

## **Rent Right**

### Pilot session

#### **Enrollment**

Enrollment began at 17. Nine students graduated. The high drop out rate is consistent with the experience of other tenant education programs.

#### **Course outcomes**

##### All students

- ◆ Determined their monthly income.
- ◆ Compared their current income and current earning potential to self sufficiency wages for Sonoma County and other areas of the state and nation.
- ◆ Made a determination as to whether they would stay in Sonoma County or move to a less expensive area (The nine graduates all elected to stay. Some of the reasons for staying: “My mother is in a rest home here and I don’t want to leave her,” “My kids are doing well in school,” “I like my job,” “I have a community through my church.”)
- ◆ Learned about inexpensive, short term career enhancement programs available to them through the junior college and JobLink. (Two students made appointments—yet to occur—with a career counselor at the junior college. Distressingly, many low-income students said they were happy with their current jobs—a fact which, to me, says that we need to work harder to encourage risk-taking and higher expectations.)
- ◆ Learned how to read their own credit report from a landlord’s point of view.
- ◆ Made a plan to improve their credit report in the eyes of a landlord. (Four students paid off accounts. Eight students began the process of disputing items on their credit reports. One student consolidated her graduate school student loans.)
- ◆ Tracked their spending for six weeks (with varying degrees of care).
- ◆ Created a workable budget for their current situation and income and a budget for when they find housing.
- ◆ Looked for ways they could cut costs (but nobody quit smoking...six of the nine students smoke—spending anywhere from \$20 - \$90 per month on cigarettes).
- ◆ Determined what kind of a dwelling they needed to fit their lifestyle. (Three students came to the realization that, with their current commuting expenses, it made sense to look for housing in Santa Rosa.)
- ◆ Learned about affordable housing options in Sonoma County. (Six participants made contact with Burbank Housing to check their status on waiting lists.)
- ◆ Learned how and why landlords screen applicants.
- ◆ Addressed their own barriers to finding housing in a variety of ways (i.e. Bad credit, poor rental history etc.).
- ◆ Completed a rental application and created a Renter’s Portfolio.
- ◆ Learned how to understand a rental agreement.
- ◆ Learned how to check out a neighborhood, an apartment and a landlord.
- ◆ Engaged in at least four practice interviews.

- ◆ Learned about basic landlord/tenant responsibilities for upkeep and repairs.
- ◆ Learned how to do simple repairs.
- ◆ Learned how to request a repair.
- ◆ Learned techniques for communicating effectively with both landlords and neighbors.
- ◆ Learned how to clean a house efficiently and inexpensively.
- ◆ Learned about emergency procedures.
- ◆ Learned how to give notice and what to do to get their security deposits back.

### **Rent Right Goals**

In addition to course requirements, all students have both short and long-term Rent Right goals to help them increase their income or address their barriers to housing.

Only one graduate has met all her short term goals already. The others are working on theirs with varying levels of diligence—levels which seem to be related to the date at which they must exit COTS programs.

### **Number of Graduates Looking for Housing**

Three graduates are actively looking for housing now. One has a Section 8 Housing Voucher. All have goals to complete before they can apply for a guarantee.

### **Teachers**

Property managers, realtors and landlords taught much of the course. But we also had a local handyman teach home repairs, a financial planner teach budgeting, a former client teach Frugal Living, an acting instructor help with practice interviews, and COTS staff people teaching home care and other subjects.

With one notable exception (Clark Rosen), the teachers who had the most trouble sticking to the lesson plan were the real estate professionals. Obviously, we want to retain these teachers, so teacher training needs to be re-thought.

### **Mentors**

The mentors came from all walks of life. One is a Section 8 voucher holder herself. All of the other mentors were homeowners. Professionally, they ran the gamut. We had a massage therapist, a physical therapist, two financial planners, several high tech people, a public defender, a computer engineer, a talent agent etc.

We may have erred on the side of caution with the way we set up the mentor/student relationship. Both students and mentors have said they want more contact, more opportunities for a meaningful relationship.

We need to re-work several aspects of the program in that light—creating more opportunities to socialize, more opportunities for the mentors to instruct, more opportunities for the mentors and students to work as a team and then present to the rest of the class.