

Perspective of Landlords About Housing First Tenants & Programs

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Perceptions of Private Market Landlords Who Rent to Tenants of a Housing First Program

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Am J Community Psychol (2015) 55:292–303
DOI 10.1007/s10464-015-9714-2



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Published online: 7 April 2015
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Abstract The rental of housing units by landlords to participants in Housing First (HF) programs is critical to the success of these programs. Therefore, it is important to understand the experiences of landlords with having these individuals as tenants. The paper presents findings of qualitative interviews with 23 landlords who rented to tenants from a HF program located in a small city and adjoining rural area in eastern Canada and in which approximately 75 % of tenants had been housed for at least six consecutive months at 2 years in the program. Findings showed that landlords are motivated to rent to HF tenants for financial and pro-social reasons. They reported holding a range of positive, neutral, and negative perceptions of these tenants. They identified problems encountered with some HF tenants that included disruptive visitors, conflict with other tenants, constant presence in their apartments, and poor upkeep of units. On the other hand, landlords perceived HF tenants as being mostly good tenants who are similar to their other tenants. Implications for practice in the context of HF programs are discussed.

Keywords Housing first · Landlords · Qualitative study · Severe mental illness · Homelessness · Substance use

Introduction

“Housing First” (HF) has become the term for what has previously been known as “supported housing” in the field of community mental health. In this approach, individuals with severe and persistent mental illness live as tenants in regular, private-market housing, and are offered portable support, such as Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) or Intensive Case Management (ICM), based on their expressed needs and choices (Tabol et al. 2010; Tsemberis 2010). Typically, individuals receive a rent subsidy through the HF program. There are no requirements for participation in treatment, stabilization of symptoms of mental illness, or abstinence from consumption of alcohol or drugs as pre-conditions for housing. For this reason, supported housing is being increasingly referred to as HF (in contrast to “Treatment First”).

HF programs have become a preferred strategy for addressing chronic homelessness of individuals with severe and persistent mental illness because the majority of HF tenants achieve housing stability (Greenwood et al. 2005; Stefancic and Tsemberis 2007; Tsemberis and Eisenberg 2000; Tsemberis et al. 2004). A critical ingredient of HF is the fact that tenants hold a lease in regular, private market housing of their choice facilitating their integration into the community (Rog 2004; Tabol et al. 2010; Wong et al. 2007). Thus, for HF programs to be successful, private market landlords must be willing to rent units to HF program participants.

There is little research on the perspective of landlords who rent property to marginalized populations. Bengtson-

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Overview of Presentation



- What is Housing First?
- The Current Study
- Study Context & Setting
- Study Sample and Protocol
- Procedure and Analysis
- Results
- Implications of Findings



What is Housing First

- Supportive Private-market Housing for individuals with mental illness with portable support
- No pre-conditions to qualify (e.g. participation in treatment, abstinence from substance use) Model includes housing subsidy for participants
- Housing Coordinator assists participants with finding housing, negotiating a lease with a landlord, moving into and adapting to new housing, and mediating any difficulties with landlords
- Individual support delivered by Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) or Intensive Case Management (ICM) teams



Housing First principles:

- 1 Immediate access to housing with no housing readiness conditions
- 2 Consumer choice and self-determination
- 3 Recovery orientation
- 4 Individualized and person-driven supports
- 5 Social and community integration



The Current Study



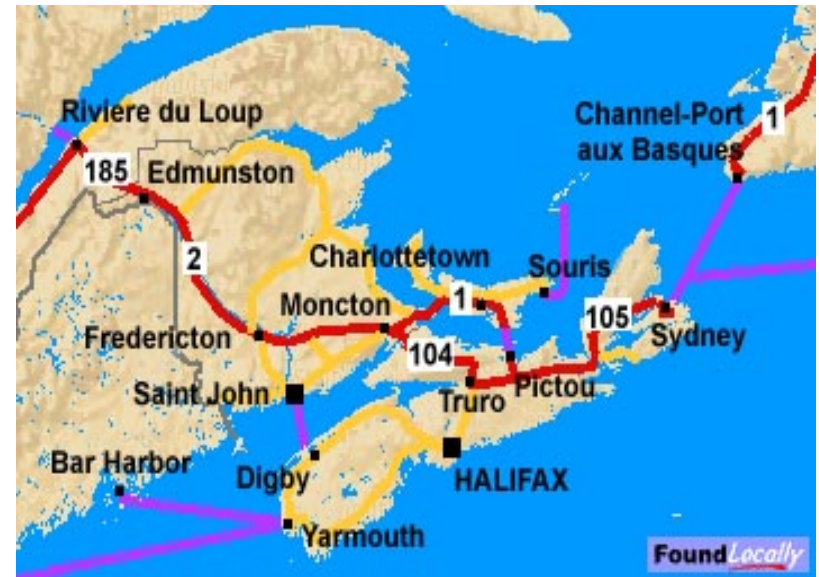
- For HF programs to be successful, private market landlords must be willing to rent units to HF program participants
- To date, no specific research has examined the experiences of landlords who rent units to participants of HF programs
- This paper presents findings of qualitative interviews with landlords who rented to tenants from a HF program located in a small city and adjoining rural area in eastern Canada
- Research Questions:
 - (1) What motivates landlords to rent to HF tenants?
 - (2) What are landlords' perceptions of the HF program?
 - (3) What are landlord perceptions of HF tenants?



Study Context & Setting



- Part of a large multi-site trial in five Canadian cities examining the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of HF for people with severe and persistent mental illness and a chronic history of homelessness (Goering et al. 2011).
- The catchment area of the site comprised the tri-city of Moncton, Riverview, and Dieppe, known as Greater Moncton, and Southeast New Brunswick, its adjoining rural region.
- The population of the tri-city was approximately 138,000 (City of Moncton 2013).





Study Sample and Protocol

- The Housing Coordinator identified 50 landlords who had at least 6 months experience with renting units to HF participants. Of the 50 landlords invited to participate, a total of 23 were interviewed.
- Of this group, 11 landlords were interviewed in March, 2011, and 12 landlords were interviewed between March and May, 2012.

Interview Protocol:

- Landlords were asked to comment on various aspects of the program including; expectations, problems they encountered, program response and communication, advantages and disadvantages of the program, how it can be improved and whether they would recommend the program to other landlords/property managers





Procedure and Analysis

- Landlords were contacted via letters of invitations and follow up phone call determine interest and to schedule interview
- Twenty-one of the 23 landlords were interviewed by telephone and two were interviewed in person.
- Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.
- Two separate data analyses were completed in line with the two sets of landlord interviews that were conducted at different times as part of the two implementation evaluations.
- The results of the two analyses were synthesized into one set of results that are reported in this paper.



Results



Table 1 Themes and subthemes emerging from landlord interviews

Themes	Subthemes
What motivates landlords to rent to HF participants	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Financial reasons2. Pro-social reasons
Landlords' perceptions of the HF program	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Responsiveness to landlords (financial support, addressing tenant problems)2. Responsiveness to tenants3. Communication (information-sharing about tenant history, information-sharing about tenant supports)
Landlords' perceptions of the HF tenants	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Negative perceived attributes of HF tenants (presentation, tendency to stay in, disruptive visitors, problematic behaviors)2. Neutral and positive perceived attributes of HF tenants (similar to other tenants, quiet, willingness to help out)



What Motivates Landlords to Rent to HF Participants?



- Financial Reasons: consistent source of income from the program was frequently cited as a benefit by the landlords
- Pro-Social Reasons: Wanting to assist people with mental health value, stating that it was a good idea to support the community integration of participants.

“A lot of them, they need, they’re human, they need a place to stay or whatever, and it’s up to them, they’ve got to make choices”

“You know, look, if he’s going to change in the program and it’s what it’s going to take, then let’s give it a shot... You know, what the heck?”

- Some landlords expressed disappointment and regret, saying they felt taken advantage of because their efforts to help were unsuccessful.



What are Landlords' Perceptions of the HF Program?



- Positive views of program responsiveness to landlords, financial support, and addressing tenant problems. However, some expressed when tenants encountered difficulties, the program failed to respond in a timely and effective manner, as well as the need for more support for tenants

“I did find that as soon as we called the team that worked with him, they were right on it ...

“I believe more support for the clients would definitely be helpful. Yeah I kinda feel like they're put there and until it's a case of us having to evict them that's the only time they [HF program] really get involved

- Some landlord reported problems contacting the program, and several expression desire for more consistent communication and information-sharing about tenant history and supports they receive.

“The only thing I would suggest is what is being communicated to the tenant be communicated to the landlord, so we're all on the same ground”



What are Landlord Perceptions of the HF Tenants?



- Perceptions of both Negative and Positive Attributes
- Negative attributes: physical appearance of tenants (e.g. dirty, greasy), disruptive visitors, conflict with other tenants, constant presence in their apartments, use of drugs, and poor upkeep of units.

“I mean yes we’ve had problems in the past but I think this, it was more like the police being there constantly because of their history or they had people they were hanging out with that had history with the police”

- Positive attributes, landlords perceived HF tenants as being “good” “quiet” “clean” and similar to their other tenants, and appreciated that they tended to stay home, because it improved the security of the building and were available to help out with and odd jobs for building maintenance.

“If you give them that small, simple task, it gives them importance in the unit. So by cleaning the hall, and after that they ended up, they took care of everything.”



Implications of Findings



1. On the one hand, landlords described having pro-social motives and engaging in helpful behaviours when dealing with HF tenants. On the other hand, they also reported stigmatizing perceptions of and responses to some HF tenants relative to other tenants.
2. Clearly defining the role that landlords play in the HF equation is important. Though landlords may desire more information-sharing in some areas, it may not always be feasible.
3. If the program is not responsive to the needs and concerns of the landlord, HF tenants risk experiencing housing instability, eviction, and compromised outcomes.
4. In general, building trust and rapport with landlords is vital for the success of a HF program landlords. Our findings suggest that HF programs need to be responsive to the support needs of landlords who house HF tenants in order to sustain the partnership.

