

Tenant Eviction Prevention: The Impact of Adult Education Intervention in Community Housing

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Abstract

Tenant Eviction is a major urban community problem. The total number of homeless individuals in this Educator's urban community increased from approximately 3,000 in 2007 to 3,419 in January 2009 [1]. There are more homeless veterans living on the street since 2009. In January 2011, there were over 4,088 homeless persons. Literature on urban housing reveals that homelessness is a spillover effect of increasing rate of eviction [2]. The University of Maryland (College Park) Extension considers eviction a community problem and is taking the lead to address eviction problems in Maryland communities. This paper is a work in progress report of University of Maryland (College Park) Extension (UME) education approach to teach financial management education to struggling residents in public and subsidized housing. The assumption of this program is that financial management education can help most residents acquire money management and decision-making skills to prevent housing evictions and promote living well in Baltimore.

1. Introduction

Based on the District Court of Maryland, from 2002 - 2009, Baltimore landlords filed a yearly average of 155,870 court complaints for eviction alleging tenant (mostly limited and moderate income residents) nonpayment of rent. In Baltimore City, tenant eviction is commonly associated with homelessness. The total number of homeless individuals increased from approximately 3,000 in 2007 to 3,419 in January 2009. Tenant Eviction is a major community problem in Baltimore based on data from the Public Justice Center, an average of 140,000 court complaints were filed in 2010- 2012. In 2008 - 2009, after attending four days of District Court hearings to get an eyewitness understanding of tenant eviction process, it was evident that education is a critical missing component in addressing tenant eviction in Baltimore City.

Relationship between landlord and tenant

It appears that there is a cordial relationship between landlords and tenants, especially on the day

that a lease agreement is signed by both parties, security deposit paid up front, and the keys handed to the tenant as a symbol of the tenant's privilege to the landlord's property - a typical win-win negotiation between both parties. As long as the tenant pays rent on time and abides by the lease agreement, and as long as the landlord attends promptly to maintenance issues and abides to the lease agreement, this cordial relationship continues. This look like a perfect situation where every tenant or landlord would like to be? Well, circumstances may sometimes dismantle this cordial relationship to bitterness. This bitterness could come from the tenant not being able to afford rent or refusing to pay and not willing to leave the landlord's property. When negotiation between the tenant and the landlord fails and the tenant is not willing vacate the landlord's property, the landlord is left with no choice, but to seek the involvement of a third party, the law and the eviction court for a legal verdict to force the tenant out of the property.

Eviction as a community problem

It is significant to note that when the landlord petitions the legal system to force the tenant out of the property, a shift in the tenant and the landlord dynamics automatically occurs that involves the community. The University of Maryland Extension considers eviction as a community problem and as such the University of Maryland Extension is taking the lead to address eviction problems in Baltimore City with a community education approach (seminars and workshops).

2. Program Objective

The objective of the Tenant Eviction Education Program is to develop a community education approach to bring awareness and help decrease the number of repeat offenders of home eviction in Baltimore. This education approach is a process that includes an annual awareness seminar "Tenant Eviction Prevention: Seminar" followed by direct teaching, "Tenant Eviction Prevention: Direct Teaching in Community Housing Units," of financial management classes (budgeting, saving, credit and banking) in government subsidized community

housing units for limited and moderate income residents.

3. Program Activities

Tenant Eviction Prevention: Seminar

In 2008 - 2009, in collaboration with essential community organizations, the Baltimore City Tenant Eviction Prevention Committee was formed under the leadership of this UME Educator . The Tenant Eviction Prevention Committee consists of program managers from Baltimore City Department of Social Service (BCDSS) - District Court Eviction Prevention Unit, the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC), the Public Justice Center, Baltimore Gas and Electricity Community Program, the Greater Baltimore Housing Program, and UME Baltimore City. Through a series of meetings and planning sessions, the first ever Tenant Eviction Prevention Seminar in Baltimore City was held in June 2009. The seminar was initiated and organized by this Educator, and sponsored by University of Maryland Extension. Attended by 15 landlords, 26 tenants, and 41 human service professionals (housing and homeless counselors, social workers, and family investment case managers) from various community organizations.

Seminar Outcomes



The Tenant Eviction Prevention Seminar is now an annual event in Baltimore City. A summary of program evaluations from 2009 to 2012 reveals that:

- 85% of participants (mostly landlords, tenants, and human service professionals) learned a lot from this seminar.
- 92% plan to use knowledge or skills from the seminar.
- 92% would recommend the seminar to their families, friends, or people at their communities and jobs.

This seminar contributes enormously to UME financial management outreach into Baltimore communities and community organizations. After every Tenant Eviction Prevention Seminar, the request for financial education increased on average by 20% (report from the Eviction Prevention Committee). Approximately 90% of this increase comes from new community organizations



establishing partnerships with UME requesting financial management education classes for their employees.

- In 2009, the Educator was invited by Fox45-TV morning news to talk about Eviction Prevention. This talk reached more than 400,000 viewers.
- After attending this seminar, the Director of Heaven-Bound Christian Ministry, Inc. (H-BCM), Annapolis Road, Odenton; used knowledge gained and budgeting activities to reach 400 low income adults and youth in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

Tenant Eviction Prevention: Direct Teaching in Community Housing Units

The Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC), Affordable Housing Cooperation (AHC) Greater Baltimore, and Salvation Army continue to be the community organizations with the most pressing need of this Educator's programming efforts. The clientele base of these organizations overwhelmingly supersede that of any other community organization that provides housing to limited and moderate income individuals and families in Baltimore City. HABC serves nearly 20,000 residents with an inventory of approximately 13,400 units in 28 family developments and 19 mixed population buildings. In addition to 12,000 more families with rental housing subsidies (Housing Choice Voucher program).

Program Activities

From 2009 to June 2013; this educator taught 129 classes, 4 hours per class of financial management education to 1,764 Baltimore residents.

The following is a brief discussion of classes taught under financial management education:

- *Personal Budgeting Class (Income, Spending, and Savings):* This class teaches participants basic methods of designing a household budget by understanding sources of income, allocating incomes to minimize consumption spending and maximize savings while thinking of rent as a priority in the budget. Practical hands-on materials (workbook, pencils, calculators, multiplication, addition and subtraction tables) and examples are used in the training to help participants understand and master the techniques used in class.
- *Credit/Debt Management Class:* This class teaches credit and debt management: unsecured/secured credit cards, the advantages and disadvantages of use of credit cards, fees, tricks of small print, car loans, payday loans, and how to avoid or manage debt. *Not paying rent on time can affect your credit; paying rent late can lead to eviction and defaulting on rent is a debt.* The class uses video clips to demonstrate real-world examples of Credit/Debt Management issues.
- *Identity Theft Class:* This class teaches participants to be aware of identity theft as a rising crime in the nation. Participants learn how to protect themselves from identity theft, and detect and report identity theft. The class uses video clips to demonstrate real-world examples of identity theft and the importance of protective measures. Identity theft can damage the personal finance and the credit history of the victim.
- *Workforce Preparation:* The class teaches career choices and job opportunities for High School Graduates or General Education Development (GED). It covers topics such as how to search for jobs, complete a job application, write and submit a resume. The class also introduces and teaches basic Microsoft Office applications (Word, Excel, and Power Point) to enable participants to acquire computer skills, which are more often than not, requirements on most high school job applications.

Targeted Audience: 2009 - 2013

The audiences are clientele of the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC), the Salvation Army, and

the Affordable Housing Cooperation (AHC). The audience is targeted by their organizations to attend these classes, because of difficulties managing personal finances and paying rent. The percentage of invested teaching time in these organizations (N = 1,764) is as follows:

Year	Classes	Average Class hrs	# of Tenants
2009	26	4	318
2010	28	4	337
2011	23	4	796
2012	28	4	219
2013	3	4	94
January - June			
	108	4	1,764

- 85% Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC).
- 10% Salvation Army.
- 5% Affordable Housing Cooperation.

Direct teaching Outcomes

Before and after every class, participants complete a UME Family Consumer Sciences (FCS) Intent to Change Behavior Assessment form. The data collected from the assessment was compiled using the FCS data base system.

Intent to Change Behavior Questionnaire	Before Class	After Class
More likely to pay your credit card bills on time	55%	80%
More likely to pay more than the minimum on your credit card(s)	46%	82%
More likely to request/review your credit report(s) annually	40%	90%
More likely to establish a debt repayment plan	30%	96%
More likely to set savings priorities and goals	58%	82%
More likely to establish an emergency fund	40%	90%
More likely to save regularly or increase savings	60%	89%
More likely to track income and spending (expenses)	72%	100%
More likely to develop a spending plan (budget)	68%	100%
More likely to compare your wants vs. needs	72%	100%
More likely to set financial goals	65%	89%

The table above is summarized data of the Intent to Change Behavior by Baltimore community housing tenants (N = 1,764) who attended UME financial management classes from 2009 to June 2013. This

data is a measure of knowledge, skills and confidence participants gained through financial management classes, and an indication of tenants' determination to improve their financial management skills and status.

4. Program Outcomes

After participating in classes, a nine-month follow up self-reported survey is conducted for teaching impact – if the intent to change behavior actually occurred to prevent tenant eviction.

9 Months Followup Impact Survey Data (2009 -2013)

Year	Housing Authority of Baltimore City <i>N = 318</i>	Salvation Army	Affordable Housing Corporation <i>(N = 0)</i>
2009	<i>(N=318)</i> • 86% practiced budgeting. • Tenants At-Risk of Eviction due to default in rent dropped from 80% to 20% .	<i>(N = 0)</i> Zero classes conducted	<i>(N = 0)</i> Zero classes conducted
2010 <i>N = 337</i>	<i>(N = 264)</i> • 92% practiced budgeting. • Tenants At-Risk of Eviction dropped from 100% to 26%.	<i>(N = 26)</i> • 90% found subsidized housing. • 65% found jobs.	<i>(N = 47)</i> • Tenants At-Risk of Eviction dropped from 100% to 5%.
2011 <i>N = 796</i>	<i>(N=777)</i> • 95% practiced budgeting. • At Risk of Eviction dropped from 85% to 30%.	<i>(N = 54)</i> • 94% found subsidized housing. • 80% found jobs.	<i>(N = 35)</i> • At-Risk of Eviction dropped from 100% to 10%.
2012 <i>N = 219</i>	<i>(N=198)</i> • 100% practiced budgeting. • At Risk of Eviction dropped from 100% to 5%.	<i>(N = 21)</i> • 99% found subsidized housing. • 92% found jobs	<i>3 Counselors are trained by Educator to conduct training for their tenants</i>
2013 <i>N = 94</i> Jan – Jul	<i>(N = 45)</i> • 100% practiced budgeting. • At-Risk of Eviction dropped to 5%.	<i>(N = 49)</i> • 16 found jobs • 20 found subsidized homes	<i>Pending end of year report from Counselors</i>

Additional impact attributed to UME Eviction Prevention efforts.

- In December 2012, major end-of-year citywide impact report on Eviction Prevention from the Baltimore City Department of Social Service (a major UME partner on Eviction Prevention Seminar) mailed to this Educator revealed:

- 5,009 households at risk of eviction received services to prevent eviction.
- 35% increase in awareness three months after as compared to three month before the Eviction Prevention Seminar.

- In December 2012, AHC, a private subsidized housing corporation (a major UME partner on Eviction Prevention Seminar) also released their end-of-year report indicating:

- 30% reduction on evictions from 55%
- 25% in turn over cost (savings to AHC due to minimal evictions)

- Program Recognition: Eviction Prevention Education Program was accepted by peers (peer-reviewed) for International and National Presentations

5. Follow-up Discussions (*financial café*)

Every 9-12 months after program implementation, this educator meets with tenants, a group meeting that the educator termed, *financial café*. In *financial café* breakfast is provided and an open, but organized forum of discussions are conducted. During the forum, tenants who have successfully utilized UME's Eviction Prevention education to prevent eviction share their testimonies. The following discussions are inspirations derived from *financial café*.

Tenants! Do Not Wait To Be Evicted

If facing eviction, *negotiate!* If evicted, be *resilient!* To prevent eviction, learn *budgeting.*"

If facing eviction, Negotiate: Tenant if facing eviction, please do not wait to be evicted? Negotiate with your landlord.

Facing eviction should not be the time to ignore or to fight with the landlord. It should be a time to negotiate the financial obligation on the lease agreement with your landlord. Note that negotiation should be a serious engagement with the landlord in matters such as negotiating with the landlord to accept late rent payments or reduced rent or requesting an alternate cheaper apartment. Keep in mind that all negotiations should be within the

confinement of the legal systems and should be written to safeguard your interest.

Conditions for a winning negotiation: The extent to which the landlord could comply with the negotiation would depend on some characteristics:

- Demeanor: Your demeanor matters - be calm, respectful, and show your best face – it does not help to lose your composure because you are at the verge of losing your apartment.
- Substitutes/Other apartments: Do your research to know the rent of other apartments in your community. Use this information to negotiate with your landlord, especially if renting the other apartments is the best alternative.
- Communication: The communication process during negotiation is best when face-to-face, because you can see the effect of the negotiation and get the nonverbal cues from the negotiation. Note that you can sweet-talk your landlord with promises, but you must comply with your persuasive promises.
 - If you negotiate to pay the rent at a given time, try to pay the rent when it is due.
 - If the rent payment will be late, do not wait. Contact the landlord and explain in a polite manner why the rent will be late.
 - Good Relationship: A good relationship is sometimes all that it takes to be successful. A good relationship with your church community - Turn to religion not just for shelter and clothes, but to seek God's help, put your trust in God, find comfort in religion, and be an active helper.
 - A good relationship with your family and friends may help you negotiate for a short-term interest free loan. A good relationship with others can help create new contacts, which could land you a job (new full time or a second full/part time job).

If evicted, be Resilient

Since eviction is always associated with distress, the tenant needs to be resilient. Resilience describes positive responses to stress. If evicted, instead of getting angry and bitter with the landlord, take a deep breath and think positively to come up with an immediate rescue plan. Resilience can help in maintaining adaptive functioning in spite of being evicted. How can you be resilient when evicted?

- Self-regulation: It is ok to be angry, but the ability to bounce back to a happy self without any delay is very essential. This is what is called self-regulation – laugh about it, laugh at yourself, take the blame, but quickly develop a cool head to think of how to move into a home or another apartment - this approach is call self-regulation.

- Talk to friends or relatives to get not only emotional support, but emergency accommodations.
- Talk to your spouse and children, and develop an exit strategy that works best for everyone.
- Explore available community resources to allow for temporary rescue such as your local Department of Social Services, and Housing Authority.
 - These organizations promote community programs that could provide you with assistance (temporary cash, energy and water bill assistance, housing assistance), which could help subsidize cash in hand for rent.

If preventing eviction, learn Budgeting:

Budgeting is a financial skill that anyone should try to practice. It is a tool as well that helps to guide your everyday spending such that your expenditure does not exceed your income.

- Even if you are being paid biweekly, monthly, quarterly or yearly, budget every time before spending.
 - If your biweekly income is less than your total biweekly expenditures, then you are facing a potential personal finance crisis
 - If your biweekly income is greater than your total biweekly expenditure, then you are doing financially well with surplus unused income.
 - When you save some or all-surplus unused income, you are building your savings.
 - Each time you save, you are encouraged to save more.
 - Each time you spend less and save more you are practicing good personal financial habits that lead towards building wealth.

- Poor financial management promotes financial problems, which could escalate to eviction. Therefore caution in prioritizing and spending is vital. The following skills need practicing to help address poor financial management.
 - The suppression of competing activities – remember the most important aspect of your budget is prioritizing, and it is obvious that your rent should be the highest priority in your budget, except if you are in a free housing. Therefore, it is always essential to allocate money first for your rent before thinking of spending on anything else.
 - Wait for the right time to do something that involves money – A penny saved is a penny gained, but a penny spent is a penny gone. Buy something when on sale or on discount or off-season.

- Hold off spending money until the situation permits: Do not go on a spending spree because you have an unexpected amount of money such as your tax refund. Save it and take advantage of the interest, no matter how small the interest yield could be.
- Avoid spending too quickly: This is similar to putting yourself on a regular diet, although this is a spending diet.

The five-year outcome of this program will be reviewed in 2014.