

Best Practices: Working with Housing Clients Who Have Disabilities

SCHEDULING & CONDUCTING MEETINGS

- Ask about access needs at first contact
 - “Do you have access needs or preferences we should plan for?”
- Offer multiple formats:
 - In-person
 - Phone or Video (with captioning enabled)
 - Email or text-based communication
- Provide materials in advance
 - Plain language summaries
 - Large print versions
 - Screen reader compatible PDFs
- Build in flexible timing
 - Allow longer appointment slots
 - Offer breaks
 - Avoid early morning/late evening if medication, fatigue, or care routines are factors

Survivors of human trafficking who also live with disabilities often face layered barriers to safe, stable housing, including discrimination, inaccessible systems, and service models that are not designed with disability in mind.

Under the ADA, a disability includes physical or mental impairments that substantially limit major life activities, including physical, sensory, mental health, cognitive, chronic, and systemic conditions.

Effective housing assistance must be trauma-informed, survivor-centered, and responsive to diverse access needs from the first point of contact.



DISABILITY INFORMED SURVIVOR CENTERED

Survivors of human trafficking with disabilities are experts in their own lives.

Effective housing support requires preserving agency, avoiding paternalism, and practicing disability-informed, survivor-centered communication at every step.

PRESERVE CLIENT AGENCY AT EVERY STAGE

- Center Choice and Self-Determination
 - Ask, don't assume, what support looks like.
 - Offer options for housing pathways, clearly explain pros & cons.
 - Respect a client's right to decline services or accommodations.
- Support Informed Decision-Making
 - Break complex processes into manageable steps.
 - Provide written summaries after meetings.
 - Allow time for reflection before making major commitments.
- Recognize Legal Rights
 - Inform clients of their rights under fair housing & disability laws.
 - Support reasonable accommodation & modification requests.
 - Explain disability status does not reduce eligibility or autonomy.

Best Practices: Working with Housing Clients Who Have Disabilities

KEY FEDERAL LAWS & PROTECTIONS

- Fair Housing Act (FHA)
 - Prohibits housing discrimination based on disability
 - Right to request reasonable accommodations & modification
 - Protection from denial of housing due to disability.
 - Protection from retaliation for asserting rights.
- Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)
 - Prohibits disability discrimination in public entities & places of public accommodation
 - Applies to public housing authorities & government-funded housing programs.
 - Requires accessible leasing offices, application processes, and public spaces.
 - Requires effective communication (interpreters, captioning, accessible documents).
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
 - Prohibits disability discrimination in programs receiving federal financial assistance.
 - Applies to many HUD-funded housing providers.
 - Requires reasonable accommodations.
 - Requires accessible units in federally funded properties.
 - Protects applicants and tenants from exclusion based on disability.

Accessible housing is essential for safety, stability, and long-term independence. For survivors of human trafficking with disabilities, inaccessible housing can create barriers to recovery, increase isolation, and heighten risk of re-exploitation.

Disability accessibility in housing includes physical access, communication access, and policy access (support animals, & payment arrangements). Many protections are already built into federal law — housing providers can use these laws to support reasonable accommodation and prevent discrimination.

NATIONAL LEVEL RESOURCES AND DATABASES

- Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC) - Database of Vouchers for People with Disabilities
 - <https://www.tacinc.org/resources/vouchers-database/>
- ACL Administration for Community Living - Housing and Services Resource Center (HSRC)
 - <https://acl.gov/HousingAndServices/Directories>
- National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) - Equitable Housing Opportunities for All
 - <https://nationalfairhousing.org/>
- National Council on Disability (NCD) - List of Resources to Assist Individual Inquiries Seeking Services
 - <https://www.ncd.gov/resources/>
- National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) - List of Centers for Independent Living by State
 - <https://ncil.org/>

This document was produced by the Freedom Network Training Institute under Grant Number 15POVC-23-GK-04059-HT, 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.



Freedom Network
Training Institute

housing@freedomnetworkusa.org

www.freedomnetworkusa.org