



Planning for Services for Different Populations and Levels of Need

Supportive housing can accommodate a wide range of individual needs. Following is a brief overview of some of the different groups housed and their service needs to assist providers in beginning to formulate a service plan.

Homelessness:

Homeless people are often shuffled from one shelter or service program to the next. The transition from the streets or shelters usually requires significant adjustments in routine and lifestyle. Similarly, homeless people often lose contact with their families and friends. Making new friends, paying rent, and becoming familiar with a new neighborhood are only a few of the many adjustments that most individuals will have to make.

Some people who have been homeless for extended periods of time may have developed behaviors that served them well on the streets but are no longer necessary now that they have moved inside. Examples of such behaviors may include the hoarding of items or failing to bathe as often as necessary. The staff may need to help tenants who were homeless make the transition from homelessness to housing. Usually, it is useful to begin by helping orient people to their new home and neighborhood. Staff should make information available about stores and services in the area and help tenants develop new routines.

The extent to which tenants may also need training and/or assistance with cooking, cleaning, laundry, using household appliances, and paying rent and other bills will become clear with time. The staff should be attentive and help provide easy access to any needed support services. Being sensitive to the enormous disruption experienced by people when they move into housing after being homeless is critical to the individual making a successful adjustment to being a new tenant. It is important for the staff to understand the reasons why people acquire certain behaviors when they are homeless.

In one supportive housing program, a formerly homeless tenant with mental illness continued to panhandle in familiar haunts even though he did not need to. The panhandling continued because it was a familiar routine and filled a primary need he had to interact with other people, which he enjoyed. The predictable social interaction of panhandling, with its limited variations and outcomes, was a reassuring activity he had fully mastered. Staff members responded by discouraging the panhandling and offering him the opportunity to choose from other activities, including vocational training for a retail position requiring many of the same skills used in panhandling.

Some localities have outreach teams or case managers working to get housing for homeless people who will work with service staff to help ensure a smooth transition.

Note: This document is included within the *Supportive Services* section of CSH's *Toolkit for Developing and Operating Supportive Housing*, which is available at www.csh.org/toolkit2. This document has been adapted from CSH's publication *Developing the "Support" in Supportive Housing*, which is available at www.csh.org/publications.

Physical Disabilities:

Depending on the severity of the physical disability and the circumstance of the individual tenant, varying levels of support can be required. Not all people require assistance. Some may need assistance with activities of daily living and maintaining their apartments. Accommodations will vary depending on the type of disability. Standard accommodations should include wheelchair-accessible entrances, living areas, common spaces, and showers. For a blind person, for instance, staff efforts may include helping a tenant adjust to a new appliance or device and working with specialized services for guidance and support. Usually, the goal of staff support is to assist the individual with a particular task or to acquire an accommodation to help maximize independence. Some localities have home health aides or care attendants who are assigned to help eligible individuals with daily chores and activities of daily living.

Older Adults:

Older adults will present a variety of needs to supportive services staff. Some will be healthy, active, and looking for ways to stay productive and involved. Others will have medical problems and will need assistance navigating health care services and systems. Inadequate medical care, dental care, and a range of miscellaneous unmet needs are common. Staff may need to help individuals with issues of death and dying, which can cause depression and stress.

Specialized services and support groups for older adults may be available in the local community. Additionally, intergenerational groups and activities are effective ways to maintain a lively, positive environment for older adults. These may include organized trips to concerts and plays, political advocacy actions on issues, and workshops about health and nutrition. Tenants may be interested in volunteer work in or outside the residence. Support groups addressing issues related to aging are often highly valued by older tenants.

Young Adults:

Providers who work with 18- to 25-year-olds will testify that it is a challenging, yet rewarding group. Support and one-on-one mentoring are key in assisting young adults to develop the independence necessary to function as adults. In particular, those coming from foster care may need extra assistance in developing independent living skills, accessing resources, and developing a support network.

Supportive housing staff must balance the provision of assistance with opportunities for encouraging and developing independence. Many basic tasks associated with maintaining a household, like paying rent or cooking, will be completely new to many young tenants. An emphasis on educational and vocational activities is particularly important. Service programs usually need to focus on the high-risk behavior that occurs during this life stage by providing educational programs on safe sex and counseling on drug and alcohol use. Finally, helping young adults become engaged in healthy and productive activities should be a part of the supportive services program.

Family Support:

Although this guide focuses on housing and services for single adults, settings that are designed for single individuals must also consider family issues. A parent may want to be reunited with children who have been in foster care, for instance, or a formerly homeless individual may be ready to visit

his/her family after a long period of separation. Additionally, providers are increasingly mixing families and single people as they develop new projects. Providing individuals with the services and support to maintain or re-establish healthy relationships with significant others is a feature of many supportive housing programs. Teaching communication skills can help tenants build these relationships. If children are involved, assistance in accessing day care, school, camps, youth employment, and tutoring or homework help is often required.

Note: CSH's *Toolkit for Developing and Operating Supportive Housing* includes additional information regarding service planning issues under both *Designing the Services Plan* and *Preparing for Tenants' Services Needs* in the *Supportive Services* section of the *Toolkit*, available at www.csh.org/toolkit2services.