

Communicating with People with Disabilities

FAIR HOUSING HIGHLIGHT #6

The topic this month is communicating with a person with a disability. When speaking with a person with a disability, consider the following:

- Try to maintain eye contact and eye level with person, even if an interpreter is present.
- Ask the individual if they need assistance and wait for an affirmative answer and instructions.
- Speak in a normal tone of voice, and if the person has a visual impairment, state your name when approaching and tell the individual when you are leaving.
- Never touch or distract a service dog without first asking the owner.
- If you do not have a Text Telephone (TTY), dial 711 to reach the national telecommunications relay service, which facilitates the call between you and an individual who uses a TTY.
- When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands.
- Avoid referring to people by the disability they have, i.e. "an epileptic, the blind" by placing the person before or in place of the disability. Say "person with a disability," rather than "disabled person."
- Remember, people are not "bound" or "confined" to wheelchairs. They use them to increase their mobility and enhance their freedom. It is more accurate to say "wheelchair user" or "person who uses a wheelchair."
- Don't be afraid to ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.

Tips for Housing Providers:

- Train your employees on Fair Housing laws and how they apply to persons with disabilities.
- Train your staff on how use a TDD or how to use the nationwide voice relay system- # 711.
- Be prepared to put your application and materials in accessible format.
- Consider all requests for **reasonable accommodations and modifications**. Under fair housing laws housing providers can only reject reasonable accommodation requests if they demonstrate that the request poses an undue financial or administrative burden or substantially alters the provision of the housing.
- All accommodation requests must be considered on a case by case basis.
- If your complex receives federal funding, you must also comply with 504 Regulations and generally are required to pay for structural modification to dwelling units and common areas when needed as an accommodation by a tenant or applicant with a disability.
- Examples of reasonable accommodations for a person with a hearing disability may be visual smoke detectors or door bells, or requests for sign language interpreters to provide effective communication.

Questions? Call the Fair Housing Rights Center in Southeastern Pennsylvania at 215 576-7711 or visit us online at www.fairhousingrights.org.