

“Tools for Tenants”

Participant Guide



Introduction

Moving to your own apartment can be stressful. It’s normal to have fears about where you will live, how you can afford to live on your own and who will be there to support you. This group will help you to identify the following:

* What is supportive housing?
* How you can afford to live on your own
* Identifying your housing preferences
* Navigating the lease process
* Who will support you
* Being a good tenant
* Knowing when to move on
* Fair housing rights

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| Tools for Tenants is a curriculum to help people understand supportive housing. It will also help people with understanding expectations related to supportive housing. |

\*This curriculum was adapted from the KIT, which is part of a series of Evidenced-Based Practices KITs created by the Center for Mental health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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“Safe, decent and affordable housing is a cornerstone of recovery from mental illness.” NYS Office of Mental Health

Lesson One: Introduction and overview and What is permanent supported housing

*Goal for the lesson: Participants will develop group rules and receive an overview of the group. Participants will also learn what is meant by permanent supported housing and begin to identify the supports they may need to live independently.*

Congratulations on taking the step towards more independent living!

This group will help you to learn about supportive housing so that you can feel comfortable and be successful in your new living environment. It will help you to learn about supportive housing. It will also help you to identify the skills you need to be successful once you move. The group will consist of 8 lessons to help you. It will be interactive, interesting and fun!

Before we get into the first lesson, let’s set some ground rules for the group.

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| Activity: Setting Group Rules  Supplies Needed: Whiteboard and markers  Brainstorm a list of rules you would like for the group. Have a discussion with your fellow group members to come up with an agreement on rules. Common group rules include starting on time, not leaving the group early, not interrupting others when they are speaking, and giving everyone the opportunity to share in the group process. |

Now that we have agreed on the group rules, let’s get started on the material for the first lesson. What do you know about supportive housing? Let’s take a few minutes to discuss these questions.

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| Discussion Questions:   1. Have you heard of the term permanent supportive housing before? What does it mean? 2. What do you think are some important aspects of supportive housing? 3. Why do you think supportive housing might be right for you? |

What is Permanent Supportive Housing?

If you have been homeless, lived in group homes, or spent a long time in the hospital or an adult home, permanent supportive housing can help you get a home of your own. People who have behavioral health conditions can live in their own houses and apartments, just like anyone else. Sometimes they just need a little help to find a place, rent or buy it, move in, and keep up with everything. That’s where permanent supportive housing comes in. Here are some of the ways that staff can help you:

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| Finding a place that meets your needs | Certain buildings might have apartments set aside, or staff might help you find an apartment, room or house in the community. |
| Applying for housing | Staff will help you with applications and do what they can to convince a landlord to rent to you. |
| Getting settled | Staff might help you with anything from getting the power turned on to making a shopping list. |
| Keeping your housing | Staff wants to make sure you keep a home of your own, so they will help you manage your money, get along with neighbors, keep up with needed chores, make friends and get whatever services you need. |

Can you think of how this type of housing would benefit you? What supports would you need to live independently? Take a few minutes to complete the worksheet below then share your answers with the group.

Directions: Read through the following checklist and place a check mark next to the things you may need help with when preparing for your move. Discuss your needs with the rest of the group.

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| **Identifying preferences for where I want to live** |  |
| Neighborhood preference |  |
| Comparing living in a house, apartment, or renting a room |  |
| **Getting what I need together to apply for supported housing** |  |
| Help with completing and submitting paperwork |  |
| **Identifying what help I will need once I move** |  |
| Getting utilities (electricity and gas) turned on |  |
| Help scheduling cable or phone installation |  |
| Finding community resources like the bank, grocery store and laundromat |  |
| Help making a shopping list of things I will need to clean my new living space |  |
| **Getting what I need to make sure I keep my apartment** |  |
| Help managing my money |  |
| Help with resolving conflict with neighbors |  |
| Help with resolving conflict with roommates |  |
| Help with making friends |  |
| Help with learning how to keep my living space clean |  |
| Help with learning apartment safety |  |

Thank you for participating in the first lesson. Come back for the second lesson when we discuss ways to afford housing!

Lesson Two: Being able to afford living on your own

*Goal for the lesson: Participants will learn how they can afford living on their own in permanent supportive housing. Participants will explore why this is an option for housing.*

How can you afford to live on your own?

A home of your own might seem out of reach, but it might not be. If you rely on disability income or don’t earn much at work, you might be able to get help paying your rent. Permanent supportive housing includes a commitment to help people with psychiatric disabilities get housing that is affordable. That means you only pay a percentage of what you earn (usually 30 percent) toward rent and basic utilities (electricity, gas and water).

How does it work?

* Some people live in buildings that are set aside for affordable housing. Usually the owner of the building gets government money to rent units to people with low incomes.
* Some people live in public housing, which is run by a public housing agency using money from the federal government.
* Some people have vouchers that pay part of their rent in housing they choose. The most common type is “Section 8,” now called housing choice vouchers, which are also given out by a public housing agency.

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| Activity and Discussion: Pros and Cons List  Supplies Needed: Whiteboard and markers  What are the pros and cons of living in a place where you pay a percentage of your earnings to rent and utilities?  Brainstorm answers with the group and share feedback. |

So what do you think? Would you give permanent supportive housing a try now that you have some more information? Last session we learned about all of the supports that are available to someone who lives in supportive housing. Today we learned that the amount of money you pay in rent and utilities is usually 30 percent of your income. Are you interested? What other questions do you have?

Next session we will talk about your housing preferences. See you then!

Lesson Three: Identifying your housing preferences

*Goal for the lesson: Participants will begin to identify their preferences when looking for permanent supportive housing.*

Today’s lesson is all about you! We will explore types of preferences that people have when they are searching for a place to live. This information will help you when you are looking for permanent supportive housing. It will help you to identify what is important to you and to help you match your preferences with housing options that may be available to you.

Part of permanent supportive housing is helping you find a place that you like. You probably won’t get everything you’re looking for though. You have to set priorities. What’s most important to you? These questions can help you decide. Answer the questions, then rank their importance from 1-5, with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important. Talk about your answers with the group.

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|  | Comments | Importance |
| **Living Arrangements** |  |  |
| Would you like to live in a house? An apartment building with just a few units? A building with many units? |  |  |
| Would you prefer living by yourself or with other people? |  |  |
| Would you like to live with specific people— a girlfriend or boyfriend, family members, or a friend? |  |  |
| Would you share an apartment if you had your own room? |  |  |
| If you had a roommate, what would you want the person to be like? |  |  |
| Is a building with private bedrooms and shared kitchens acceptable? |  |  |
| Is a shared bathroom in the hall acceptable? |  |  |
| Would a bathroom shared only with one or two other people be all right? |  |  |
| Do you prefer living with all women (or men), younger people, etc.? |  |  |
| Would you prefer to live around other people who have psychiatric disabilities? Would you prefer not to? |  |  |
| **Features** |  |  |
| What features in a home are important to you— air conditioning, dishwasher, onsite laundry, etc.? |  |  |
| Do you need any special accommodations for a physical or sensory disability, such as ramps, elevators, or doorbell signalers? |  |  |

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|  | Comments | Importance |
| **Neighborhood** |  |  |
| Do you want to live in a specific neighborhood? |  |  |
| What features of the neighborhood are important to you? Examples of things you might want are a quiet environment, parks, well-lit streets, shopping, libraries, or public transportation. |  |  |
| Do you need to have easy access to any specific place—for example, your job, treatment facility, place of worship, or family home? |  |  |
| **Support Needs** |  |  |
| Would you like to have onsite staff available any time of the day or night? |  |  |
| Would you prefer to live in a place that has no staff onsite and have staff visit you instead? |  |  |
| **Security and Visitors** |  |  |
| Do you like having company? Do you want to have overnight guests? How often? |  |  |
| How do you feel about having your guests screened at a front desk? Do you like knowing that other people’s guests are screened? |  |  |
| **Alcohol and Other Drugs** |  |  |
| Is a community that strongly supports sobriety important to you? |  |  |
| How do you feel about being in a setting where some people may be using drugs or alcohol? |  |  |
| **Activities** |  |  |
| Would you like to have access to in-house groups? |  |  |
| Do you like the idea of having staff-sponsored activities like trips and movies? |  |  |
| **Pets** |  |  |
| Do you have a pet? |  |  |
| Would you like to have a pet? |  |  |

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| Discussion Questions:   1. Think about your preferences and your priorities. What would you be willing to give up if you had to? 2. Have you looked into permanent supportive housing with anyone? What have you found? |

Now that you have identified your preferences you can set priorities. What are the three things that you must have in your new living situation? List them here:

1.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

List two things that are least important to you.

1.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What are two things that you would be willing to compromise on?

1.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

You’re making great progress on identifying what you need when you move to permanent housing! Keep up the good work! Our next lesson will focus on learning about what a lease is and what you and your landlord’s responsibilities are. See you then.Lesson Four: What is a lease?

*Goal for the lesson: Participants will learn what a lease is and the responsibilities of a landlord.*

Moving to your own apartment can be a little bit scary. It’s okay to have questions and be nervous. Today’s lesson will focus on what it means to have a lease. We will also discuss the responsibilities that your landlord may have. This will help you to feel more comfortable when making informed decisions about your move to supportive housing.

What is a lease?

Living in permanent supportive housing is different from living in a group home, adult home or other types of “mental health” housing. In permanent supportive housing, you sign a document called a lease. This is the same piece of paper anyone else who rents a house or apartment signs. A lease gives you rights under the law. It also makes you responsible for certain things. When you have a lease, you cannot be kicked out because you refuse treatment or other services. You can keep your housing as long as you meet your responsibilities. Your landlord also has responsibilities. Let’s take a minute to read about them now.

My responsibilities:

1. paying rent on time
2. keeping space clean
3. making sure that the house or apartment is not damaged
4. being a good neighbor

My landlord’s responsibilities:

1. keeping the property safe (working locks, no dangerous conditions)
2. making sure heat and plumbing work
3. entering the property only for specific reasons (like repairs) after telling you

These are just general examples. Your lease might say other things. For example, your lease may limit people moving in with you. Housing staff will help you understand your lease.

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| Discussion Questions:  What does it mean to be a good neighbor?  What can you do to make sure that you are a good neighbor?  How can you go about resolving issues that may arise with neighbors?  How can you go about getting problems resolved with your home if they arise? Problems with repairs, for example? |

Great! Now you have a good idea of what you and your landlord’s responsibilities are. The next session will help you to identify what supports you will need to be successful in your new living situation.

Lesson Five: Your support needs

*Goals for the lesson: Participants will identify what supports they will need once they move to supportive housing to ensure success.*

There are many ways that housing and PROS staff can help you to choose, get, and keep a home in the community. Use the checklists below to mark off any things that you might need help with while you are preparing to move and even after you move. Discuss these with the group once you have read through the lists.

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| **General Supportive Services** | Already working on this | Need some help in this area |
| Moving in and getting settled in your new home |  |  |
| Setting goals and making plans to meet your goals |  |  |
| Meeting your responsibilities and avoiding eviction |  |  |
| Escaping domestic violence and staying safe |  |  |
| Speaking up for yourself |  |  |
| Getting involved in issues that affect other tenants and you |  |  |
| Finding fun activities |  |  |
| Making friends |  |  |
| Becoming involved in a place of worship |  |  |

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| **Vocational Services** | Already working on this | Need some help in this area |
| Learning job skills |  |  |
| Finding a job |  |  |
| Enrolling in computer classes |  |  |
| Keeping a job |  |  |

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| **Independent Living Skills** | Already working on this | Need some help in this area |
| Making sure you pay your rent on time |  |  |
| Budgeting your money |  |  |
| Preventing and resolving conflicts with your landlord and neighbors |  |  |
| Shopping for groceries |  |  |
| Planning and cooking meals |  |  |
| Keeping your home clean and safe |  |  |
| Taking public transportation and getting around the community |  |  |
| Applying for and maintaining disability benefits |  |  |

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| **Health/Medical Services** | Already working on this | Need some help in this area |
| Scheduling visits to a doctor or dentist |  |  |
| Learning to eat healthfully |  |  |

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| **Mental Health Services** | Already working on this | Need some help in this area |
| Scheduling visits to a therapist or psychiatrist |  |  |
| Learning about mental illness, medications, and treatments |  |  |
| Taking your medication the right way |  |  |
| Talking to your doctor about side effects |  |  |

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| **Substance Abuse Services** | Already working on this | Need some help in this area |
| Scheduling alcohol or drug treatment |  |  |
| Finding drug and alcohol-free recreational services |  |  |
| Finding self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) |  |  |

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| Discussion Questions:  Which of these services are you currently working on? How will these services help you to become better prepared for supportive housing?  Which services do you think you will need more help with once you move to supportive housing? |

Today’s lesson should have helped you to identify what your needs are so that you can be successful when you move to supportive housing. The next lesson will focus on what you and your landlord’s responsibilities are and how you can be a good tenant.

Lesson Six: Being a good tenant

*Goal for the lesson: Participants will learn the essentials of being a good tenant. This includes everything from paying rent on time to being a good neighbor to learning how to deal with problems before they become unmanageable.*

The most important part of being a good tenant is paying the rent on time. It’s usually due on the first of the moth. You might have a grace period, but remember that the rent is due on the first, and if you go beyond the grace period, you could lose your home.

Know the rules about people moving in with you. Remember, if your name is on the lease, you are the one who is responsible for paying the rent. If you have roommates, all of the rent is due, not just “your share.”

Set aside time for needed cleaning and household tasks. Usually, if something fails on its own, like a leaky roof or a broken furnace, it’s the landlord’s job to fix it. But it’s your job to keep up the place and prevent damage.

Remember:

* You are responsible for any damage you cause
* You are also responsible for any damage your guests cause, so think about who you invite
* Don’t clog the toilet. (Keep paper towels, sanitary napkins, cigarette butts, toys etc., out of the toilet.)
* Don’t clog the kitchen sink. (Keep grease and excess food out of the drain.)
* Change your light bulbs and the batteries in your smoke detectors.
* Keep your refrigerator and oven clean.
* Tell your landlord about any problems before they get worse!

Respect your neighbors:

* Keep your music or TV volume down.
* Be polite. If you don’t want to talk, a quick “hello” keeps things civil.
* Respect common areas (like laundry rooms or lobbies). Be quiet, don’t smoke or drink alcohol, and keep the area clean.

Don’t let problems get out of control.

* Politely mention any issues (like someone playing loud music).
* Don’t let people take advantage of you (frequently borrowing or asking for favors). It’s natural to want to help, but there are limits.
* If problems continue, supportive housing staff might be able to help.

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| Discussion Questions:  List three things that you are responsible for to maintain your supportive housing:  1.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  2.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  3.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  List three responsibilities that your landlord has:  1.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  2.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  3.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  List three ways that you can be respectful of your neighbors:  1.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  2.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  3.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |

Today’s lesson helped you to learn about the responsibilities of being a good tenant. Come back for the next lesson, where we will talk about what you need to do when you are ready to move on from supportive housing.

Lesson Seven: Time to move on

*Goal for the lesson: Participants will learn what to do to make the move from supportive housing a smooth transition.*

People move. It’s a part of life, even in permanent supportive housing. If you are moving out, do it the right way. Your references from past landlords are important!

* Find out how much “notice” is required. That is, how long before you move do you have to tell the landlord? Send your landlord a letter with the date that you plan to move out.
* Fix any damage you or your guests have caused. The local hardware store sells supplies for fixing nail holes in walls, for example.
* Clean everything. This includes the oven and the refrigerator.
* Walk through the house or apartment with the landlord. This helps prevent surprise charges for cleaning or repairs.
* Make sure your landlord has a forwarding address for you.

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| Discussion Questions:   1. What has been your experience with moving? What else have you done that we haven’t talked about while preparing for a move?   List three things that you should do when getting ready to move out of supportive housing:  1.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  2.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  3.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |

You’re nearing the end of the group curriculum and you’re doing great! The next lesson is the last one. We will talk about fair housing practices and where you can go if you feel like you are being discriminated against in your housing situation.

Lesson Eight: Fair housing is your right!

*Goal for the lesson: Participants will learn about fair housing rights, reasonable accommodations and how to get help if they are being treated unfairly.*

In a case called Olmstead, the U.S. Supreme Court has said that people with disabilities have the right to live in the community rather than in institutions. You also have the same right to buy or rent housing, without discrimination, regardless of what type of disability you might have. That means a landlord cannot do the following:

* Refuse to show you available housing
* Steer you only to certain units or buildings
* Make you pay an extra deposit
* Put conditions in your lease that aren’t in other people’s leases
* Ask inappropriate questions about your disability.

What are some inappropriate questions?

* What kind of disability do you have?
* Why do you get disability income?
* Do you take medications?
* Have you been in the state hospital?
* Have you ever lived by yourself before?
* Do you know how to take care of yourself?

What if I have special needs?

Landlords might be required to make what is called a reasonable accommodation, or do something slightly out of the ordinary, to meet your needs. Some examples include the following:

* Letting a case manager help you with the rental application
* Letting you pay your rent by mail because you are nervous about going to the rental office.

What types of housing are covered by federal laws?

Three important Federal laws cover most types of housing:

* The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) applies to housing funded by the city, county, or state.
* The Rehabilitation Act applies to housing receiving Federal funds
* The Fair Housing Act applies to most housing.

What’s not covered?

Generally speaking, the following are not covered:

* Units in a building where the landlord lives
* Housing designed specifically for people with disabilities.

What can you do if you have been treated unfairly?

Talk to your case manager or other supportive housing staff.

Call the Federal government’s toll-free hotline: 1-800-669-9777 (voice) or 800-927-9275 (TTY)

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| Discussion Questions:  List three things a landlord can NOT do when working with someone with a disability:   1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   List two accommodations that you may need and can get help with:   1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   List two things that you can do if you feel that you have been treated unfairly:   1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |

Thank you for participating in the Tools for Tenants group! You have completed the group and have the tools you need to identify and successfully move on to supportive housing. You should continue to use the resources and supports that you have. That may include a PROS service coordinator, a Health Home care manager and/or a supportive housing case manager. It can also include supports in the community like someone from your spiritual community, or a friend or family member.

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| Who is important to you? Who will be part of your ongoing support network? |