

EVICTION REDUCTION PROGRAM OF BARRIER BUSTERS: A Centralized Access and Financial Assistance Program for Washtenaw County

Background: The Barrier Buster project is a network of human services professionals representing over 30 agencies who can cut through administrative barriers and efficiently address human services needs.

Program Purposes: (1) To reduce evictions based primarily on financial circumstances of tenants; and (2) to assist people with bad credit and high risk rentals to achieve housing in Washtenaw County.

Program Services:

- Money for past due rent, first and last month's, security deposits, etc. made available to individuals based on referral from landlords and/or social service agencies;
- Financial assessment completed by Barrier Buster (a Barrier Buster is a human services professional involved with one of over 30 local agencies);
- Financial counseling provided by MSU Extension: required for some based on financial assessment, optional for others;
- Social Service needs assessment completed by Barrier Busters, referrals made for needed social services to retain and secure tenancy;
- Repayment of Barrier Buster Eviction Reduction funds negotiated with tenant over a period time to assist with revolving nature of fund; and
- Supplemental emergency needs funding (utility assistance, food, medication, etc) made available from Emergency Unmet Needs Fund.

Program Process for Participating Landlords:

- Landlords faced with a household at risk of eviction can call one of two Barrier Buster Eviction Reduction Specialists and will receive a response within one business day. The human service professionals that will serve as Eviction Reduction Specialists are: Harriet Bakalar from the Housing Bureau for Seniors and Mary Beth Lampe from Community Support and Treatment Services.
- The Eviction Reduction Specialists can address the household's needs directly if appropriate and/or refer the crisis to another Barrier Buster if the referred consumer is already linked to an agency. The Eviction Reduction Specialist receiving the initial call is responsible for follow-up with the landlord to insure responsiveness of the system.
- Determination of Barrier Buster support will be completed within one business day and the landlord informed of the results. If Barrier Busters can assist the individual/family, a check will be made available to the landlord within two business days of initial contact.

Program Funding: Funding is administered by the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation. Already, Barrier Busters has secured commitments for \$125,000 of funding in FY 2004/2005 from public agencies for basic emergency needs services. An additional \$100,000 has been pledged by the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners as a challenge grant to the community. Should the community respond to this challenge by matching the Board's funds, a revolving Eviction Reduction Program fund totaling \$200,000 will be established. Clients capable of repaying the Eviction Prevention assistance provided to them will do so, sustaining the fund in perpetuity.