

Talking About the Affordable Housing Crisis:

Tools for Delivering Bad News

Telling clients about the affordable housing crisis in the Denver metro area is stressful. The way we give bad news can directly affect how a person reacts to the situation. Unfortunately, as service providers, we tell people daily what resources are not available. Preparing ourselves for these conversations can make a difference in how our clients experience hearing

disappointing news and move forward in their search for housing. With scarce resources, we're all responsible for managing expectations. We set our community partners up for success when we are all on the same page. Giving consistent, accurate information also reduces our own stress and helps us maintain a connection with the people we serve.

Studies have shown that what clients value most in the person who gives bad news is the news-giver's attitude, the clarity of the message, privacy and having time to ask questions. Here are some tools for delivering bad news effectively.

Community Resources

Colorado Housing Connects
coloradohousingconnects.org provides education about housing choice vouchers and the lottery process. Their website links to search tools such as socialserve.com and the Department of Housing and Urban Development's list of subsidized properties.

844-926-6632

Colorado Crisis Services
Emotional Support

844-493-8255

Community helpline and shelter options

2-1-1

Aging and Disability Resources of Colorado (Denver metro)

303-480-6700

Housing Talking Points

When you provide statistics, sometimes it's best to stick with the basics. Depending on the client's situation, you may help them understand:

- We are in a housing crisis in the Denver metro area and have a severe shortage of affordable places to live.
- Colorado is the fourth-fastest growing state in the nation at 1.6 percent; the population growth rate is currently double the national average. Between July 2013 and July 2014, a net average of 3,000 people moved to the metro area every month.
- There is more demand than supply, which is rapidly driving rents up. Average rent in the metro area for a one-bedroom apartment is \$1,265/month.
- Some areas have zero vacancy; with less vacancy, there's less turnover so it's harder to find open units.
- Waitlists are typically more than a year long; some waitlists are completely closed.

Encourage persistence and thinking outside the box

- “Can you think of a temporary solution?”
- “Do you have friends or family you could live with? Even out of state?”
- “Have you thought about looking for a place outside of Colorado?”
- “Are there any other adults living with you who could help with rent payments?”
- “Are there things that might free up some of your income?”

Find out what the client knows and ask what they want to know

“What have you heard about the housing situation? May I give you some current information?”

Give warning that there is bad news

“I'd like to be honest with you about what we're hearing from other callers and housing professionals.”

Help the client identify their strengths and supports

- “Keep in touch with your friends/family – it sounds like you've been a support for each other through hard times before.”
- “That was a lot of information – you're doing great to still be on the phone with me through this with everything else on your plate.”
- “That was a lot – you'll call back if you have questions?”

Be straightforward

“You may or may not have heard but we are in a severe housing crisis in the metro area. In fact, all of Colorado has an affordable housing shortage.”

If appropriate, refer clients to other agencies – be clear about scope of what they provide

“I can give you other numbers to call but I don't know of an agency that is going to be able to find you housing.”

Provide information at a pace the client can handle

“I want to give you a little more information so you know what you're looking at in your housing search right now.”

The art of the WARM TRANSFER

If you believe another agency may be able to help, offer to call with the client on the line. This saves the client from having to summarize their story again and helps the other agency understand why you are making the referral. If you leave a message, you can ask the client to leave their name and phone number after you leave the message:

“This is [your name] from [your agency] and I have [client] on the line. She called to learn more about her rights as a tenant and we thought you might be able to explain those to her. [Client], can you leave your number? And my number is [your number] if you need to reach me. Thank you.”

Respond to the client's emotional reaction

- “You're quiet – this is really disappointing news to hear.”
- “Are you feeling worried about what you'll do now?”
- “I'm so sorry you're in this situation.”

Be genuine and honest

Give yourself enough time to provide accurate information without interruption. **Remember that giving bad news well can strengthen your relationship with the client.**



Talking About the Affordable Housing Crisis: Tools for Delivering Bad News

Sources:

Apartment Association of Metro Denver. (2015). "Denver Metro Apartment Vacancy and Rent: Second Quarter 2015 Report." Denver, CO: Throupe, R. L., and Von Stroh, J. L.

Bies, R. (2012, May 30). "The 10 Commandments for Delivering Bad News." *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://onforb.es/JNfcvC>.

Farber, N. J., Urban, S. Y., Collier, V. U., Weiner, J., Polite, R. G., Davis, E. B., and Boyer, E. G. (2002). "The Good News About Giving Bad News to Patients." *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 17(12), 914-922. Retrieved from <http://doi.org/10.1046/j.1525-1497.2002.20420.x>.

Jackson, K. (n.d.) "Delivering Bad News: Communicating Well Under Pressure." MindTools. Retrieved from <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/bad-news.htm>.

State Demography Office, Colorado Department of Local Affairs. (2014, November). 2014 Population Overview [Data file]. Retrieved from <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dola/node/104461>.

State Demography Office, Colorado Department of Local Affairs. (2014). Colorado County Profile Systems [Data file]. Retrieved from https://dola.colorado.gov/demog_webapps/psParameters.jsf?counties=T.

