

First Wednesday in Supportive Housing
June 2, 2004

The Double Bottom Line: Property Management in Supportive Housing

Presenters:

Irma Poe, Program Officer at CSH. Irma has extensive supportive housing Property Management experience in the San Francisco Bay Area and recently spearheaded the creation of a supportive housing property management manual.

Carole McCabe, Executive Director, Avalon Housing, Ann Arbor, MI has extensive property management experience, especially in small, scattered site developments. Avalon has a proven track record of developing and operating housing that is well managed, and having tenants that other organizations might consider too challenging.

Pat Jackson, Regional Coordinator, Community Housing Management, is the largest supportive housing property management company in **CT**, operating 270 units of housing in small to medium sized developments throughout the state.

Facilitator welcomed group. Presentation began with Irma Poe, who detailed her past experience in the field. She also referred to "SHPMOM", Supportive Housing Property Management and Operations Manual" which was created out of a 2001 California property management initiative. Community partners-development corps, social service providers, government entities and consumers-were communicating their needs to CSH. How are supportive housing projects managed differently, and how could CSH provide the support needed to the projects? CSH researched these questions to determine the answers by asking providers from Northern and Southern CA what is different about/what are your best practices/tools for managing supportive housing properties?

Also to come from that initiative is a curriculum for non-profit providers for property management operations, as well as current figures of operating costs for three modes of supportive housing:

- A Large 70 unit SRO
- Develop and operate a new 20 unit construction
- Smaller rehab projects

Carol McCabe of Avalon Housing followed Irma. Avalon began as an emergency shelter program for adults which became permanent supportive housing. They use an enhanced property management model targeting disables single adults. The model has two parts: Traditional Landlord with a "twist", and non-traditional methods to manage supportive housing.

Landlord with a Twist: Avalon is pro-tenant, they will work with tenants to create options to keep the tenant in residence and able to comply with the terms of their leases. Some creative means have been payment plans that allow tenants to pay their rent weekly, or to pay into a damages fund. Avalon arranges rental inspections yearly, but will inspect more frequently if necessary. They also provide full time maintenance staff heavily involved with the units and the tenants. Often, the staff are the eyes and ears of the building-good allies-and can be a benefit for communication.

Non-Tradition methods of Property Management: Avalon provides 24 hour on call response staff, they actively build relationships with security and the local police, participation in curb appeal which consists of volunteer tenants & neighbors, with one project even winning the Golden Trowel award from the city; tenant organizations to provide support and entertainment for tenants which keeps them involved with each other and their community; on-site social supports are provided out of two units-they are flexible, individualized and voluntary. Tenants dealing with addiction issues-Avalon follows the Housing First model. As long as the tenant can meet the terms of the lease they can remain housed. Avalon discovered that when dealing with these special needs individuals, engagement is critical to building relationships & establishing trust. This involves long-term engagement and outreach work. Providing alternate entertainment activities assists tenants in re-focusing their social time. Being an advocate for tenants helps them to navigate the system to their advantage. Tenants with co-occurring issues are vulnerable; they really need advocates to speak for them.

Key Principles:

- Mission Driven
- Eviction if the Last Resort
- Screen In, Not Out
- Pro-tenant

Pat Jackson of Community Housing Management followed Carol. Pat listed why she enjoys the work she does because it involves the community, stresses teamwork, and builds trust.

Pat stressed that one should bring property management into the process early. They can assist with design issues, tenant needs and comfort, amenities and security issues before they become a challenge. Property Managers need to know who the tenants are, and what are their needs. Based on the answers they receive, they will use criteria best suited for those tenants to help them improve their lives.

Operating Budgets: early input from property managers regarding issues such as 24 hour staffing can help prevent necessary services from being omitted or overlooked.

It is the property managers responsibility to protect the owner and provide housing & support for the tenants. Property Mangers needs to fulfill and follow many requirements:

- Financial
- Regulatory
- Legal
- Employment
- Monitoring

The property management staff must understand the purpose of the house and the population itself in order to provide the best services possible.

Screen In: keeping people housed; calls for the ability to develop unique situations to assist tenants.

Educate the property management staff so they can provide the best to the owner and the tenants.

Know your boundaries: what are our responsibilities? What are the responsibilities of the service providers? These groups can teach each other.

Work with local resources: this builds relationships, improves neighborhood relations, neighborhoods can advocate for supportive housing.

Q&A Period

Q: How can one control the costs of damages to property by tenants?

A: This is a behavioral issue that needs to be addressed. What is the relationship with your funding source? Have money set aside for damages only; plan for it in when planning operating budgets. Have tenants pay into a damages fund; arrange payment plans with tenants. Make them responsible somehow for the damages. Maximize the opportunity to be reimbursed by your funding source/capture every dollar.

Q: How to deal with personal relationships within units proving housing for adults? Can relationships be combined with recovery? Can it work?

A: This can be a challenge. It is difficult to educate both tenants. They must understand that rental agreements will change as additional members move into the unit, and they need to be aware of potential consequences. Provide each tenant with their own rental agreement even if they live in the same unit as a "family". Seek additional resources from Avalon Housing and CSH.

Q: How can I handle a tenant association that empowers the group but does not allow the group to become a bargaining group?

A: Establish a leadership team first. Provide staff-volunteers and interns-to work with the groups. Allow for mentoring/tenant skill building. Be committed to the group, provide staffing and resources. Be clear about the need to share power, what are the expectations/responsibilities of the group? What are your resources/what will the agency provide/willing to provide? Leadership comes and goes in any particular community-be prepared for changes. Allow flexibility for tenants to have some control over issues such as house rules. Allow them the option to add to or refine current rules. Refer to CSH website for publications.

Q: Can you describe the screening process?

A: You might have to develop new screening processes to accommodate tenant issues; changes of procedure and requirements; give them the benefit of the doubt and prepare to accept the challenges. Involve supportive services in the evaluation process-can you accommodate the tenant? You want to help the tenant be successful. SHPMOM has a section on tenant screening processes.

Q: How many staff is adequate to accommodate 24-hour security?

A: There is no standard number or an easy answer to this question. Payment is always an issue, and you can overcome this by making sure this expense is included when you create your budget. Find funding sources willing to pay for this service.

Additional Resources:

CSH Website: www.csh.org

Avalon Housing: www.avalon.org

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