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STRIVING TOWARD BEST PRACTICE

Identifying Appropriate Housing and Negotiating a Lease Avoiding Scams Sponsor responsibility

Sponsors have a responsibility to source, safe, secure, reliable and sustainable housing that is affordable to meet the needs of those they sponsor. There are two major challenges involved -- finding available housing in an overheated rental market that is affordable; the other is negotiating the lease with the rental property landlord or agent in the newcomer's name when there is no credit history in Canada. Keep in mind the key needs – affordability, location, access to public transportation and safety. Three major requirements for rentals include references, proof of employment and a credit report, which are impossible for newcomers to provide, but a sponsor has a role to play here in providing assurance that the rental costs will be covered over the 12 months. In addition, during the newcomer's 12 months of sponsorship, there may be landlord/tenant issues that need to be addressed. Educating is a responsibility.

Key guidelines:

Identifying housing

- **Research** - access housing availability through local community publications, social media, the internet, as well as by talking to friends and family.
- **Community mapping** - consider doing a community rental building map and get to know rental agents; review online rental registries.
- **Real estate agents** - try real estate agents and ask for information on rentals.
- **Settlement agencies** - seek information from your local settlement agency.

Negotiating a standard lease

- **Lease inclusion** - the lease must include parties to the agreement, rental unit details, terms of the tenancy, first and last month's rent, services and utilities specified, information around responsibility for maintenance and repairs.

- **Co-Signing** -- sponsors may be asked to co-sign leases for 12 months. If considering co-signing, showing the lease to a lawyer to know what the ramifications are. May want to take an interpreter with you to lease signing.

Identifying Scams

- **No in-person meeting** - landlord does not want to meet you in person.
- **No invitation to see the property** - encouraging move-in without seeing the property.
- **Asking for money** - asking for rent or security deposit before signing the lease
- **Rental amount** - rent is lower than market rate.
- **Screening process** - there is none.
- **Inappropriate lease signing** - landlord asks for signing of an incomplete lease.

Responsibility of sponsor

- **Education of the newcomer family** - information about how to maintain a good relationship with a landlord. How to look after the rental unit, the newcomers may not be familiar with the expectations of maintenance.
- **Resolving issues** – know everything about rights and responsibilities by consulting the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation – <http://www.equalityrights.org>
- **Landlord/tenant issues** – ensure a process for addressing issues.

Connections:

- **Housing Help Centre** – 416 285-8070
- **Metcap** – <https://www.metcap.com>
- **PRSN regional resource directory** – www.refugeesponsor.net.ca/resource_directory
- **Bonnie Hoy and Associates** – when all else fails, contact Bonnie Hoy at bonnie@bonniehoy.com, <https://www.bonniehoy.com>, 416 821-9425; she may be able to suggest what might be available particularly in the GTA, and link you to properties that have available units.

Reference:

- PRSN workshops on Housing - September 2019 and May 2022