

# Housing-Focused Case Management for People Involved with the Criminal Justice System

Housing-focused case management is an effective component of a Housing First, strengths-based approach to reducing housing barriers for people impacted by the criminal justice system. Individuals reentering the community from incarceration or otherwise involved in the criminal justice system may face challenges relating to custodial trauma, community supervision requirements, and other barriers. A housing-focused approach calls on providers to build rapport and apply trauma-informed strategies to develop a housing plan responsive to the client's particular circumstances and goals.

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## Key Strategies and Action Steps

- **Apply culturally competent strategies** responsive to the challenges faced by individuals reentering the community from incarceration
- **Develop a housing-focused case plan** that is responsive to the client's individual strengths and challenges
- **Support the client to implement the plan** and lower barriers to stable housing
- **Ensure the client is set up for success** in long-term housing stability

## Apply Culturally Competent Strategies

Housing-focused case management has a singular focus: supporting a permanent exit from homelessness to stable housing. The principles of housing-focused case management allow case managers to provide culturally competent services with a focus on the specific needs of people impacted by the criminal justice system, including those living with carceral trauma.

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## Understanding Carceral Trauma

Carceral trauma refers to the adaptations that people who have been incarcerated are required to make to survive the experience of incarceration. These adaptations, which can be behavioral, psychological, emotional, and spiritual, are natural and necessary responses to the unnatural state of living in jail or prison.

People enter incarceration with their own histories of trauma, and more than two-thirds of people in the criminal justice system have a history of childhood neglect or abuse. They continue to experience trauma at every step in the criminal justice system process, including arrest, detention, and incarceration. Incarceration brings separation from home and community, loss of control over every aspect of a person's life and forced detention in a high-control, unsafe, punitive environment.

As a result, many people develop carceral trauma, which can linger in a number of ways after leaving the carceral setting, including:

- **Institutionalization:** increasing dependence on external constraints for regulating behavior and decision-making
- **Hypervigilance/hyperarousal:** engagement of the body's fight, flight, or freeze response
- **Interpersonal distrust:** constant fear of staff and other people in detention creates challenges in developing and maintaining trusting relationships
- **Altered relationship to space and time:** the carceral timeline is tied to slow, controlled, repetitive daily routines, compared to the faster, less routinized external world
- **Emotional control** and suppression of internal reactions
- **Social withdrawal** and isolation

While these symptoms and behaviors represented a necessary approach to surviving incarceration, they can present significant barriers to obtaining and maintaining safe housing upon reentry. It is important to take these factors into account when working with the client to identify their housing preferences and support success in the housing search and transition.

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## Strategies for Engaging Clients Impacted by the Criminal Justice System

Respecting a participant's right to self-determination is especially important when working with people who have been involved in the criminal justice system, even if they are mandated to specific treatment or services. Strategies include:

- ❑ **Apply the principles of Housing Focused Case Management:** This approach leverages partnership with clients to engage their strengths and lower barriers to housing in an individualized and flexible way that recognizes client voice and choice.
- ❑ **Focus on engagement and rapport building:** Developing rapport is very important during the initial engagement phase. This is especially true when working with people involved with the criminal justice system, which can result in a mistrust of authority and government agencies. Ensuring that participants understand the case manager's role, have agency in developing housing goals, and are being heard and acknowledged through active listening can be useful ways to build rapport.

- ❑ **Use motivational interviewing techniques:** Motivational interviewing is designed to empower people to change by developing intrinsic motivation and skills. This approach includes reflective listening, offering empathy, reflecting a participant's words and goals, and using open-ended questions.
- ❑ **Be familiar with trauma-informed care principles:** A trauma-informed approach can involve elements such as creating a safe space for participants, developing trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, and cultural, historical, and gender responsiveness.
- ❑ **Coordinate with your client's behavioral health and criminal justice system case team:** Anticipate that your client may be working with criminal justice system and behavioral health partners in several ways. Some clients who are in community supervision (e.g. probation or parole) may have a [Collaborative Comprehensive Case Plan](#) that sets out the roles of various partners and may provide opportunities for coordination. [This tool can also be used by housing case managers when they are acting as the lead case planner.](#)
- ❑ **Recruit staff with lived experience of incarceration** who can support a trauma-informed, culturally competent approach to develop and strengthen the relationship between service provider and client.

#### **Community Spotlight: Pima County, AZ**

[Pima County Housing First](#) (PCHF) is a permanent supportive housing program that serves people who are reentering the community from the county jail or at risk of entering the criminal justice system, are experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and have co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.

In its role as the lead case planner, Old Pueblo Community Services (OPCS) collaborates with local government and criminal justice system partners to quickly connect participants to housing and wraparound support services. OPCS case managers are responsible for assessing and enrolling participants and providing evidence-based Intensive Case Management Services to reduce jail contact and increase housing stability. Trauma-informed services include housing navigation, rental assistance, and housing retention services.

In the initial two years of operation, the initiative enrolled 314 clients, providing approximately 60% with supportive housing. An evaluation demonstrated a reduction in criminal justice system service utilization by over 50%. Of the 89 individuals who had received PSH by July 1, 2020, 82% retained their housing for at least 12 months.

## Develop a Housing-Focused Case Plan

A housing-focused case plan provides a roadmap for the client and the case manager, breaking down housing plans into attainable steps. Goals and responsibilities are clear, and the plan focuses and limits interventions to address specific housing barriers, including those the client may be experiencing because of their criminal record or experience of incarceration.

To develop a housing-focused case plan:

- Constructively discuss the client's housing history and preferences
- Gather additional information to assess potential strengths and barriers
- Work together to draft the plan, clearly identifying responsibilities and roles

Five Principles of **Housing Focused Case Management** for people impacted by the criminal justice system:

- **Housing First** – an evidence-based approach that quickly and successfully connects clients with housing by eliminating barriers and preconditions to housing.
- **Strengths-based** – an approach that identifies and recognizes client and community strengths and empowers clients to achieve their goals.
- **Recognizes client voice and choice** – focused on collaboration and partnership between the case manager and the client, rather than a top-down approach.
- **Individualized and flexible** – the housing search is individualized for each client and flexible in intensity, depending on the specific strengths, opportunities, and barriers faced by each client.
- **Focus on housing** -for clients not currently housed, the primary goal is to develop a strategy to assist them in securing housing. Once housed, the goal is to ensure that adequate supports and community linkages are in place so the client can stabilize

### Constructively Discuss the Client's Housing History and Preferences

Client interviews provide important information in designing a housing-focused case plan. Interviews should focus on identifying the client's requirements and goals for a stable housing solution and the strengths and barriers relevant to their housing search.

Client interviews include the following steps to develop important information for the housing plan:

- ❑ **Understand the client’s preferences and needs**, including factors such as housing location, configuration, and cost.
- ❑ **Work with the client to identify strengths** that will support the housing search. People with lived experience of incarceration bring their own unique strengths to the housing search process. These strengths may include survival skills, resilience, and experience navigating bureaucracy.
- ❑ **Identify barriers** to obtaining and retaining permanent housing such as:
  - Criminal record
  - Limited or no rental history
  - Evictions
  - Lack of tenancy knowledge
  - Lack of valid ID
  - Disability
  - Sporadic employment history
  - Debts/insufficient savings
  - Insufficient or no income
  - No or poor credit history
  - Unresolved legal issues
  - Substance use disorder

The following chart illustrates questions that can be especially relevant for individuals who are involved with the criminal justice system. Case managers can consider adding some or all of these questions to their standard housing interviews for CJS-involved clients.

Suggested Interview Questions for CJS-Involved Clients	
Client’s Preferences and Needs: Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where does the client feel safe?</li> <li>• Where does the client have a network of family or friends?</li> <li>• Is there anywhere the client wants to avoid (e.g., due to domestic violence, substance use disorder recovery, or relationships related to the individual’s criminal history)?</li> <li>• Does the client need to live in any particular area to access certain services and supports? Does the client have access to a car or will they rely on public transportation?</li> <li>• Is the client on probation or parole? Are there community supervision requirements that should be considered?</li> <li>• Is the client prohibited from living in certain areas, due to restraining orders or registration requirements related to a sex offense conviction?</li> </ul>

### Suggested Interview Questions for CJS-Involved Clients

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was the last place the client lived that worked well? What about that situation made it work well?</li> </ul>
<p>Client's Preferences and Needs: Configuration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What type of housing arrangement would the client prefer now? In the future? Does client have any concerns about moving into their own place?</li> <li>• Are there child custody considerations?</li> <li>• Does the client have pets?</li> <li>• Does the client have accessibility considerations due to a disability?</li> <li>• Keep in mind trauma-informed design and care principles when identifying housing options. For example, shared housing can provide a supportive community, while private rooms can provide important privacy and healing space to people with histories of carceral trauma.</li> </ul>
<p>Strengths &amp; Barriers: Income</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the client's current sources of income or expenses (e.g., employment, benefits, spousal/child support)? Does the client owe court or supervision fines or fees?</li> <li>• Is the client receiving all eligible benefits? Are there limitations on eligibility due to criminal history? Does the client need benefits (such as VA, SSDI/SSI, Medicaid, etc.) reactivated or redetermined?</li> <li>• Is the client currently working, or able to work? Can the client return to a past area of work? Did the client receive work training, receive a GED, or participate in an education program while incarcerated?</li> <li>• What can the client afford to pay in rent with the program's assistance? What will the client's budget be after rental assistance is discontinued?</li> </ul>
<p>Strengths &amp; Barriers: Rental History</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the client had a lease before? How did that go? Does the client have past evictions?</li> <li>• When was the most recent lease? Clients with lengthy periods of incarceration may have a long gap between leases.</li> </ul>
<p>Strengths &amp; Barriers: Networks and Resilience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are possible support persons or networks who may be able to help the client with income, employment, benefits, housing</li> </ul>

### Suggested Interview Questions for CJS-Involved Clients

search or moral support? This can include local programs or peer support for individuals with experience of incarceration.

- How well can the client solve problems and access services, independently or with support?
- When has the client helped or supported others?

### Gather Additional Information

At this stage, the case manager is seeking a more complete picture of the client's housing situation to identify strengths and anticipate challenges. The client may not know, remember, or be comfortable sharing all of the information needed to provide effective assistance, so with the client's permission, try to supplement the client interview with third-party research. This may include:

- Public records check for evictions
- Credit report
- Criminal background check
- Contacting previous landlords
- Speaking with the probation or parole officer

The purpose of this information is to support the case manager to anticipate strengths and proactively address barriers that may arise during the housing search.

### Work Together to Draft the Plan

Collaborate with your client to create a strengths-based, individualized housing plan. The plan should include clear, attainable goals that reflect the steps needed to achieve your client's housing objectives. Defining clear responsibilities and roles for the client, case manager and other members of the support team is crucial to successful implementation, ensuring each member of the team understands their next steps.

The plan should include:

- Assessment of housing barriers and strengths** identified through the interview process
- Achievable short and long-term goals**, focusing on the steps needed to achieve the client's housing stability objectives and priorities

- ❑ **Next steps to support client to implement the plan** in line with the client’s individualized needs
- ❑ **Clear responsibilities and roles of client and case manager**, reflecting the client’s strengths and challenges

In identifying the responsibilities and roles of each partner, work collaboratively with the client to identify and harness their unique strengths. Rather than offering all clients the same housing case management, try to tailor your efforts to your client’s abilities. For example, some clients have more interest or ability than others in leading or participating in the housing search.

Considerations include:

- Does your client have access to reliable transportation?
- Does your client have demands on their time and availability from community supervision requirements, such as frequent required check-ins with probation or parole?
- Is your client’s availability limited by other daily responsibilities (i.e., employment, caretaking, behavioral health support meetings, etc.)?
- Is your client experiencing impacts of extended incarceration that might impact their ability to navigate transportation, technology, or other processes?
- How confident does your client feel about next steps and the housing search process?

## Support Client to Implement the Plan

Implementing the housing-focused case plan includes three elements:

- Overcoming stigma
- Leveraging local resources
- Understanding Fair Chance Ordinances

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### Overcoming Stigma

Overcoming stigma by landlords and employers is an essential component to building income and improving housing stability for people impacted by the criminal justice system. Please refer to Engaging Landlords to Support Housing for People with Criminal Records for detailed guidance on engaging landlords to provide housing for people with criminal records.



- **Build a rental packet.** Rental packet documents should include evidence that the client does not pose a risk to the landlord, their property, or other tenants. Examples include:
  - References from former landlords stating that the client was a responsible tenant
  - Letters from community members that speak to the client’s character and/or personal development
  - Certificates showing that the client completed a program, such as a substance use treatment program or a domestic violence intervention program
  - Evidence that a conviction was dismissed or overturned on appeal, and therefore should not be considered
  - Letters of support demonstrating support networks and community connections, including volunteerism or community service
- **Prepare the client** to talk about their background.
  - Let the client know that potential employers and landlords might ask them broad or detailed questions about their background, including their criminal history.
  - Ensure the client is familiar with what information a landlord is allowed to consider when screening them for a housing unit.
  - Talk to the client about their preferred responses to potential questions, and practice with them until they feel confident about their answers.
  - Support the client to identify strengths in their history that they can highlight, such as personal changes they have made since becoming involved with the criminal justice system; successful completion of education, workforce, volunteer, and other meaningful programs or activities; or ways they have helped others.

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### **Leveraging Local Resources to Overcome Barriers**

Building your client’s local support network allows them to access mainstream benefits and community-based supports. Relevant mainstream benefits or support can include:

- Organizations providing peer support and resources for formerly incarcerated individuals
- Benefits advocates & enrollment assistance
- Legal aid to assist with pending legal issues or expungement

- Food assistance programs
- Employment/workforce development
- Subsidized mass transit program
- Free community college, literacy, GED, & ESL programs
- Credit restoration programs

Your client may need your assistance to obtain these benefits, including support completing forms; assistance with gathering documents and preparing for appointments; help to obtain necessary ID or documents; connection to relevant legal resources; and a place to store documentation.

#### **Community Spotlight: Multnomah County, OR**

The [Multnomah Barrier Mitigation Program](#) provides legal assistance to clients with criminal justice system histories who are currently experiencing homelessness. The partnership between the Metropolitan Public Defender (MPD) and Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS) provides civil legal services focused specifically on reducing barriers to obtaining housing.

Services include:

- Record expungement
- Reducing court fines and fees
- Warrant resolutions
- Felony reduction
- Driver's license restoration
- Appealing housing denials and reasonable accommodations in connection with criminal records

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#### **Understanding Fair Chance Ordinances**

A growing number of communities are adopting fair chance ordinances, local laws that limit the use of criminal records in screening prospective tenants. It is important for case managers to know whether there are any fair chance ordinances that apply in the region, what kind of housing they apply to, and what information they do and do not permit landlords to consider.

Understanding the local fair chance ordinances that might apply to your client can help housing case managers advocate for their clients and limit the use of clients' criminal records to screen them out of housing opportunities.

## **Ensure Client is Set Up for Success**

People returning from incarceration are likely to need basic move-in support, including furniture; initial financial assistance to cover security deposits; and education and coaching around the responsibilities and expectations of tenancy.

- Identify Sources of Household Supplies and Furniture
- Provide Tenant Training, Coaching, and Mediation
- Connect Client to Community-Based Supports

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### **Identify Sources of Household Supplies and Furniture**

Housing-focused case management can include working with clients to identify the resources they will need to live comfortably in their new home. This can include furniture and other household supplies such as:

- Beds and linens
- Basic furniture, including a table, chairs, couch, and lamps
- Kitchen supplies, including cooking equipment, dishes, silverware, and cooking staples
- Consumables, including trash bags, lightbulbs, paper towels and soap
- Decorations, including photographs or items with sentimental value
- Space for paperwork, such as a desk, drawer, or shelf to store essential paperwork, including benefits information and job applications
- Furniture and equipment for children or other dependents

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### **Provide Tenant Training, Coaching, and Mediation**

Once a client has obtained a safe and stable place to live, it is equally important to ensure they are supported to retain that housing. Individuals who have experienced incarceration may have limited experiences of successful tenancies, and the impacts of carceral trauma can add to the challenges of navigating housing situations.

Housing-focused case management involves strategies and support to prevent conflicts from arising as well as assistance when challenges do come up, including:

- ❑ **Tenant Training** - People returning from incarceration may have little to no rental history or experience as a tenant. Tenant training programs provide skills and education to support prospective clients with understanding the responsibilities and expectations of tenants and landlords.
- ❑ **Client Coaching** - After a tenant has moved into a new home, it is important for providers to recognize that even a positive change creates stress. For example, individuals with extensive experiences of incarceration may find the lack of structure challenging. Working with tenants to identify potential stressors, such as isolation or excessive visitors, can prepare them for a more easeful transition.
- ❑ **Landlord Mediation** - The first few months of tenancy can be a time of disruption and conflict as clients adjust to new roles and responsibilities. Providing mediation services early on in the tenancy can support the client in retaining housing by identifying the landlord's concerns, problem-solving, and promoting compromise. may be able to step in to help mediate the resulting conflicts.

### **Community Spotlight: The State of Tennessee**

The Tennessee Housing Development Agency (THDA) offers the [Good Tenant Training Program](#), which helps people with criminal justice system involvement to gain skills needed to overcome housing challenges. Recognizing that these individuals may have a lack of experience in maintaining successful housing, challenges with managing finances, and limited resources for move-in costs and deposits, as well as significant stigma, THDA provides a comprehensive, four-hour interactive workshop with a HUD-certified housing counselor. Topics include introduction to renting, money management, leases and tenancy, maintenance responsibilities, being a good neighbor, renters rights, and the eviction process.

Participants receive a certificate of completion that a tenant can present to a landlord as part of their rental packet, additional access to housing counseling following the workshop, and an overview of public and private resources available to support participants with their housing goals.

Criminal justice system partners in Tennessee have engaged with THDA to connect individuals with criminal records to the training through referral by parole and probation officers, providing the training in jails and other corrections facilities, and partnering with the courts to provide the training to individuals in community supervision.

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## Support Client to Create Community Connections

Social withdrawal and isolation can be a significant component of carceral trauma and may make it challenging for your client to develop and sustain a community support network. At the same time, housing success and well-being often depends on social connections and activities that can bring a sense of purpose and fulfillment. After your client has transitioned to stable housing work with them to identify opportunities for engagement. This can include, for example:

- Introductions and support in connecting with your client's new neighbors
- Connections to local faith community for clients with religious affiliation
- Identification of local social activities of interest to your client, such as community gardens, chess clubs, or other opportunities
- Introduction to identity-based organizations with resources or social groups that align with your client's interests, such as LGBTQ+ community centers, cultural organizations, senior centers, or organizations with programming in languages other than English
- Identification of programs and supports for households with children and youth (childcare, after-school programs, tutoring) and assistance enrolling in local schools
- Locating local programs that support health and well-being such as nutrition education, community acupuncture, counseling, and behavioral health and substance use recovery groups

## Additional Resources

- [The Bridge: Supporting the Previously Incarcerated Through Rental Housing Counseling \(HUD Exchange\)](#): A document produced by HUD's Office of Housing Counseling that highlights efforts by two communities to increase access to housing for people with criminal records
- [SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach \(SAMHSA\)](#): This manual highlights the need for a trauma-informed approach when supporting communities what have experienced trauma
- [Covid-19 Homeless System Response: Housing Problem Solving \(HUD Exchange\)](#): An overview of techniques and resources that can support housing-focused case management