

HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOUSING OPTIONS: PARTNERSHIPS WITH LANDLORDS

Survivors of human trafficking are faced with many barriers while trying to access and maintain housing. Due to their trafficking situation, survivors may not have a rental, credit or employment history. Some survivors may also have a criminal record and/or may not have a legal immigration status creating further barriers for access to affordable and safe housing. These barriers drastically limit housing options for survivors.

There are programs at the federal, state, and local level that may ease some of the financial challenges for survivors by providing rental assistance. Anti-trafficking programs may be able to provide rental assistance through [OVC](#), [TVAP](#), [DVHT](#) or other anti-trafficking funding. Additionally, survivors may obtain a voucher from [HUD](#) or their local Housing Authority. However, even after rental assistance is issued, survivors still face the challenge of securing a lease. As mentioned above, some rental units may have criteria that can preclude survivors from securing a unit. These challenges can be addressed through creative advocacy with landlords.

NOTE ON CONFIDENTIALITY

A survivor's confidentiality is always a top priority. Service providers should not disclose information regarding the survivor's case, personal information, and whether or not an individual is a survivor. A potential landlord does not need to know about an individual's victimization in order to be a potential partner.

Only provide individual information that is necessary for the leasing process, and only with the survivor's permission.

BENEFITS OF BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH LANDLORDS

There are numerous benefits to having a network of community landlords who could provide low barrier housing.

These benefits include, but are not limited to:

- Lower rent;
- Fewer requirements;
- Lower (or zero) bureaucratic hurdles such as restrictions;
- More flexibility;
- More allies who support anti- trafficking efforts.

For example, landlords may contact providers when they have an available unit, which can make identifying housing easier.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Housing survivors of trafficking by building relationships with landlords may work best for large organizations, with a broad mission and client base in order to protect confidentiality. It is important to note that building partnerships with landlords can be challenging. The process can be long and time consuming. Below are some steps that service providers have found useful.

Identifying a Landlord

Ideally one dedicated position will be tasked with identifying housing and creating partnerships. For small organizations, however, designating tasks to outreach or direct service staff can be effective. For example, designate a number of hours per month to building relationships with landlords. Even board members and volunteers can be trained to build these relationships within their networks.

Service providers should start where they are comfortable within the community. For instance, tap into your organizations' board members, staff, friends, family and their networks. Community landlords can be owners of apartment complexes, duplexes, or individuals who may have an extra room in their house.

Locating these landlords through your networks is the most effective way to establish a trusting relationship. In most cases, a landlord agrees to become a partner because of the trust they have with the service provider they connect with. Appeal to both their altruism and their business sense.

You may also consider identifying property managers who serve as a third party between the rental unit and the potential tenant. This may provide your organization with more options and may add a layer of confidentiality since the property manager is not the owner of rental unit.

Relationship Building

Relationships with landlords should be treated as professional, business partnerships. Once a potential landlord is identified, meet in person to build mutual trust. Describe the success and positive impact of your work, and invite them to become your partner. Next, describe the business case for this partnership. Landlords place great value in timely rent payments. Explain how the service provider will ensure timely rent payments and for how long. Describe what you do to ensure that clients are able to maintain rent payments after their subsidy ends.

Additionally, it is helpful for landlords to know that you will be supporting the potential tenant. All tenants come with their own challenges. Knowing that they will have someone to assist with any serious problems can help reassure the landlord. While respecting the privacy of the survivor, describe the types of services your organization provides in general terms. Also describe your confidentiality policy, and how that will limit the information you will give the landlord about any specific tenant.

This document was produced by Freedom Network USA under Grant Number 2017-VT-BX-K018, awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this document are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.



Addressing Challenges

One of the biggest challenges while partnering with landlords, is to maintain the confidentiality of survivors while building a trusting relationship between the provider and the landlord. It is important to discuss your confidentiality policy before you have placed a survivor in the rental unit. Inevitably, some challenge will come up - noise complaints, misplaced trash, non-compliance with some rule. The landlord may approach the tenant first, or the organization. The service provider may be tempted to explain the challenges the survivor is facing in their life to encourage empathy in the landlord, but that would compromise confidentiality and potentially the survivor's safety.

The provider should not reveal any personal information about the survivor to the landlord. Simply listen to the landlord and express your willingness to assist. Discuss the issue with the survivor and ask how you can assist in responding to the challenge of the landlord, without assuming the solution. If the survivor chooses to leave, or is unable to avoid eviction, assist the survivor in finding a new housing option.

Maintaining the Relationship

It is important to nurture relationships with landlords. Providers should make an attempt to follow up regularly to provide support, when possible. Without revealing any personal information about survivors, encourage the landlord to remember the benefits and successes of the relationship. Finally, recognize their support publicly. Everyone loves good press!

Possible recognition ideas:

- Invite them as a special guest to your fundraising or training event.
- Nominate the landlord for a community award or for an award from your organization.
- Host a landlord appreciation event if you have multiple housing partners.
- Highlight their role in the anti-violence and anti-human trafficking movement in your organization's newsletter or annual event.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE

Explain your organization generally

- Many of my clients are struggling to find housing because they either don't speak English, don't have a work history, rental history, and/or don't have a credit history.
- My clients are hardworking and dedicated, they just need a little support.
- These create barriers to moving forward successfully, in spite of their hard work.

Explain the services you provide

- We can provide support services such as case management, legal services, and medical care.
- We support our clients in finding a job, getting a better education, and life skills.
- But without landlords who are willing to open the door for them, our impact is limited.

Make the ask

- I am hoping to find landlords who can become our allies, who can trust in our work and can be a housing provider for these individuals.
- The ultimate goal is to ensure the individual's well-being and success.
- Together, we can make our community stronger.