules, respecting property, or other lease regulations.

Step 2: Help a person determine if a change in a person's health/medical situation or disability had a relationship to his/her ability to be a good tenant.

Step 3: Help a person to write a "story" or explanation of circumstances leading to issues with a person's ability to maintain a positive tenancy.

Step 4: Help a person to realize strengths and assets as a tenant.

Step 5: Help a person reach out to a previous landlord to obtain a positive reference or an agreement to understand a person's circumstances when providing a reference.

Step 6: Help a person to connect to community supports and services to overcome current and future challenges to rental history.

ⁱThe 811 Project Rental Assistance Program: A Training Guide for Case Managers Working with Non-elderly Persons with Disabilities, by Martha Egan, The Coordinating Center, on behalf of The Maryland Partnership for Affordable Housing. 2013

A1.7 Action Steps to Overcome Criminal Background Issuesⁱ

- Step 1:** Develop a trusting relationship with a person.
- Step 2:** Help a person to explore past activities in his/her background that may impact accessing affordable housing.
- Step 3:** Verify that information disclosed on public judiciary information system is correct/accurate.
- Step 4:** Help a person to remove open warrants and to seek legal counsel if necessary.
- Step 5:** Help a person to understand rules and policies about criminal activity impacting housing.
- Type of criminal activity
 - Patterns of criminal activity
 - Time period of last reported activity
- Step 6:** Help a person determine if a change in health/medical situation had a relationship or impact on behavior causing criminal activity.
- Step 7:** Help a person to demonstrate commitment and acceptance of rehabilitative services as he/she approaches housing providers.
- Step 8:** Help a person to identify community supports and services to assist with supporting positive community interactions and behaviors.

ⁱThe 811 Project Rental Assistance Program: A Training Guide for Case Managers Working with Non-elderly Persons with Disabilities, by Martha Egan, The Coordinating Center, on behalf of The Maryland Partnership for Affordable Housing. 2013

A1.8 Tips for Section 8 Renter Approvalⁱ

If you are having problems finding housing due to issues with your credit rating, criminal record, or rental history, here are some tips that may help:ⁱ

- If your screening problem is related to a disability, you have the right to ask for a [reasonable accommodation](#) during the screening process. Call the Fair Housing Council at 1-800-424-3247 for more information about screening and disabilities.
- If you have a history of substance abuse, make sure you have completed a treatment program and/or are actively involved in support programs.
- Get free copies of your credit reports from the three credit-reporting agencies. Know what is on your report ahead of time so that you will be able to respond to negative or inaccurate charges that appear on it.
- Call your local Community Action Program. These agencies offer free trainings for tenants. The classes may be called “Tenant Education,” “Housing Readiness,” or “Rent Well” classes. Often landlords are more willing to accept tenants who have taken these classes.
- When you call to make an appointment to see an apartment, be polite over the phone. If you think your children will interrupt you, place your call from a different room, or have someone watch over them while you are on the phone. Don’t disclose past problems over the phone to landlords.
- Arrive 15 minutes early to your appointment. Dress as if you were going to a job interview. Don’t bring your children if they will misbehave. Explain to the landlord that you are looking for a long-term home.
- Ask the landlord for a tour of the apartment and all common areas of the building. Show the landlord that you care about the quality of your home by asking questions about the apartment and building. If you see things you like about the apartment, let the landlord know. If the apartment doesn’t meet your expectations (if it is unsafe or if the landlord is rude to you), don’t hesitate to look someplace else. Any problems you observe now will probably only get worse later.
- After the tour, if you decide this is a place where you could live, tell the landlord about your past rental history. Explain briefly what happened in the past and explain why things are different now. Take responsibility for your mistakes.
- The landlord is required to give you a piece of paper detailing their screening process, what exactly they check, the cost of the screening fee, and how you can correct misinformation. The landlord is also required to tell you how many units are available, and how many applications have already been taken. Ask the landlord what he or she thinks your chances are of being accepted — if your chances are 50/50 or worse, ask if there is something else you could do that would help.

If the landlord seems unwilling to negotiate with you, it probably means that your application won’t be accepted. In that case, don’t pay the screening fee. On the other hand, if the landlord seems encouraging or tells you that other tenants with the same problems have been accepted before, submitting your application is probably worth the try.

ⁱ <http://www.homeforward.org/residents/section-8-handbook/tips-for-renter-approval>