

# A Promising Approach to Prevent Homelessness for Domestic Violence Survivors

Cris M. Sullivan, PhD and Heather Bomsta

Michigan State University Research Consortium on  
Gender-based Violence

Peg HacsKaylo, DASH

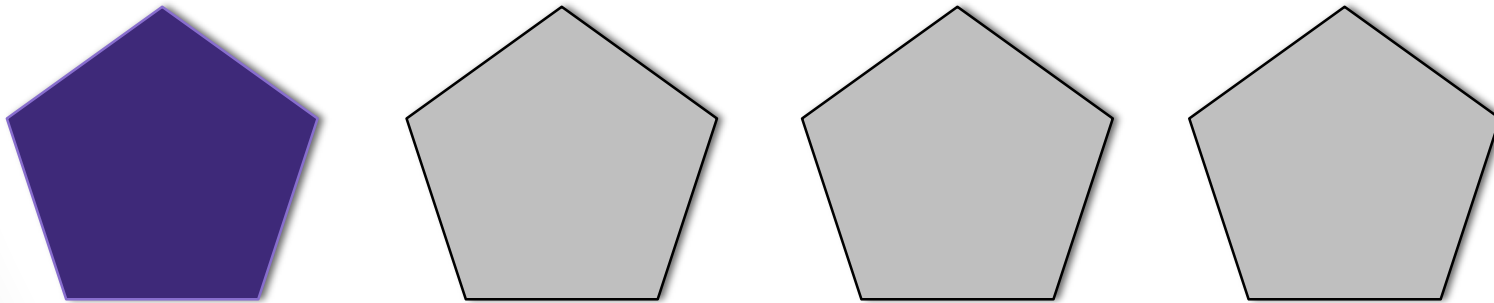
# The Problem

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



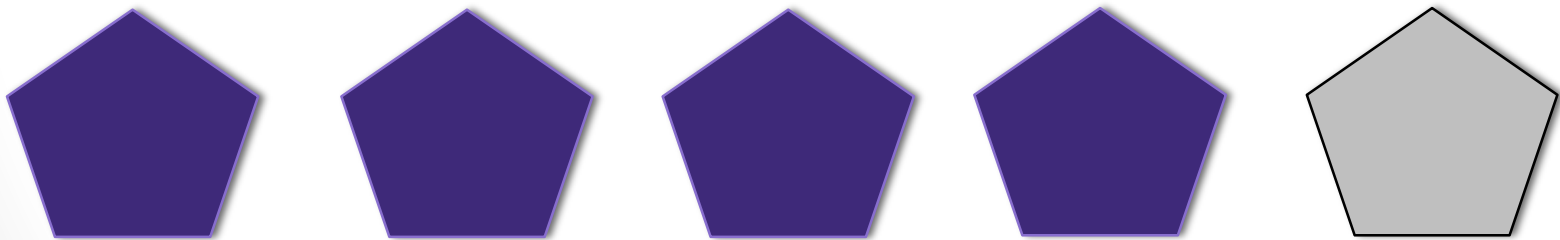
# The Problem

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



# The Problem

- Pathways from DV to homelessness are both direct and indirect:
  - Many abusers intentionally destroy victims' financial stability by ruining their credit, harassing them at their jobs, preventing them from working or going to school, stealing from them...

# The Problem

- Indirect pathways include:
  - DV often leads to injuries, PTSD, depression, all of which can lead to job instability and housing instability
  - Many women leave their homes to protect their children, but then can not afford to support them

# Innovative Responses

- “Domestic Violence Housing First” is a model using **intensive, mobile advocacy** and **flexible funding** to help survivors obtain safe and stable housing
- “Flexible funding” with brief advocacy is being examined as a way to **prevent** homelessness from occurring

# Why Flexible Funding?

Some survivors ***can avoid homelessness*** if they have ***access to immediate funds***, coupled with housing advocacy and support.

International aid studies have shown that ***direct funds*** to those in need have ***immediate*** and ***long term positive impacts***.



# Does Flexible Funding Work?

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



# DASH Provides a Range of Services:

- A 43-unit apartment-style “shelter”
- A transitional-to-permanent scattered site safe housing program
- **Housing Resource Center**: A variety of homeless prevention services through:
  - Advocacy
  - The **Survivor Resilience Fund** (**a flexible funding program**), where grants are given to help survivors attain stable, safe housing

# Guiding Principles in Flexible Funding Decisions

- “Can **any other organization** provide this resource?”
- “Will this grant 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

# Research Plan

- Survivors invited to participate when applying for grant
- Interviewed at 30-days, 3-months and 6-months post-grant
- 55 survivors in study
  - 95% retention rate at three months
  - 87% retention at six months



# Demographics

- 53 women, 2 men
- Average age 34 (range 21-57 years old)
- Primarily African American
- 82% have children
  - (range 0-4)



# Amount of Flex Funding Awarded

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

Grants were used for:

Moving expenses      Utilities  
Car repair      Back rent  
Credit card debt      Storage unit fees  
Out-of-state travel to  
court for custody hearing      Other needs

# Housing at Six Months Follow-up

**94% housed**

| Up-to-date<br>on rent | Somewhat<br>behind on<br>rent | No way to<br>pay next<br>month's<br>rent | Homeless |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--|----------|
| 37 (76%)              | 6 (12%)                       | 3 (6%)                                   | 3 (6%)   |

# The Process of Receiving the Grant was Important to Survivors



- Process was:
  - Low barrier
  - FAST
  - Caring and non-judgmental



# Low Barrier

"When I went to DASH they were more willing to listen to my story, ask some questions, 'OK, we can help you.' And that was it. It wasn't like 'OK, we need you to join our program. We need you to sit down. We need you to come in everyday. We need you to come in...' It wasn't like that. I didn't feel like ... ***I didn't feel like somebody put a gun to my head – I mean to, you know, receive help.***"

# *FAST*

“I expected to be there for hours. I had brought as much information that I could possibly find because I just assumed that it would be a long day there and it would be a million and one questions, but it was totally the opposite. It was totally the opposite and it was very refreshing.”

# Caring & Non-judgmental

“Usually you talk to someone like that [a service provider] and it’s more like, ‘oh, I would’ve did this’ or ‘I would’ve did that.’ And, you know, it wasn’t like that. It was more like they understood. ...I didn’t have to hear, ‘oh, well, why didn’t you leave?’ or – you know. I didn’t get that from them.”

# Children's Well-being

“[My daughter] used to be kind of violent with her doll babies and, you know, having tantrums, slamming doors. And now it's more relaxed so she's more calm with her doll babies.



She's not ripping doll babies' heads off.”

# Impact on Well-being

- Midway through the evaluation, we started asking at 6 months (n=31):
  - Thinking back over the last 6 months, when you went to DASH for funds... would you say that, overall your life is better off, worse off, or no different:
    - ☑ Better off ➡ **100% felt “better off”**
  - And would you say you are more hopeful about the future than you were then? Less hopeful? Or no change?
    - ☑ More hopeful ➡ **90% felt “more hopeful”**

# Impact on Safety

- We later began asking survivors in 6 month interviews if they had experienced any domestic violence since receiving their flexible funding
- Of the 23 survivors asked the question:
  - 20 (91%) reported no further DV
  - 1 reported receiving harassing phone calls
  - 2 experienced further DV

# The Promise of Flexible Funding

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

# Next Steps

- Identify where else this is happening; replicate
- Some government agencies looking at how to provide more of this type of funding and service, as it appears effective *and* cost-effective

