



# Rapid Re-Housing for Youth FAQs

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## **We're having trouble finding landlords who will rent to youth. They won't rent to youth under 18. Many youth in our community over 18 generally don't have any credit history, past leases in their names, or income that landlords think is sufficient. What should we do?**

For youth under 18, state and local laws related to leasing to 'minors' vary. A good first step in addressing the need is to determine what the local laws say. Partnering with a landlord/tenant or legal assistance program to explore options for renting to youth under 18 can be helpful. There might not be a "one size fits all" approach, and solutions might need to be determined on a case-by-case basis. The options might depend on the youth's situation (e.g., if they have gone through the emancipation process, they might have more rights to sign contracts).

For youth over 18, issues are the same for anyone in early adulthood regarding lack of rental history, credit, and limited income. Using a three-party lease or subleasing to a client might be an excellent way to overcome barriers. When designing Rapid Re-Housing projects for youth, it's important to take into consideration all financial needs. For example, build funds into the budget to be used for broken leases or home repairs as youth develop experience living independently.

There are probably projects in the community that support youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood that are well-versed in securing private market units for youth. They face the same challenges and might have tips to share regarding finding and building relationships with landlords for youth tenants.

Finding landlords to partner with is an important role of members of the Continuum of Care. There are many ways the CoC can support building relationships with landlords for youth tenants:

- Host landlord recruitment and appreciation events focused on youth homelessness and reach out to organizations that have an interest in serving youth such as faith-based organizations, LGBTQ groups, and affordable housing associations.
- Recruit landlords who support helping youth experiencing homelessness or who routinely rent to youth (such as near colleges or universities) to create a pool of youth-friendly landlords.

- Offer enticing support to landlords—for example, have a staff member on-call during non-business hours to help resolve issues, offer larger security deposits with private dollars, meet frequently with participants in their homes, and check in with landlords regarding concerns they might have. It can be very attractive to show a landlord the savings s/he might experience by having a steady source of tenant referrals with staff who will work to avoid eviction.

## **We are worried about maintaining landlord relationships if we place youth who end up not paying rent or are bad tenants. How can we mitigate this risk?**

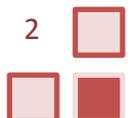
Some youth, like some adults, will have a difficult time in their first (or second or third) housing placement. Mistakes will be made as a natural part of the learning experience. However, the support that staff provides can help retain landlords even if they have an occasional negative experience with a tenant. Ensure that you have appropriate Release of Information with the youth tenant on file so that you can have open communication with the landlord.

Establish strong practices to mitigate risk. Examples include calling the landlord to check if participants have paid their portion of the rent, providing a phone number that is staffed 24/7 in case a situation arises that requires mediation, and establishing an open relationship with the participant so that they feel comfortable problem solving challenging issues with their case manager. In the event that a tenant gets evicted or damages landlord property, have protections in place that can help lessen the landlord's stress.

Never promise the landlord that all problems can be avoided; however, stress that staff will do their best to help resolve problems that occur with participants—which is more support than other tenants receive. And always do what is promised.

## **How do we ensure that staff will be a good fit for a youth Rapid Re-Housing project?**

Gauging staff's reaction to descriptions of Housing First, Positive Youth Development, Trauma Informed Care, and Harm Reduction during the interview process can help you understand if the person is open to the concepts and they can implement the models. Ask prospective employees specific questions about their views on substance use, LGBTQ+ people, homelessness, youth choice, lack of requirements for services, the philosophy of consequences



that do not use the threat of eviction or return to homelessness as a tool for program compliance, positive risk-taking, etc.

Once staff have been hired, regular training and support of implementation of these concepts is important. It may sometimes be easier to support the theory than to implement these models in practice. Staff should receive coaching on how to apply these practices as issues arise with participants. Routinely reviewing case notes and housing stability plans, asking for youth feedback, and observing staff interaction with participants and landlords helps supervisors identify areas where staff might need assistance in improving. The more a participant feels like their case manager cares about them and works to support their needs and preferences, the more likely the youth will succeed. Oftentimes, obtaining housing is the first time youth have had a safe and stable place to be, and the transition can be challenging. Hiring staff who can empathize with youth while maintaining professional boundaries is important.

