

Addressing the Needs of Families Impacted by DV through Rapid Re-Housing

A Webinar for the Interagency Workgroup on Ending Family Homelessness

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A Necessary Shift

- Housing has long been a focus of the DV movement, but resources have been concentrated primarily on emergency and temporary housing
- Shelters/Transitional Housing: Increasingly resource-strained, not an option for some, and only a temporary solution if no permanent housing options exist at exit
- Growing emphasis on expanding our housing focus also reflects recognition of ongoing impacts of DV – and of the need for a DV lens when addressing housing barriers

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A Complex Entanglement

- Housing considerations are a huge part of deciding what to do when DV becomes part of living situation
- For many survivors, fleeing DV means losing their housing and becoming impoverished
- Fears and uncertainty about how they will make it on their own, where they can live result in many survivors staying – especially when there are children
- In cases where abuser exits the shared housing, survivors may lack resources to sustain costs

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The Intersection

- DV/sexual assault history (and trauma impacts) significant contributing factors to chronic homelessness in women
- 92% of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse in their lives; 63% were victims of domestic violence
- DV is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children (over 40% of family homelessness)
- Homeless women may seek the perceived safety of a new partner and become the victim of survival sex and other coercive control

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Pairing Housing Help with DV Know-How is Powerful

- DV interferes with housing access and with success in maintaining it
- Even once in new housing, abuse may remain an issue; abusers often sabotage attempts to live independently
- Survivors who can't maintain their housing are highly vulnerable to return/re-abuse
- Specialized, DV-informed, tailored services can address these interacting factors and be the difference in survivors' ability to truly embed safety in their lives

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Issues That Can Challenge Stabilization

- Trauma impacts (survivor and children)
- Ongoing legal issues
- Fears about child custody, deportation
- Isolation from social supports
- Stalking-prone abuser
- Interrupted/sabotaged employment history
- Criminal record
- Chemical dependency
- Bad credit, inexperience with handling money
- Pets often part of the household

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Rapid Re-Housing: Is This Really a Good Idea?

- Some survivors need/want 24-hour support and confidentially-located shelter
- Some face considerable housing barriers and may not be able to achieve/maintain tenancy without longer-term subsidy or master-leasing
- Others want to return to/remain in previous housing once abuser vacates
- Many want nothing more than to leave systems and agencies behind and establish themselves in new housing ASAP
- Conclusion: Housing needs of survivors are on a continuum, and a range of options are required – including RRH

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Home Free's Pathway

- 1926: Shelter for homeless women and their children
- Incorporated DV services in early 1970's
- Added non-residential services in 1998, including "housing first" pilot
- 2003: Closed shelter to expand non-residential services
- Current: Serving 4,800 per yr out of 10 community-based sites and through mobile advocacy

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Home Free Aims to...

- Provide options for those excluded from or not best served by shelters
- Increase availability of support & advocacy based in the community
- Offer active cross-system intervention and flexible, survivor-driven services
- Target housing stabilization and persistent issues that can result in return to abuser

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Home Free's Design



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Home Free's Housing First Services

- Scattered-site model staffed by mobile advocates; approx. \$850,000 annual budget
- Rental subsidy/flexible financial assistance: approx. \$3,500 - \$5,500 per HH
- Capacity: 55-75 households/yr
- Usual duration of services: 6-9 months financial assistance (step-down), up to two years advocacy
- "Light touch" support also provided (outside of housing program)

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Our Approach

- Broad eligibility, minimal program requirements
- Tailored, survivor-driven services
- Mobile advocacy and home visits increase accessibility of services
- Strong emphasis on working across systems to address barriers
- Long-term support to better ensure true stabilization
- Trauma-informed
- Rental agreements held by survivor

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Home Free Outcomes

- 90% + stably housed 12 months post-exit
- 70% reach Milestone 5 (significant gain in self-advocacy skills)
- 90% + increase coping skills/self-sufficiency
- Self-Assessment:
 - 95% + increase ability to stay safe
 - 95% + increase ability to make informed choices
 - 95% + increase knowledge of resources/how to access them

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SHARE Study

- Home Free participated in CDC-funded research study from 2005-2009
- Primary Research Question: What's the role of housing stability in preventing re-victimization and reducing negative health outcomes of DV survivors and their children?

Quasi-experimental longitudinal study funded by CDC (U49CE000520-01)

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SHARE Study Basics

Design:

- 286 women DV victims with housing instability
- Self-reported data at baseline, 6-, 12- and 18-month interviews

Baseline Findings:

- Low levels of **“literal” homelessness**, but high **housing instability**
- **Health:** High rates of PTSD and depression
- **Severity of Violence:** Extreme levels of danger
- **Employment:** Ability to work highly compromised
- **Service Utilization:** High use of public services
- **Children:** High rates of pediatric symptoms, missed school, and functioning outside of normal ranges

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SHARE Study Findings

- Housing instability was associated with poorer outcomes above and beyond survivors’ level of danger due to DV
- Increased housing stability a significant predictor of improvements in many areas of life:
 - Increased safety, decreased vulnerability to abuse
 - Lower levels of PTSD and depression
 - Higher quality of life
 - Increased ability to sustain employment
 - Improvements in children’s outcomes
- Women continued to face long-term health, mental health, and economic constraints

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Home Free's Current Challenges

- When new housing is needed, increasingly difficult to find affordable units within reasonable span of time
- Eviction prevention funds are less available with increasing federal emphasis on rapid re-housing
- Restrictions on allowable costs in many funding streams reduce flexibility to address survivors' myriad economic challenges
- Emphasis on applying funds to rent assistance requires finding other support for necessary staffing

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WSCADV: DV Housing First

- Pilot project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and coordinated by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence among 13 domestic violence programs across Washington State
- DVHF focuses on helping survivors retain or access safe, permanent housing quickly—often bypassing emergency shelters completely
- Flexible approach gives survivors ability to establish a home and the freedom to choose how best to rebuild their lives

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Four Key Service Components

- Tailored services, mobile advocacy
- Housing Search Support
- Landlord and Housing Authority Relationships
- Practical, Temporary Financial Assistance

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DV Housing First Is Effective

- Initial success with the first cohort of 4 agencies led to increased funding and expansion for the second 9-agency cohort
- In Cohort 2, 53% of survivors had permanent housing at program entry, increasing to 86% by January 2013
- After retaining housing, survivors felt safer and their danger levels decreased

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January-September 2013 Data

- 56% of new program participants (N=140) had permanent housing at program entry
- 64% of ongoing program participants at September point in time check in call (N=453) were still housed
- 30% could not be reached (either did not return call to advocate or phone was disconnected)
- 3% had lost their housing
- Over half secure fair market housing
- Of those who stay connected with their advocates, over 90% retain their housing.

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January-September 2013 Data

- Over 39% of new program participants are Native American.
- 66% are survivors of color
- 11% identify as Hispanic/Latina
- 22% identify as Immigrant or Refugee

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Survivor-Identified Needs

At intake:

- 90% identified housing
- Next highest need identified was financial/independent living skills at 54%
- Safety planning was identified as a need by 39%
- Support was identified by 5%

At follow-up, identified needs were more evenly distributed:

- Health and Well-Being was the highest (26%)
- Financial/independent living skills and employment (each at 25%)
- Safety planning was identified by 18.5%
- Support group was identified by 2.6%

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DVHF Changes the Lives of DV Survivors and their Children

“Because of the support I’ve been getting through this program, I’ve been able to focus more on what I need to do to take care of myself and my kids: school, mental health appointments, doctor’s appointments and staying away from relapse.”

- DVHF Participant

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DVHF: Culturally Sensitive Services

Survivors of Color comprised 63% of those in the Cohort 2 evaluation summary.

“It’s very important they understand my tribal community, in terms of spirituality. My housing advocate really tried to learn the culture; she went out of her way.”

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Dignity Restored

- Survivors reported the respect and trust they felt for their advocate
- Survivors reported that the small things make the biggest difference: a bed, a car tire, children’s school supplies

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Rapid Re-Housing For Survivors: Flexibility is Vital

- Progressive engagement instead of a set allocation and time frame
- Options in the system for survivors that need longer term financial and/or services support
- Flexible funding for a variety of needs that contribute to household stability
- Survivor-driven, culturally sensitive advocacy (participant-centered) and voluntary services
- Support with returning to community of origin or building new community
- Advocacy framed by safety planning and awareness of potential for abuser's sabotage
- Trauma-informed: personal trauma and historical trauma

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Last Thoughts: Collaboration Is A Must

- DV providers and homeless services providers need each other to be effective supports for survivors
- Many survivors seek services outside of DV system
- Housing is foundational; integration better ensures survivors have access to these resources and to sensitive response

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The Value of Diversified Funds

- Only 26% of SHARE study participants met federal definition of homeless; most are struggling with housing instability
- Many survivors receive emergency help after fleeing abuse but struggle to maintain housing
- Others “double up” but can only stay temporarily
- With flexible dollars, housing responses can support survivors to stay in their own housing if they can do so safely

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