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Home Works

Solving Family Homelessness through
Permanent Supportive Housing

By Kate Durham

www.csh.org

Corporation for Supportive Housing

The Corporation for Supportive Housing helps communities create permanent housing with services to prevent and end homelessness. As the only national intermediary organization dedicated to supportive housing development, CSH provides a national policy and advocacy voice; develops strategies and partnerships to fund and establish supportive housing projects across the country; and builds a national network for supportive housing developers to share information and resources. CSH is a national organization that delivers its core services primarily through six geographic hubs: California, Great Lakes (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio), Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, and Southern New England (Connecticut, Rhode Island). CSH also operates targeted initiatives in Kentucky, Maine, Oregon, and Washington, and reaches many other communities that request assistance through its national program support teams.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

In 1998, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) launched the first national effort to extend the promising model of permanent supportive housing – a successful, cost-effective combination of affordable housing with services that helps people live more stable, productive lives – to homeless and at risk families with special needs. Families targeted for supportive housing include those whose head of household has chronic health conditions that are episodically disabling such as mental illness, HIV/AIDS, and substance use, and/or other substantial barriers to housing stability including domestic violence and history of out of home placements. In the years since the launch of this initiative, CSH has continued to partner with local organizations to help expand the availability of supportive housing for homeless families, and to document and support the replication of effective models.

Home Works draws upon the pragmatic lessons learned from many family supportive housing projects in operation in and around San Francisco, Chicago and Minneapolis. Designed primarily for service providers, housing developers and managers, and also for public and private funders, *Home Works* offers practical guidance for the development and operation of family supportive housing (FSH). While FSH can benefit tremendously from best practices and lessons learned in adult supportive housing, there are points of differentiation worth noting. *Home Works* aims to stimulate thinking about some of these important differences so that these factors can inform decisions about program philosophies, service packages, staffing, partnerships, and funding.

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the building blocks necessary to design and implement successful supportive housing, read *Home Works* in conjunction with other Corporation for Supportive Housing publications, particularly [*Family Matters: A Guide to Developing Family Supportive Housing*](#), written by Ellen Hart Shegos for CSH and published in 2001. Designed for service providers and housing developers interested in developing permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless families, *Family Matters* provides information on the development process from project conception through construction and rent-up. Hart Shegos discusses alternatives to new construction, such as scattered site leased housing, and provides practical tools to guide decision-making about housing models, partner selection, and service strategies.

Intended to complement *Family Matters*, *Home Works* aims to strengthen existing projects and increase the successful development of permanent supportive housing for homeless families with special needs across the county. It should also be a useful resource for projects exploring conversion from transitional housing to permanent supportive housing for families.

Content

Information and tools are organized in two main ways in this document:

“Part 1: Principles” approaches permanent supportive housing for families on an issue-by-issue basis. The first chapter offers a plan for exploring conversion from transitional housing

to permanent supportive housing. The remaining chapters assume a supportive housing model. Each chapter answers key questions; the guidelines that emerge are based on the experiences of existing supportive housing projects.

Chapter 1.	<u>Conversion from Family Transitional to Permanent Supportive Housing</u>
Chapter 2.	<u>Tenant Engagement</u>
Chapter 3.	<u>Children and Youth Services</u>
Chapter 4.	<u>Harm Reduction</u>
Chapter 5.	<u>Leadership and Community Building</u>
Chapter 6.	<u>Domestic Violence</u>
Chapter 7.	<u>Building a Team</u>

“Part 2: Profiles” introduces a range of integrated systems in practice. Canon Barcus Community House is one example of an established FSH site, while the Homeless Children’s Network/Family Supportive Housing Collaborative demonstrates the community-collaborative approach to service provision. The third profile, Housing Opportunities for Women, discusses this organization’s conversion from transitional to permanent housing. The fourth profile, Collaborative Village Initiative, describes some of this project’s unique features including its involvement of anchor families to help stabilize, support and transform this community.

Profile 1:	<u>Canon Barcus Community House</u>
Profile 2:	<u>Homeless Children’s Network/Family Supportive Housing Collaborative</u>
Profile 3:	<u>Housing Opportunities for Women</u>
Profile 4:	<u>Collaborative Village Initiative</u>

Links to relevant tools, forms, resources and publications can be found throughout the document.

Content for this guide was informed by focus groups of service and property management staff of supportive housing projects in San Francisco, Minneapolis and Chicago¹. Groups were organized around issues and participants were asked the following questions:

- What has been the greatest learning or surprise about this aspect of your work?
- What has been the greatest success in this aspect of your work?
- What has been the greatest challenge?
- If you could do something differently, what would it be and how?

Youth and adult tenant focus groups in San Francisco provided further input.

Please note: Quotes and descriptions of experiences from all of these sources are provided in boxes throughout the text.

¹ [Appendix 1](#) includes a list of people who participated in focus groups and/or who added content to the document through their review and feedback.

Definitions

The title, *Home Works*, reflects the increasing evidence that permanent supportive housing offers the most effective set of solutions to homelessness for families with special needs.

Across the county, there is a broad range of models and perspectives within the field of supportive housing, especially as it relates to approaches for delivering services to tenants. Two key areas where there is considerable variance are voluntary versus mandatory services and the approach to housing people with active substance use issues. These topics are considered especially complex in family supportive housing. The Corporation for Supportive Housing's (CSH) perspective is that service participation should not be a condition of tenancy in permanent supportive housing. CSH has also found that approaches based on harm reduction and other strategies that seek to engage and support tenants at all stages of change are especially promising, particularly for those who are most at risk of long-term homelessness. These kinds of strategies can significantly increase housing retention among individuals and families.

Some supportive housing is intended to achieve outcomes other than, or in addition to, housing retention, which may reflect the priority of funders, the needs and preferences of tenants, and/or the mission and values of the organization that provides the housing. Approaches that incorporate some requirements that tenants participate in services, or that they abstain from all use of alcohol or other drugs, are more common in supportive housing that is intended to help families or individuals achieve recovery from addiction, or reunification after involvement with the foster care system, for example. Recognizing the diversity of views on these important issues, CSH continues to engage in constructive dialogue with our partners in the supportive housing, disability rights and human services communities around the country².

While this range of models reflects a variety of needs and situations, this guide recommends pairing permanent affordable housing with a proactive voluntary-service approach to resolve homelessness for families with special needs. Several key definitions³ clarify the assumptions that underlie the approach presented in *Home Works*:

Permanent and Affordable Housing: A primary purpose of supportive housing has been to increase the availability of permanent housing to very low-income individuals and families. In supportive housing, the term 'permanent' typically refers to affordable rental housing in which the tenants have the legal right to remain in the unit as long as they wish, as defined by the terms of a renewable lease agreement. Typically tenants pay rent in an amount that does not exceed 30 percent of their income and they enjoy all of the rights and responsibilities characteristic of rental housing, so long as they abide by the legal conditions of their lease.

²Adapted and excerpted from [Supportive Housing for Families Evaluation: Accomplishments and Lessons Learned](http://documents.csh.org/documents/Resource_Center/Family_Supportive_Housing_ExecSummary.pdf). A Report from Philliber Research Associates for the Corporation for Supportive Housing, Spring 2005. (http://documents.csh.org/documents/Resource_Center/Family_Supportive_Housing_ExecSummary.pdf)

³ Adapted from CSH's Toolkit for Ending Long Term Homelessness (<http://www.csh.org/toolkit>).

Tenant: *Home Works* uses the term ‘tenant’, rather than consumer, resident, client or participant, to refer to the people who live in supportive housing. This term underscores the point that people living in supportive housing should have the same rights and responsibilities of tenants in other lease-based, permanent housing.

Voluntary Services: The term ‘supportive’ in supportive housing refers to voluntary, flexible services designed primarily to help tenants maintain housing and improve the quality of their lives while maximizing their ability to live independently. Voluntary services are those that are available to tenants but not demanded of them. Such services can include coordination/case management, physical and mental health, substance use management and recovery support, job training, literacy and education, youth and children's programs, and money management.

In supportive housing, services are voluntary for tenants but not for staff. You need enough staff, equipped with good and ongoing training, to proactively engage tenants in services. After all, if this population were in a position to find and access the services they need or to meet the mandatory criteria required in program-based housing, they wouldn't need supportive housing.⁴

Harm Reduction: Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies that reduce the negative consequences associated with drug and alcohol use, including safer use, managed use, and non-punitive abstinence. These strategies meet users “where they are at”, addressing conditions and motivations of drug use along with the use itself. Harm reduction acknowledges an individual’s ability to take responsibility for his or her own behavior.

⁴ All unattributed quotations provided in such text boxes within this report are from supportive housing staff and tenant focus group participants, as described on pages 5 and 6.

CHAPTER 1: CONVERSION

From family transitional housing to permanent family supportive housing

This chapter looks at the potential for converting transitional housing for families to permanent supportive housing. It provides:

- Some of the questions that you will need to ask to determine if conversion is right for your program or agency;
- A checklist of action steps to take if you decide to convert;
- A [sample timetable](#) that illustrates how long such a conversion can take.

Many of the steps involve analyzing your current operations in a new way, or forecasting how future changes will impact your staff or your bottom line. If you are considering converting, you may want to get assistance from a strategic planning consultant with housing experience or from a technical assistance provider. This chapter will help you to think through all of the key considerations you may want to address if you decide to undertake conversion.

Why consider conversion?

There is a growing, national dialogue about the effectiveness of transitional housing as a way to end family homelessness. New housing models for families, such as housing first and rapid re-housing, emphasize that many families can do well given permanent affordable housing with support immediately, without spending time in transitional housing to become ‘housing ready.’

Some communities have made a community-wide commitment to converting transitional housing. Chicago’s Plan to End Homelessness – *Getting Housed and Staying Housed* (www.chicagocontinuum.org) – for example, reorients the city’s Continuum of Care away from a housing readiness model and towards housing first. The core tenets of Chicago’s new approach are to prevent homelessness whenever possible, rapidly re-house individuals and families when homelessness cannot be prevented and provide wraparound services that promote housing stability and self-sufficiency. All transitional housing programs receiving HUD or Chicago Department of Human Services funding will become either permanent or ‘interim’ housing (less than four months), with specific, universal outcomes.

Other communities are beginning to talk about conversion as an approach to increase the supply of permanent housing for homeless families. Some organizations, such as [Housing Opportunities for Women](#), have decided that switching to permanent housing will better meet their clients’ needs. Whether your organization should consider conversion will depend on your mission, the trends in your community, and the way your program is funded and structured.

Does conversion fit your organization's mission?

Converting from transitional to permanent supportive housing is likely to represent a significant shift for your agency's culture.

Transitional Housing	Permanent Supportive Housing
Most transitional housing is program-based: residents are considered clients, not tenants, with a need for a certain time limited set of services to become 'housing ready,' after which time they are expected to obtain independent housing, usually without further support.	Permanent supportive housing focuses on housing families and providing an array of services to help them maintain housing stability in the long run.
In transitional housing, participation in services is usually mandatory, and families can lose their housing if they don't 'work the program' (participate in services and follow all the rules).	In permanent housing, services are usually voluntary and encouraged as needed (see other sections of <i>Home Works</i> , particularly Chapter 2 Tenant Engagement). Staff are expected to create and maintain a program worth 'working'.
Transitional housing usually does not have disability requirements (though many families in transitional housing may have disabilities that qualify them for permanent supportive housing.)	Most permanent supportive housing targets people with disabilities, such as mental health or HIV/AIDS, that have contributed to past homelessness.

With these differences in mind, ask:

- Does having families spend time in our transitional housing prior to getting their own apartment make sense in terms of *their* needs?
- Even if our program has good outcomes (most graduates gain permanent housing, increase income, and so on), could clients have achieved these results without having to move again?
- Was it helpful for families to stay here before getting a permanent place or could we have provided similar support to them in an apartment of their own?
- Did families' time in transitional housing contribute to their long-term stability, or did it delay achieving stability?
- If I were in this situation, which would I prefer?
- What do our clients want?

Involving staff, residents and board members in your exploration is critical to reaching a good decision, to obtaining buy-in, and to charting the new course. A change in your model is significant for staff, who may see their performance as being challenged or their job security threatened. Staff need to be included in talking about what changes would mean and how to implement them, as well as what kind of skills, training, and other support they may need to make a successful change.

Suggested action steps:

- ☒ Inform yourself about national research, for example through the information published by the National Alliance to End Homelessness and the Corporation for

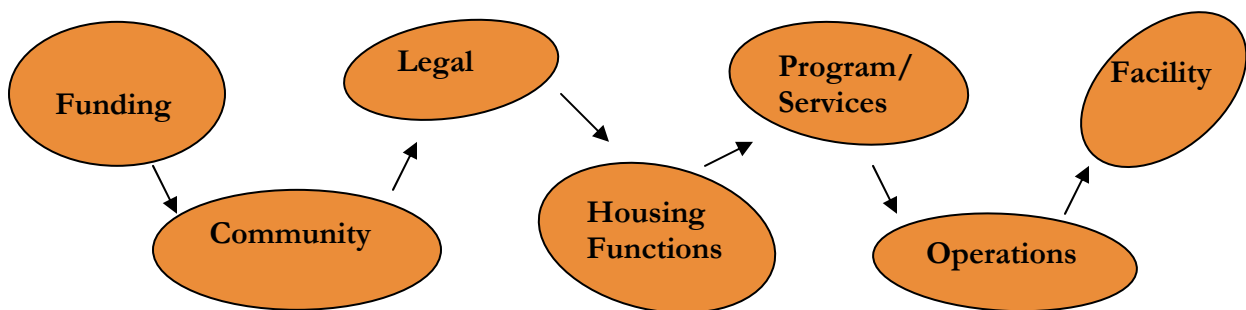
Supportive Housing, about different housing models and permanent housing for families.

- ☑ Do an internal analysis of your program's stated goals, outcomes, and long-term impact on families. Are families successfully 'graduating' from your program? What percentage of families leave, or are asked to leave, before program completion and what are the reasons for this? If your program requires people to be 'housing ready' before they get permanent housing, is this consistent with your mission to (for example) end family homelessness?
- ☑ Ask if your target population is currently well-served in transitional housing. Would they be well served by permanent supportive housing? To qualify for HUD Supportive Housing Program funds after the transition, your population must be disabled according to the [HUD definition](#). How many of your existing clients meet this definition?
- ☑ Ask residents what they like about your program and what they don't like. Involve them in helping you think about potential changes. If you can reach former residents, ask them about their experiences during and after they left the program.
- ☑ Talk with staff and board member about your organizational mission and objectives – does the program model still make sense today? What would it take to change the model – what would staff and board need to learn to make a shift?
- ☑ Visit permanent supportive housing sites in your community, and if possible, in other communities, to learn more about how they operate.

Seven stepping stones

If you decide to proceed, what other factors will you need to address to achieve conversion? Converting to permanent housing will have an impact on every aspect of your program's design and operations – from funding to staffing to the messages you send to the community in your brochures and appeals. At a minimum, you will need to analyze each of the seven areas identified below.

Review each of these seven stepping stones, determine what applies to your program, and then develop your own list of action steps in each area - suggested action steps are identified for each of the stepping stones as well.



1. Funding analysis

Look at each of your primary sources of capital, operating and service funding and determine whether it will continue to be available to you if you change your program design to permanent housing. Some funders may be indifferent or very positive about the change, but others may not continue to fund you. Consider undertaking a significant education campaign to explain to funders why you are considering conversion, showing how the anticipated programmatic benefits align with their goals. Likewise, assess how your individual donor base may respond to conversion and be prepared to answer their questions. You may also want to begin exploring alternate funding streams, including those only available for permanent housing.

Suggested action steps:

- ☑ Prepare your case. Using information from your internal analysis and from national researchers, prepare a sound rationale for your choice to convert and why it is feasible for you to do so. (The National Alliance to End Homelessness has a number of materials available that can help you do this.)
- ☑ Contact key funders. List all the funders you need to talk to, noting whether you are primarily informing them of your change or requesting something of them, such as amending a grant agreement. Consider beginning with those funders who are most likely to support you and asking for their support with other funding agencies.
- ☑ If you are considering converting a HUD-funded SHP transitional program, contact your local HUD Office to confirm that funding will allow conversion and to ascertain the timing necessary to convert their funding to permanent housing.
- ☑ Hold forums for board members, major donors, and foundation officers to educate them about the issue, your decision, and what it means for your agency. Consider bringing in representatives from organizations that have already converted, or that already provide permanent housing.

2. Community analysis

Closely related to the funding analysis is an analysis of the trends in your community. Is the Continuum of Care looking for ways to increase permanent housing? Are the standards for acceptable program outcomes changing in a way that might be difficult for your program to meet in the future? Knowing where your local Continuum of Care is heading may help you to decide what kind of housing model to adopt for the future, and how quickly you need to make decisions or begin program changes.

Suggested action steps:

- ☑ Speak to representatives from your local government and Continuum of Care board about the changes you are exploring. Ask where they think the emphasis in your community is going. See if they would assist you with a feasibility study for conversion.

- ☑ Talk to other transitional housing providers about their program and outcomes. What trends are they encountering? Are they considering a shift? Look for opportunities to learn from one another.

3. Legal analysis

If you own the transitional housing site (or have a long-term lease), analyze the restrictions that govern the property. Some programs operate in buildings owned by the local government or a private landlord and leased to the organization. Some sites are owned by the non-profit operator and their acquisition and development were funded by public or private loans. Unless your building was donated outright or you bought it exclusively through private funding, you will probably need to review your lease and/or loan documents (regulatory agreements, deeds of trust, promissory notes) to see if you are specifically restricted to providing transitional housing. Generally, such documents have a use clause that describes the permitted uses of the property. A use clause that identifies the project as transitional housing does not necessarily preclude conversion, depending on the basis for the restriction, but it does need to be changed if you convert. Often, the use clause simply reflects your original funding application and can be changed through an amendment process.

On the other hand, certain development sources may be restricted for short-term or transitional housing. (See below for a specific discussion of HUD SHP.) If your project used such a source for development or renovation, you need to look closely at:

1. The term of the loan or grant and the pay back mechanism.
2. Whether the lender or funder has flexibility to allow conversion (for example, is the restriction statutory, regulatory or simply un-mandated practice?)
3. The remedies that the lender or funder has if you are no longer in compliance.

Ultimately, you may need to pay back some or even all of the loan or grant, but if you can identify another source that will ‘take out’ the first, that may be desirable. If the financing structure of your project is complex, you will probably want to have a lawyer or development consultant review your documents.

Another legal issue to consider is the impact of any zoning and conditional/special use permits requirements. Consult with your planning and zoning department to determine if you are required to make legal changes in order to operate permanent housing.

Suggested action steps:

- ☑ Review leases, regulatory agreements and other documents governing your operations for use requirements in consultation with a lawyer and/or development consultant.
- ☑ As much as possible, determine whether any restrictions you identify can be changed, and decide how you want them changed, prior to making your request to the lender, funder or owner. You may be asking them for something that they have not dealt with before, and it will be better if you are prepared with a solution.

- ☑ When you are ready, approach the entities that have an interest in the property about your conversion plans and the amendments that you need.
- ☑ If necessary, go to your planning and zoning department, and/or consult with an architect to determine whether you need to change any use permits.

4. Housing functions analysis

Many transitional housing programs have operated as enrollment or treatment-oriented programs rather than as housing. They have often used program agreements rather than leases and have terminated participants without going through legal eviction. While the legality of this approach is questionable in some cases, the practices have seldom been questioned and have worked for many transitional housing providers.

As a provider of permanent housing, however, your organization will have to follow Fair Housing and other state and federal housing laws. You will be required to provide your tenants with all the rights and obligations of tenancy, including entering into leases, collecting rent, collecting and returning security deposits, providing reasonable accommodations for disabilities if requested, providing tenants with appropriate notices if they are out of compliance, and, ultimately, evicting them if they are in violation of their lease. You will also need to follow fair housing laws as far as marketing your units and screening tenants for entry. This is a big shift that requires knowledge and training and a structure that supports it. CSH's publication, [*Between the Lines: A Question and Answer Guide on Legal Issues In Supportive Housing – National Edition*](#), may be a useful resource about the laws that pertain to supportive housing.

Suggested action steps:

- ☑ Consult with an attorney about the kinds of legal documents, such as leases, reasonable accommodation policies and tenant notices, that you will need to use (see the Sample Forms in the [Canon Barcus Profile](#) at www.csh.org). You should also be able to get other sample documents from CSH or other housing providers that you can adapt.
- ☑ Identify who in your organization will be responsible for administering the housing-related functions of the program, such as marketing units, collecting rents, giving notices to tenants, and ultimately pursuing eviction if necessary. Ensure that this person or division is well-trained in all of the legal aspects of housing management.
- ☑ If your organization is not prepared to carry out these functions, consider hiring a property management firm with experience in permanent supportive housing for all or part of these functions. In permanent housing, it is usually wise to have clear distinctions between property management and the services team.
- ☑ Even if you are not going to perform all of the functions yourselves, ensure that everyone in the organization who works with the project has an understanding of the legal responsibilities of the organization and the roles of the people involved.

5. Program/services analysis

If you are operating transitional housing now, your program is probably designed to work with families on an intense but relatively short-term basis, and may require participants to meet certain participation requirements. Permanent housing will almost certainly require a different approach and a different service model. Review the information about service models for family supportive housing in the other chapters of this guide, *Home Works*, as you think about what conversion means programmatically and what kind of service package you will provide.

If you decide to convert, you will need to modify your existing program structure, staffing, and outcome measures in light of your new program design. Look closely at whether you will need the same number of staff, the same positions, and the same skill sets. For example, you may find that you have less of an emphasis on housing search and short-term job search and more on managing mental illness or long-term employment preparation. Also, examine the outcome information you collect and report on – funder requirements for outcomes in permanent housing typically have more to do with measuring housing retention and self-determined success for each tenant and less with achieving specific programmatic goals such as sobriety or employment. Finally, consider staff expectations and training – both what you expect employees to come in with and what you provide on the job.

Once you have determined your new structure, staffing, and outcomes, you will need to revise all of your housing documents, including policies and procedures and operations manuals for staff, program brochures and application materials for tenants, and general organizational materials. Even your website will need to be changed. Don't underestimate the importance of making sure that your written guidance reflects how your program will operate.

Suggested action steps:

- ☑ Look at your current staffing configuration and determine if it works with the new permanent supportive housing model. For example, do you need specialists with experience with specific disabilities, such as mental health? Do you need fewer case managers or more, and what expertise do they need to have?
- ☑ Identify staff skill sets needed for permanent supportive housing. Examine current training practices and job requirements. Are different skill levels required for staff? Will existing staff have to re-apply for their positions? Build into regular staff development practices training related to housing permanency, such as tenant engagement strategies and fair housing law. Check in with staff regularly about their ongoing training needs.
- ☑ If you identify service gaps, consider partnerships with other agencies to meet certain service needs, such as employment expertise, primary health care or mental health services.
- ☑ Review your measurable outcomes and revise them to reflect a permanency model. Common outcomes in supportive housing include length of stays exceeding two years, positive departures for families who do leave, and success for family members at meeting their long-term goals for income; education (including children's

education); quitting, reducing or better managing drug use; family reunification and other goals.

- ☑ Set up a process to review and revise your housing policies, procedures and other documents and practices. Consider identifying a staff team to do the review and make recommendations for the changes.
- ☑ Be prepared for some bumps in the road. Not every change you make will work right away and not every staff member will be happy about the changes. Keep communication channels open and people focused on the outcomes to which you have agreed.

6. Operating Budget Analysis

Similar to the funding analysis described above is an analysis of the current operating budget and expected changes to cost and revenue from conversion. Typically, transitional housing programs fold their operating and service expenses into the same budget. As a permanent housing provider, you will need to track your budget and expenses for operations and services separately. Indeed, the financing of each component in permanent housing is often completely distinct.

Operating budgets will include all of the costs associated with maintaining your facility once it is ready for occupancy, including property management, utilities, maintenance, insurance, security, debt service or other loan payments, and operating and replacement reserves. If you lease your property, operating costs generally include the cost of leasing the units and any maintenance that is not covered by your owner/landlord. If you have never budgeted this way, seek assistance from a development consultant or a technical assistance provider like CSH to help with this analysis and the development of a new budget for the project.

Budget impacts from conversion may include:

- Increases or decreases in operating costs based on legal and eviction costs, depending on whether you have previously entered into leases with tenants (see Housing Function analysis above.)
- A reduction in the turnover rate of units, resulting in reduced unit preparation and tenant screening costs.
- Changes in rent amounts paid by tenants and rent collection rates.
- Opportunities to obtain rental assistance or operating subsidies, such as with Shelter Plus Care or Section 8 certificates.
- Increased or shifted costs due to creating or reorganizing a housing administration function.
- Increased operating costs tied to building security (e.g. 24 hour front desk coverage)
- Changes in staffing patterns.
- Allocation of costs between services and operating budgets

Suggested action steps:

- ☑ Calculate the average income of your current transitional housing tenants.⁵ Compare this to the incomes of tenants of a permanent family housing provider in your community or in a similar community. This will help you to anticipate rent collection amounts and to decide whether you will need additional operating subsidies. Typically permanent supportive housing requires an operating subsidy to cover the difference between the rent a tenant can pay and the cost to operate the unit.
- ☑ Analyze your current program structure. Will converting to permanent housing mean you need a separate housing administrative function to collect rents, screen tenants, maintain properties, and so on?
- ☑ Consider whether you can bring in additional subsidies, such as Shelter Plus Care, if you convert, and determine if these subsidies will conflict with any current funding. Will operating revenues from rents and/or potential subsidies cover the costs of conversion?

7. Facility analysis

Finally, determine if the site or building you are converting will function well as permanent housing. If your program is a form of shared living, is it possible to convert the site to separate units? Housing is shared in some sites, but most permanent family housing programs have separate units for each family, including bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom in each unit. Do you need to consider other factors, such as tenant parking or the need for on-site services space? Also, is there deferred maintenance on the building that should be addressed? Conversion may be a good time to address some of the building's deficiencies and to interest funders in supporting the renovation of the building. Since you will be undertaking a lot of outreach and public relations work, these efforts may also offer opportunities to raise funds to meet some facility needs.

- ☑ Consult with staff and residents about how the site works now and what kind of changes will make it work better as permanent housing. Potential considerations are security and privacy in terms of entryways, the creation of private units or living areas, expanding the size of certain units to accommodate larger families, improving on-site space for services or recreation, and parking.
- ☑ Conversion may offer an opportunity to raise money for facility upgrade and deferred maintenance. Talk to potential funders about what you think you need to make the building function better as permanent housing.
- ☑ If you are going to reconfigure, you may want to partner with a developer or development consultant to help with funding, design issues, and construction oversight.

⁵ It has been reported in some communities that transitional housing projects that charge rent lose rental income from residents who cease to pay in the final months of residency because they know they will be made to leave when their time allotment runs out. If this is true for your project, take this into account when analyzing rent collection relative to both a transitional and permanent model.

How long will this process take?

Once you decide that conversion is the right direction for your organization, it is not possible to do it all immediately. Many of the necessary steps identified through analyzing the areas described above will take time, including modifying funding agreements and documents, changing program guidelines and staffing configurations, retraining staff and making modifications to your building. A sample timetable, adapted from a real project undergoing conversion, is provided below. Plan on the formal conversion process taking at least a year and maybe more, and for the shift in organizational culture to perhaps take several years. If you have been doing things one way for a long time, changing your approach may not be easy or immediate, so you may wish to hire a consultant, seek technical assistance from CSH, or contact other providers who have already been through this process. CSH can help you identify with which organizations to talk.

Sample timetable for conversion

This timetable is adapted from a real project that is undergoing conversion in Chicago. This example is for a project with primary funding from HUD SHP and with a building that is privately leased.

Date Completed	Activity/Tasks
October 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confirm with HUD that funding will allow conversion from transitional to permanent supportive housing.• Take conversion proposal to Board of Directors for approval.
November 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin discussions with participants informing them of change.• Begin meetings with additional funders to discuss impact of change and answer questions.
December 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Receive notification of HUD renewal funding for 2005 SHP round.
January 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine if changes are needed in the conditional use permit.• Change participant paperwork to reflect program change as of 7-1-06.
February 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meet with local Continuum of Care Board regarding plans to convert.• Begin development of staffing plan.• Begin discussion of supportive housing philosophy.
March 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare 2005 HUD technical submission as Transitional Housing.
June 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit 2006 SHP renewal application to HUD as Transitional Housing.
July 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If needed, apply for revised conditional use permit.• Revise intake paperwork.
August 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meet with owner regarding amending lease to reflect change in use of property.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop building safety procedures.
September 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify staff skill sets needed for new program. • Meet with staff to discuss conversion and timetable. • Plan site visits to other permanent supportive housing programs.
October 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop intake and waiting list procedures. • Write program policies and guidelines. • Develop information systems/reporting procedures. • Identify staff training needs. • Identify staff skill assessment tools. • Revise intake paperwork to reflect need for a disability. • Write up eligibility criteria.
November 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin revision of program rules and expectations. • Develop eviction prevention procedures. • Revise staff job descriptions. • Begin development of programming plan – case management and education / employment.
December 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training begins. • Receive notification of HUD renewal funding for 2006 SHP round.
January 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin accepting applications for permanent supportive housing. • Staff training continues.
February 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin interviewing candidates for permanent supportive housing. • Staff training continues.
March 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete interviewing candidates for permanent supportive housing • Staff training continues. • Prepare 2006 HUD technical submission – ask for amendment of HUD grant from Transitional to Permanent Supportive Housing.
April 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop list of first 30 tenants and waiting list. • Staff training continues. • Develop new program outcomes and indicators. • Meetings/linkage agreements with outside resources.
May 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap up staff training. • Complete hiring for staff positions.
June 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff orientation and team building.
July 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grand opening – Open House. • Apply for HUD 2007 renewal funding as Permanent Supportive Housing.

SHP Funding

Many transitional housing programs are funded through HUD Supportive Housing Program (SHP). SHP funds can be used for either transitional housing or permanent supportive housing, so it is possible to convert the contract. Generally, however, conversion from transitional housing to permanent supportive housing will be seen as a major change, because it requires both a change in the type of use and a change in the eligible population. Permanent housing under the SHP program is restricted to persons with disabilities – families served would need to meet the [HUD definition](#) of a disabled family. These changes will require an amendment to the SHP grant agreement.

Your HUD office will explain what you need to provide in order to request the change. At minimum, you will probably be required to:

- ☒ Describe to HUD why your project is no longer needed as transitional housing – how that need is being met in another way or is no longer applicable;
- ☒ Produce a letter from your Continuum of Care coordinator stating that the Continuum supports your decision and that your project would score equally well or better in your local rating and ranking process;
- ☒ Revise your HUD SHP technical submission to reflect the new program and target population. You may wish to revise your operating and services budgets at the same time, to reflect a permanent supportive housing budgeting approach.

Because of the long time period over which HUD conducts the annual Continuum of Care funding competition, the window in which you may request and get approval for such changes may be small. As soon as you know you are considering conversion, consult with your local Continuum of Care coordination agency to get its assistance in approaching HUD.

CHAPTER 2: TENANT ENGAGEMENT

This chapter looks at how to make a voluntary services approach work well in supportive housing. The goal of a voluntary-services model is to provide a broad range of accessible and useful services so that tenants can get the support they want, when they want it, in a way that works for them. When the tenant has choices about using services, proactive engagement strategies are essential.

A voluntary service model⁶ is based on the following principles:

- People have a right to safe, affordable housing.
- Housing is a person's home, not a residential treatment program.
- All tenants hold property leases and have the full rights and obligations of tenancy.
- Participation in services is voluntary and not a condition of tenancy.
- Staff must work to build relationships with tenants, particularly those who need support in maintaining their housing.
- Tenants prefer 'normal' living arrangements and practical, relevant, flexible support services that are designed to maximize their independence.
- Services are designed to be user-friendly and driven by tenant needs and individual goals.

Services are what distinguish **supportive** housing from merely **affordable** housing. Individuals and/or families are in an FSH project because they could likely benefit from support in order to remain housed and to thrive. Therefore, the objective is to create an atmosphere where tenants have enough trust and confidence to reach out for the support they and their families need, both in times of crisis and in a proactive way. The menu of relevant and useful services is an important strategy for engagement, as is flexibility and responsiveness to ensure that services meet tenants' changing needs. To be effective, services should be appealing and accessible; they should also help ensure housing stability and maximize each tenant's ability to be self-sufficient. A voluntary-services approach requires that the project team take creative, proactive steps to engage tenants. As a focus group participant clarified, "Services are voluntary for tenants, but mandatory for staff."

This chapter addresses these questions:

1. How do you do voluntary services well?
2. What package of services will engage your tenants?
3. How do you establish a service-based culture from the start?
4. How do you ensure that services are accessible?
5. How can a team engage tenants most effectively?
6. When should services be changed or modified?

It may be helpful to also read CSH's publication, [*Developing the "Support" in Supportive Housing*](#). This manual addresses service delivery issues, with details on employment, mental health,

⁶ From CSH, "[Developing a Supportive Housing Program](http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/library/shp/training/DevelopingServiceProgramC.pdf)."
(<http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/library/shp/training/DevelopingServiceProgramC.pdf>)

HIV/AIDS and substance use services, as well as chapters on community building and facing crisis and conflict.

How do you do voluntary services well?

This chapter gives a detailed answer to this question. In brief, however, these steps⁷ offer an overall framework for effective service engagement in family supportive housing.

- **Set the stage:** Become a familiar face. Begin to establish credibility with tenants in a non-threatening manner. The process can start at the initial interview before the family is accepted for tenancy.
- **Initiate the 'strategy':** Engage potential tenants in conversation, and provide incentive items with real and perceived benefits that promote trust. Help tenants to meet important needs. Know the locations of local libraries, recreation centers, food banks, childcare centers, after school programs and employment and day programs. Give each family at move in a booklet describing agency and local resources.
- **Sustain the relationship:** Engage families in conversation about everyday issues such as how things are going for their children in school. Don't make assumptions/judgments. Ask open-ended questions.
- **Organize activities:** Informal interaction also comes in the course of field trips to sporting and cultural events. By organizing family members around events they want to attend, the support services staff can build rapport and stronger relationships.
- **Proceed with outreach:** Help families to define service goals and activities as trust is established.
- **Be genuine:** Be observant/share observations based on behavior, don't be afraid to reflect reality back to tenants, e.g., “looks like you're losing weight.”
- **'Program' creatively:** Organize support groups that are not perceived by tenants as 'programmy' or therapeutic. At one site, substance users were attending weekly meetings on substance use. When the meeting name was changed to “Life Enhancement” and dealt with more global issues, such as issues of mental health, money management and independent life skills in addition to substance use, even more tenants attended.
- **Be a resource specialist:** Give choices and information. Host pre-natal, infant and parenting classes. Help families with the education needs of their children. Provide names of tutoring programs and education advocates.
- **Maintain consistency:** Avoid showing any signs of favoritism. Enforce professional standards of conduct for staff including family confidentiality and privacy.
- **Be inclusive: Solicit input.** Play to individuals' strengths using asset-based engagement.

What package of services will engage your tenants?

The short answer – tenant-centered services – seems self-evident but is in fact a useful guideline. In transitional housing and/or treatment model, the service package is pre-

⁷ From CSH, “[Designing Tenant Engagement Strategies in Scattered Site Housing](http://www.csh.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&PageID=199).” (<http://www.csh.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&PageID=199>)

defined; in family supportive housing, by contrast, a project must provide – or offer linkage to – a flexible array of activities and services to engage and draw tenants in. Tenants may stay in FSH for many years and so their needs will change over time. For staff accustomed to transitional housing, this necessity for creative, flexible, tenant-centered services may be the most significant change as they move into a voluntary services model.

Identify the services that are required in order for the project to meet its objectives. If the key objective is for families who are at risk of homelessness to maintain their housing, design services that take into account the needs of your specific tenant population and the support they may need to prevent and/or

It's misguided to think that homeless families don't need support services since we all build our own support systems. None of us is 'self-sufficient.' Most of us have support services in our lives.

respond to crises that threaten their housing stability. With housing stability in mind, services should be focused on supporting tenants in meeting their lease obligations, maintaining a safe and healthy living environment, allowing others the peaceful enjoyment of their homes and complying with basic house or community rules. Often a core of essential services is provided on-site - or at a community hub in scattered site models - and referrals are made to outside agencies for additional services. While the actual array of services will vary project to project, the most common services for families in supportive housing include⁸:

- Early intervention or problem solving on issues that may affect housing stability
- Referrals and assistance with accessing community-based services
- Advocacy or assistance in solving legal, financial or school system problems
- Facilitation of tenants' involvement with property management
- Adult education, employment skill development (both soft skills and hard skills), and job placement and retention services
- Health care
- Mental health counseling, therapy and support groups
- Substance use management and recovery services
- Parenting support
- Conflict resolution between and among tenants
- Recreation, community building, social and/or interest groups
- Childcare
- Children and youth services including academic support, after school enrichment, recreation, youth development and counseling services

Families bring particular needs. Experienced staff from existing family supportive housing projects offer the following considerations for determining service packages:

⁸ Adapted and excerpted from [Supportive Housing for Families Evaluation: Accomplishments and Lessons Learned](http://documents.csh.org/documents/Resource_Center/Family_Supportive_Housing_ExecSummary.pdf). A Report from Philliber Research Associates for the Corporation for Supportive Housing, Spring 2005. (http://documents.csh.org/documents/Resource_Center/Family_Supportive_Housing_ExecSummary.pdf)

- A significant number of families living in supportive housing may be newly reunified or have current interaction with the local Child Welfare Agency. Be prepared to support healthy parenting, family reunification and family preservation.
- Children are likely to comprise the majority of tenants in a family supportive housing project. Provide developmentally-appropriate, health, educational, recreational and employment services for children and youth (see [Chapter 3: Children and Youth Services](#)).
- A significant percentage of woman and children living in family supportive housing will have histories of past and/or current family violence. Be prepared to address domestic violence through services, security and community-building (see [Chapter 6: Domestic Violence](#)).
- It is often difficult for families to budget because children have many unexpected needs or wants. Financial management can be a particular challenge in single parent families. Offer financial planning workshops to help in this area.
- Food security can be a real issue for families living in supportive housing. Offer workshops in meal planning and shopping on a budget, and explore ways to provide food, through food banks, farmers markets or other means.

Examine what services are required for the community culture you want to establish. For example, if you wish to promote a non-violent community, in addition to rules against firearms, services such as domestic violence prevention and support are needed to make this expectation a reality.

Beyond providing core services, survey tenants to find out what additional services and activities they want, and then create customized programs that meet their needs and interests. In a voluntary service model, it is the team's responsibility to find out what people need and want, not to make people fit into what an agency offers. Classes that teach skills such as English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) or using the internet might be offered in addition to more traditional 'therapeutic' services. Yoga, music or creative writing classes can offer creative outlets and support tenants in building stress-management skills.

Develop programming that is linked with tenancy conditions. Workshops on the basics of daily living, such as recycling and cleaning the house, for example, can support tenants who are preparing to pass their annual property management inspections.

Our engagement starts with the rent up process. Once a family is approved – the conditions are that the family is homeless and one member has a disability – they come out to the site. Together, we assess their needs and goals – what they want to achieve in their life. When we take the position that we are investing in that family, they don't have a problem responding. The motivators are: good, affordable housing; taking care of their children; meeting their immediate needs for food, clothing and transportation. So we start with these goals. We present the tools they may need in order to reach their goals, so that they can make informed decisions. We create an environment that both supports and challenges the family – so that they feel that they have been successful.

Services related to children and youth are often very effective in engaging tenants – both the parents and the children and youth themselves. Chapter 3 discusses in some detail the design of services that aim to meet children’s needs and to break the generational cycle of homelessness. Here, it is important to note that children are often the first in a family to engage in activities, with parents drawn in later. Conversely, engaging parents in services may be crucial to ensure children’s safety and health.

Finally, although you may provide some services directly, ensure that staff are knowledgeable and can make referrals to outside agencies. This offers tenants choice, maximizes tenant’s independence and encourages their participation in the larger community.

How do you establish a service-based culture?

Establish an explicit culture of services from intake onwards. When you meet with new tenant families, create a respectful atmosphere of trust and mutual obligation, so that all family members understand what they can expect and what is expected of them.

Take practical steps to such as:

- Providing information packets about services and offer to introduce families to service providers at move-in, (see [“Tools for Scattered Site Housing – Moving In”](#))
- Distributing or posting fliers explaining services. Continue this on a regular basis.

Build expectations into housing retention. Specify the community’s values and standards up front, so that tenants are aware of these expectations from the start. They can be framed as formal agreements or contracts that the tenants draw up themselves, or can be kept less formal, as expectations embodied in the values and culture of the project. Find the best balance for your particular project and tenants.

When we move a tenant into a site, we all walk four blocks in each direction to see where everything is, stores, services, Alderman’s offices, etc. They get a sense of whether it is safe at night to be walking and begin to build a relationship with staff.

How do you ensure that services are accessible?

Take steps to ensure that services are easily available and to engage tenants to participate. As staff, you are in the marketing business, and your tenants are your customers. For example:

- In single site projects, ensure services staff spend time in the lobby or common space, either formally or informally, so that they can interact more easily with tenants.
- Ensure that services staff are working

The biggest challenge is people paying their portion of the rent. They could lose their housing for not paying rent, but it’s almost impossible to get kicked out of our project. We meet the person right there. We don’t make anything mandatory. We try to take some of the typical thinking out of their head, just let them live. “You are not in prison where we try to make you do everything.” We keep it real simple.

- at times that are convenient for tenants, such as early mornings, evenings, and weekends.
- Ensure that staff reflect the demographics of the community and that they have fluency in languages other than English, when relevant.
- Keep an open office door; play music that will attract tenants' attention.
- Allow tenants to approach services on their own terms.
- Even when a tenant says they are not interested in support, continue to provide opportunities for engagement.
- Combine social events with educational components. Provide food.
- Keep appointments and be flexible about scheduling. Where possible, allow for drop-in appointments.
- Provide childcare.
- Post attractive and creative notices in public places about new services, groups, and community meetings.
- For scattered site projects, send out frequent mailings with up-to-date service and program information.

Involve tenants in providing services for each other. For example, family members can co-facilitate workshops or groups; older youth can play a role in mentoring younger children; and parents can volunteer in after school activities and tutoring. Offer volunteer incentives and in-house internships. Tenants can also be quite helpful in an advisory role to staff, particularly offering suggestions to improve service delivery and design.

Maintain staff in the building's community space so it can be used by tenants. Alternatively, change the requirement that staff be present. For example, consider requiring a deposit, then allowing tenants to use community space on their own for special events.

When should services be changed or modified?

Services may need to be changed when there is reduced demand for them from tenants. In transitional housing, tenants move on after a specified period and services are often tailored to that short-term cycle. However, tenants may stay in family supportive housing indefinitely, and services may need to change as people's needs change. Anticipate also that tenants may withdraw from services once their needs are met, but then may come back at a later time as new needs emerge. Effective tenant engagement requires a balance between continuity and responsiveness in service design and programming.

I find that need motivates people. Once a need is met, they move on to other needs.

Identify and address obstacles to tenant engagement. Recognize the complex barriers that may prevent tenants from using available services. For example, many tenants operate in a crisis mode and it is hard to engage them between crisis episodes. They may fear that they

will be evicted if they ask for help, or be reported to Child Protective Services if they reveal parenting challenges.⁹

These signs may indicate that engagement strategies and/or services need re-thinking:

- Tenants only take advantage of services when their situation is desperate;
- Parents lack curiosity about their children's participation in services;
- Community involvement is lacking;
- Tenants hold a 'nothing expected/nothing required' attitude; and/or
- There is evidence of unmanaged mental health issues and/or increasing substance use in tenants' homes and/or increasing stress within households and/or in the community-at-large.

In general, if tenants are not using services, there is probably something wrong with the services, not with the tenants.

The process of developing a cooperative and supportive environment is not linear. We might think that things are going well, routine chores are being carried out, people are getting along, but then something happens and the equilibrium changes. We have to understand that households and communities are dynamic and subject to change. We might need to re-build relationships and skills that we thought tenants and staff had already acquired.¹⁰

⁹ Adapted from The Urban Institute and Harder Company: *Family Permanent Supportive Housing Report*.

¹⁰ From CSH, "[Designing Tenant Engagement Strategies in Scattered Site Housing.](http://www.csh.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&PageID=199)" (<http://www.csh.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&PageID=199>)

CHAPTER 3: CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Many families who move into permanent supportive housing have histories of trauma and homelessness and like their parents and other adults, children carry with them the effects of these experiences. Homeless children are 66% more likely to have at least one major mental disability that interferes with daily activities than children who have not been homeless, and are 150% more likely to experience anxiety, depression, or withdrawal. Formerly homeless children also suffer in an academic setting, as 45% of them did not attend school on a regular basis while homeless. Homeless children are twice as likely to repeat a grade, often due to frequent absences and moves to new schools, while 28% attend three or more schools in a single year.¹¹ (See [“Signs of Stress in Children”](#) and [“Impact of Homelessness on Child Development”](#))

These and other challenges engendered by homelessness persist long after children move into permanent housing with their families. If these problems go unaddressed, children remain at high risk for school failure, delinquency, chronic depression, substance abuse, suicide, and adult homelessness – even after they are housed. Identifying strategies for working with children and youth in supportive housing to alleviate such devastating effects is key to ending the cycle of homelessness.

Best practices developed for single adult supportive housing projects need conscious adaptation in order to be effective for family supportive housing (FSH) where children are likely to comprise the majority of tenants. Effective FSH therefore calls for space, activities, and staff dedicated to children and youth as an essential component of services. In addition to health and mental health services, age-appropriate programs should emphasize activities that build self-esteem, community, and a range of skills: leadership, academic, vocational, and social. On-site children/youth programs should provide sanctuary for young tenants: a place where they can feel good about themselves and where they can begin to let go of the stress that they experience in their lives. Include outcomes for children when measuring the success of a given project and find ways to engage children in program development, implementation, and evaluation.

With children, FSH projects have the potential to invest in the future – to promote the possibility that these young people can experience healthy adult lives. To support children to break the cycle of homelessness, create broad and innovative programs and hire management and staff capable of acting on this powerful vision.

This chapter addresses these questions:

- 1. How do you design effective services for children and youth?**
- 2. How do children’s needs inform physical design?**
- 3. What kind of services promote youth development?**
- 4. How do you staff an effective children/youth program?**
- 5. How should the project engage with parent-child relations?**
- 6. How can the project best support the children’s education?**

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education, 1999. Better Homes Fund, 1999.

How do you design effective services for children and youth?

While the rest of the chapter will give more detail on designing these services, answering the following questions for your own FSH project will provide a good beginning framework for your services planning.

1. What is the driving philosophy of your children/youth services?

For example, “positive youth development.”

2. What are the goals of children/youth services?

Examples may include:

- To provide fun, safe, educational, and recreational activities for children/youth;
- To provide opportunities for the children/youth to develop positive, healthy relationships with adults and their peers;
- To provide opportunities for children/youth to engage in activities that nurture their development, build their esteem, develop healthy socialization skills, and build community;
- To connect children/youth with opportunities and activities available in the broader community;
- To provide families with opportunities to interact with one another in positive and healthy ways.

3. Who will the children/youth program serve?

- What age group(s)?
- Tenants only? Or will programming be offered to other children in the neighborhood?

4. What is available in the project’s neighborhood/community? What is the service gap for children/youth services?

5. What resources do you have for the children/youth program? What additional resources will you need?

Resources should include:

- Dedicated space, child and youth friendly furniture, equipment, materials, and supplies (art, educational, recreational);
- Staff and collaborating partners;
- Field trip/recreation fund, stipends, and incentives.

6. What hours will you schedule children/youth programming?

- Consider after-school, evening, weekend, and summer schedules.

7. How will you address liability?

Explore these areas:

- A healthy staff/child ratio,
- Staff credentials and ongoing staff training,
- Service availability (or not) when parents are not on site,
- Team familiarity with mandated child-abuse reporting laws.

- Licensed vs. non-licensed services

There are pros and cons to having licensed services. Licensing puts requirements on adult/child ratios, staff credentials, insurance and facilities and may open up funding opportunities. There are some program types (recreation and education) that are exempt from licensure. Whichever route you choose, you must understand what restrictions that choice will create regarding the kinds of services and supervision you can and cannot provide, and under what circumstances you can provide them. Consult with your city or county Social Services/Family and Children's Services Agency to learn more about the regulations in your community.

8. How will you involve children/youth in program design and implementation?

9. How will the children/youth program involve adult family members? How will it connect to the broader array of services in the building and in the community?

10. How will the children/youth program staff connect with other staff and service team members?

- Develop confidentiality and communication protocols.

How do children's needs inform physical design?

If you are developing a single-site family supportive housing project, keep children's needs in mind when selecting a location for the building. Neighborhoods with lots of crime and drug use can be especially challenging for children, who may develop tough attitudes to cope with the environment. If you must locate your project in such a neighborhood, make sure that you allocate adequate and secure indoor and outdoor space for children to congregate and play safely.

Naturally, children need a safe place to play and develop in any environment. Unfortunately, many existing single-site supportive housing projects lack dedicated space for children. Project staff have found that children will play in the hallways, lobbies, and other community spaces if there is no allocated recreation place. In addition to being important for children, dedicated play space means that parents know where their children are. Dedicated space for children should be centrally and conveniently located, not a hidden room somewhere that must be locked when not supervised. It should be open, particularly for infants and toddlers, to support their gross motor skills and cognitive development. The space should also be large enough to accommodate groups of children and youth; frequent interaction with peers is critical for social development.

New family developments should design dedicated space for children, including green space and dirt, as well as indoor space in which to play and learn. Indoor space can serve as a homework/learning center and outdoor space (including green space and dirt/grass) allows urban children fresh air and exercise. For the same reasons, existing programs can consider adapting rooftop space for community open areas and or establishing a community garden.

Physical design should include space for all ages: playgrounds for toddlers and young children; a gym, basketball court, computer room and hang-out space for older children and

teens, suitable for after-school, evening, and weekend activities. With childhood obesity on the rise, especially amongst older children and youth, large and open indoor and/or outdoor space that can accommodate physical activity is ideal. For indoor spaces, furnish rooms with durable children and youth friendly furniture (such as smaller tables and chairs).

Consider situating children's space to allow for passive observation on the part of staff. For example, create a playroom next to the services office with a window in between. Children benefit greatly from accessible spaces like these. If the children's service coordinator has her/his own office, children will stop by the office to talk, often yielding valuable one-on-one time. Providing office space for children's staff enables them to hold open office time for the children.

Because they see children as an insurance risk, some property managers forbid them to play in common areas without adult supervision. This is limiting for the children and difficult to enforce consistently. The result can be unhealthy and discouraging relationships not only with the children but also with families as a whole. In addition to designing or allocating both indoor and outdoor spaces for children, try to involve property management within a team approach, as explained in [Chapter 7](#).

What kind of services promote youth development?

In programming for children and youth, consider both the potential and needs of the young person as a whole, rather than only her or his problems. It may be helpful to familiarize your team with the principles of youth development. This is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences that help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent.¹² Positive youth development addresses the broader developmental needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models that focus solely on youth problems.

Youth development strategies, therefore, focus on providing young people with opportunities to build skills, exercise leadership, form relationships with caring adults, and help their communities. A youth development approach is characterized by these three components:

- Viewing young people and families as partners, rather than as clients, and involving them in designing and delivering programs and services;
- Giving children and youth access to both prevention and intervention services and programs that meet their developmental needs;
- Offering youth opportunities to develop relationships with caring, supportive adults.¹³

¹² National Youth Development Information Center. A Project of the National Collaboration for Youth (www.nydic.org).

¹³ Family and Youth Services Bureau [FYSB], quoted in the [National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth brochure](http://www.nydic.org/nydic/programming/whatis/terms.htm) (<http://www.nydic.org/nydic/programming/whatis/terms.htm>).

In addition to the design questions discussed in the previous section, program development for children and youth living in FSH should consider the following recommendations and guidelines:

Children in supportive housing should be able to participate in all the same things as other kids. From the first day, if they feel different, 'less than,' it goes deep.¹⁴

Develop services that counter the unpredictability and trauma of homelessness

The needs of children and their families do not disappear once they secure housing; in fact, having the foundation of stable housing is often what makes it possible for children and youth to begin to strengthen their physical, mental, emotional, and family health. It is often only after formerly homeless children have been housed for six months or more that they begin to feel safe enough to reveal the symptoms of their trauma and, by doing so, can begin to heal. Therefore:

- Encourage innovative programming. Recognize that children's behavior is often a result of their traumatic life experiences, and create programs to deal constructively with the past and current traumas of the children.
- Engage in routines, play, communications, and interactions that intentionally promote child development. (See ["Practical Program on Child Development"](#))
- Make sure that the program is predictable and consistent (staff, time, place) so that the children and youth know what to look forward to.
- Draw clear guidelines for behavior in the children/youth space. This is important for teaching limits and discipline, and for ensuring safety.
- Devote energy and resources to these programs. Children/youth services work – children are looking for positive connections with adults and their peers, and they will respond favorably to creative and dedicated programming.
- Hire staff with skills, energy and motivation to work with children and youth.
- Incorporate peer-led support groups, which work well with older children and youth to help build self-esteem and leadership skills.

I think girls unfortunately are quieter and tend to fall through the cracks more than boys do.

A staff leader began a teen-group program three years ago. Of our teen girls, two have given birth and one is pregnant. We know we need to address sexuality but only with parents' permission. We plan to have parents to co-facilitate these sessions. We started this program saying, "This is what we think you need." Now, we ask them, try to be more respectful of what they request. In a current group, for example, the kids are discussing what they think they need in order to be successful.

¹⁴ From CSH, "[Designing Tenant Engagement Strategies in Scattered Site Housing](http://www.csh.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&PageID=199)." (<http://www.csh.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&PageID=199>)

Connect children and youth to services and activities in the broader community

Ensure that children in family supportive housing can participate in the same activities as other children at their school or in their neighborhood. Some children/youth will want to use on-site or project-based services and others won't, so it is important to have links with broader community resources. Consider partnering with a neighborhood-based children/youth organization to help bridge access. Accompany children to local recreation centers to introduce them to outside opportunities. Set up car-pooling or other transportation to take children to off-site activities on an ongoing basis, especially those that would otherwise require children to walk through dangerous areas.

Engage children and parents concurrently

Children play an important role in community building, both in their own right and by drawing parents together in community activities. In many projects, children are more involved in activities than their parents. Engaging children and parents in

At our holiday party, one of the most popular activities is taking holiday pictures. Each family can take pictures of themselves, because many don't have family pictures.

Through our life skills program, we have learned that everything works much better if parents are involved. We have a Parents Advisory Council team, ten or twelve parents, specific to the supportive housing program. We answer questions like, "How do I participate?" Every parent has a team of other parents to talk with.

Our goal is to have those kids grow up healthy, strong, and stable enough that they don't become homeless as adults. In the shelter context, in the congregations, the volunteers want to know why the moms just disappear. We say, "engage the kids, then we can bring the moms in." So I transferred that approach from the shelters to our permanent supportive housing project.

Creative programming experiences:

In our first year, we had lots of problems with kids hanging out in the community, doing things they weren't supposed to be doing. So we developed a lot more programming, working with colleges, volunteers, and after-school programming. We bring in other people to help us out, such as girl-scout troupes, tap and ballet classes. I had no idea cooking would be so popular. So we got a chef to teach them and help them cook. And then the parents got involved as the kids said, "Hey mom, taste what I made!"

We have a socialization club that meets with kids and talks about things like how to handle bullies, being recruited for gangs, and so on.

Children are helping to plant flowers in the backyard – this is just beginning to flourish. We aim to instill in the kids a sense of their place and wanting to keep it nice.

We offer activities for children, such as arts and crafts, while their mothers are in group. Staff also scout out low cost and/or affordable excursion opportunities in our community such as free days at museums.

We had a Halloween party with the kids. They went from apartment to apartment.

activities together can strengthen their relationships with each other and support healthy family functioning. Hold concurrent parent/child education time. For example, have a GED class for parents at the same time as homework-help hour for their children. Provide opportunities for activities in the broader community, such as field trips and movies that involve the whole family.

Provide age-appropriate and gender-specific activities and services

Plan age-, gender-, and developmentally-appropriate activities, including some time/space for teens. Parents in one family supportive housing project have helped to organize regular dances for their teens.

Involve children/youth in program design and implementation

Involve the entire community in determining what activities and services to offer. Include children on tenant councils and/or create a children and/or youth council. Open office hours for the children are a good idea in general, and will also help to get their input in program design. Have children/youth define rules for their space. Engage older youth in a program through which they can mentor and support the younger ones, and provide stipends for older youth who assist in children's programming.

Participants in San Francisco's Bayview Commons Children/Youth Focus Group expressed these needs and desires:

Fewer restrictions

Fewer evictions

To be allowed to make noise and to express our own opinions

Fewer inspections of units

The cameras taken down so people can't spy

Change 9pm building curfew

A rock star to visit

More respect for kids – don't accuse us automatically

A store in the building that sells snacks and drinks

A karate class

Holiday parties

Movie night

Board games

After-school program

Free time in the community room

Trips (to Six Flags and for a BBQ in the park)

More time to talk with the resident manager

Meetings like this where you can say what's on your mind

Outdoor activities (a basketball hoop, a playground for older kids, space to play sports)

A water fountain in courtyard

Bars on windows facing courtyard so we can play sports without breaking windows

Tables in the courtyard for art projects

Indoor activities

Video games in community room

More houses

A band for people who live here

Incentives to participation are important in children/youth services. One project distributes “caught you being good” gift coins when children participate in activities such as cleaning up the yard.

How do you staff an effective children/youth program?

A number of factors influence the answer to this question. Staffing the program yourself (versus working with an outside collaborator) may give a project more flexibility; you are able to change the program as the population ages and their needs change. On the other hand, partnering with a children/youth-specific organization, such as a

As well as gift certificates for kids, we have 'caught you being good' coins – just for the kids. We had a community clean-up day, and it was cold; we were out there for two hours picking up trash and the kids worked hard. So, where we can't always get the parents involved, we can get the kids involved.

YMCA, after-school program, or community recreation center can mean that your project gains access to an experienced staff, an array of community resources, and a broader pool of potential funding. (For an example of collaboration, see [Profile 2: San Francisco's Homeless Children's Network/Family Supportive Housing Collaboration](#))

Regardless of whether you partner or staff the program yourself, children and youth need staff who are consistent and focused on working with them. The relationship between the children/youth and the staff is key to the young people's engagement and thus key to the success of the program. When hiring, assess applicants' understanding of child development as well as for their sensitivity to the possible special needs of formerly homeless children and youth. (See ["Signs of Stress in Children"](#) and ["Impact of Homelessness on Child Development"](#))

It is important that children/youth staff have access to the overall service team for both sharing information and getting support. Encourage all project team members, not just the children/youth specialists, to make connections with the children. For example, allocate time within work hours for all staff to participate in children's activities (outings, sports, and so on.)

See [Chapter 7](#) for more recommendations about building your project's team.

How should the project handle parent-child relations?

Children experiencing homelessness often end up carrying the burdens of their family. They may find themselves in a precarious position between their families and the housing project. For example, some families rely on their children in order to qualify for subsidized housing. Additional challenges exist for children in newly reunified families.

We have learned that all children's services work much better if parents are involved.

Family supportive housing must keep a delicate balance between avoiding the danger of usurping parents' responsibilities and authority on the one hand, and, on the other, responding to the need to provide services and support that promote children's healthy development. While reinforcing the parent's role as primary caregiver is always important, sometimes it becomes necessary for supportive housing staff to step in more actively on a temporary basis while simultaneously supporting the parent to regain their role as caregiver.

Confidentiality and respect for the parent's role must be observed and are important considerations for the staff working with children or youth. On one hand, they must resist the temptation to "use kids as a second set of eyes and ears" to find out what the parents are doing. For a child to tell tales on their family can be dangerous and harmful on many levels. But on the other hand, staff can learn a great deal from the children about what is going on for the family, and it is important that they be attentive to signs and messages that children are sending, consciously or unconsciously. Ask yourself if the child's trust is being violated in any sense – the answer may be a useful gauge in seeking this delicate balance. Pay attention to parents' preferences for on-site or off-site services for their children. The latter (off-site services preferred) might indicate a healthy desire for their children to be integrated into the larger community. Alternatively, it might indicate a concern that their children will tell 'family secrets' to staff – a danger signal to staff. In general, the ideal is to offer a mix of project-based and community-based services.

School staff don't necessarily recognize our parents as the support they need to be. Before staff really realize what is happening, they tend to take over the role that the parents should be playing. Instead of having the parents say, "I know my child best and what is good for them," the professionals are telling them what they need to do. Two kids were severely handicapped—they had been in a car accident—and 22 professionals got involved. I said, "We won't decide anything unless the father thinks this is the right thing to do."

We have daily contact with kids, so we see behaviors that reveal early what's really going on at home, before the parents might talk about it. Part of the challenge is about confidentiality: how much do I as the youth coordinator need to know about the mom? There may be a safety issue, so this kind of coordination acts like a filtering device.

We take the position that the principle person is the parent, not the child. We only work with the child once we have the parent's permission. We don't make decisions or recommendations to the child without the parent – so that they know we are working with them to help them meet the needs of their family and not taking over the role of the parent in the process. For example, donors want to be Santa Claus, but we say no, they need to talk to the parent, to ask how they want to give gifts. It is the parent's choice, whether things are given through the parent or by the donor. We believe that this approach is healthier – for the parent to lead.

If the child does something wrong, we talk to the parent about it so that they can address it. This opens up the conversation to support the parent. We may talk with them about root causes of behaviors. We may talk about things to work on such as spending time with the child other than cooking and homework – how to have fun together, share something other than the day-to-day grind to get to know your children. I find that parents then see themselves, they come to understand how their children are similar to them in these moments. So, in the engagement process, our goal is to build a strong relationship with the head of household.

We do work with everyone in the household. How to support the adult and make sure kids are safe? This is why you work with the child as well. The children will let you know what is going on. We have child advocates at our agency and work with parents on behaviors that might hurt their children. They provide services for the adult, to build up the adult in front of the child.

Parents' responsibility and authority should be honored. Children's services should not be a 'dumping off' facility. However, for parents feeling overwhelmed by life's demands, it may be a great relief to send their children to safe services for a few hours a day or for several hours a week.

How can the project support the children's education?

Children and youth who have been in homeless situations experience developmental delays that hamper academic achievement at four times the rate of children in the general population and are three times more likely to show signs of a learning disability.¹⁵ They are also twice as likely to repeat a grade, often due to frequent absences and moves to new schools. While they are homeless, 45% do not attend school on a regular basis and 28% go to three or more schools in a single year.¹⁶

At the same time, success in school has proven a viable route out of poverty and homelessness. Without the opportunity to receive a quality education, formerly homeless children are much less likely to acquire the skills they need to break cycles of poverty and homelessness as adults. Supportive housing environments should do everything they can to support access to quality education, working with students, parents, and schools to break down barriers to young tenants' academic success.

First and foremost, project staff can meet with neighborhood schools before families move into supportive housing. This simple step can make a big difference in helping schools prepare for and welcome children from formerly homeless families. Staff can also educate themselves about the local school districts' enrollment policies, school calendar, and after-school and summer programs so that this information can be provided to families directly upon – or, ideally, even before – move-in. Promote awareness among families of the

We have 65 children across a broad age-range from infants to 18-year-olds. The biggest struggle with our after-school program is getting the parents involved so that it doesn't just feel like babysitting.

Parents used to say they couldn't participate because they have young kids, so we provided childcare. Staff alternate taking care of kids, from infants to eleven-year-olds. We offer a thirteen-week parenting class, using a book about multi-ethnic parenting. Two staff facilitate and two do childcare.

We had such a high parent participation rate in our kids' programs that we had to put in place a safety net for the kids whose parents didn't show up. There might be thirty kids with parents and five without – this was very hurtful to those kids, so we got volunteers at the ready in case a parent didn't show up so those kids could still participate.

One little boy in 5th grade can remember attending nine different schools in 1st grade alone. He is now acting out about that.

¹⁵ Zima, D.T., et al, February 1997. "Sheltered homeless children: their eligibility and unmet need for special education evaluations." *American Journal of Public Health* (<http://www.ajph.org>).

¹⁶ U.S. Dept. of Education, 1999. Better Homes Fund, 1999.

importance of early care and education and how to access these services in your community. Early childhood years influence the effectiveness of all subsequent education efforts.

The [McKinney-Vento Act](#) is a federal law that requires that homeless children and youth be given equal access to the same, free, appropriate education, including preschool, that is provided to other children and youth. The legislation gives homeless students the right to stay in their school of origin, even if they move; to enroll in a new school without proof of residency, immunization and school records, or other papers; to get transportation to school; to attend a preschool program; and to receive all the services they need for a meaningful education. These mandates remain in effect throughout the academic year during which a formerly homeless family moves into housing. Therefore, new tenants in supportive housing projects should be assured all of their rights under this legislation.

The Act requires that every local educational agency designate a liaison for students who are homeless and specifies their legal responsibilities. On behalf of families new to supportive housing, staff should identify the local school district's Homeless Liaison and contact them to discuss and coordinate support and services.

Parents are central to facilitating positive educational outcomes. It has been found that the degree of parental involvement in education is more significant to student success than the parents' income or education. Improved student achievement and behavior, reduced absenteeism, and restored parental confidence in education are among the proven positive results of parent involvement.¹⁷ Supportive housing staff can help build bridges between school and parents. This may involve educating teachers and school officials about supportive housing, and/or supporting parents to build the confidence to get involved in their children's schooling. Specific suggestions include:

We ask the teachers to come to the site for the meetings – to go to the families rather than expect them to come to the school. One teacher was having a BBQ, creating ease and a comfort level. We tell the teachers, it takes a lot of time to track the parents down so it would save time to just meet the parents at home. The parents don't mind at all to have the teachers come into their homes.

We had to tell the school that they need to talk to the parent first; don't call us to make decisions.

- Invite the Homeless Liaison in your school district and/or the Principals or Parent Liaisons from your neighborhood schools to a community night to meet your tenants.
- Ensure that someone on your staff team is knowledgeable about navigating the school district – from preschool through high school.
- Provide opportunities for parents to connect with and mentor other parents around educational issues.
- Develop confidentiality agreements and releases of information that protect families' privacy rights while allowing schools and the FSH program to share relevant information, when appropriate.

¹⁷ Institutes for Responsive Education. The Home School Connection: Selected Partnership Program in Large Cities, Boston.

- Assist parents in finding realistic and accessible venues for participation in their children's education, such as reading aloud to children, introducing early learning experiences to stimulate cognitive development, actively acknowledging the relationship between child achievement and parent expectations, showing interest in progress at school, helping with homework, discussing the value of a good education and possible career options, requesting an Individualized Education Plan or some other kind of assessment, and keeping in touch with teachers and school staff.
- Ensure that your common space environments promote and model literacy and education through the presence of books and other written materials, and through family literacy programming or mobile book services.
- Hold an annual back-to-school event to provide parents with information for the upcoming school year and to provide students with backpacks and school supplies.

We found that we needed a volunteer to do homework when the parents aren't able to assist the kids. Many parents had horrible experiences in schools and may not be capable of helping their children.

We prepare the parent: what to do at a parent-teacher conference. We think the children should be there. So many parents have had such negative experiences that they walk into the school and just shut down. We help them realize they all need to be on the team.

We've had an advocacy program come in to work with parents about conferences. They offered great tips on how the parents can be more positive, not just throw their hands up.

Many of our children are labeled special needs because they're acting out; they might not have the formal diagnosis but they have the behaviors. These can be a convenient cover up for what they don't know (low reading skills, for example) especially for the boys. I have one boy whose verbal skills are excellent but his reading is 1st grade level. You'd never know by talking to him and he'd never own up to it. So we have the parent there and we read with the kids.

CHAPTER 4: HARM REDUCTION

In the world of supportive housing, harm reduction is an approach to increasing both access to housing and housing stability and retention. While it is not possible to do more than introduce some key concepts here, this chapter offers a definition of harm reduction, the case for adopting the approach within family supportive housing, and practitioners' guidelines for implementing a harm reduction model.

Harm reduction is defined as a set of practical strategies that reduce the negative consequences associated with drug and alcohol use, including safer use, managed use, and non-punitive abstinence. These strategies meet drug and alcohol users where they are, addressing the conditions and motivations of drug use, along with the use itself. Harm reduction acknowledges an individual's ability to take responsibility for their own behavior as it affects them, their loved ones, and the community. This approach fosters an environment where individuals can openly discuss substance use without fear of judgment or reprisal, and does not condone or condemn drug use. Staff working in a harm reduction setting work in partnership with tenants and are expected to respond directly to unacceptable behaviors, whether or not the behaviors are related to substance use. The harm reduction model has been successfully broadened to reducing harms related to other health and wellness issues, such as HIV/AIDS and mental illness.¹⁸

The following values and practices underlie the application of harm-reduction strategies to families living in supportive housing:

- Families deserve safe, affordable housing regardless of their special needs.
- Services and service plans in supportive housing are tenant-driven. Services are designed to maximize independence, they are available as and when needed, and they are flexible and responsive to tenants' needs.
- Services in supportive housing aim to help people reduce the harm associated with their special needs such as substance use, mental illness, or health-related complications.
- Services focus on helping tenants stay housed by assisting them to meet the obligations of tenancy such as paying rent.
- In an open and non-judgmental atmosphere, tenants are encouraged to explore the obstacles to the achievement of their goals. Staff take steps not to alienate tenants or cause them to hide substance use or psychiatric symptoms.
- In helping people to achieve goals they set for themselves, a trusting relationship is established.
- Participation in services is not a condition of tenancy (the voluntary-services model). Instead, the focus is on making services attractive to tenants.

By acknowledging the complex forces that keep a person using or addicted, harm reduction offers an alternative to the sobriety model, in which tenants must remain clean and sober as a condition of tenancy.

¹⁸ Adapted from CSH's Ending Long-Term Homelessness Toolkit, (<http://www.csh.org/toolkit>).

This chapter addresses these questions:

- 1. Why shift to a harm-reduction approach?**
- 2. How do you implement harm reduction?**

Why shift to a harm-reduction approach?

The most persuasive argument for harm reduction is that it works. Beginning with the needle exchanges that dramatically reduced hepatitis and HIV infection in Europe, research has found that a neutral stance towards any behavior makes change far more likely. Projects applying a harm-reduction approach say that it makes it easier to engage and build relationships with families.

While accepting that harm reduction is effective for single adults, some people have reservations about implementing it in FSH. However, to refuse housing to a family because one or more members are not abstinent runs counter to the family's best interests, including those of the children. Strict policies which require new tenants to be alcohol or drug-free for a period of time before becoming tenants, or those with abstinence rules, may discourage tenants from admitting or seeking help for drug or alcohol use out of fear that their housing may be threatened.

A harm reduction philosophy, on the other hand, shapes policies and programs that acknowledge but do not condone that many tenants do use substances. The question then becomes one of strategy: How do staff ensure a non-judgmental approach, allowing parents and other adults the right to make their own decisions, while ensuring the protection and safety of children? Staff from FSH projects implementing harm reduction strategies recommend the following to promote children's health and safety:

We were considering — 'What about harm reduction?' — so we went into the whole thing with a psychologist, property managers, and social workers. We're calling it 'behavioral responsibility.' In other words, if it affects other folks, you, or your children, if it becomes a problem, then you are responsible for resolving it.

- Engage parents in ongoing conversations about the possible effects of their drug or alcohol use on their children.
- Involve parents and the community as a whole in setting rules and guidelines for the express purpose of protecting children.
- More broadly, build community within the project, as a foundation for parents to take harm-reducing measures themselves, such as asking a neighbor to take care of the children when they are under the influence themselves.
- Acknowledge that there can exist an inter-relatedness between child neglect and substance abuse. Make parenting support, training, and childcare available. Safe, engaging children's services are essential in harm reduction environments.

How do you implement harm reduction?

Projects that embrace a harm reduction approach strive to create environments in which tenants can discuss substance use and other behaviors without fear of judgment. Education

is provided, along with access to treatment and other resources so that individuals are fully informed and can make their own choices. In a harm reduction setting, staff work in partnership with tenants and are expected to respond directly to unacceptable behaviors, and to the effects these behaviors have on the tenant's life, their family, and their community, whether or not the behaviors are related to substance abuse.¹⁹ Clearly defined and pragmatic harm reduction guidelines can set realizable goals for users and help reduce potential harm. These may include:

- Alcohol use, drug use and public intoxication are not permitted in community areas of the building or in front of buildings.
- The selling or distributing of drugs is not allowed in the building or in front of the building.
- Behaviors that disturb other tenants are unacceptable.
- Tenants are responsible for paying their rent.²⁰

(See the [Lease Addendum for the Community Engagement Program](#))

Harm reduction requires a conscious shift in service approach by individuals and teams and may be a new idea for staff coming from a treatment or mandatory service background. Staff may need time to develop an understanding of the value of the approach. They will benefit from regular consultation and a forum in which to vent their frustrations and disappointments among their peers. Increasing staff members' understanding will also help reduce their judgment of tenants, and thus enable them to work more effectively.

To ensure safety, and a sense of boundaries for tenants and staff, identify in advance what determines the 'bottom line.' In other words, when is it appropriate to call in outside intervention, such as the police or child welfare?

Staff members from FSH projects that are implementing harm reduction strategies offer a range of recommendations, based on their experiences.

- Harm reduction is a philosophy, a consciousness. To implement it well, everyone – from property managers, to service staff, to outside partners – must be on the same page.
- Teams require regular and ongoing training in harm reduction to help increase staff's understanding and to help keep personal judgments in check.
- Teams also benefit from ongoing clinical consultation about how to implement harm reduction practices. Regular consultation will help staff recognize that some tenants will have many ups and downs and there are ways to stick with them regardless.
- If you are going to do it, get all the way committed to a harm reduction approach. If you do harm reduction half-way, it doesn't work.
- Building relationships between staff and tenants, and between tenants and their peers in the community, is an important aspect of harm reduction. Tenant communities can become self-monitoring and promote care for each other in ways that are impossible when individuals and families are isolated.

¹⁹ Adapted from CSH's Ending Long-Term Homelessness Toolkit, (<http://www.csh.org/toolkit>).

²⁰ Adapted and excerpted from [Supportive Housing for Families Evaluation: Accomplishments and Lessons Learned](#). A Report from Philliber Research Associates for the Corporation for Supportive Housing, Spring 2005. (http://documents.csh.org/documents/Resource_Center/Family_Supportive_Housing_ExecSummary.pdf)

- Harm reduction is a very ‘hands-on’ approach. Large caseloads can make it difficult (although not impossible) to implement harm reduction well because staff may not have the opportunity to intervene before a crisis hits.
- Acknowledge that food security can be a real issue for families living in supportive housing. Poverty plays a role in the decisions people make; parents may engage in risk-taking behavior such as prostitution or dealing because it puts food on the table. If this is the case, explore ways to provide food and other needs.
- The basics of harm reduction must be learned and applied. Since there is not much that is black and white, judgment calls must be made. Team building among service providers is very important in harm reduction environments because team members can support each other in making those important judgment calls.
- Learn and use techniques such as motivational interviewing to help tenants overcome the ambivalence that may keep them from making desired changes in their lives.

People may not see themselves as having done a lot – so, review with them the progress they have made. Remind them: your kids saw you when you were a junkie or a prostitute and now they see you in a more positive way. Always work with the male figures in the household. I tell them: do what you do, but use moderation and don't destroy your family. I am the same as you – I just turned right instead of left. You make mistakes but you learn from them.

CHAPTER 5: LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

This chapter examines the interrelated themes of building community and fostering tenant leadership. Both grow out of effective strategies to engage tenants in voluntary services (as explored in [Chapter 2](#)) and can, in turn, greatly enhance tenant engagement: this can become a constructive cycle.

Community building is an integral component of supportive housing and a key to its success. Fostering relationships with and among tenants enhances the overall stability of a supportive housing project. Tenant involvement in the life and leadership of an FSH project can make the difference between being just a place to live and being a real home. Encouraging a sense of ownership in the community promotes mutual understanding, cooperation, and care among tenants and between tenants and staff.

Actively pursuing a positive sense of community within the project and integrating the project into the neighborhood can have powerful benefits for both the staff and the tenants. When tenants are empowered to participate in governing their living community they are more likely to respect property and treat their neighbors with respect. Community building and leadership development efforts can help to²¹:

- Empower tenants by giving them real authority and input and teach them skills needed to impact their environment.
- Increase and improve social and psychological ties among community members.
- Foster stability and a sense of belonging.
- Increase opportunities for communication and socialization among peers and between staff and tenants.
- Actively promote a set of positive norms that counteracts the development of negative communities.
- Combat isolation that can result in psychiatric deterioration and/or relapse.
- Increase the possible sources of social, vocational and/or religious opportunities for tenants.
- Appeal to applicants who may be considering tenancy and don't wish to live in a setting that feels institutional.
- Identify and address physical problems in the building and improve safety and security.
- Ensure a greater degree of customer satisfaction in service delivery.
- Promote the development of tenants' advocacy and organizational skills.

When you invite tenant involvement and leadership, you must be willing to hear criticism, share some authority for decision-making, and be open to change.

²¹ List adapted from CSH: "[Community Building In and Around Supportive Residences](http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/library/shp/training/CommunityBuildingH.pdf)," (<http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/library/shp/training/CommunityBuildingH.pdf>).

Some of the brightest promise for successful community building and leadership in family supportive housing lies with the younger tenants. Youth, once encouraged and empowered to make decisions and recommendations about issues affecting them, can be a strong voice both inside and outside the community.

This chapter proposes practical answers to these questions:

- 1. How do you approach community-building in an FSH project?**
- 2. What activities build community in an FSH setting?**
- 3. How do you foster FSH tenant leadership?**
- 4. What role do children and youth play in building community and leadership?**
- 5. Why encourage civic participation among tenants?**

How do you approach community-building in an FSH project?

Building community is a long, slow process in any context. It may take FSH tenants time to get used to the idea of participating in community activities and to learn to trust each other and the staff. At first, you are likely to see the same few people at all of the activities you plan. While many homeless people are familiar with living in community, some have been away from it for so long that it seems strange; others have had bad experiences with community involvement in the past; and many value their new privacy after long periods in shelters.

Tenants all respond differently. Some people will really want to access activities with their neighbors - others will not be interested. Given this, it is important to try different approaches to building community.

The stability of the community is important for building trust. Staff turnover can be hard on community-building efforts (as discussed in [Chapter 7: Building a Team](#)). The longest serving staff members tend to become over-worked and over-contacted by tenants.

Tenant turnover can have a similarly negative effect on community-building efforts. With new tenants, trust must be built from scratch. To address these factors, engage with tenants to develop site protocols for what happens when staff leave or new staff are hired, when tenants leave or move in, for crisis response and at other turning points.

We try movies, fish fries and other social activities. Before this, we just did community meetings but we found that the meetings often became gripe sessions. Our aim is to get people out of their apartments and interacting with each other.

Staff from FSH projects recommended some practical measures:

- Form a tenants' peer welcome committee to introduce new families to the neighborhood, the residence and neighbors.
- Enhance natural supports. Encourage tenants to reach out to other families in the project, such as through visiting the elderly, bringing meals to sick neighbors, celebrating each others' milestones and holidays, and sharing community dinners. Pair up tenants

with activities in common, to maximize resources such as babysitting or homework clubs.

- Reach out to all tenants. Supportive housing staff sometimes target activities to individuals with special needs and tend to lose the interest of other tenants. However, engaging all tenants increases the overall stability of the building and promotes interactions across families.
- Provide accessible space for tenants to congregate, organize and socialize.
- Involve anchor families – families who have overcome homelessness and can act as positive role models for their neighbors – in leadership and mentoring roles. (see [Profile 4: Collaborative Village](#))

Acknowledge and be responsive to individual needs and obstacles and plan creatively around gender and age differences. [quwomen](#) Community-building can occur within and among different age levels – for instance, in children and youth activities, adult activities, and intergenerational or family activities.

What activities build community in an FSH setting?

In general, staying true to a tenant-centered philosophy will ensure that you design creative, meaningful, and engaging activities. Accept what is and isn't important to tenants. Use surveys, suggestions boxes, and/or tenant council meetings to directly involve tenants in defining the activities they want.

Activities that allow for casual interaction, such as coffee hours and entertainment, are effective for bringing people together. Similarly, guest speakers and workshops around topics of common interests such as career planning, financial management, health, and current events can bring tenants together in a learning environment.

It is important to be realistic. Don't overwhelm people with activities and don't maintain program offerings for the sake of continuity. Sustainability and momentum are only valuable while the program is meeting a purpose. Recognize and acknowledge even short-term participation and programs (such as a tenants' breakfast club) that are popular for a while and then fade. Celebrate the positive. Be aware that staff may confuse their own investment in a program with tenant success.

Document community-building activities. For example, consider tracking progress over time through video stories. Such documentation acknowledges and reflects participants' success, encourages others to get involved, and fosters a sense of community.

Staff from existing FSH sites identified some community-building activities they have held:

- Community cleaning days. The project buys cleaning supplies and provides for trash disposal. Offer cleaning/decorating awards by floor or building and involve the children by offering incentives.
- Tenant-planned and implemented gardens.

- Community picnics or dinners to which everyone brings their favorite side dish and shares recipes.
- Events that celebrate tenants' accomplishments and holidays.
- A breakfast and bag-lunch club for school-age children. The project provides ingredients for breakfast and bag lunches for children, and interested parents take turns making the food Monday through Friday mornings during the school year.
- A stipend program to compensate tenants for doing jobs for the community. (If concerned about paying tenants in cash, try gift certificates instead.)
- A tenant-run food bank or farmers' market. Tenants share recipes using the ingredients available that week, or hold a cooking demonstration.

Be cautious about tenants raising money for their own activities or community needs. There are often trust issues between tenants over control of the money. Instead, work to provide funding out of services or operating budgets for tenant-identified activities or resources.

How do you foster FSH tenant leadership?

Tenant leadership is integral to healthy communities. Finding and empowering tenant voices is key. It may be difficult at first, or simply take time to get tenants to speak up and take the lead. The next challenge is to move people from voicing their needs to taking action. While speaking up is an essential first step, it is important to encourage positive and proactive involvement thereafter.

Many formerly homeless tenants are crisis-minded and may lack skills in non-crisis living. Some people may create drama and crisis conditions so that they can think clearly. Others, post-trauma, tend to be numb and unresponsive. Crisis-management skills can be adapted and re-channeled. The challenge is to draw on and adapt these skills through community and project leadership; in other words, to replicate those capacities without the crisis trigger.

Identify natural leaders and develop leadership skills. Are there particular tenants who are already known to have good skills in diplomacy, communication, or problem-solving? Are there other people who might be interested in taking on a leadership role but lack the skills needed to do so? Are resources available to teach leadership skills?

Make gender- and age-specific plans, and be sensitive to obstacles such as language barriers. Incorporate translation needs and costs into your planning. Tenant leadership can develop through community meetings and tenant advisory groups and councils, as well as other less formal situations. Staff of FSH projects offered a range of suggestions for empowering tenant voices and promoting leadership:

- Hold monthly meetings between tenants and the property manager to address building issues.
- Set up a tenant board, council, advisory group, association, or a 'voice of the community' group to advocate and negotiate for activities and services the tenants want or need.
- Involve tenants in planning and program design and services implementation.

- Initiate specific councils instead of one large tenant council; for example, initiate a monthly parents' advisory group to inform design and implementation of children and youth programming.
- Have tenant meetings just for children and youth; develop a children/youth council to inform the design and implementation of children and youth programming.
- Identify and work with the natural leaders in the building who know everyone.
- Offer leadership trainings for tenants, including skill building such as meeting facilitation.
- Hire consultants or work with a community partner specifically to help tenants organize within the FSH project and/or in the wider community.
- Highlight and call out the tenants' major accomplishments in their organizing and leadership.
- Create stipended internships based in the community.
- Involve community leaders in supporting other tenants at different stages of healing.
- Encourage and support tenants to get involved in neighborhood associations and other groups in the broader community.
- Build on people's experience and personal power through civic activism or political engagement.
- Appoint tenant representatives to the organization's Board of Directors.

Involve tenants in the development of community rules and other building policies. Experience has shown that there are numerous advantages to this approach. When tenants are supportive of the community's rules, they are more likely to incorporate them into practice and to remind others to do the same. In this way, rules can help influence the culture and norms of the residence. In soliciting input for the rules, staff should be clear regarding the use of tenant input and how it will be factored into final decisions to avoid raising unrealistic expectations.

We place a staff member in the community a year before a building is built, to identify ambassadors in the community to connect with. If you only have one person working on this, and they leave, you have a problem. Now, we use a team in case there is turnover. We have started using tenant leaders in these roles as well. They attend CAPS (community policing) meetings. This helps inoculate the project against some of the effects of staff turnover and builds tenant leadership as part of community relations.

What role do children and youth play in building community and leadership?

Meeting children's need for community can help them thrive. Children play an important role in community building, both in their own right and by drawing parents together in community activities. In many communities, children are often more involved in activities than their parents. Invite parents to, and involve parents in children's activities.

Community-building can have a positive effect on children's well-being. For example, when people know and trust their neighbors, they are more likely to take care of each other's children when necessary.

Respect and include parents and children in the way you organize space and allocate staff. For example, if there is a space to play in the meeting room, parents can come to community meetings. Consider providing food, so that working parents do not have to choose between community involvement and feeding their children. "Taking care of the children" is often a parent's reason for non-participation, so some programs provide childcare alongside activities.

If people are isolated in their units, it can be bad for them. Their kids could be going hungry and you may not know if you don't get them out of their units. Social events will draw the kids out and then the parents come along. When we found that some kids weren't getting breakfast before school, we organized moms to share cooking for all the kids in the school. That was a way for everyone to get breakfast without anyone having to know who is hungry.

We are training parents to be leaders in their school community. Parent patrols or crossing guards are a good place to start. The women walking the kids to school could become PTA members.

Youth leadership warrants particular attention, programming, and budgets. Funding for youth leadership programs may be available from local or state government or foundations. Some projects organize youth leadership training separately, while others include youth over twelve years of age in adult organizing, particularly civic activism. Youth at one project, for example, organized to educate their community about the health hazards of smoking and have created smoke-free zones in their building. Through such activities, young tenants learn a wide range of skills, from public speaking to graphic design.

Why encourage civic participation among tenants?

'Community' exists within the project but also in the neighborhood, school district, and city. Civic organizing and active citizenship widen the community-building perspective and make a powerful bridge to leadership. National elections provide one opportunity but there are many others that connect with tenants' motivations.

We have several moms with teens. Sometimes the moms will bring them to the group. We may ask the questions slightly differently but we do include them in the group and try to honor their voices. Other women in the group mirror this and act as aunties to these girls. Boys may come (there aren't as many) but they are much quieter. At first the girls don't want to say anything, and then, with a little gentle prodding, they become very engaged because a space is made for their participation.

In focus groups with FSH providers, this approach sparked great enthusiasm and participants described many positive experiences. A sense of voice is powerful in anyone's life, so it is no wonder that advocacy, engagement, and activism are seen as a natural extension of leadership and community efforts in FSH projects.

When a tenant passed away, the police and emergency people couldn't fit a gurney in the elevator and they took her out in a bag. Everyone was watching. At least 75% of the people in the building rallied around this issue – how the police treat you. It's an issue that people want to talk about. The police commissioner came and apologized and this created an opportunity to create a relationship with the police.

We have begun to look at how to choose an issue. It should be felt by all; it must increase the power of the organization; and we have to prepare for winning or losing. Is it winnable? If it doesn't look winnable, could we win part of it?

Getting involved in civic action made a huge difference. The election really got a lot of people involved. We helped them but they ran with it. Our tenant training has four site-based topics (landlord-tenant issues, maintaining rental units, etc.) This fifth session on civic involvement was like 'grad-school level.'

We engage people by involving them in the political life of the community. Our tenants know who their alderman is.

Everyone wants to be involved in purposeful activity. People appreciate holiday dinners and that's often how you get people downstairs, but it's like eating candy – it doesn't have the lasting effect of even a small-scale but more purposeful activity.

There are many ways you can find your voice, but I think civic participation is the most direct route. You can touch it, feel it and see that it makes a difference. Forty of our tenants went down and became deputy registrars, registering voters. One group worked on getting the polling station moved to the building – to increase tenant voting and get neighbors into the building – and that group of tenants really bonded. From there, they want to knock on doors, do candidates' forums, go to the State Legislature and hold people in the Legislature accountable to what they said in the candidate forum, and so on. It takes courage to march into a politician's office. We saw the transformation: from not going to a meeting, to going to talk to a State Senator. From there, it's a small step to interviewing for a job.

Women say that they are living in a beautiful building but when they walk outside, they see drug dealers use the vacant lot across from the building. This was a great challenge to organize and make a change in the community – we recognize that we need to move beyond the community of the building to the broader community in which the building is sited. The women don't like idea of moving the drug dealers to another neighborhood, so we're exploring ways to get them off the street. The women have connected with a minister who hangs out over there and they are developing a relationship with the dealers to see if they can get them to change.

We have a writing group, where a tenant can work on things s/he is angry about – relationships with neighbors or police, they can't find dental care, etc. Then we tell the tenant to find ten people who agree with them. In this way, they find their anger and then transform it into a productive action. For example, someone was very angry about the way they were treated by the police in front of the building. Staff met with them to find out what their self-interest is, to help them see another way to use their leadership. We work with them to break it down into something that can be fixed. For instance, building a relationship with police so that they knew who the good guys are – flip the script. This kind of action works to end isolation and bring people back into community; it helps people find their voice and then use their voice effectively.

CHAPTER 6: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Family supportive housing provides an opportunity to end the cycle of family violence. To do so, both service staff and tenants must be highly sensitive to the incidence of domestic violence, skilled at encouraging disclosure and providing support, engaged in building communities that value health, and proactive in promoting individual empowerment, health and economic self-sufficiency. Property management must also be committed to policies that encourage disclosure and prevent re-victimizing.

Domestic violence is defined as physical or mental abuse that occurs between members of a family, common home, or household. While male to female violence is by far the most common form, other domestic violence scenarios exist: female to male; same sex violence; parents towards children; children violent towards a parent, other adults, or other children; parent towards children; and between extended family members.

Approximately one out of every four American women report that they have been physically abused by a husband or a boyfriend at some point in their lives. The incidence of domestic violence among women who have been homeless is even more staggering. Many studies demonstrate that domestic violence is both a cause and consequence of homelessness, particularly among families with children. For example, in 1998 46% of cities surveyed by the US Conference of Mayors identified domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness.

Given these statistics, we can expect that a significant percentage of families living in permanent supportive housing will have histories of past and/or current family violence. Housing may free a victim from domestic violence - access to safe, affordable housing may make it possible for a domestic violence survivor to finally escape an abusive relationship. At the same time, fear of losing housing may prevent disclosure: some tenants may feel forced to keep silent and remain in an abusive relationship for fear of losing their housing. Still other survivors may have been separated from abusive partners while in shelter or transitional housing, only to find the batterer returns once permanent housing is secured.

This chapter addresses these questions:

- 1. How can policies help to break the cycle of domestic violence?**
- 2. How do you raise community awareness of domestic violence?**
- 3. How does community-building help to address domestic violence?**
- 4. What strategies encourage disclosure?**
- 5. What are the key elements of responsive services?**
- 6. How do you support staff in addressing domestic violence?**

How can policies help to break the cycle of domestic violence?

Opportunities exist within a voluntary-service setting for education, training, and support about issues of family violence. Conscious decisions about intake procedures, training and orientation of staff, design and delivery of services, design and security of housing, property management practices, and eviction policies (and eviction-prevention strategies) can support efforts to prevent and break the cycle of family violence.

Some housing policies fail to support domestic violence victims and may inadvertently place them at continuing risk. For example, the public housing statute that allows public housing authorities to evict households for any criminal activity by a member of the family or a guest that threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other tenants can be interpreted so broadly as to permit the eviction of victims of domestic violence. If tenants fear that domestic violence will be considered grounds for eviction, they face a dilemma over whether or not to disclose violence and ask for help and therefore may choose to put themselves and their children at risk of violence in order to *not* risk their housing. Ironically, in situations such as these in which disclosure is withheld, the abuser is provided with greater opportunity to commit further crime. To prevent such interpretation of eviction policies, domestic violence victims should be excluded from “one-strike” eviction rules.

To support both disclosure and the stability of domestic violence victims’ housing, evaluate project policies and protocols as the first step towards creating communities that do not tolerate domestic violence or punish victims. Include leases, house rules, eviction practices, and grievance procedures in your evaluations.

To make disclosure as safe as possible in a voluntary-service setting, establish a strong and consistent policy against domestic violence in leases, community rules, and other documents. Tenant buy-in – or even initiation – is the best way to ensure that a policy is implemented. An ideal scenario would be for tenants themselves to enforce a community rule of non-violence. In this way, tenants can hold each other accountable to a peer-based culture of non-violence.

How do you raise community awareness of domestic violence?

We all need to appreciate the big picture around domestic violence and to understand its power dynamics, especially those of gender. Recognize that violence can happen to anyone – everyone is a potential victim and a potential abuser. It is easy to stereotype the sorts of people or families likely to experience domestic violence, but domestic violence is “both predictable and unpredictable at the same time.” Some instances are obvious; others may surprise you.

Defining the violence is sometimes difficult because people name and describe it differently depending on their cultural context. Training in cultural competency is helpful. Make every effort to have the tenants’ cultural diversity reflected in the staff you recruit.

Ensure that all service staff has the same baseline training in domestic violence issues and policies. Link this training with awareness and training around gender and human rights. Educate desk clerks and other property management staff about domestic violence, focusing on identifying danger signals and on responding in emergency situations.

Consider developing a community-wide domestic-violence collaborative in which one or (ideally) a number of supportive housing sites partner with a community-based domestic violence organization, to train staff, provide therapeutic services, engage in case consultation, and assist in safety planning and emergency response protocol development. In addition to promoting cost-effective and sustainable services, such an approach can help promote one standard of care across the community. Instead of each site's service teams developing their own expertise, the collaborative partner with expertise in domestic violence can provide training, outreach and staff, helping to create a consistent approach and reducing duplication of design and implementation efforts. Importantly, a collaborative model also ensures a clear distinction between housing site staff and domestic violence service staff, creating an environment of service confidentiality that can help increase tenants' trust and willingness to access critical services. Finally, this design may make expansion easier - with additional resources, more sites could be added to the collaboration, or services could be deepened with existing partners, without needing to recreate the infrastructure that supports the partnerships. A starting point for creating such a collaborative relationship could include a basic orientation for all staff about domestic violence, its dynamics, forms of abuse, and safety planning.

How does community-building help to address domestic violence?

Stopping the cycle of violence is one of the most challenging demands of family supportive housing. However, supportive housing has the potential to envision, create, and sustain violence-free communities. Families have a greater chance of overcoming domestic violence in an environment of stable housing, support services, and community building. Outreach, education, and community-building among tenants are the first steps.

Raising awareness facilitates abuse identification and service access. Community-building is key for creating an environment safe for and encouraging of abuse disclosure – the basis for a successful intervention and prevention program. So, cultivate active community voices, peer leaders, and a community-wide holding of the non-violent ideal.

Create venues for tenants to take advantage of the wisdom and security that peers can provide for each other. This will also help to break through the shame and social isolation that families and victims often feel.

An engaged and supportive community offers vulnerable tenants the best safety and prevention net. Domestic violence is highly appropriate as an issue around which to encourage tenants' organizing and advocacy efforts. A non-violent culture is best initiated and enforced by tenant peer accountability.

What strategies encourage disclosure?

In addition to raising awareness among all tenants, projects should focus prevention and support efforts towards tenant families in which domestic violence is taking place. This may be identified by staff or other tenants, or family members may choose to disclose this problem.

Working to stop domestic violence in supportive housing presents particular obstacles. Often times both parties – abuser and victim – are living in the same location, have the same neighbors, and often have the same friends. It is often difficult to determine who is the abuser.

Supportive housing staff recommend the following:

- Make anonymous incident report forms available to all tenants to encourage reporting.
- Try talking to family members separately, rather than only meeting with the family as a group, when abuse is less likely to be discussed.
- Establish a documentation trail, so that you can make a case should police or other forms of intervention become necessary. Bear in mind that domestic violence is criminal behavior and that it is appropriate to report it, in accordance with the project's guidelines.
- Establish good relations and protocols with local law enforcement delineating their response to domestic violence calls from your project.
- Have households sign releases at move-in that agree to staff intervention if domestic violence is suspected.
- Ask households to create a safety plan, including planning around safety of children, should domestic violence occur.
- Be careful about adding new people to a lease. Try to extend the process as long as possible or have a mandatory waiting period. Given the number of missing partners who return once housing is secured, a waiting period offers indirect support to help a vulnerable partner (usually the mother) to withstand pressure to share housing. With time, the partner with the lease has the opportunity to assess if a new or renewed relationship will be a healthy one.
- Be sure that you set thresholds for intervention and eviction and stick to them. Use the 'muscle' of property managers when necessary to get tenants to deal with issues.
- Remove the abuser only, as opposed to whole family, if they can be positively identified.

Children suffer directly as victims and indirectly as observers and secondary victims. Their behavior is often a strong indicator of what's going on in the family. They may exhibit the effects of seeing abuse through their own actions and words.

What are the elements of responsive services?

Design services that emphasize the development of healthy and nurturing relationships that benefit women, their partners, and their children by breaking the cycle of violence *before* patterns of behavior are entrenched and transmitted. Site-specific constellations may consist of individual counseling, group counseling, court or social service accompaniment, advocacy, referrals, age-appropriate educational groups and community-organizing activities. Design services to ensure that past and current victims of domestic violence receive both emotional and practical support at every phase of their move away from violence.

When educating and supporting tenants, be especially careful about the terminology you use. For example, announcing a “healthy relationships discussion group” is likely to draw wider attendance than a “domestic violence discussion group.” Find creative ways to engage and involve tenants in these activities.

In all cases, support services must be consistent and reliable. Schedule regular hours and services, whether from staff or contracted professionals.

How do you support staff in addressing domestic violence?

Addressing domestic violence is difficult for service providers. Transference is a challenge; it is hard to separate our job from our personal responses. Stepping back from the situation is especially difficult for service providers who are domestic violence survivors. Many other issues, such as mental health and substance use, are often intertwined with domestic violence. Establishing a genuine relationship with tenants is often required before a staff member can address domestic violence issues.

Create a staff support or self-care group, as a structure in which staff can leave their burdens with others. This group could have rotating topics of discussion, one of which is domestic violence. This group will also model a culture of self-care for tenants.

Training for all staff is critical because increased knowledge and skills promote confidence and improve their ability to respond appropriately to domestic violence.

Recognize that it is not always appropriate for site staff to be the ones to take action when domestic violence requires it. Good working relationships and emergency response protocols with outside agencies and systems are essential. A further benefit of the collaborative model is that it establishes partnerships with the police, district attorney, Child Welfare, and other authorities.

CHAPTER 7: BUILDING A TEAM

This chapter presents guidelines for staffing a family supportive housing project. As with all aspects of implementation, your philosophy and vision are the touchstone for all decisions and processes in this area.

Service provision in FSH differs in several key regards from that in single adult projects, in treatment, or in transitional housing settings:

- FSH involves children.
- Families may stay on indefinitely in permanent supportive housing.
- Tenants engage in services on a voluntary basis.

Each of these elements affects the qualities you will look for in team members; the kinds of support that staff will need; and the particular combination of staff and outside partners that will make up the most effective team for your FSH project.

This chapter addresses these questions:

1. **How do you select and equip an effective staff and team?**
2. **What are the advantages of a team approach?**
3. **How can you best support your staff?**
4. **How can you mitigate the impact of staff turnover?**

How do you select and equip an effective staff and team?

A project's philosophy is an essential guide for recruiting, selecting and training staff and partners. Ensure that each potential member of your FSH service team is comfortable with the organizational philosophy and approach, especially around values such as voluntary services, harm reduction, tenant empowerment, and youth development.

For example, when children are involved, staff members may be inclined to tell parents what to do – in particular, how to raise their children. This makes it even more important to establish, agree, and revisit the project's philosophy. Staff need to have bought into a clear framework of core values, such as parent empowerment, if they are to operate effectively on the fine line between appropriate intervention, and respecting and upholding parents' autonomy.

In voluntary service environments, staff must be skilled in proactive engagement and in building mutually respectful relationships with tenants. This affects the kind of personality and skill-base you will seek to recruit.

Diverse tenant bodies require a matching diversity among staff members. This allows tenants to meet with the staff member with whom they are most comfortable. It is important to recognize and address language diversity as well as a range of backgrounds and experiences.

Team roles and attitudes:

It is the staff's job to see the promise and desire in tenants and call it out.

I could easily become a surrogate father to children. But that wouldn't be healthy. If I leave, I'd be one more person who has abandoned them. You start out doing case management, then they view you as a friend because you are helping them, but you are not a friend. Don't take tenant's situations personally. Take it professionally. Use it as an opportunity to address the underlying issues.

Staff need to be non-judgmental. Otherwise, you start projecting what you think, and tenants can pick it up right away. Show respect and give people their dignity. No one should leave the office feeling lower than when they entered.

Treat people according to their age, even if they are acting younger. Show your expectation that they will work through issues like adults. Be genuine and have unconditional regard for the person. Nine times out of ten, if you have a good relationship, people will talk to you

Remember that it could be you on the other side of that desk. It's about sharing, never holding a threat over someone's head.

Explore how doing this work impacts you. You have to be healthy yourself. You are dealing with all sorts of issues and need to be a resource for the families you serve.

What are the advantages of a team approach?

A service-team approach may be more effective than a caseload structure for putting an FSH philosophy into practice, as team members can focus on their area(s) of specialty (for example, youth services). Teams can be made up entirely of site staff or can include outside consultants and/or collaborative partners. Service teams offer several advantages, including:

- Staff turnover does not leave such a gaping hole for tenants, because more than one staff person will have likely been working with each family.
- A team model creates opportunities to hire specialists rather than generalists. This can translate to more expertise within your team.

I can't take my 40-year-old's values and apply them to a 70-year-old. You need to push your own values to the side. This elderly tenant doesn't want to work any more. He wants to focus on his health, his grandchildren.

Your project's values and culture should inform job titles and staffing patterns. For example, consider using the term service coordinator, or tenant advocate, instead of case manager.

This guide proposes a team approach between all those involved in family supportive housing: property management, service teams, collaborative partners, outside agencies, neighborhoods, and the tenants themselves.

As with all supportive housing, both the relationship and distinctions between property management and social service staff are key to the FSH team's success. With good working relations, the two branches can prevent problems rather than having to solve them down the line. At the same time, each can do their own job more effectively if there is no confusion between the different roles and areas of responsibility.

Both property management and service staff should be involved in an FSH team from the onset of the project: from design, to development, to implementation. Communication between the two during all of these stages must be regular, consistent, structured, and objective; it should also be forward-looking and not just relate to the emergency of the day. Both should be clear about the values that inform the project's culture, as well as its goals and objectives. (See the [Supportive Housing Property Management and Operations Manual, 2003](#))

Collaborative Partners

A variety of service models exist within FSH. Sometimes one agency will develop and manage all of the support services. More frequently, a collaborative group of agencies will develop and provide services. Collaborative service partners may bring both expertise and resources to your project, thereby enriching service packages for tenants. Take advantage of the wealth and variety of expertise in your community. Identify the services your project needs and find the best providers. Recruit them early, make them a partner, and give them influence in program design and fundraising. (See [Profile 1: Canon Barcus Community House](#).) Don't be afraid to be choosy about with whom you work. Before partnering with another organization, confirm that your visions match.

In a team approach, staff members work together and advise, criticize, and support each other. If someone is crossing a boundary, another team member will call it out. Staff have a passion to be of service. They might have disagreements, but as staff and adults, they have to be able to apologize. Everyone must respect each other.

While FSH adult tenants will have some of the same service needs as their counterparts in permanent supportive housing for single adults, there are also some unique differences that will benefit from partnerships formed early on. Be prepared, for example, to address family preservation. Many families living in supportive housing will have current interaction with the local child protective services agency. To support families and to promote coordination and collaboration, develop a relationship with your Child Welfare Agency.

Getting YMCA involvement has been key for our boys' group, girls group, gym, and other programs. We just didn't have the resources to hire a separate staff member for kids.

Meet with the principals of elementary, middle and high schools in your neighborhood, even before your project opens, to help prepare them for an influx of children, many of whom may have special needs. Develop links with domestic violence organizations, parenting groups, after-school programs, and neighborhood recreation centers.

For certain services, a staff member from an outside partnering agency may be the best provider. For instance, a tenant may find it safer to open up to a mental health counselor whom they do not meet in day-to-day situations. This increases the potential for trusted confidentiality. Supportive housing staff involved in [San Francisco's Homeless Children's Network/Family Supportive Housing collaborative](#) found this to be a huge advantage. They emphasized the multiple benefits of counselors from an outside agency:

- The idea of 'therapy' lost its stigma and adults began to ask for counseling services.
- Freed up from the stressful demands of crisis intervention, site-based staff were able to be far more effective in their work.

How can you best support your team?

All members of the team will need orientation, training, and support in order to take a proactive and assertive approach to tenant engagement. In particular, team members who are making the shift from transitional housing and/or mandatory services will benefit from creative and thoughtful opportunities to engage with this new vision. Provide a regular and ongoing forum for staff to voice problems and frustrations, build skills, and reflect on their work. A space in which to vent and then let go of frustrations is essential to this challenging work.

If relevant to your project, discuss with staff the goal of empowering tenants to take responsibility for their own lives. Address the power dynamic upfront. Tenant empowerment involves staff letting go of power.

Staff who have worked within transitional housing, treatment, or other program models may need a new or expanded skill set, as well as a shift in attitude and expectations. Consider different ways to meet these needs for all team members:

- Provide upfront and ongoing training and awareness-raising as proactive steps rather than repair measures.
- Schedule regular occasions for staff to come together to learn from each other, both in formal presentations and less formal discussions.
- Ensure regular and ongoing individual and team supervision.

Encouragement and advice for staff:

Don't personalize tenant involvement or lack thereof.

Be patient! It is much easier to do things for tenants than to support them to do things themselves, but....

Value your life experience as well as your formal education.

Believe that everyone who is willing is teachable. Strive for tenant leadership – it is integral to healthy communities

Suspend judgment – a neutral stance makes you much more effective.

- Spend team supervision and/or meeting time supporting staff to both vent and to stand back, thereby helping them to maintain empathy and engagement with tenants while avoiding becoming overly involved on a personal level.
- Equip existing staff to mentor new staff.
- Remind the team that, often, what does work goes unseen. We tend to see what doesn't work. It is important to notice that some families are doing well.
- Organize for services staff from different sites and different organizations to visit each other's buildings and spend time learning from and helping each other.
- Seek, document, and reflect on tenants' feedback, as this can lead to best practices.

A project that works in isolation can be an issue for staff as well as tenants. Consider meeting regularly with other FSH projects to share best practices, solve problems, develop new resources, and build camaraderie among colleagues. This kind of network can become formalized. One example is San Francisco's Family Supportive Housing Network.

The San Francisco Family Supportive Housing Network (SFFSHN) is comprised of nonprofit housing and service providers that together represent more than a dozen on-line and upcoming family supportive housing projects in San Francisco. It is chaired and convened by the Department of Human Services and the Corporation for Supportive Housing. The group was initiated in 2001 and now meets monthly to share information and best practices and to strategize about building the resources necessary to ensure the long-term health and stability of families in supportive housing.

The SFFSHN has successfully built partnerships, advocated systems change, and developed resources to better serve tenants in family supportive housing. Working as a collaborative, the SFFSHN delivers a unified message that gets results. This collective approach has also created opportunities for funders and mainstream service providers to benefit from economies of scale, both in terms of cost effectiveness and broad impact. The network's successes include the following:

- **San Francisco Unified School District: *Homeless Education Funding***

McKinney Vento legislation requires that each homeless child or youth have access to the same education, including public preschool education, that is provided to all other children and youth. It also requires that homeless students have access to the services and academic support they need to meet the same challenging achievement standards to which all students are held. The legislation ensures this assistance for homeless children/youth from the time that they are homeless through the academic year that they gain housing. The SFFSHN worked with the Unified School District to extend services to formerly homeless students in supportive housing to a *full* academic year after move-in. To implement this expansion of services, the SFFSHN partnered with the district to secure additional McKinney funds to provide academic tutors at five supportive housing sites.

- **Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation: *The Family Permanent Supportive Housing Initiative***

In response to SFFSHN's clear message that children and youth living in supportive housing were seriously under-served, initial grantmaking focused on children and youth services. Resulting projects included mental health services for formerly homeless children and youth

living in nine permanent supportive housing sites. The existence of the SFFSHN made it easier for the foundation to focus its resources and make a broad impact across housing sites.

- **Department of Human Services: *Improved Coordination with Family Preservation and Reunification Services***

Approximately one-third of families living in the city's supportive housing projects interact with the local child protective services agency. To ensure that families receive necessary preservation and reunification services, the SFFSHN is engaged in dialogue and planning with the Department of Human Services Children and Family Services Division towards improved collaboration and coordination.

- **La Casa de Las Madres: *Reduce Domestic Violence in Family Supportive Housing***

To respond to the high incidence of domestic violence in family supportive housing, the SFFSHN has developed a partnership with La Casa de Las Madres, a local domestic violence services provider, to develop strategies to better respond to situations within individual families and to build community consciousness and zero tolerance within supportive housing communities.

How can you mitigate the impact of staff turnover?

The team approach offers some ways to mitigate the negative impact of turnover. Even a small FSH project can involve a range of staff and outside partners in its team, so that tenants can engage with and come to trust more people. A consistent structure can make up for personnel changes, as tenants know what to expect when they approach services staff.

Experiences of staff turnover:

The manager gave notice after three years. The families were extremely angry with her. They say, "She abandoned us."

I'm the third case manager in the building in three years. A lot of families are pretty hesitant to get involved.

We had a party, invited everyone in that person's case load to say goodbye and meet the new person. It was a ritual, a ceremony, and felt more respectful of the families.

I would involve the families in the hiring process for new staff. Some of the community leaders could be involved. It gives them an education on what really goes on, instead of just having a new person show up.

It's a teachable moment. In the culture of poverty, closure doesn't happen often. There's usually just a break. So having a party, involving tenants in the hiring, can all be part of describing that bridge, that process.

Tenants need to believe in the team who deliver services. Staff turnover can be a problem for building personal and community connections with tenants who may be reluctant to

confide in people whom they think will leave soon. When staff do leave, tenants need to be able to acknowledge and discuss their frustrations and fears.

Working in family supportive housing settings can be challenging. Low pay scales make it especially difficult for service providers to find and retain quality staff. Paying people well and supporting them on the job is the best counter to staff turnover.

This is not a job for rookies fresh out of college. We hired seasoned case managers. As an agency, our staff is probably higher paid than most, because we're on call 24-7. Our staff need to be highly skilled because they have to deal with every social problem that exists. So the pay should reflect the skill set that the work demands.

PROFILE 1: CANON BARCUS COMMUNITY HOUSE SAN FRANCISCO, CA

The Canon Barcus House is a 48-unit permanent supportive housing apartment building for homeless, very low-income families living with special needs, particularly those related to substance use, mental health, and/or HIV/AIDS. Families have voluntary access to a wide range of services and enjoy the same tenant rights as any other San Francisco renter. Episcopal Community Services opened Canon Barcus Community House on March 19, 2002.

Click [here](#) to view the full profile of Canon Barcus Community House online at www.csh.org.

PROFILE 2: SAN FRANCISCO'S HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK/FAMILY SUPPORTIVE HOUSING COLLABORATION SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Collaborative Description

San Francisco's Homeless Children's Network was created in 1992 by a collaborative of emergency family and domestic violence shelters as an innovative means to develop and share skilled counseling and other resources for homeless children/youth. Each of these agencies sheltered children who were severely traumatized, yet none had therapists on staff that specialized in the psychological problems of homeless children. Participating agencies decided that, rather than each developing expertise in this area separately, it would be more effective and efficient to create a service team of experts to serve children/youth throughout family emergency and domestic violence shelters and transitional housing in San Francisco. Homeless Children's Network (HCN) was created with a mission to decrease the trauma of homelessness and domestic violence, to increase the strength and effectiveness of the HCN collaborative, and to provide early childhood education and consultation to shelter-based and family childcare providers. To fulfill its mission, Homeless Children's Network now provides comprehensive, developmentally appropriate mental health services, case management, and family support services to homeless and formerly homeless children, youth, and their families throughout San Francisco.

In 2002, members of San Francisco's Family Supportive Housing Network, acknowledging the efficacy of this model, approached HCN to form a partnership and broaden their clientele to include children, youth, and families living in family supportive housing. HCN's expertise in homeless children and youth's mental health, their history of working collaboratively, and their role as the 'hub' of children/youth mental health services amongst more than nineteen shelter and transitional housing providers, made them the ideal provider of mental health services to formerly homeless children, youth and families now living in supportive housing.

Project Description

First funded in 2003, the project has developed and implemented mental health services specifically for formerly homeless children and youth, ages six through seventeen, and their families, living in nine permanent supportive housing sites in San Francisco. Within the context of stable housing, HCN and its partnering agencies work with recently housed children and youth, and their families, to help them establish and maintain developmentally and culturally appropriate mental health statuses.

Instead of the service teams at each of the nine sites developing expertise in children/youth mental health services by individually hiring their own therapists, HCN provides essential mental health services through a "floating" staff of three therapists. These therapists travel to each of the nine sites and provide regularly scheduled therapy to formerly homeless

children and their families. These staff also provide clinical consultation to the supportive housing service staff. This best practices model ensures one standard of care amongst supportive housing sites and reduces fragmentation and duplication. This model also facilitates ease of expansion; with additional resources, but little additional infrastructure, more sites can be added to the collaboration, services could be expanded to 0-5 year olds, or services deepened for the current target population.

Three full-time license-eligible MSW or MFT therapists with significant experience working with homeless and/or formerly homeless children, youth and their families each provide thirty hours per week of mental health services, totaling ninety hours per week project-wide. These services are provided at the nine supportive housing sites, as well as at relevant schools, childcare centers, after-school programs, and, when appropriate, HCN offices. Each of the nine sites are allocated ten regularly scheduled hours per week of a specific therapist's time.

The crises that HCN therapists work with families on include substance abuse relapses, child protective services intervention, hospitalizations and health crises, domestic violence, depression, death/suicide and discovery of sexual abuse of children. Through strength-based individual, family and group therapy, therapists have been able to provide a consistent and stabilizing presence in the lives children, youth and their families.

The permanency of housing at these nine housing sites offers an environment conducive to tremendous therapeutic healing for these children growing up in supportive housing. Leveraging expertise and resources from all members of the collaboration, the services not only improve the mental health of formerly homeless children and their families, thereby enhancing family functioning, but also plant the seeds essential to prevent a future return to homelessness for both the children and their parents. This project has proven to be a key investment towards the goal of supporting chronically homeless families to break the cycle of homelessness.

Total number of children/youth served

The project serves more than 150 children and their families each year. This represents approximately 33% of children/youth ages six through seventeen living in the nine supportive housing sites. Children, youth and their families receiving mental health services through this collaborative become eligible for services through HCN's other programs, including continuing mental health services, family support and parent education, childcare consultation, after-care services, advocacy support, as well as assistance in the forms of cash, clothing, household items, and coupons for family entertainment.

Collaborative Structure

Staff with decision-making authority from each of the collaborating agencies meet monthly to discuss and evaluate the effectiveness of the collaborative structure and the program design, and to recommend improvements. These regular meetings have proven invaluable to ensuring smooth program implementation, healthy communication and clear expectations.

Key strengths of San Francisco's Homeless Children's Network/ Family Supportive Housing Collaboration

- Model allows for flexibility; therapists adapt approach to individual site cultures.
- Model is cost effective. The alternative, hiring individual therapists at each site, is expensive.
- Model utilizes experts who provide high quality services.
- The independence of therapists who are not tied to housing sites is key to service effectiveness and to building trust with families.
- The collaboration builds on a model that has proven effective.
- Mental health services open up the possibility for deep and lasting change.
- Reliability: this is a model that works.
- The collaboration has successfully leveraged other funding.

PROFILE 3: HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN CHICAGO, IL

Becoming part of the permanent solution

Housing Opportunities for Women (HOW) was founded in 1983 when it opened the first transitional shelter for homeless women in Chicago. For its first 12 years, HOW focused on the operations of this program, providing single homeless women with six- to eight-month stays in congregate living with supportive services intended to prepare them for permanent housing.

Around 1997, the recently hired Executive Director Britt Shawver and staff first began to look closely at the program they were operating and to question if it was meeting the organization's stated goals. HOW's mission is to "provide permanent solutions to the problems of homelessness and poverty for women and children." They asked themselves: what do we mean by permanent? How is what we are doing here contributing to permanent solutions?

I asked the staff, "do you think women come here because of the services that we offer and because they really think they need our help, or do you think they come here because they have no where to go and this is housing?" When you look at it that way, everybody knows the answer.

Through a process of reflection, HOW began to determine that the approach – women spending six to eight months at their transitional site only to leave for other housing – was wasting time and contributing to the women's destabilization. They also realized that more and more women were undergoing family reunification with children and that the program needed to be able to serve the whole family, not just the mothers. They began to engage in a discussion about what they could do to be part of the solution.

The first step was an internal and external scan. They read what the literature was beginning to say about transitional housing outcomes and discussed their own experience in the program. Part of the process involved talking with the participants, in focus groups and house meetings and through formal surveys. Participants gave feedback about what worked in the program and what didn't. The overall message was clear: the women wanted their own apartments.

HOW engaged its staff in several internal discussions and held a day-long retreat with staff and Board members to consider taking the organization in the direction of permanent family housing. They realized that to change their approach would also mean changing their program structure – and their building. Providing each family with a separate apartment would take them from housing 24 women in six two-bedroom apartments to housing only six families at the same site. To meet their goals, they would need other housing resources.

HOW began aggressively to seek out other housing resources to build a portfolio of subsidies that could assist families to move into the community.

During the time it was considering changing its model, a sister organization closed down and gave HOW its now vacant transitional housing building. This gave HOW the opportunity to try out the new program model of permanent housing in a new site, before having to convert its existing program.

Transitions are among the things that are most destabilizing in people's lives: divorces, deaths, moving. Moves are destabilizing yet we were setting families up to have to move again.

The organization went through extensive training on creative engagement strategies, harm reduction approaches, access to community resources, and housing laws and practices. Some staff worried that HOW would not have control over who got into their housing – they wouldn't 'know' them before they had to commit to housing them permanently. Some people weren't convinced until they began doing it – housing families they might not have previously admitted and putting them directly into an apartment with successful outcomes.

Besides making the case internally, HOW had to make the case to funders in the community, some of whom had strong commitments to transitional housing. HOW's Executive Director presented the findings of their internal and external scan and her conviction that HOW's model needed to change to offer permanent solutions to homelessness. Although they lost some funders who identified their niche with the front-end/emergency part of the system, they gained new funders who had not previously supported them, ultimately growing the budget.

As the organization made the transition, keeping communication lines open was essential. Staff had to feel that they could raise concerns with how the transition was going without the fear that they would be seen as nay-sayers, going against the direction the organization had chosen. HOW made a real effort to retain staff and help them make the adjustment, though some people did eventually leave because they weren't convinced that the model would work.

Once HOW had determined that the permanent housing model was working in the new site, they began the process of converting their original transitional house as well. They received state funding to rehabilitate the building, combining two units to make a larger three-bedroom, creating an on-site resource center, and addressing deferred maintenance.

There was suddenly recognition among staff that what the residents wanted was not that different from what they would want. They said 'I wouldn't want to live in congregate housing, I'd be angry too.' It really began to erase the line between 'them' and 'us.' Once you take that out, it allows what you're doing to be what is most helpful to the families, instead of you paternalistically deciding what is best for them.

The organization also made significant structural changes in its departments and staffing. Previously, case managers had been responsible for collecting rents from clients, a

function they did not usually do well or enjoy. HOW created a housing department, separating the rent collection and lease enforcement function from the services function. They hired a property management company to manage the building and grounds, an arrangement that has relieved them of one of the major headaches of operating a site-based program.

Changing the program also led to some new staff positions. Because they were working with more families, they hired a case manager who is an early childhood development specialist, and they hired a teacher. They also began to partner with other community organizations for service functions they didn't have on staff, such as primary health care and focused employment assistance. They emphasized with staff that a key part of their new role was to help connect tenants to services in the community.

HOW realized that to implement this change fully it needed to revise its policies and procedures. They put together an internal Quality Assurance task force with people from each division in the organization to develop the new manual. The process – reviewing old documents, developing new policies, reaching final agreement – took over a year.

Today, HOW operates several subsidy programs and two buildings, both of them permanent housing: one with permanent subsidies and one with transitional subsidies. Families in the transitional subsidy program are prepared from the outset that within two years they need to be ready to assume the rent on their units. They have had good success with this approach, and are meeting their goal of permanence, but this program model is not right for everyone. HOW tries to offer different opportunities to its families, through resources such as Shelter Plus Care, Section 8, CDBG and other subsidies that can assist families for a longer time.

HOW is still undergoing the organizational transformation involved in converting from transitional to permanent housing. Training, refinement of the model, and internal discussions continue. They look forward to being able to track longer-term outcomes for the families in permanent housing, in order to show how well the new model is performing.

PROFILE 4: COLLABORATIVE VILLAGE MINNEAPOLIS, MN

The Collaborative Village Initiative (CVI) is a 20-unit permanent supportive housing development for families in South Minneapolis. Project for Pride in Living (PPL) and Pillsbury United Communities (PUC) work in partnership to develop and implement CVI. PPL developed and now manages the property and PUC provides on site support services to CVI families. The project rented up during the summer of 2004.

CVI has a number of **unique features** including:

The size of the apartment units and the “village” design

Of the 20 units, two are 5-bedroom units, four are 4-bedroom units; eight are 3-bedroom units and six are 2-bedroom units. Housing units are clustered to create a collective or “village” atmosphere that facilitates family interactions, collective events, community building and safety. Design features include controlled access; a community center for community meetings and gatherings, celebrations and children’s activities; dedicated space for after school programming; small meeting rooms for counseling and therapy, and offices for management and service staff.

The profile of tenants

CVI tenants include larger families with histories of homelessness and multiple risk factors, who are currently being served by at least two different Hennepin County Departments (e.g. Economic Assistance, Children and Family Services, Adult Services, Community Corrections). Families that have potential for involving and/or re-integrating fathers/males into the family are expected to be in the majority. CVI’s family profile is as follows:

- Families with 3-10 family members (though open to all eligible families).
- Homeless (as defined by HUD).
- Low income – at 30% of area median income.
- A documented disability (head of household).
- Families that are significant users of Hennepin County services (and therefore add significant cost to Hennepin county) and that are involved with a minimum of 2 Hennepin County Departments.
- Families with a least 2 of the following risk/stress factors, including but not limited to:
 - Significant risk for out of home placement (abused and/or neglected or at high risk for abuse and neglect).
 - Ongoing domestic violence.
 - Adult/child criminal behavior (including gang involved).
 - Adult chemical dependency/substance abuse.
 - Children significantly behind in school.
 - Significant adult/children mental health concerns.
 - First born children birthed by teen parents.
 - Lack of positive/functional kin/friends.

- Families expressed interest in consistent and active participation in personal development activities and in CVI's supportive program elements, and in becoming active and contributing members of the CVI community.
- If a father/male figure doesn't currently exist, there is a possibility that a father/male figure may integrate with the family at some point in time.

Anchor families

Anchor families – families who have overcome homelessness and can act as positive role models for their neighbors – occupy four of the twenty units. These families assume leadership and mentoring roles in the “village”. Anchor families play important roles in CVI including:

- Being a source of support and encouragement to CVI tenants.
- Helping to insure that community living expectations and norms are understood and adhered to.
- Helping to organize and facilitate social events, village meetings, celebrations and holiday events.
- Helping to resolve community conflict.
- Eliciting feedback from tenants and providing CVI staff with reality checks to insure tenant driven programming.
- Assisting with up to ten hours a week in support services such as after school programming, groups, etc.

Anchor families are provided with a stipend that offsets rental expenses. Specific roles and responsibilities are negotiated with each anchor family based on their respective strengths. Anchor families participate in ongoing community building trainings and attend regular meetings with PUC staff.

Supportive service approach

Services at CVI are voluntary. Staff employ intensive engagement strategies to motivate tenants to utilize services as needed to maintain their housing and keep their children safe. Services fall under the following categories:

- **Cultural Case Management**
Cultural case management has the ultimate objective of coordinating community support services to meet the needs of CVI tenants in order to promote their highest level of stabilization in the community. It is a model that has resulted in considerable success with some of the most dysfunctional consumers of mental health and chemical dependency services. A basic tenet of the model is that clients

I think it's an honor to be an anchor family...they were designed to be living examples of how your life can be, even if you've been living in a shelter for years. Sharing your experiences with people helps build trust. I started a group called 20/20: Men of Vision, a mentorship program for young men, both those living at the Village and around the neighborhood. Young men need role models. I'm here to keep the kids focused.

need a place to live and must have whatever support services they need to help them stay in compliance with their lease and sustain their housing. The intensity of the relationship between the tenant and the staff and the services the staff provides and/or coordinates must be flexible enough to vary with the level of need expressed by the tenant at any given time.

- **Mental Health and Substance Abuse Counseling and Harm Reduction Services** Case management from provider agencies of mental health and chemical dependency service systems are critical to each tenant's stabilization and the reductions of harmful behaviors and effects associated with mental illness and chemical abuse. Mental health and counseling program staff will be available and assigned to work with families with identified issues, as chosen by the families. Specialized services including children's therapy and adult rehabilitative mental health services are also available.
- **Community Building** Community building activities are a critical element to CVI's peer support model. All tenants are strongly encouraged to participate in regularly scheduled activities that include but are not limited to the following: village meetings, CVI community celebrations, and community outings.
- **Empowerment Groups.** Depending on tenants' needs and interests, a number of empowerment groups may be provided, such as: friendship groups for children, women support, parenting group, father's group, AA, NA or other 12-step support groups, domestic violence support, mental health support, boys and girls support, anger management, grief and loss, use and abuse reduction.
- **Youth Programming.** Staff develop structured and unstructured programming for youth within the CVI facility, depending on the ages and needs of the youth living at CVI at any particular time. PUC also provides priority access for CVI tenants to PUC's off-site youth programming including child care centers, after school programs and youth employment services.
- **Employment Services** CVI emphasizes the centrality of work for health and wellness. Employment and regular work discipline play an integral role in overall healing and to a sense of purpose. At least one adult per family is expected to be engaged in work activities with the goal of generating income toward support of the household.

Expected Outcomes

CVI's tenants' goals reflect the project's unique features, as follows:

GOAL 1: Obtain and remain in permanent housing

- 100% of those entering the housing will be provided with housing subsidy to cover rents requiring more than 30% of household income.
- 80% of those entering the housing will not use emergency shelter or other forms of temporary housing after entering CVI.

GOAL 2: Increase Skills and or Income

- 75% of adult family members will secure regular employment or be enrolled in an educational program by six months after entering CVI.

- 100% of households will have at least one adult regularly employed or enrolled in an educational or training program by 12 months after entering CVI.
- 100% of all school age children will be enrolled in school.
- 100% of school-aged children will comply with Minneapolis Public School attendance standards (no more than five unexcused absences per year).

GOAL 3: Increase Skills and Capacity of Staff to Deliver Services Using a Harm Reduction Model

- At least 66% of PUC's CVI staff will participate in training in harm reduction, motivational interviewing and/or other similar trainings intended to build capacity of staff to engage tenants in services without making services mandatory or imposing other participation requirements.
- All documents, policies, procedures and outreach material related to CVI will be reviewed to ensure that any references to mandatory service participation or "program goals" is removed and a "housing first" approach and language are instead used.

Unfortunately, poor people often pay for bad choices longer than others. The staffs' role at CVI is to help family members think about their choices and how their choices positively or negatively affect themselves and their children.

APPENDIX 1

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