



Service Philosophies in Supportive Housing

When developing a plan for supportive services within a supportive housing program, it is important to clarify the philosophical approach to service delivery that the program will emphasize. This emphasis should inform all aspects of operations, including discussions when hiring staff or interviewing potential tenants. Philosophical approaches often emphasized within successful supportive housing programs include:

Housing First, with Voluntary Services

- People have a right to safe, affordable housing.
- Housing is a choice, not a placement. Housing is a person's home, not a residential treatment program.
- Tenants prefer "normal" kinds of living arrangements and practical, flexible supportive services.
- All tenants hold leases and have the full rights and obligations of tenancy.
- Participation in services is voluntary and not a condition of tenancy.
- Staff must work to build relationships with tenants, particularly those who need support in maintaining their housing.
- Emphasis should be on user-friendly services driven by tenant needs and individual goals.
- Classes that teach skills such as yoga, creative writing or ESL might be offered as opposed to more traditional therapeutic or treatment-oriented groups.

Consumer-Driven Program Design

- Consumers are active community members. When tenants are empowered to govern their living community, they are more likely to respect property and treat neighbors with respect.
- Tenants are involved in planning and program design, services implementation, evaluation and policy development.
- Tenants participate in the design of the house rules and therefore may be more likely to abide by them.
- Tenants are encouraged to make their own life choices even though they may conflict with the provider's preferences.
- Tenants have a mechanism to communicate with or participate on the organization's board of directors.
- Leadership development and skills training is offered.
- Tenants may be hired as staff.

Note: This document is included within the *Understanding Permanent Supportive Housing* section of CSH's *Toolkit for Developing and Operating Supportive Housing*, which is available at www.csh.org/toolkit2.

Harm Reduction / Working with People with Substance Use Issues:

- People deserve safe, affordable housing regardless of their special needs.
- Services aim to help people reduce the harm caused by their special needs, such as substance abuse, mental illness or health-related complications.
- In helping people to achieve goals they set for themselves, a trusting relationship is established with the provider. This relationship has been proven to be a key to many individual change processes.
- Services focus on helping tenants stay housed by assisting with the management of problems that interfere with their ability to meet the obligations of tenancy, such as paying rent.
- Tenants are encouraged to explore obstacles toward their goals in an open and non-judgmental atmosphere where they can contemplate costs and benefits of receiving services addressing their special needs, so that staff does not alienate tenants or cause them to begin a dishonest game of hiding their drug use, psychiatric symptoms, etc.
- Participation in services is not usually a condition of tenancy.