Role, Duties, and Responsibilities of the Housing Specialist

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**Why Do We Do This?**

**SAMHSA Definition of Recovery**

- A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.

- Four major dimensions that support a life in Recovery:
  - Health
  - Home - A stable and safe place to live
  - Purpose
  - Community
“The treatment for homelessness is housing . . . It is that simple.”

Sam Tsemberis, CEO
Pathways to Housing
Most consumers want to live in their own apartment.

Providing supportive housing to consumers increases the likelihood that they will continue receiving treatment and reduce substance use.

Housing services are an essential treatment component.

Safe affordable housing is key to recovery.
Service Delivery Models/Philosophy of Providing Housing Services

- Housing First
- Consumer Choice
- Harm Reduction
- Permanent Supportive Housing
Housing First

- Evidence-Based Practice that focuses on moving individuals that are homeless directly into permanent supportive housing that offers supportive services.
- Consumer choice is a key element of the approach.
- There is no requirement for enrollment or maintenance of treatment services.
- People do not have to progress through a linear set of preparatory residential services in order to be successful in permanent housing.
The premise is: Increasing housing stability is a necessary first step before addressing an individual’s mental illness and substance-related disorders.

Uses a harm reduction approach – sobriety is not a requirement for assistance with housing.

- Focus is prevention of harm and risks associated with behavior rather than adherence to a particular treatment plan
- Individuals are empowered to make their own choices, and regardless of choices, they are not treated adversely
Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)

- SAMHSA Evidence-Based Practice
- 6 Core Principles
1. Consumer choice in housing and living arrangements
- If consumers are “placed” in a setting that is not of their choosing, they are not likely to succeed.

2. Functional separation of housing and services
- Most successful when there is a separation between housing matters (rent collection, physical maintenance of the property) and services and supports.
3. Community integration and rights of tenancy

- Housing is in regular residential neighborhoods
- Natural supports are encouraged
- Residents have full legal rights in a tenant-landlord relationship
- Tenants must abide by normal standards of behavior and conduct outlined in a lease
- Lease requirements are distinct from “program” rules
- The agreement between the tenant and landlord determines length of stay
6 Core Principles of PSH

4. Flexible, voluntary, and recovery-focused services

- Offering services is mandatory, acceptance of services by the tenant is voluntary
- Type, location, intensity, and frequency of services adjust to meet tenants’ changing needs

5. Decent, safe, and affordable housing

- Tenants pay no more than 30% of their income
6. Access to housing and privacy

- Eliminate barriers and redefine readiness
- Research does not show that people with mental illnesses do better in housing if they pass a readiness screen
- Access to housing should be restricted to those elements required of any tenant, for example, ability to pay rent
- Achieving and sustaining tenancy is the primary goal and focus
Role of the Housing Specialist

- Countywide Housing Specialists
  - Receives referrals from DMH Clinics in Service Area

- Housing Coordinators/Liaisons for Agency/Clinic
  - Receives referrals from the agency case managers

- Treatment Team Member Specializing in Housing
General Categories of Duties

- Assists consumers with obtaining housing
- Assists consumers with maintaining housing
- Participates as mental health team member
- Develops housing resources in the community
Assists with Obtaining Housing

- Conducts Housing Assessment
  
  Everyone should be **assessed individually** to match housing with need and desire

  - Housing Intake and Needs Assessment
    - Housing history and evictions
    - Income eligibility
    - Housing needs, areas, safety, and space
    - Independent living skills

  - VI-SPDAT – Coordinated Entry System
Coordinated Entry System

A way by which persons experiencing homelessness, and organizations providing housing, find each other in a systematic and efficient manner

- **Assess**
  - Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT)

- **Assist**
  - with obtaining all documents required for housing

- **Assign**
  - match the person to permanent housing
Assists with Obtaining Housing

- Works with consumer to develop housing plan
  - Short term vs. Long term goals
    - Identifies funding sources and resources
  - Identification of barriers
    - Assists in resolving legal history barriers (e.g. warrants, expungement)
Assists with compiling and assessing eligibility information in compliance with housing regulations

- Provides referrals to appropriate housing resources

- Assists with completion of applications for rental subsidies such as Homeless Section 8 and Shelter Plus Care or the Housing Assistance Program

- Assists with preparing for interviews with Housing Authority, managers and property owners (e.g. mock interviews)
Assists with Obtaining Housing

- Gathers required documents such as identification, social security card, bank statements
- Accompanies/transport consumer to all necessary related appointments as requested
- Educates consumer about available housing resources and assistance in the community
- Determines and certifies eligibility for federal, state and locally funded housing programs based on client income, assets and other financial data
Assists in the housing search process

Educates consumers about tenant rights and lease responsibilities

Advocates and negotiates for consumers with poor credit and poor housing histories (i.e. evictions or lack of housing tenancy)

Assists with moving in
Assists with Maintaining Housing

- Ensures consumer is connected to on-going mental health services
- Advocates for consumers with landlords
- Averts possible evictions by addressing any concerns of the property owners and managers
- Liaison between landlord and consumer and mental health team
- Conducts in home visits at least quarterly
Assists with Maintaining Housing

- Helps develop connections within the community by visiting the local library/places of worship/parks
- Teaches money management/paying bills
- Teaches how to shop and cook
- Connects to volunteer service opportunities
- Supports employment/education goals
Participates as Mental Health Team Member

- Provides information, training and technical assistance to team members regarding housing resources
- Accepts housing assistance referrals from team
- Works with team to obtain information for housing applications such as documentation of disability
- Conducts home visits
- Ensures all required quarterly/annual reports are submitted
Participates as Mental Health Team Member

- Informs team of consumer programs in meeting housing goals
- Informs team of any observed, or landlord/manager reported, difficulties consumer is experiencing in the housing including:
  - Need for additional supports
  - Crisis intervention
  - Medication evaluation
Develops Resources in the Community

- Conducts outreach to property owners and managers to:
  - Develop potential housing resources
  - Provide education about mental illness to reduce stigma
  - Increase availability of housing opportunities in the fair rental market
Develops Resources in the Community

- Researches housing resources and develops community specific housing resource directory
- Liaison to Countywide Housing, Employment and Education Resource Development (CHEERD)
- Represents agency program at Service Area and Countywide housing-related meetings
Housing Specialist Presenters

Arthur Poghosyan

former Housing Specialist
Downtown Mental Health Center

Gillian Hibbert

Housing Specialist and Case Manager
San Fernando Mental Health Center, Inc