

I have a Temporary Assistance shelter grant. What Now?

In many instances, DSS will require a “pre-occupancy inspection” if the housing you have chosen is owned by a private landlord. Before scheduling this inspection, you should make sure none of the following hazards are present:

- no potable (safe) water or the water is off to specific fixtures
- no gas service/no gas meter (if needed to operate heat, hot water, and cooking appliances)
- no appropriate /approved way to heat the apartment
- Inadequate heating (heating capacity minimum is 68 degrees faranheit between Sept 1st–June 1st)
- Gas burning appliance not vented/not vented properly
- Gas burning appliance installed improperly (i.e. hot water heater located in bathroom)
- Gas burning furnace or space heater with yellow or orange burning flames
- Chimney has uncovered openings/ vent-pipes aren't sealed where they enter the chimney
- Sewer/drain pipes leaking, not draining, or sewage backups on the property)
(flip over for more about inspections)

If you are homeless and need immediate assistance, call **Crisis Services at 834-3131**. They will be able to link you with shelter or refer you to programs that could provide housing assistance. You can also visit windows #5 and #6 at the Rath Building (158 Pearl Street) and they will provide emergency assistance if you are eligible.

I've been denied rental assistance by DSS, what else can I do?

There are agencies in Buffalo that will supply rental assistance or security deposit assistance for those who qualify and have a denial **in writing** from DSS.

Hispanics United of Buffalo
254 Virginia St, Buffalo, 14201 856-7110

Buffalo Urban League
15 Genesee St, Buffalo, 14203 854-7625
Provides rental assistance when funding is available; will assist in finding housing year-round.

Catholic Charities
525 Washington St, Buffalo, 14203 856-4494

Community Action Organization
99 Harvard Place, Buffalo 14209 881-6543
Provides rental assistance (security deposit, eviction prevention, mortgage assistance, first month's rent) when available.

I could not obtain rental assistance and I am being evicted. What can I do?

Call Crisis Services Emergency hotline 834-3131. They will work with you to set up a housing plan in an emergency and also determine a proper long-term plan for housing.

Housing Discrimination and Your Rights

As a renter, you have rights protected by municipal, state, and federal law. You cannot be discriminated against based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, disability, age, sexual orientation, military status or familial status (the presence of children in a family), **lawful source of income** (including public benefits), gender identity or expression. Keep in mind that while you cannot be discriminated against based on the source of your income, your landlord can ask that you show proof of your income and determine if you can afford to pay for that housing (as long as the landlord does this for all applicants). If you feel you are the victim of housing discrimination, contact the Housing Unit at Neighborhood Legal Services (847-0650) or Housing Opportunities Made Equal (854-1400) immediately.

I Need Housing!



www.wnyhomeless.org

Special thanks to: Neighborhood Legal Services, Karen Carman, Housing Opportunities Made Equal, and the Department of Social Services for their assistance with information contained in this pamphlet.

Where do I begin?

Establish an income. If you are not working, it is highly recommended that you apply for Temporary Assistance (TA) immediately at Window #7 of the Rath Building. Cash assistance can take 30 days for families and 45 days for individuals to activate.

I want to find an affordable apartment. Where can I get a list of affordable housing?

Lists are available from:

Belmont Shelter Corporation
(1195 Main St, 884-7791)

Ask them for an affordable housing list as well as a "Mod Rehab" list; this is a list of apartments that have Section 8 attached to them but not to you, making them more affordable even if you do not qualify for Section 8.

If you have access to internet, you can also access the Belmont Shelter On-Line Apartment Search Database.

Go to:

http://www.belmontshelter.org/rent_view.php

This database is updated every Tuesday.

You can also visit or call:

Rental Assistance Center
(470 Franklin St, 882-0063)

What is considered "affordable housing"?

As a simple guideline, housing is considered affordable if the cost of rent or mortgage, as well as utilities, is equal to 30% of your total monthly income. If you can find an apartment at or near 30% of your overall income, call the landlord to determine if it is available. Don't be afraid to negotiate rent with a landlord.

How will I know that the apartment I find is safe?

Arrange to see the apartment or home and make sure it is safe. Examples of unsafe conditions are mold; damaged, loose or buckling floors; frayed wiring; wiring or outlets near where water could splash or collect; no smoke detectors; loose and chipping paint; broken toilets; leaks from sinks; insect or rodent infestations; holes or leaks in the roof. Do not be afraid to ask questions of the landlord.

I've been threatened with eviction because of rental debt. What can I do?

You can apply for emergency rental assistance from The Department of Social Services (DSS). Go to the Housing Unit located on the first floor of the Rath Building, 158 Pearl St., Buffalo.

You must show that you are being evicted because you owe back rent (arrear). **DSS requires court papers or a letter from your landlord threatening to sue you if you don't pay.** The letter from your landlord should have a breakdown of the exact months and amounts you owe. Under certain circumstances, DSS may ask for the money back, either by recouping future cash assistance or by having you sign a repayment agreement.

If you go to Window #5 or #6 at DSS and tell the worker that you have an emergency, you must be seen that day. Any denial of assistance must be in writing. If DSS is willing to help, but needs more documentation from you, you should be given a list of items needed and a date to return. If your emergency need must be met the same day, DSS must issue cash or a "guarantee letter" that day. If DSS denies your request, **the denial must be in writing.** You must have your denial in writing to assist in challenging a denial of assistance or when applying with other agencies for rental assistance.

If DSS refuses to pay your back rent, and your landlord is threatening to evict you, call Neighborhood Legal Services immediately at 847-0650 and ask for the Housing Unit. They will review DSS's decision with you and determine if you should challenge the decision. They may agree to take your case.

What about Section 8 Housing?

It is recommended that you apply for Section 8 assistance. However, this will not serve your immediate housing needs. The Section 8 wait list is approximately 5-7 years. Visit the **Belmont Shelter Corporation** to apply, as well as learn more about other housing options.

(Apartment Inspection Requirements—continued from flip side)

- No electric service/no meter
- Cockroach/rodent infestations
- Missing/inoperable/broken plumbing fixtures
- Unopenable Windows (painted/screwed shut)
- Missing or inadequate stairway/ porch handrails or guardrails and balusters
- Missing/damaged/improper flooring in the kitchen and bathroom
- Inoperable/missing exterior and interior doors and door hardware
- Blocked entry or exit (i.e. egress blocked by junk, exterior door has inside lock)
- Exposed electrical wiring/improperly wired fixtures/outlets
- Smoke detectors missing/inoperative
- Structurally unsound/falling walls, floors, ceilings, porch decks, stairs, etc.
- Window glass broke out/missing
- Bedroom accessible only through another bedroom or bathroom

The following *could* be a barrier to passing inspection: damaged or badly soiled walls, floors, ceilings; missing or inadequate lighting in rooms, hallways, and stairways; damaged, soiled, or inoperative appliances (if supplied); gas space heater installed on carpeting without a flame-resistant plate; flammable materials stored too close to gas appliance; loose, drafty, or badly cracked windows; no screens for windows (seasonal); damaged or missing molding or trim; damaged or missing electrical outlets, outlet covers, switches, switch covers; leaking plumbing fixtures; junk, trash, debris, excessive garbage.