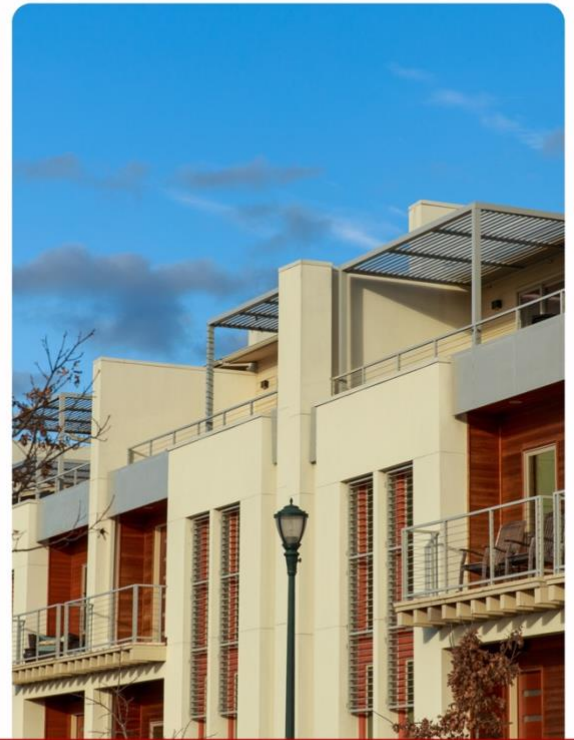


People Assisting the Homeless 4 Step Retention Strategy

Author: Jasper Chew



What is the PATH 4 Step Retention Process?

People Assisting the Homeless' (PATH) 4 Step Retention Process is a property management strategy used in the organization's supportive housing facilities to address and resolve tenant-related issues or conflicts. Formerly unhoused individuals can sometimes have difficulty adjusting to residential life, especially in shared-living facilities where they regularly interact with others. They may be out of practice or unfamiliar with navigating relationships with their fellow neighbors and their landlord. This can lead to behavior that violates the community's guidelines or the terms of the resident's lease, unnecessarily jeopardizing their housing security. The 4-Step Retention Process encourages property management teams and supportive service providers to work collaboratively with residents to prevent issues from escalating. Typical property management practices can be punitive, focusing on enforcing rules rather than addressing the underlying causes of behavioral issues. These practices often lead to eviction, ultimately setting back an individual's progress toward ending their homelessness. PATH saw an opportunity to lead with services rather than enforcement, aiming to reduce evictions, stabilize tenants in their housing, and promote a more positive relationship between tenants, service providers, and property management.

The 4 Steps

The four main steps are: 1) education, 2) reinforcement, 3) intervention, and 4) program exit. Each step involves service providers working with property management staff and the tenant to identify the causes of issues and design individualized solutions and action plans to resolve any lease-violating behavior or concerns. Common issues include interpersonal conflict among residents, excessive noise, unauthorized guests, late payments, and other minor offenses that violate the housing facilities' guidelines. Providers mediate meetings between property management staff and tenants, working towards resolution and reducing infractions. Sometimes, resolution may be as simple as helping tenants and property management understand one another, while others may require changes in tenant behavior to be compliant with their lease. If no resolution is reached within an outlined timeframe, then all parties proceed to the next step, documenting progress and action items along the way. Each step is a progressively more intensive intervention, requiring more collaboration, communication, and work. In cases where tenants pose an imminent risk to themselves or others, providers can proceed directly to step 3 for everyone's safety.

In the first step, PATH educates the tenant on the rules and details of the lease, as well as the connection between their behavior and the lease terms. Providers train tenants on what it means to be a "good neighbor" in their community and how to navigate situations, such as sharing facilities like washer and dryer machines with others or approaching property management staff if there's an issue with their unit. Roles, communication, and documentation procedures are established from the outset. This piece of life skill training is often essential, especially for folks who may have experienced homelessness for many years and do not have practice managing their lease and working with neighbors and property management. This step also involves educating property management organizations about the specific needs and experiences of their formerly unhoused tenants, helping them understand and prepare to work with a tenant population they might not have experience dealing with. Many of these tenants may carry histories of trauma, mental health issues, and substance abuse, which can make working through disagreements or problems more challenging. The long-term success of a PSH site hinges on mutual understanding and respect between management and tenants, even in the face of discord. This preventive education is crucial to ensure the site's management approaches issues collaboratively rather than through punishment, building on the trust that PATH will be there to support both tenants and management to resolve all issues. If the tenant's initial behavior is not resolved or escalates, then property management issues a written lease violation, and all parties proceed to step 2. During this step, providers focus on problem-solving and addressing the tenant's needs. They explore factors that might contribute

to disagreements or tenant behavior, identify relevant resources, design individualized action plans with achievable goals, and work toward preventing another lease violation.

If issues persist, step 3 is the provider's final attempt to intervene and stabilize their client's housing before resorting to eviction. PATH brings all parties together to develop a Housing Retention Plan, which outlines immediate, concrete steps to resolve issues. Tenants are given a reasonable amount of time, generally within one month of the initial infraction, to rectify their behavior. However, if issues remain unresolved, then all parties proceed to step 4, where PATH prioritizes positive exits from housing. Providers collaborate with other service partners and the tenant's support system to explore alternative housing options, facilitate a swift re-entry into housing, and prevent the tenant from receiving a formal eviction notice on their record, which can harm their future housing prospects.

Keys to Success

Obtaining buy-in from all parties involved and pairing the 4-Step Retention Process with a rich set of services are important to this program's effectiveness. All parties need to understand and commit to the roles and responsibilities outlined in each step of the process. Property managers might be hesitant to commit to a program like this because it requires more training and patience than simple enforcement actions, like written violations or warnings. Providers can help achieve buy-in by demonstrating the high levels of service and support they can provide tenants, convincing property management staff that these issues can be resolved and the community's stability maintained. Tenant buy-in is equally important; tenants are best able to manage their position in their community when they know they have services to support them and property managers who view them as valuable members of their community.

PATH has learned that this is not a process that stands alone. Its success hinges on its ability to provide tenants with the services they need to address the underlying causes of their behavioral issues. Connecting tenants to mental health resources, employment, social safety net benefits, case management, and life skills training is important to resolving issues. Similarly, the program also requires comprehensive training. Providers and property management need to be prepared for a wide range of scenarios. The transition from homelessness to housing is not seamless or straightforward. Tenants might still be dealing with long-term issues like addiction, mental illnesses, disabilities, or other health challenges that make it difficult to adjust to life off the streets. Several players are involved in a tenant's housing retention, including case managers, community partners, other service providers, and the tenant's support network. Coordination and shared understanding can make a significant difference. This variety

of players involved can also complement training, as it can lead to unique perspectives and ideas that training may not always cover.

Results and Considerations

Overall, PATH's 4-step process has been successful in reducing evictions in their supportive housing facilities and preventing individuals from returning to homelessness. PATH initially developed the 4-step process to reframe housing retention as a shared responsibility and acknowledge formerly unhoused people as humans, likely with extensive trauma and other complicating issues, who are capable of making mistakes. This approach is not intended to dismiss or excuse negative behavior. Rather, it acknowledges that these issues arise and demonstrates how the safety of the community can be maintained and improved without punishment or detrimental enforcement tactics. PATH has incorporated the 4-step process in all of its permanent supportive housing sites and treats it as standard operating procedure.