

Application for FirstSteps Community House

Background Information

FirstSteps is a reentry house located in Champaign. We provide housing to people who are returning to the community from prison. The house is managed by FirstFollowers Reentry Program. FirstFollowers is an organization founded and led by formerly incarcerated people. Our mission is “to build strong and peaceful communities by providing support, guidance, and hope to formerly incarcerated people and their loved ones through peer mentorship.” Our motto is “building community through reentry.”

What We Will Do At First Steps

We will welcome you to our FirstFollowers community. We will do everything we can to ensure that you succeed. We will provide you with a mentor from our organization. We will also provide you with case management and support to enable you to become part of the broader community as quickly as possible. Since we believe in Building Community Through Reentry, we expect you as a resident of our house to contribute your labor and energy to community projects, depending on your availability and ability.

Our house is rent-free but we expect you to look for work. We will help you in your job search. When you are employed, you will be expected to pay 10% of your wages to cover the expenses of the house. Another 10% will be put into a savings account which will be handed over to you when you leave. If you are not working we will expect you to do volunteer work to earn credit for purchasing clothing and other items. Regardless of whether you are working you will be expected to do chores in the house to maintain cleanliness and order.

There is no fixed time length for your stay at FirstSteps. As a general rule, people remain in our house for between three months and a year. If you complete your program and are ready to move out, you will have an opportunity to be provided with a Section 8 Housing voucher which will enable you to rent anywhere in Illinois, depending on the conditions of your mandatory supervised release.

Our house is fully furnished. You will have access to the kitchen and laundry facilities. We will provide TV, laundry soap, bar soap, toilet paper, sheets, blankets, pillows and towels. We will provide some clothing initially. We expect residents to contribute to food costs and we will work with them to acquire a Link Card as quickly as possible. We will ensure provision of meals but you will be expected to take part in preparation of meals and cleaning the kitchen after meals.

We do not cover medical costs but will work with you to get you enrolled in a program to cover medical expenses.

Discipline

Our house is a drug-free, alcohol-free zone. Anyone found in possession of drugs, alcohol or weapons of any kind will be immediately expelled from the house. Anyone who is intoxicated or high on any substance will also be immediately expelled from the house. Lastly, anyone found having sexual relations with anyone on the premises of the house will be immediately expelled. These expulsions are non-negotiable. We do not allow disruptive or violent behavior. If you engage in that such behavior we will consider how to respond to your case. However, in nearly all cases, violent behavior will result in your expulsion.

We expect our residents to fully cooperate with parole agents and other personnel who come from the Department of Corrections. As you know, the conditions of mandatory supervised release allow parole agents to search our house any time of the day or night. We will try to work with parole agents to minimize any friction but we need to fully cooperate with the conditions of mandatory supervised release, including house searches.

Apart from maintaining discipline we expect residents to maintain high standards of hygiene both in regard to their person and their room. We have all smelled the inside of a prison. We don't want that odor in our house.

Applying to FirstSteps

We encourage people to apply to FirstSteps about six months before your release date. We will communicate with you by letter, by phone and, if possible, by visiting you before you are released. In order to be admitted to our house, you need to ensure that you will be released to Champaign County. We can provide letters of support but we cannot change the location of your release. That is the decision of IDOC. You need to work with your counselor or case manager to ensure that Champaign County will be your release site.

Selection Criteria

We give first preference to people who have spent several years in prison and don't have a safe place to live. We do not discriminate on the basis of your race, religion, sexual preference, country of origin, citizenship status or the nature of your offense. However, since this house is a partnership with the Housing Authority of Champaign County we must abide by the Housing Authority rules. Therefore, we cannot accept people whose offense puts them on the sex offender registry for life. We also cannot accept anyone who has been convicted of manufacturing methamphetamine in public housing while they were residing there.

We judge people's applications on the basis of their desire to succeed, their discipline, education and work record in prison, the content of any personal references they can supply and our assessment of the quality of the application or of an in-person interview.

To enter FirstSteps a person does not need to come straight from prison but they must have served time in a state or Federal prison to be admitted.

Our program

We design individual programs for residents, depending on your goals, your skills and your experience. We will work with you to develop a plan of action and assist you in carrying it out. As part of the program of the house you will be expected to attend a check-in meeting Monday through Saturday at 7:30 a.m. You will be expected to be dressed, washed and have eaten before the check-in meeting. At the check-in we will review your program for the day and arrange the supports you need to complete your program.

In addition, you will be expected to attend the FirstFollowers Reentry Drop-In Hours on Tuesday and Thursday from 1 to 5 at Bethel AME Church, 401 E. Park Street, Champaign. We will provide transport to the drop-in. If you have a conflicting appointment, such as a job interview, employment or doctor visit during those hours, you can be excused. Otherwise attendance is mandatory.

If you are on an electronic monitor we will work with you and your parole agent to try to secure the movement you need to make your program work.

You will be a probationary member of the house for a month. At that point you will have a review and your residency will be accepted, your probation extended or you will be asked to leave.

Where to send the application

Please fill this out and mail it to FirstFollowers, P O Box 8923, Champaign IL 61826. We will send you a letter indicating that we have received your application and set up a way to communicate further with you. If you have a family member or friend who can follow up on your application we encourage you to use them as a support. If you have access to email you can send it as an attachment to firstfollowercu@gmail.com

We have a limited number of spaces so even if you are an outstanding candidate we may not be able to accept you into our house. In certain cases, we may offer you a place in the house at a later date than your release but you would have to be responsible for your housing until a place in our house opens up. If this is your situation, we will make it clear to you and give you a precise date when we will have space available.

To be accepted at FirstSteps Community House an applicant must complete all questions of this application and be interviewed by a FirstFollowers interview committee. The committee will then vote on acceptance. Carefully read the application and honestly answer the questions. We recognize that many applicants are incarcerated and may not be able to answer all questions. If you cannot answer a question, fill the box in by saying "does not apply."

1. Full Name (government)		3. Date of Birth		
		Month	Day	Year
2. Present address City State Zip		4. Do you have a family member or friend that we can contact about your application? If so, please supply their name and phone number and indicate their relationship to you (e.g. sister, friend, etc.)		
		5. What is your prison ID number?		
6. If you are currently in prison, how long have you been incarcerated this term?	7. Indicate if you have been in prison previously (do not count county jail) Yes No	8. Have you ever attended a support group or received treatment services for substance use or abuse or mental illness? Yes No		
9. What is the highest level of education you have completed?		10. What do you think is your most valuable skill?		
11. What programs or educational courses have you been involved with in prison?				

11. What jobs have you held in prison?	
12. Marital status (check one) Married Never Married Separated Divorced	13. Do you have children? If so, list their ages and what city they live in.
14. Circle any of the following documents you have in your possession. Birth Social Security Card State ID Certificate Driver's License	15. Have you completed any job training or held any jobs which could help you find employment? Please list them below.
20. Have you ever been enrolled in a treatment facility for alcoholism and/or drug addiction? Yes No If "yes" list the treatment provider, phone number and primary counselor, if any.	21. Do you take prescription drugs? Yes No If "yes" list drugs and reason (if known) the drug has been prescribed.
22. Do you have any medical conditions that require prescription drugs or a doctor's supervision? Circle one. Yes No	
22. Projected Date of Release from Prison (you must inform us if this changes)	

23. Tell us why you think you would be a good candidate to live in our house. You might mention your goals, what kinds of support you might need to achieve those goals, and what challenges you think you will face living in a house with other men coming home from prison.

24. Is there anything else about you that you think we ought to know?

26. I realize that the FirstSteps House to which I am applying for residency (A) prohibits all residents from using any alcohol or illegal drugs, (B) expels any resident who violates such prohibition, In accepting these terms, the applicant excludes himself or herself from the normal due process afforded by local landlord-tenant laws.

I have read all of the material on this application form including the limitations set forth in item 26. I have also answered each question honestly and want to achieve successful reentry into the community.

SIGNATURE:

DATE:
