



Holding an Open House

Open House vs. Community Forum What is the most effective way to communicate to your community about supportive housing and to get input from the community? In the past, developers have held open meetings or forums to perform the dual functions of informing the community about their plans and hearing concerns from the community. Unfortunately, this kind of meeting often engenders an “us vs. them” atmosphere.

Rather than stage an open meeting, consider an open house. This allows for more person-to-person contact, and greater sharing of concerns and information. Since the interactions take place in small groups there is less likelihood that some of the negative aspects of group behavior will be reinforced.

Space – The Open House should be held in an accessible location. If it can be held in a place with positive community connections like a church or school, so much the better.

Time – Hold the Open House on a weekday evening from 5:30 PM till 8:30 PM. This provides an opportunity for people to stop off after work or to come after dinner. Make sure you pick a date that does not conflict with other important community events. (A Massachusetts developer unwittingly chose the first night of Passover for a community meeting about a housing project. Many of the leaders of the community were Jewish and considered this scheduling oversight a sign of bad faith by the non-Jewish developer).

People – The most important element for a successful Open House. Having enough people available to answer questions, distribute materials, show videos and conduct virtual tours is critical to a good open house. Think of it like a fair or exhibitor’s hall at a convention. Have at least four different areas for people to get information and talk with supportive housing proponents. Here are some suggestions:

1. [Reaching Home Video](#) – Schedule half- hourly showings of this 13 minute video.
2. [Picture Gallery](#) – Exhibit photos of successfully completed and operating SH projects. A continuous loop slide show is another good visual tool.
3. [Question and Answer sessions with small groups](#). Have proponents make themselves available to answer questions. Have fact sheets available which address some of the myths about supportive housing.
4. Service Provider – Have the service provider agency present to talk about their experience and their approach.
5. If possible, include people who live in supportive housing now or who are interested in living in a new supportive housing project in the community.

Refreshments are always welcome as is some kind of child care. Make the evening as upbeat and positive as you can. Before the open house, provide training for the people conducting the Open House using tools from this Toolkit.