

EFFECTIVE INTERACTIONS WITH TENANTS WHO EXPERIENCE MENTAL ILLNESS

Things to know and suggestions for dealing
with potential problems

Presenters: Ellen Quinlan LCSW, Director of
Residential Treatment, Shalom house Inc.
And Megan Christenson, Property Manager,
Shalom house Inc.

Basic facts about mental illness

Fact: Nearly 44 million adults experience mental illness in a given year.¹



1 in every 5 adults in America experience a mental illness.



Nearly 1 in 25 (approximately 13.6 million) adults in America live with a serious mental illness.



One-half of all chronic mental illness begins by the age of 14; three-quarters by the age of 24.

Prevalence of Mental Illness by Diagnosis



1 in 100 (2.4 million) American adults live with schizophrenia.¹



2.6% (6.1 million) of American adults live with bipolar disorder.¹



6.9% (16 million) of American adults live with major depression.¹



18.1% (42 million) of American adults live with anxiety disorders.¹

Some Guidelines for Housing Providers and Mentally Ill tenants.

- ▣ 1. If you learn during the tenant screening process that a prospective tenant has a mental illness you can't use this information to screen them out.
- ▣ 2. You can't ask a tenant about the nature or severity of their mental illness.
- ▣ 3. You can't evict a tenant for being mentally ill.
- ▣ 4. Mentally ill tenants can be asked to adhere to the terms of their lease to the best of their ability. You have the right to hold them accountable for missed rent payment, property damage or dangerous or seriously disruptive behaviors.

Some Guidelines for Housing Providers and Mentally Ill tenants.

- ▣ 5. Landlords can be asked to provide “reasonable accommodations” to enable mentally ill tenants to stay in their housing.
- ▣ Examples may include:
 - ▣ Help filling out the rental application.
 - ▣ Allowing the tenant to move to a quieter part of the building if available.
 - ▣ Enabling the use of a separate entrance to limit interactions with other tenants.

Guidelines Continued

- ▣ Some Landlords get creative in reducing the impact of potential problems. One example is a Landlord who had a tenant whose hallucinations caused her to hear voices coming from her walls. She attempted to stop this by physically lashing out at the Voices (and the walls) causing a lot of damage.
- ▣ The very understanding Landlord provided her with a foam bat which saved the walls but allowed the tenant to safely engage in fighting back at the voices without damaging her property and putting her tenancy at risk.

Guidelines Continued

- ▣ These reasonable accommodations are not required to impose undue hardship on you as a Landlord.
- ▣ The tenant needs to request the accommodation in order for it to be granted.
- ▣ If an accommodation is requested on the basis of a mental health disability the landlord has the right to request necessary documentation to verify the link between the disability and the need for the requested accommodation.

Guidelines Continued

- ▣ Landlords with “no pets “ policies may need to allow service or emotional support animals prescribed by a Doctor.
- ▣ Direct threats to the safety, health or property of the other tenants (or staff) are exempt from requirements to tolerate or provide reasonable accommodations. However it may need to be proven in Court in the event a tenant contests an eviction and where that line is can be hard to prove.

Creating the best relationship with your tenant to fall back on when problems arise.

- ▣ Ask the tenant for an emergency contact if you normally do this with all tenants. It is better to request that the tenant give you the name of a friend or family member than a mental health provider.
- ▣ The reason for this is that mentally ill people change providers, fire them or stop showing up especially when their mental health is deteriorating. Providers have to adhere to very strict confidentiality rules leaving you no-one to communicate with.

Creating the best relationship with your tenant

- ▣ Call or visit the tenant when things are going well to build trust.
- ▣ If your tenant suffers from intense paranoia or anxiety you may be seen as a threat when you are just trying to communicate with them to solve a problem.

Behaviors or symptoms which may make it difficult to be a successful tenant

- ▣ Paranoia
- ▣ Disorganization
- ▣ Intense Anxiety or depression
- ▣ Hoarding
- ▣ Substance Abuse (guests)

Property Management Side

- Brief History
- Early signs and trying to prevent crisis/eviction
- Managing initial interaction/intervention
- Final actions and beyond



Facts about SHI Housing

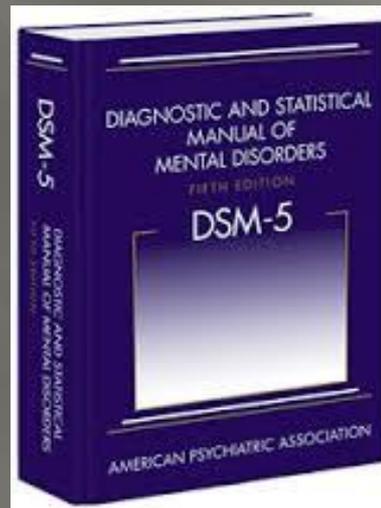


- ❑ Shalom House owns and manages 26 properties
- ❑ The properties range from small group homes with 24 hour staff to independent living multifamily apartment buildings.
- ❑ The properties are primarily located in Portland



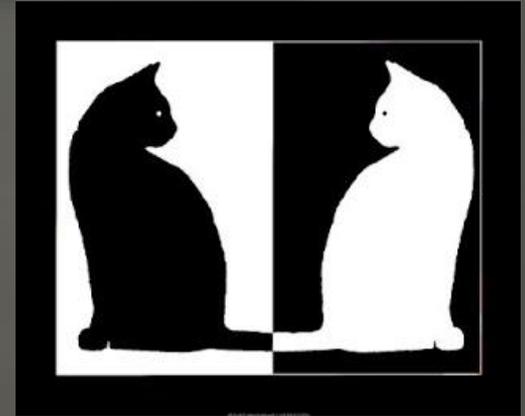
Who SHI Houses

- ❑ In order to live at a Shalom House residence you have to have a disabling mental illness.
- ❑ Shalom House has the ability to provide residency to approximately 230 households



My Tenant is Not Themselves

- They are creating disturbances
- They stopped paying rent
- They leave you a voicemail repeating “I love you” over and over
- They are calling to report things you know are not happening
- They are decorating with duct tape



What Next?

- Call or write the tenant to start a conversation
- Give them resources; Warm Line, 774-HELP, caseworker, 2-1-1 Maine
- Work with the caseworker or housing specialist or other supports and report the facts

...Ideally the interaction would end here.



But Things Get Worse

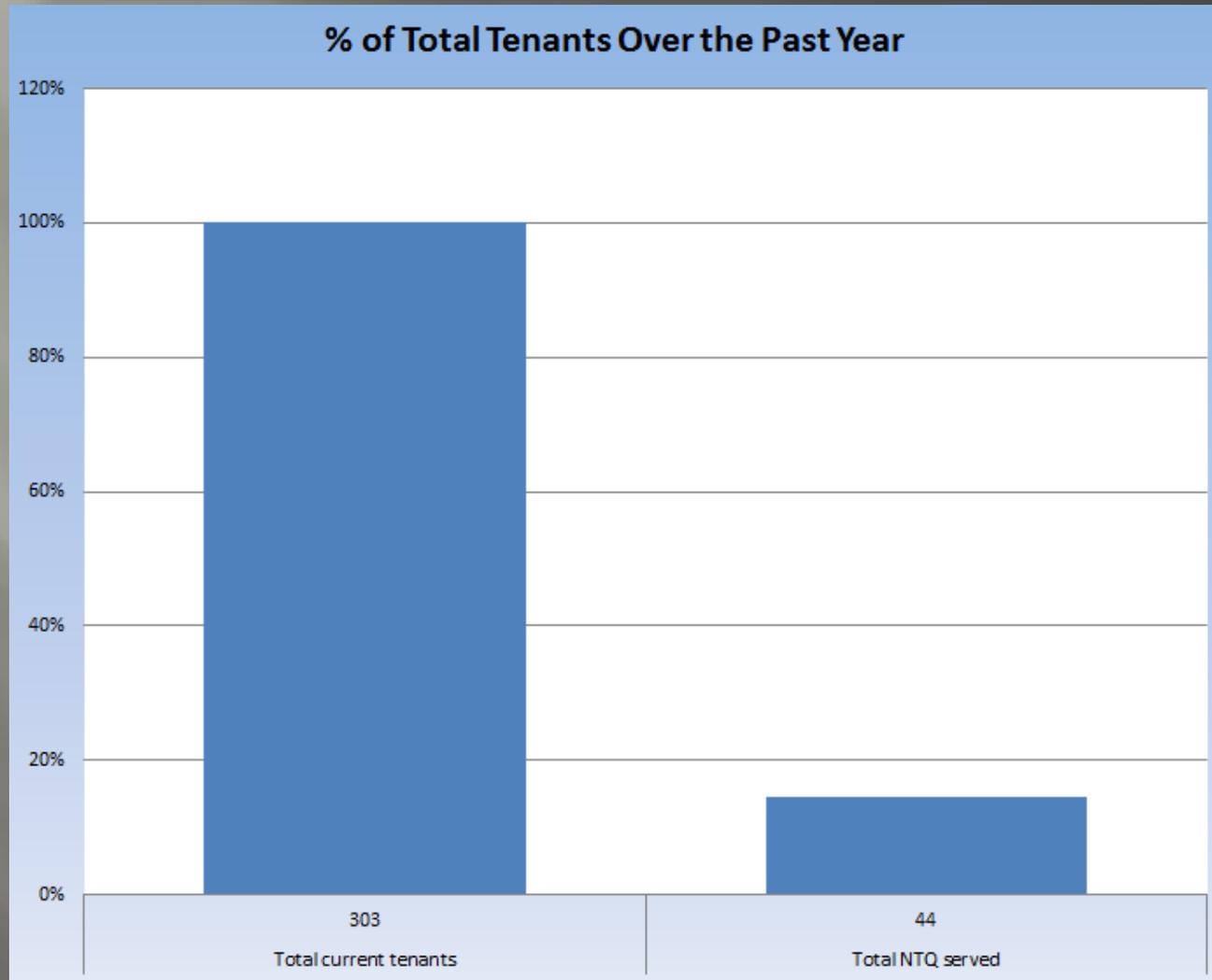
- Now other tenants are being effected negatively
- There is now real damage to your building
- You are seriously worried about their safety and the safety of the other tenants
- The resources have been exhausted
 - Police Liaison (Opportunity Alliance)
 - Community Policing (PPD)
 - Crisis line (intervention 1-888-568-1112)
 - Adult Protective Services (DHHS)



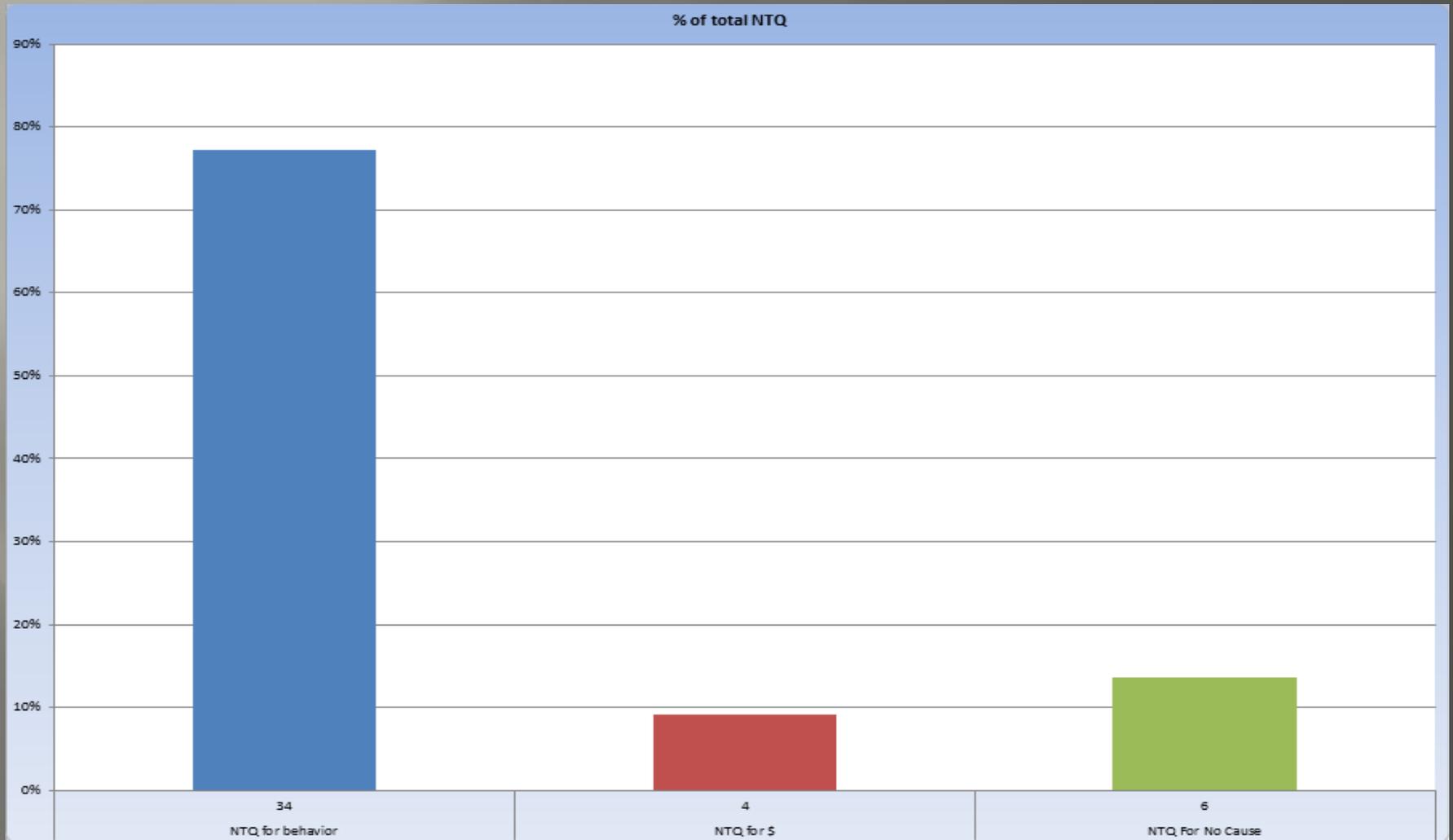
Last Resort ...But Not Really



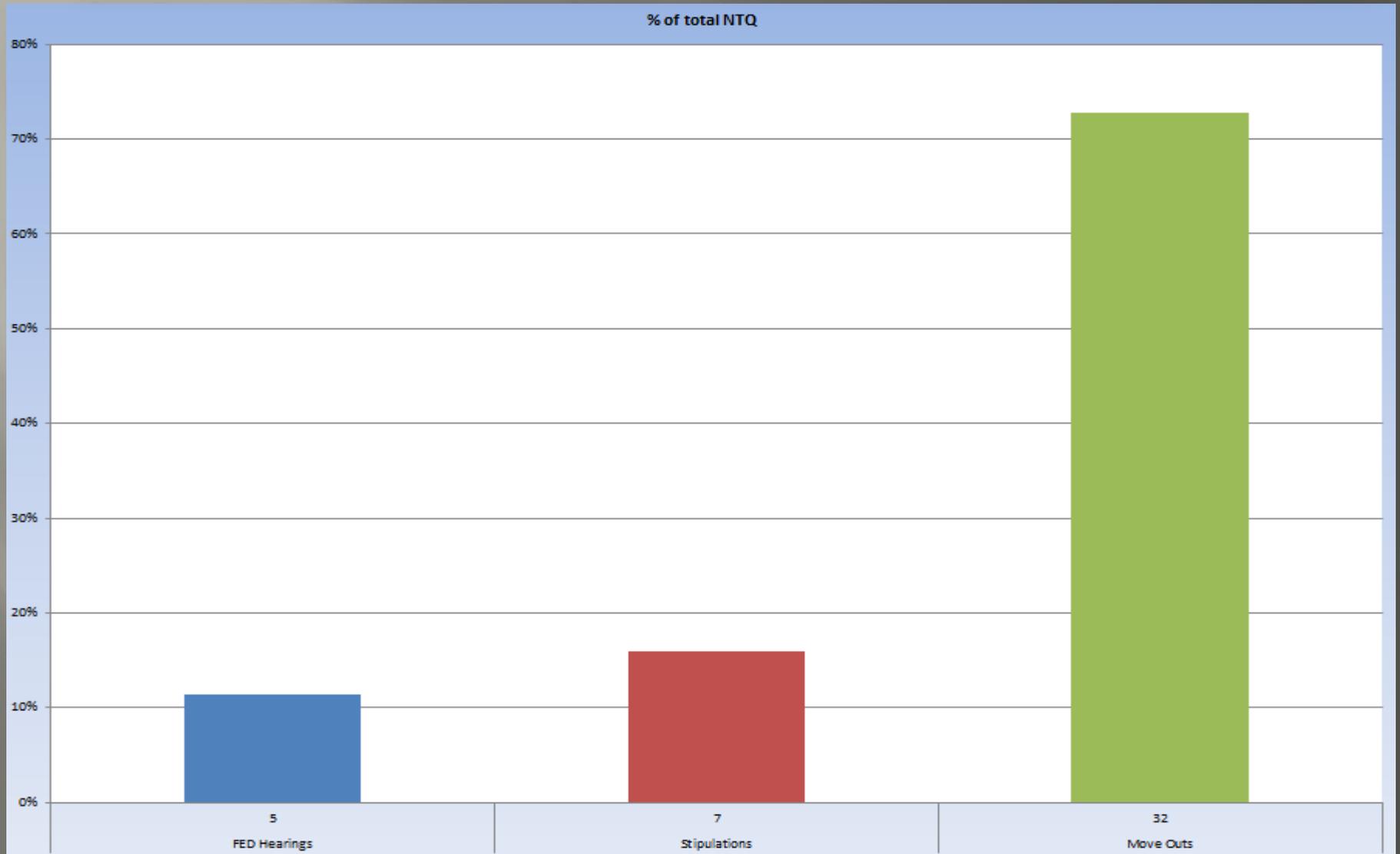
How Many Tenants Did I Ask to Leave?



Why Did I Ask Them to Leave?



Did They Leave?



Beyond the Notice

- Stipulations
 - Probation period
 - Extension
- Eviction



SUMMARY

- Know your legal obligations
- Build a trusting relationship with the tenant early
- Possible early detection signs
- Resources at each stage