

Using VOCA and Flexible Funding to Increase Safe Housing Options for Domestic Violence Victims: Updates and Innovations

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What are we going to do?

- Introduce the Domestic Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium (DVHTAC)
- Provide a national overview of the critical intersection of domestic violence and homelessness
- Discuss the use of flexible funding, including VOCA funds, to provide direct housing assistance
- Identify promising practices from various States, including a review of current research on the use of VOCA funds

DV & Housing TA Consortium

Four Federal Agencies

- Family Violence Prevention & Services Program/HHS
- Office on Violence Against Women/DOJ
- Office for Victims of Crime/DOJ
- Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs/HUD

Four Technical Assistance Providers

- National Alliance for Safe Housing (NASH)
- Collaborative Solutions, Inc. (CS)
- National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV)
- National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV)

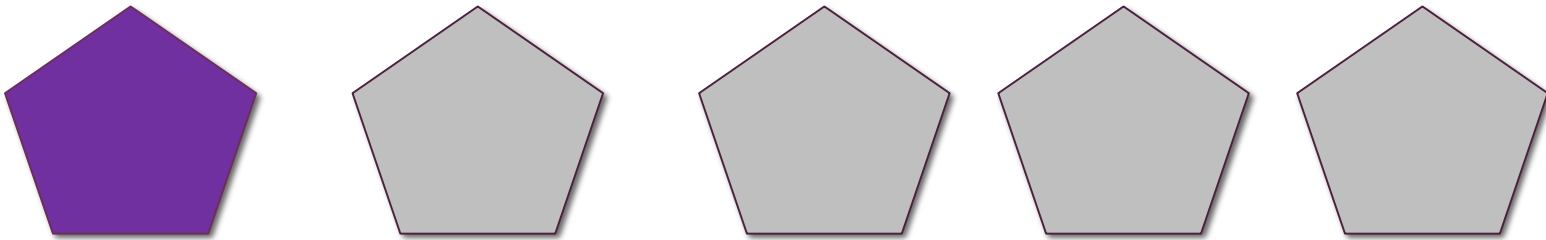
THE PROBLEM

Housing instability is 4x more likely for women who have experienced domestic violence



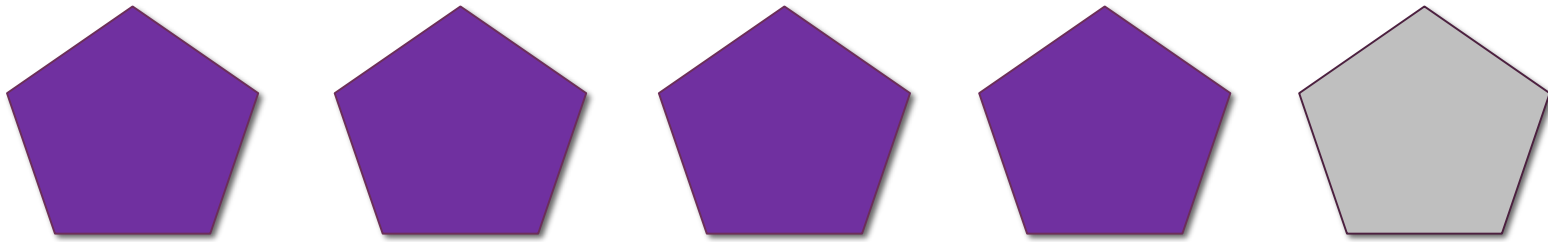
THE PROBLEM

One in four homeless women cite domestic violence as a major contributor to their homelessness



THE PROBLEM

Of homeless women with children, over 80% have experienced domestic violence



“Not a Peripheral Issue”

“For victims of domestic violence, ‘housing is not a peripheral issue, or an issue that can be postponed for resolution later on. Rather, for women who fear for their safety and for their lives, housing is an immediate and pivotal issue on which the question of escape itself rests.’”

UN Women, Safe and affordable housing (quoting Centre in Housing Rights and Evictions, 2006), accessed August 2, 2013, <http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/1458-safe-and-affordable-housing.html>.

Safe Housing for Survivors

- Flexible programming and financial assistance
- Mobile advocacy framed by safety planning
- Survivor driven, trauma informed, culturally responsive voluntary services
- Low barrier, minimal program eligibility requirements
- Flexible duration for survivors who need longer-term support
- Support for reconnecting with community

What are we learning from research and evaluation of innovative approaches?

How can we enhance safety, housing stability and well-being for domestic violence and sexual assault victims and their children?



RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



Does Flexible Funding Work?

- Evaluated DASH – District Alliance for Safe Housing – an innovative program in Washington, DC



Amount of Flex Funding Awarded

- Average grant: \$2,078
- Grant range: \$275 - \$8,508

What were grants used for?

Moving expenses

Utilities

Car repair

Credit card debt

Storage unit fees

Back rent

Out-of-state travel to
court for custody hearing

Other needs
Child Care

The Potential of Flexible Funding

- Flex funding with **brief** advocacy is promising option for survivors who were relatively stable and are now experiencing a crisis
- *Flex funding is far cheaper than shelter*
- Flex funding with **longer-term advocacy** (DV Housing First, DV Rapid Re-housing) is also promising, needs further research

Major Themes from Interviews with Mothers

- The value of housing stability for children
- How grants increased children's safety
- Limiting or eliminating children's exposure to the chaos of homelessness
- Improvements in children's school performance after family housing situations stabilized
- How children are impacted by their mother's stress

Avoiding Homelessness

"We would have been separated, and my children are my life. They my heart. So I'm sure physically, emotionally, spiritually, that would have really, really been negative for me and for him."

Impact on Child Stress and School

"My son's grades have much always been on the Honor Roll. But ...around that time his grades, they started slipping, but then we got back on track and back into our place. He brought home a progress report and it was like all A's... or A+'s."

"So once I moved and I actually got my apartment, they've been to school every day, and they've been to school on time, and both of their academics have improved."

Ability to Leave Unsafe Situations

“We’re in a place where we are safe and we don’t have to worry about no one trying to harm us.”

Making All the Difference

“It helped to provide us with the finances to make the move out of that bad situation. I mean if it wasn’t for that money... I don’t know how we would’ve gotten through... that rough time.”

Housing Status at Time of Grant and at Six-Months Post-Grant

Housing Status	At Time of Grant	At Six-Months Post-Grant
Homeless	21%	2%
Precariously housed	33%	1%
Economically imperiled	46%	97%

95% HOUSED

Average grant: \$2,106

Definitions:

- **Homeless** – living in a shelter, staying in a place not intended for habitation (such as a car, the streets or an abandoned building), or staying with family or friends, couch-surfing or staying in a place not intended for habitation (such as a car, the streets or an abandoned building)
- **Precariously housed** – at risk of imminent eviction, or seriously behind on rent and in jeopardy of eviction
- **Economically imperiled** – housed, but unable to pay for or living without basic utilities or behind on bills to the point that their employment/housing could be jeopardized



FLEXIBLE FUNDING – CA DVHF PILOT PROCESS EVALUATION

Category	Funds	% of Total
Rental Assistance	\$788,439	85%
Move-in Costs and Deposit	\$ 49,476	5%
Children's Needs	\$ 48,859	5%
Utility Bills	\$ 11,835	1%
Other categories included (<1% each):		
• Education/Training		
• Transportation Assistance		
• Security Assistance		
• Legal Assistance		
• Physical/Mental Health Needs		
• Employment		
Total	\$926,837.61	100%



FLEXIBLE FUNDING: PROCESS CHALLENGES

- 1) Budgeting sufficient funds for the **administrative costs**
- 2) Determining **what funds could be used for**
- 3) Whether and when to **provide funds directly to survivors** rather than to housing or service providers



LANDLORD ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES

- 1) **Engaging** landlords in a tight housing market
- 2) Not all landlords accept **third party checks**
- 3) Engage without **disclosing DV** agency

Other approaches of interest

- **Domestic Violence Housing First** is a model using intensive, mobile advocacy and flexible funding to help survivors obtain safe and stable housing
- **Rapid ReHousing**, which combines housing identification, financial assistance for rent and related expenses (typically for six months or less), and supportive services
- **Transitional Housing** and its short and longer term outcomes for survivors, including comparisons with Rapid ReHousing and DV Housing First

Exploring the use of flexible funding, including VOCA funds, to provide direct housing assistance

VOCA Final Rule

- 2016 VOCA Final Rule was issued to clarify use of VOCA Victim Assistance Funds
- Expanded uses of VOCA to support safe and stable housing for survivors of domestic and sexual violence
- Designed to provide states with maximum flexibility to address survivors' housing needs, particularly as a result of their victimization

VOCA Final Rule

- VOCA can support a continuum of services to crime victims, including:
 - Comprehensive legal assistance
 - Transitional Housing
 - Expanded coverage of relocation expenses, and
 - The use of funds for forensic interviews and medical examinations.
- Emphasis on transitional housing and relocation expenses.

VOCA Final Rule

- Relocation expenses – costs related to the relocation of victims (generally where necessary for the safety and well-being of a victim), including, but not limited to:
 - Reasonable moving expenses, storage fees;
 - Security deposits on housing;
 - Travel expenses to relocate;
 - Rental expenses or back rent;
 - Utilities and utility startup costs;
 - Other costs incidental to relocation to such housing.
- Transitional housing – costs to support transitional housing for victims (generally, those who have a particular need for such housing, and who cannot safely return to their previous housing, due to the circumstances of their victimization)

Other uses

- Shelter for victims of domestic violence or human trafficking, as well as victims of sexual assault where a victim needs to move;
- Children's needs – to provide support for childcare, children's health needs, counseling, etc., particularly if the need is directly related to support services being provided to victims and secondary victims of crime;
- Transportation – same as above.

Innovative uses of VOCA

- **COLORADO** - Housing for Crime Victims Special Project launched eight sites around the state with support from the Division of Criminal Justice Office for Victims Programs and Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV); Projects use the Domestic Violence Housing First model (survivor-driven mobile advocacy, housing assistance, supportive services, community engagement, and financial assistance);
- **CALIFORNIA** - DVHF Process Evaluation of 32 pilot sites using VOCA support to provide flexible financial assistance and mobile advocacy to survivors to help them avoid homelessness and achieve safety in housing.
- **NEW HAMPSHIRE, ARIZONA, NORTH CAROLINA** and others

Innovative uses of VOCA

Flexible Funding –

- Some survivors *can avoid homelessness if they have access to immediate funds*, coupled with housing advocacy and support.
- Existing emergency funding programs often lack a *low-barrier, trauma-informed approach*, making them *difficult for survivors to access*
- International aid studies have shown that *direct funds* to those in need have *immediate* and *long term positive impacts*

Guiding principle in Flexible Funding decisions –

- “Can any other organization provide this resource?”
- “Will this money help this person to retain housing, not just today, but **over time**?”
- Process is **survivor-centered, accessible, and respectful**
- Process is **quick** to respond to urgent situations

SAFE HOUSING PARTNERSHIPS

The new website for the Domestic Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium

UNDERSTANDING THE INTERSECTIONS

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

EMPLOYING KEY APPROACHES

PUBLIC POLICIES

- Data, infographics, literature reviews, and reports that describe the intersections between domestic violence, sexual assault, homelessness, and housing
- Strategies for building effective and sustainable partnerships across systems and case studies of successful collaborations
- In-depth resource collections organized around four key approaches to addressing and preventing housing instability among survivors
- Access to relevant federal laws, regulations, and policies

Have questions? Need TA? Want training?
Contact the Consortium directly through the site!

Need Technical Assistance or Training?

Go to SafeHousingPartnerships.org and use the
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE tab in the top toolbar

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Questions and Discussion

