



**ECHO Housing Work Group
 “Housing Specialist” Research Project
 June 28th, 2013**

- GOAL OF PROJECT:**
- To identify how “housing specialists” are currently being utilized as it relates to doing outreach to landlords/property owners to develop, maintain and sustain relationships that help to expand housing opportunities for persons with housing barriers including search for affordable housing
 - To make recommendations how we may enhance what we are currently doing around landlord outreach and expanding housing opportunities for persons looking for housing

Organizations Interviewed:

Organizations with Designated “Housing Specialists”:

ARCIL
 ATCIC
 Caritas
 Downtown Community Court
 Green Doors
 HACA
 Travis County HHS TBRA Program
 UTAHC—Money Follow the Persons

Organizations with Case Managers Performing “Housing Specialist” Role:

AIDS Services of Austin
 COA Communicable Disease
 Family Eldercare
 Foundation for the Homeless
 Front Steps
 Lifeworks
 SafePlace
 Salvation Army
 Travis County Inside Out
 Travis County MHPD
 VA-VASH

Organizations Not Engaging in Landlord Outreach:

A New Entry
 Foundation Communities
 Mobile Loaves and Fishes
 Travis County Jail

Process of Project:

National scan for best practices/ promising practices related to landlord outreach		May-June
Interviews of local organizations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One on one interviews • Sent meeting summary to informer for review and revisions • Summary is only used to identify key findings and not being shared publically 	May
Convening informers/organizations interviewed to review key findings:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlights of best practice review • Highlights of how local organizations are doing landlord outreach • Discussion/recommendations on ideas for enhancing strategies for landlord outreach 	Late June
Key findings/recommendations presented to ECHO Housing Work Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For discussion and/or possible action 	August

Organizations Interviewed: Dedicated “Housing Specialist” vs. Utilizing Case Managers for Creating Landlord Relationships

Organization	Informer:	Dedicated “Housing Specialist”:		Utilizing Case Managers for Role	Partnering to Utilize Dedicated Housing Specialist
		# of:	Funding Stream:		
A New Entry	Michael Ortega			N	N
AIDS Services of Austin	Sandra Chavez			Y	Y
ARCIL	Mike Martinez	1 FTE	DSHS-TX	N	N
ATCIC	Darilynn Cardona-Beiler	1 FTE		N	N
Caritas	Michelle Akers, Lori Frasco	2 FTE	COA—BSS+	N	NA
COA Communicable Disease	John Harper			Y	Y
DACC	Michelle Myles, Bree Williams	1 FTE*	COA-ESG Grant	N	NA
Family Eldercare	Shontel Gauthier, Kendra Peters			Y	N
Foundation Communities	Tim Miles			NA	N
Foundation for the Homeless	Ashlyn Riley			Y	Y
Front Steps	Kameron Fowler			Y	Y
Green Doors	Andrea Garcia	1 FTE	Misc.	Y	N
Housing Authority of Austin	Lisa Garcia	1 FTE	HUD	N	N
Lifeworks	Dave Davis, Jenna Pywell			Y	N
Mobile Loaves and Fishes	Alan Graham			NA	N
SafePlace	Claudia Thompson			Y	Y
Salvation Army	Brian Killworth			Y	Y
TC HHS	Ana Everett	½ FTE	TC--CDBG	Y	N
TC Inside Out	Patricia Bouressa			Y	N
TC MHPD	Valerie Whiting			Y	N
TC Jail	Mary Moran			NA	N
UTSA HSC/Money Follows the Person	Helen Eisert	½ FTE	DSHS-TX	Y	N
VA--VASH	Andrew Miller			Y	N

*Grant written for one fte housing locator and one fte housing stability case manager. Since implementation, however, both ftes are dividing up these roles/functions.



ECHO Housing Specialist Research June 2013

Key Findings in “Housing Specialist” Local Research:

- We use different terms for a “housing specialist” and their roles/functions vary between organizations that have dedicated position/s.
- Existing “housing specialists” as well as case managers are being very creative in developing strategies to work with landlords and getting clients housed.
- Current market conditions are making it increasingly more difficult to find housing options for clients.
- There are a number of ways to work on building credibility and strengthen relationships with landlords to help open up housing opportunities.
- There appears to be limited formal marketing or landlord outreach strategies within organizations but especially in a community/comprehensive, proactive strategy.
- There are limited formal training opportunities for dedicated housing specialists and/or case managers performing the function of landlord outreach and/or housing searches for clients.
- Some terms commonly used may have negative stigma attached to them that impacts relationship building with landlords and some organizations are changing the way they use terms.
- Few organizations are collecting measures to help track how effective we are in expanding the number of housing units and landlords willing to serve vulnerable populations or tracking/reporting how long it is taking to get clients into housing.

Key Recommendations (General) From 06-28-13 Informer’s Meeting

- Create strategy/s to connect housing specialists/case managers to do more peer-to-peer information sharing regarding strategies to house clients
- Develop a macro/comprehensive strategy that will:
 - Develop messaging/marketing strategy to reach property owners, landlords and in particular corporations who own several apartment complexes to open more affordable housing options/strategies;
 - Enhance relationships with groups like Austin Apt. Association, Texas Apartment Association, Austin Board of Realtors and other groups in this industry;
 - Enhance relationships with commercial housing locator services;
 - Coordinate marketing activities at industry related shows/workshops;
 - Coordinate/develop training opportunities for both case managers and landlords; and
 - Develop appropriate responses to problems identified.
- Develop tools/strategies to help landlords/case managers appropriately interpret criminal histories and to use the info to assess true risk to housing



Housing Specialist Research Project Detailed Analysis of Key Findings and Recommendations from Informers

- We use different terms for a “housing specialist” and their roles/functions vary between organizations that have a dedicated position/s.

Organization:	Title:
ARCIL	Relocation Coordinator
ATCIC	Housing Specialist
Caritas	Landlord Outreach Specialist
Downtown Austin Community Court	Housing Locator
Green Doors	Senior Housing Specialist
HACA	Landlord Outreach Specialist
TC HHS-TBRA	TBRA Coordinator
UTSAHSC—Money Follows the Person	Housing Specialist

- Existing “housing specialists” as well as case managers are being very creative in developing strategies to work with landlords and getting clients housed.

Challenges:	Working Well:	Ideas/Recommendations
Those with multiple barriers (such as credit history issues, previous evictions, debt, unpaid damages, criminal history, etc.) very difficult to house	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilizing co-signers for leases • Offering short term leases (i.e., 3 months) to help create positive relationships with landlords for riskier populations • Helping clients to work with credit companies to clear debts and other credit problems • Providing “tenant education/good neighbor” classes to clients • Utilizing internal staffings and list serve-like tools to share info about what is working and to solve problems • Using senior case mgrs./housing specialist to peer mentor others • Stressing case mgmt. services, utilization of representative payees, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop strategies to connect up housing specialists and case mgrs. to do more peer-to-peer information sharing regarding locating housing for their clients • Examine ways that some of this work on their housing barriers can begin while in jail
Multi-family housing does not always work for clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaching out to private landlords trying to lease single family homes • Reaching out more to owners of duplex/four-plex communities • Looking at Craigslist and Green Sheet, etc. postings for opportunities • Utilizing co-ops, shared/roommate situations, and student housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
Forming relationships with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joining Austin Apartment Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECHO to continue to work on building

industry groups related to housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participating in landlord training (to learn more about that world and networking with landlords) Participating in industry shows/events with booths 	<p>relationships with Austin Apt Association, Texas Apartment Association as well as the Austin Board of Realtors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn more about industry events and coordinate marketing among organizations
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• Current market conditions are making it increasingly more difficult to find housing options for clients.

Challenges:	Working Well:	Ideas/Recommendations
Very limited affordable housing options/vacancies and no real time way of knowing this info	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of commercial housing locators Use of various lists/websites for affordable housing options or housing accepting subsidies Using clients to help identify available housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase use of/formalize relationships with housing locators/Austin Board of Realtors Develop systemic tool/web-based tool that will track vacancies more real time
Size of deposits increasing	Some funding streams available to help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage funding streams to be flexible enough to use for this Increase funding for increased deposits
Income tests increasing (2x or 3x rent)		
Increasingly more difficult to house persons with criminal backgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having some success getting clients housed with case mgr training on reasonable accommodation processes Some programs have case mgrs. trained in motivational interviewing techniques to help work with this population Helping clients gather recommendation/character letters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance training for case mgrs. and landlords on how to pursue or develop processes to utilize "reasonable accommodation" request for offenses that occurred as a result of their disability Develop education tools to help landlords/case mgrs appropriately interpret criminal histories and to use the info to assess true risk to housing
Going to same landlords/feeling of competition between providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Networking informally with other organizations Collaborating for use of "housing specialist" 	
Concentrating outreach/housing in lower opportunity neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looking for "for rent" signs in neighborhoods Using client choice to help advocate with landlords when they find a place they would like to live 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop formal, macro, large scale strategy for doing landlord outreach that includes looking at higher opportunity areas and neighborhoods
Using boarding homes and motels more and for longer stays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some are doing inspections for any housing they use including boarding homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop strategy that engages boarding home providers and provides training (i.e., MH First Aid Training, etc.) and expertise to strengthen their housing Develop a "certification" program for boarding homes to participate in Examine who and how we are using motels and ideas for strengthening/utilizing this strategy

Challenges:	Working Well:	Ideas/Recommendations
Wait lists for actual affordable housing units as well as vouchers are longer and taking longer for names to come up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of outreach case mgrs. to keep track of clients who are waiting on housing 	
Some vouchers are taking a long time to use and we are set to get more in the next 2-4 months		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider a system that links up all voucher programs Determine how vouchers can have more flexibility in where they can be used

- There are a number of ways to work on building credibility and strengthen relationships with landlords to help open up housing opportunities.

Working Well:	Ideas/Recommendations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having something in writing that clearly spells out how they can work as a team and solve problems Ensuring that rent will be paid timely Being able to cut checks quickly to get clients in housing quicker (units are being rented very fast) Giving landlords contact information for who they can call at any time when a problem is identified Being responsive to those calls Stressing case mgmt. services, utilization of representative payees, etc. Subsidies to help pay rent seems to help landlords accept riskier clients Providing on site services to clients Recognizing landlords formally and informally to show appreciation Some funding streams have been able to use for bed bug eradication (but there are some new issues arising) One organization has funding for a one-time "deep cleaning service" for clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider developing a macro-level response system to landlords who may be having problems with a client and cannot get in touch with a case manager or get problem resolved Consider ways to minimize financial costs to landlords if a client has damages in their unit or for cleaning services more regularly or at move out

- There appears to be limited formal marketing or landlord outreach strategies within organizations but especially in a community/comprehensive, proactive strategy.

Challenges:	Working Well:	Ideas/Recommendations
Most do not have formal brochures or flyers about their programs and rely on informal outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps build credibility with landlords if you can hand them something when talking with them Helps to have information about your program on the web (they can learn even more than what is on a flyer/brochure) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop formal, macro, large scale messaging/marketing strategy Encourage organizations to develop brochures about their programs as well as put messaging/marketing info on their website
Most marketing is program based		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop formal, macro, large scale messaging/marketing strategy

Challenges:	Working Well:	Ideas/Recommendations
Difficult to engage property managers at large complexes or complexes owned by corporations (policies set and cannot be adjusted at the property level)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a macro-level, comprehensive messaging and marketing strategy to engage some corporations regarding reducing screening/eligibility screening criteria (but we must also be aware of how fair housing is impacted in any ask)
There appears to be rapid turnover with property managers as well as entire complexes (which sometimes means starting over in building relationships)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some organizations try to react quickly when they learn that this has happened and be proactive in re-establishing that relationship on behalf of their client/s 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a more systemic strategy for learning about these changes and proactively reacting to it so that marketing messages do not get lost
Some organizations are concerned about advocating with landlords for their clients due to confidentiality issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some can use a collaborative "housing specialist" for housing location but the case mgrs. are still not always comfortable being the contact person for landlords issues that arise 	

- There are limited formal training opportunities for dedicated housing specialists as well as case managers performing the function of landlord outreach and/or housing searches for clients.

Working Well:	Ideas/Recommendations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some organizations are participating in the Texas Apartment Association's REDBOOK training (seminars, webinars, etc.) http://www.taa.org/taa-news/2705-taas-redbook-and-apartment-and-rental-housing-legal-seminarsq-provide-critical-legal-updates Austin Apt Association also offers training and seminars that are reduced in cost to members of the association http://austinaptassoc.com/displaycommon.cfm?an=5 Many organizations are participating in fair housing seminars/workshops as well as reasonable accommodation training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop formal as well as informal training or cross-sharing opportunities for dedicated housing specialists and case managers performing this function to help them develop strategies that will lead to increase in housing options for vulnerable populations Explore how to utilize the TAA and AAA training opportunities for community based providers

- Some terms commonly used may have negative stigma attached to them that impacts relationship building with landlords and some organizations are changing the way they use these terms.

"Voucher program"	"self-sufficiency program"
"Housing subsidy"	"housing assistance" or "rental/financial assistance"

- Few organizations are collecting measures to help track how effective we are in expanding the number of housing units and landlords willing to serve vulnerable populations or tracking/reporting how long it is taking to get clients into housing.

• Specific Ideas Related to Helping Link More Homeless Persons Leaving Jails to Housing/Community Based Services Related to Housing:

- Offer “tenant education” classes in jail: financial readiness, reading credit histories and how to address the issues, how to address criminal backgrounds when applying for housing, what does a lease mean, how to be a good neighbor, etc.
- Develop strategies to help clients begin working on addressing housing barriers prior to release.
- Develop more “transitional housing” and “bridge funding” to house persons coming out of jails in order to stabilize them and develop plans for move to permanent housing.
- Provide ATCIC liaison/services at the jail to do more effective continuum of care planning including housing planning for their clients.
- Create opportunities for “in-reach” services to the jails for community based providers doing housing location/programming to effectively engage clients prior to release and to help begin those housing services.

Resources for Finding Affordable Housing:

- Section 8 Landlords: www.gosection8.com
- TDHCA “Vacancy Clearinghouse”: <http://hrc-ic.tdhca.state.tx.us/hrc/VacancyClearinghouseSearch.m>
- Austin Tenant Council: Guide to Affordable Housing: http://www.housing-rights.org/PDF/GAHGAA_2012.pdf