

Household Management Protocol

Approved June 17, 2010

Purpose:

Participants in the MHCC At Home/Chez Soi Demonstration Project randomized to service teams have experienced a period of homelessness that may impact their readiness to successfully manage tenancy in a market-rent apartment. The Service teams hold specific responsibilities to assist participants to manage their tenant role. This includes information, support and monitoring through home visits that occur at least once per week.

Background:

Participants who move into subsidized units through the Project are tenants, with tenant rights and responsibilities as any tenant in the market, with the support of service providers to help them be successful in their tenant role. In Ontario, rental housing is regulated both in terms of rent and the landlord and tenant relationship. Understanding legal responsibilities is important to help avoid eviction. Eviction avoidance involves helping to avoid situations where the tenancy may become at risk and the participant wishes to remain in the unit.

Successful tenancies are those where the tenant, landlord and neighbours have good relationships and where roles and responsibilities are understood and acted upon. The service provider is critical in helping to support these positive relationships within this framework.

Process:

Lease Signing: Service provider(s) from the Service Team working with the participant will attend the lease signing. The service provider will review the lease conditions with the participant to ensure the Participant understands their roles and responsibilities under the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA). The lease is to be faxed to Housing Connections as well as to income support sources.

Landlord Relationship: The service provider should maintain regular communication with the landlord throughout the participant's tenancy to effectively respond to any concerns as they arise. The service provider is to complete the Contact Sheet for Building Staff (available on Housing Connections website) and submit to the property manager. In

addition, the landlord should be contacted monthly to ensure rent has been received. If any conflicts arise, face-to-face meetings are advised as a better way to resolve problems than writing letters or leaving phone messages. Ensure the participant attends any meeting related to their tenancy and are the final decision-maker.

Housing Connections will also develop a relationship with the landlord when accessing units and through its agreement process to establish rent allowance payments. There will continue to be a secondary relationship, therefore between Housing Connections and the landlord. Ongoing and regular communication between service providers and Housing Connections is important. Housing Connections will notify service providers of landlord communications regarding their clients (i.e. complaints), and where the complaint is about a service provider, will notify the Service Team lead.

Rent Direct Payment: Paying the rent regularly and on time is the single most important factor in a successful tenancy (Keys to the Front Door, 2005). While the pay direct option is voluntary, it is the preferred option for the Project, and that Project participants will choose the pay direct option for their portion of the rent, through their bank, trustee or social assistance provider. The service provider will assist participants to complete and submit necessary forms.

Insurance: All participants will sign the SOHO Insurance Form in conjunction with lease signing. This insurance covers accidental damages in the unit and common areas during the period of tenancy. This cost is not borne by the participant.

Move-In Inspection: The service provider(s) working with the participant will assist in completing the Move-In Inspection Form. This allows the participant and service provider to identify deficiencies in the unit upon move-in to the landlord and Housing Connections, to protect the participant from unwarranted damage claims in future. This form is to be faxed to Housing Connections.

Furniture Checklist: The service provider and participant will complete the Furniture Checklist (available on Housing Connections website) to verify that all furniture provided through the Project is delivered and in good condition. The service provider will fax this form to Housing Connections upon completion and communicate directly with designated Housing Connection representatives any deficiencies noted.

Emergency Furniture: If furniture will not be delivered before the date of move-in, the City of Toronto has delegated to Service Team Leads responsibility for procuring emergency furniture through the use of pre-loaded Visa cards. Emergency furniture consists of an air mattress, camping chair and table. The participant will be allowed to keep these items after regular furniture delivery.

Bedbug Protocol: Before move in, the service provider will assist the participant in bedbug prevention procedures, including laundering all clothing before moving items into the unit. Mattress and box spring bedbug protective covers are provided through Project funds. Service providers will provide information to participants about bedbug prevention, identification and eradication procedures. Service providers will continue to monitor the unit for bedbugs during regular home visits.

In the event that bedbugs are found in the unit, service providers will work closely with the participant to arrange unit pest control treatment through the landlord and assist in unit preparation, including laundering.

Safety Tips: The service provider will review the Toronto site approved Safety Tips form with participants upon move in.

MHCC Welcome Policy/Weekly Visits: The service provider will review their agency's Welcome Policy reinforcing expectations of the MHCC's At Home/Chez Soi Demonstration Project informing participants that weekly visits will occur during the period of the Project. The participant should start out in his or her tenancy understanding that the service provider will be meeting in the home. Build in the expectation from the outset that regular home visits will occur. It is not because the service provider is "checking up" on the participant. Ideally the service team creates a matter-of-fact atmosphere that this is the way the agency works. Participants have the option of opting out of treatment but are still required to see their Service Team weekly. Ideally these visits will allow the service provider to provide ongoing coaching and help identify problems or potential problems that could impact the tenancy. Visits that occur weekly or more frequently allow a proactive role for the service provider to intervene (See the Damages Protocol) and prevent the risk of eviction.

If the participant misses 2 or more consecutive appointments, the service provider should go to the participant's unit. The service provider cannot force their way in, but they can let the participant know they are concerned and available.

This message could be delivered through a note to the participant left under the apartment door. The service provider also can insert their business card into the door-jam noting the missed visit and requesting contact. The card will fall if the door is opened. A follow-up visit to the unit will indicate if the participant has entered the unit since the last visit. The property manager and/or referral source should also be contacted when there are concerns about participant safety as there may be reports about participant's recent activities. The landlord may assist through a scheduled or emergency unit inspection accompanied by the service provider.

If the service provider believes the participant is seriously ill, call 911.

Housing Orientation: Housing orientation includes 3 components: housing tour, tenant responsibilities and housing skills. For persons who have never had an apartment of their own or have been living in a shelter, hospital or boarding home, their success as tenants may depend on a good orientation with their service provider.

- Unit orientation – introduces participant to the specific features of their apartment, including how to work appliances and thermostat.
- Building Tour – orienting participant to fire escape, laundry facilities, garbage and recycling routines, etc.
- Neighbourhood orientation – assisting participant in adaptation to new neighbourhood begins with walking together to locate transit stops and local

- shops. Service provider should also provide transit schedules, local library location and hours, drop-ins, walk-in clinics, etc.
- Tenant responsibilities – explains the tenant’s role in keeping their home, including when it is appropriate to call the landlord for a repair and whom to call, how to plunge a toilet and what to do if there is a fire.
 - Housing skills – life skills for anyone living independently, such as cooking, cleaning and banking. Service providers will assist participants in weekly home visits in side-by-side training in activities of daily living to help participants acquire necessary skills.

Unit Set-Up – The service provider will assist the participant in accessing necessities for housekeeping and participant goals. Initial priorities would include access to food through groceries, food banks or Meals on Wheels. Other targeted items would include pots and pans, curtains, and cleaning supplies, such as a mop ,bucket and toilet plunger. The service provider will assist clients to access additional funds such as the Start-Up Allowance (CSUB), dependent on their income source.

Property Maintenance: The tenant is responsible for the cleanliness of their unit; for doing their part to maintain the health and safety of their unit and the building as well as the peaceful enjoyment of the building by themselves and other tenants. Service providers will regularly monitor the condition of the unit and assist directly when needed. Side-by-side cleaning may allow the participant to learn the skills needed to maintain their apartment. In some cases, additional resources may be required, and may be supported through City of Toronto programs (i.e. Extreme Clean).

Safety Plan: Service providers will work collaboratively with participants to develop a safety plan. The participant will be oriented to local hospitals and given contact information to reach the Service Team during office hours or a crisis support team or Service Team pager number after hours (i.e. Gerstein Centre). Service providers will work closely with participants to encourage telephone service either through landline or cell phone connections. Service providers will emphasize the importance of telephone access to reach emergency services either through their Service Team or outside support services. Post emergency contact numbers in a conspicuous place agreed to by the participant.

Avoiding Isolation: Service providers will explore the risks of isolation with participants when they move into their own units. Strategies that can help break isolation can include sourcing free televisions/radios/computers through internet resources (i.e. Craig’s List, Kijiji) and assisting clients to cover monthly expenses through budgeting or their voluntary/involuntary trustees.