

Engaging clients in Housing Stabilization Services: Tips from the experts

Prepared by the [HSS TA Team](#)

These are notes from the HSS TA Team Office Hours held in June 2025. Tips courtesy of our experts, Jane Lawrenz and Rod Wooten, and Office Hours participants.

Scenario #1: Client lacks self-awareness or in denial of disabling condition and does not want to sign any paperwork.

- Requires long-term, consistent engagement and trust-building. Spend time really listening to their story and where they are coming from. Every person wants to be seen, heard and understood.
- Try using different terminology. “Mental illness,” for example, can carry a lot of stigma. It might be easier for the person to think of it as being stressed or having a hard time emotionally. Emphasize that anyone going through something difficult like homelessness or housing instability would be struggling. Focusing on the context and situation may be easier than talking about what is “wrong” with someone.
- Some disabling conditions come from trauma and often people have been taught not to talk openly about it. It's creating a safe, judgement free space, where they feel comfortable to open up without the risk of something bad happening
- If the concern is around mental illness or substance use, are there other conditions they may have that would qualify them for HSS? This could include a physical condition or learning disability.
- Clients can mistake the PSN process for a formal mental health diagnosis. Explain that it's not about labeling or diagnosing them, but rather about identifying areas where they might need support, like communication, mobility, or decision making. It's a tool to better understand their struggles and connect them with the right services, not a clinical assessment.

Scenario #2: “I only want to hear from you when you find housing for me!”

- Spend time on the front end to really get to know the person, their situation and what their goals are. Explain what HSS is and what you can help them with before you get to this point.

- Ask the client what their expectations are for HSS and how they think they could contribute to the process.
- Be upfront and set clear expectations about the housing search process, how long things take, how often they should be in touch and what their role is.
- Have intermediate goals that you regularly check in on (e.g., obtaining needed documentation, job search, criminal expungement, etc.).
- Have an agenda for each meeting with clear goals. If possible bring something tangible to help them out.

Scenario #3: Client's phone is disconnected and you can't get in touch with them.

- It's very important to have a backup plan to reach them other than a cell phone, because this is a common situation. This includes getting as many emergency contacts as you can. Ideas for contacts: family member, friend, other social service worker.
- Ask them where they spend time and where would be a good place to find them if they fall out of touch.
- Collaborate with outreach and shelter workers that may also come in contact with the person
- Get an Release of Information signed by the client for other professionals you may want to connect with.
- Have a consistent agency policy about no-shows, staying in touch with a client and frequency and number of attempts to contact. This should be communicated clearly with every client at intake. It also needs to have some flexibility built in when people inevitably get into difficult situations and lose touch.
- Sending a letter to their physical address with your number, and a request to get called back too can help.

Scenario #4: Client is already receiving services/in housing and doesn't understand why signing up for Housing Stabilization Services is necessary.

- Reiterate that the goal is to help the person stay housed and that you want to make sure they get everything that they need to do that.
- Having additional, more long-term services will help prevent future homelessness.
- Explain how HSS can help with things beyond just getting the rent paid and help them gain long-term stability and move on to the next phase of their life.