

Strong Foundation for Healing: Shelter & Sexual Violence

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Sexual Violence is a Threat to Stable Housing

Sexual assault is a most intimate crime, and when it happens in our most intimate sanctuaries—our homes—the trauma is devastating and difficult to escape. “The majority of sexual assaults take place in or near victims’ homes or the homes of victims’ friends, relatives, or neighbors” (Mindlin and Vickers, as quoted by NSVRC, 2010). Thus, for many survivors of sexual violence, home often is not safe. Survivors struggle with seeing and touching constant reminders of the assault: a bed, a kitchen table, a broken window, or the new locks on the door. And if a survivor must leave home—whether to get away from the constant triggers, or due to an eviction, or in order to flee the perpetrator—losing the comforts and familiarity of home only compounds the trauma of sexual violence. Survivors need a safe place for the emotional work of recovery. Advocates start where the survivor is. The advocate plays a critical role in helping survivors navigate housing options and regain a sense of safety.

Until very recently, the anti-rape field has not considered shelter and housing to be sexual violence issues. When we think and write about the crisis of sexual violence and our response, we typically think about medical needs, legal issues, and emotional support. As a movement, we often overlook the shelter and housing needs of sexual violence survivors. We seldom ask survivors about housing concerns. But healing from sexual violence can only happen on a foundation of safety and safety starts with home. Indeed, rural survivors tell us that without safe, habitable housing, other interventions will not work (Logan, et al., 2005). Safe shelter is a basic human right; a prerequisite to meeting life’s other needs (Greco & Weschler, 2010). Now, equipped with the research and inspired by some promising practices, we are coming to see that housing is a core issue in our sexual assault advocacy work. In this paper, we will consider issues and advocacy related to emergency shelter and longer-term housing for sexual violence survivors.

The shelter and housing needs of sexual violence survivors are incredibly complicated and often hidden. Adult survivors of child sexual abuse usually do not present to shelters as such; they often seek services and support as domestic violence survivors or homeless women. A sexual assault is more than enough to destabilize housing. Breaking leases, hiring movers, and securing affordable and safe housing are barriers that many victims and survivors face in today’s society

and harsh economic climate. Securing safe, stable housing is virtually impossible for many, especially people living in poverty or those dependent on a perpetrator. We know that survivors are resourceful. Yet as they do what it takes to survive, moving from place to place and changing phone numbers (often several times), they often drift out of rape crisis, domestic violence, or other social services. When multiple victimizations, various forms of oppression, chemical dependence, or mental illness come into play, survivors face formidable barriers to accessing services and shelter. Housing advocacy can be an invaluable resource for survivors on so many levels.

Sexual Violence Survivors Need Shelter

Greco and Weschler (2010) explain that there is a symbiotic relationship between sexual violence and housing insecurity. Sexual assault, especially at the hands of an intimate partner or family member, can jeopardize housing. One study found that “61% of homeless girls and 19% of homeless boys report sexual abuse as the reason for leaving home (Estes & Weiner, 2001)” (NSVRC, 2010). In turn, homelessness or unstable housing can put one at risk for sexual violence. Goodman, Fels, and Glenn (2006) surveyed the literature on homelessness and sexual assault and reported on the widespread and persistent violence experienced by homeless women in the VAWnet report, *No Safe Place: Sexual Assault in the Lives of Homeless Women*:

Indeed, homeless women have been described as enduring a “traumatic lifestyle” (Goodman et al, 1995)—one in which traumatic experiences such as sexual assaults are layered upon ongoing traumatic conditions such as struggling to meet basic survival needs and living with ongoing dangers and threats... One of the largest and most in-depth studies on this topic found that 92% of a racially diverse sample of homeless mothers had experienced severe physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives, with 43% reporting sexual abuse in childhood and 63% reporting intimate partner violence in adulthood. Over half (57.6%) reported experiencing violence in at least two out of four age periods (0-5; 6-12; 13-18; 18+) (Browne & Bassuk, 1997). In another study, 13% of homeless women reported having been raped in *the past 12 months* (Wenzel, et al., 2000).

The trauma of childhood sexual violence has been linked to chronic mental illness, chemical dependency, homelessness, and adult victimization (Goodman, et al., 2006; Hoedemaker, 2010). Poverty is certainly linked to these issues, but the risk of violence is strongly linked to shelter, or the lack thereof: “compared to their low-income housed counterparts, the sexual assault experiences of homeless women are more likely to be violent and to include multiple sexual acts” (Goodman, et al., 2006).

Some survivors lose housing after years of stable housing for a variety of reasons. If the perpetrator is the breadwinner and has been removed from home, arrested, or fired from a job, the family may not be able to make rent or other household bills. Many sexual violence survivors struggle to manage day-to-day activities as they put their energy into coping with rape trauma or

PTSD symptoms. For example, a survivor may be afraid to leave home alone, and therefore misses work. If the boss does not understand trauma, and the state does not provide workplace protections for survivors, he or she will likely lose the job and start missing mortgage payments. LGBTQ youth are at high risk of being kicked out of the family home, and many turn to survival sex in exchange for shelter and food. This increases the risk of sexual assault. Rural survivors face additional struggles in housing. In small communities, it can be nearly impossible to find a home undetected by the rapist. People living in rural communities often have few job opportunities. If the rapist is a supervisor at the only factory in town, the survivor may have no choice but to quit a job and perhaps move to a new community. Many rural people live in isolated homes or farms in the country, far from police or neighbors. This physical isolation can exacerbate the emotional isolation so many survivors feel.

Oppression complicates and changes the relationship between shelter and sexual violence. People of color, native peoples, people with disabilities, people with mental illness, people with chemical dependence, rural people, LGBTQ people, people in later life, trafficked people or those in prostitution, and poor single mothers and their children, among other marginalized groups, all face additional hurdles in obtaining safe and affordable housing which increases the risk and worsens the ramifications of sexual violence (NSVRC, 2010). Many marginalized groups are over-represented in subsidized housing and homeless shelters, which increases their vulnerability to unscrupulous or predatory landlords, exposure to unsafe neighborhoods and living conditions, and dependence on perpetrators for survival. Sexually violent landlords often prey on the most vulnerable in society, assaulting people with disabilities or demanding sex for missed or late rent checks. Maintenance staff could also be sexually violent, and landlords may unwittingly give apartment keys to a rapist on their staff. Multiple studies demonstrate the importance of considering the “historical context and current contextual factors many women face, including multiple oppressions, lack of appropriate, culturally relevant, and timely resources, and growing up in unsafe settings without sufficient material and emotional support” (Goodman, et al., 2006).

Shelter & Housing Advocacy for Sexual Violence Survivors

There are many ways advocates, programs, and coalitions can respond to the shelter and housing needs of sexual violence survivors. Let us consider first what dual/multi-service agencies and stand-alone rape crisis centers working in relationship with domestic violence programs are doing to broaden their services. Then, we will examine the success of the Sexual Assault Crisis Team, the only stand-alone sexual violence shelter in the country, and share lessons every program can take from their story.

Successful shelter and housing advocacy, like all our ventures, is rooted in a partnership between rape crisis centers and coalitions. Coalitions support the development of sexual assault shelter and housing services by building linkages with statewide organizations and individuals in homeless services, housing authorities, landlords, public interest and legal aid attorneys,

disabilities advocates, anti-poverty and domestic violence advocates, legislators, and others with a stake in housing, shelter, and sexual violence. Coalitions have great expertise in developing training modules and providing technical assistance for member programs on responding to needs of sexual violence victims and survivors who are homeless or experiencing unsafe or substandard housing. Coalitions also support the prevention and outreach efforts of member programs around housing issues.

Coalitions—both dual coalitions and two stand-alones working in partnership—surface the connections between sexual violence, oppression, and housing needs and lead their states in policy advocacy around housing issues and funding for housing and shelter services for sexual assault survivors. Coalitions provide media advocacy across the state and give training and technical assistance for allied organizations on the intersections between sexual violence and housing issues. Finally, coalitions celebrate and replicate the work that is happening across the field.

Rape crisis and domestic violence programs are learning the different shelter and housing needs of sexual violence survivors, and looking to meet them with an array of creative solutions, many of which cost little or nothing. In many cases, changes in culture and policy may be all an agency needs. For example, many dual/multi-service agencies are examining policies with an eye to sexual violence and finding ways to expand services. Agencies may find they can make rental assistance available to sexual violence survivors as well as domestic violence survivors. A stand-alone rape crisis center and domestic violence program might improve the organizational culture of both agencies for sexual assault survivors by providing training and technical assistance to one another. Dual/multi-service agencies have built-in strengths in this work. The domestic violence and sexual violence staff, whether separate or merged, often collaborate on agency-wide and community changes and can look to housing for sexual assault survivors as a new collaborative activity.

Stand-alone rape crisis centers and domestic violence programs can enter into collaborative agreements to enhance their partnership and one another's services. A rape crisis center and domestic violence shelter may form a partnership to develop referral protocols, service agreements or MOU's, and specific policies to make the shelter a resource for sexual violence survivors. This collaboration can also help the rape crisis center learn more about economic justice and housing advocacy work, a great strength of domestic violence programs and coalitions.

Whether starting from a dual/multi-service agency or stand-alones working in partnership, working with other community groups will greatly strengthen the community response to sexual violence. Coalitions can support this work with model policies and task force documents, training, and candid encouragement of developing shelter services and comprehensive housing resources for sexual violence survivors. Many communities, both urban and rural, have task forces or alliances for the homeless and most communities have mental health and substance

abuse treatment facilities. Some places will have landlord-tenant unions, city council committees, or university committees. All of these groups, and more, can be powerful allies in addressing the housing needs of sexual violence and domestic violence survivors.

Sheltering Sexual Violence Survivors

This section presents the emergency shelter issues for sexual violence survivors, and advocacy and organizational techniques to respond to the need. To put some order on the discussion of the shelter needs of sexual violence survivors, we distinguish three categories of shelter need: emergency shelter for those who present as sexual violence survivors, shelter for survivors of multiple victimizations who present as domestic violence survivors or homeless women, and shelter for homeless women who have been sexually assaulted. We will also discuss broader housing advocacy issues for sexual violence survivors.

Emergency Sexual Assault Shelter

Survivors of a recent sexual assault, adults, teens, or child survivors with their non-offending parent, may need emergency shelter for a number of reasons. First, they may not feel safe (physically or emotionally) or comfortable at home right after an assault, whether or not it occurred at home. Safety is an intricate combination of factors that depends on more than the immediate presence or absence of physical danger. Survivors of sexual violence often struggle to regain their sense of safety on physical, mental, and emotional levels, because violence undermines safety. When violence shatters one's trust and control, the world feels like a profoundly dangerous place. Staying where the assault occurred can be a traumatic reminder of that loss of trust and control. Survivors may want to be in a secure location with other survivors for a short while. Second, sexual assault survivors may need to flee a perpetrator who shares or has access to the home, such as a family member, partner, ex-partner, roommate, or landlord. Third, survivors may lose housing after a disclosure of sexual violence. This is particularly common for teens and young adults, who are kicked out of the home for disclosing. It also happens more slowly for child victims and their non-offending parents. Oftentimes, when the perpetrator is also the breadwinner, an arrest or loss of a job can cause the family to slide into poverty. Fourth, if survivors need or want to move, repair, or rearrange their homes, they may want to stay in shelter until that happens. Fifth, for survivors who must return to a community for court proceedings, shelter may be a safer, more comfortable option than a hotel. It is worth noting here that some agencies find the liveliness of shelter to be triggering for sexual violence survivors, and they offer hotel vouchers as an alternative to sexual violence survivors (as space and resources allow).

Coalitions support survivors of recent assaults with policy advocacy. They advocate for laws that allow sexual assault survivors to break a lease if needed (due to the assault); provide temporary employment protections if unable to work due to physical injuries or trauma; broaden crime victim compensation to include coverage of rent and utilities if needed, and prioritize sexual assault survivors on Section 8 or other public benefits lists.

Checklist for Providing Emergency Sexual Assault Shelter:

- Policies and procedures support services to sexual violence survivors. For example, it may not be appropriate to require participation in group sessions or daily shelter guest meetings. Sexual assault survivors will have different case management and advocacy needs or may not need case management. The agency has (or is working towards having) policies on outreach, screening and intake, accompaniment, case management, and other services that are relevant and appropriate to the needs of sexual violence survivors.
- The agency has a plan for providing safe, emotionally supportive shelter to male and transgendered (both male- and female-identified) sexual violence survivors. Not all shelters will host male or transgendered survivors at shelter, but they can work with other service providers to provide comprehensive services. Shelter services for male and transgendered survivors, just like for female, go beyond a roof over one's head and a locked door. All survivors need access to crisis intervention, advocacy support, healing with peer survivors, and a welcoming environment.
- Community partners, such as law enforcement and community mental health, know that sexual violence survivors are welcome at the shelter.
- The agency or state coalition provides regular training on the specific shelter, housing, and economic needs of sexual violence survivors and advocacy tools for helping sexual violence survivors with shelter, housing, and economic issues.
- Staff and volunteers at the rape crisis center or dual/multi-service program know that sexual violence survivors are welcome at the shelter. Even if the agency is a dual program, check that all staff and volunteers know this.
- The survivor has access to the sexual assault advocate, and the advocate is able to meet with the survivor in shelter in a private space.
- The agency discusses best practices for serving teens that are homeless because of violence. For example, the agency builds community partnerships for serving teens or sets a policy for serving teens without parental knowledge.
- Staff and volunteers assess the survivor's shelter needs when providing crisis intervention and offer shelter to sexual violence survivors. Sexual assault advocates continually assess housing, shelter, and economic needs over the course of providing advocacy.
- Shelter staff, especially those doing intake, know how to welcome and orient sexual violence survivors to the shelter. The agency may have to change or add to orientation procedures, as a sexual assault survivor in need of emergency shelter will have different needs in case management and other services than domestic violence survivors. For example, survivors of recent sexual assaults may not know yet what their triggers are, and may be surprised by what upsets or does not upset them. The surprise of unexpected triggers may cause more distress than the trigger alone. Shelter staff must be prepared to help sexual violence survivors as they navigate the immediate aftermath and begin to regain control.

Checklist for Providing Emergency Sexual Assault Shelter (continued):

- The staff and agency leadership regularly discuss how best to meet the needs of sexual violence survivors and how to balance the particular needs of sexual violence survivors with current shelter policies. For instance, some shelter guests may be frustrated if they perceive that sexual violence survivors do not have to follow the same rules that they do. Staff may want to create plans to respect the privacy of sexual violence survivors in shelter, especially in rural communities, and discuss ways to address guest frustrations while honoring confidentiality. The agency staff leadership may also hold a review of the rules and their fitness for all shelter guests.
- Shelter staff knows how to provide emotional support and trauma-informed services to sexual violence survivors (see next section for more specific ideas). At a minimum, shelter staff is able to provide support related to flashbacks/nightmares, acute health concerns, and emotional and physical safety needs.

Survivors with Multiple Victimizations and Needs

Adult survivors of child sexual abuse often present their primary concern to shelters as domestic violence or homelessness. Many of these survivors do not have the words to identify what happened to them as abuse, or they do not know that they can talk to the program staff about it. Survivors with long histories of abuse have learned that many systems and service providers are not safe and thus may be reticent to disclose (Goodman, et al., 2006). It is difficult to balance this awareness with shelter eligibility requirements that hinge on self-identification of victimization, but there are steps programs take to support more survivors. Successful advocacy takes into account *all* a survivor's experiences, strengths, and challenges. It is up to us to open the door to discussing sexual violence in all contexts, such as sexual violence within domestic violence, past sexual violence but current domestic violence, or sexual violence in the context of homelessness. It is not necessary to apply for new grants or open up a new wing of the shelter to serve adult survivors of child sexual abuse. What is necessary is attention to staff training, service options, and trauma-informed protocols. Coalitions, with their trusted expertise in advocate training, can provide model curricula or training ideas on multiple victimizations and shelter issues. Coalitions are also in prime position to host discussions or workgroups to figure out issues around self-identification of victimization, supporting chronically homeless or chronically mentally ill survivors, and updating protocols with trauma-informed practice.

Checklist for Sheltering Survivors with Multiple Victimizations & Needs:

- Intake and assessment procedures include sexual violence. Intake, whether based on a form or set of interview questions, seeks to open up dialogue with shelter guests about sexual violence. Remember that many domestic violence and sexual assault survivors are also survivors of child sexual abuse and oftentimes the advocate's discomfort or lack of asking is the only reason they do not tell.
- Agencies and/or the coalition provide regular training on sexual violence, including long-term effects of multiple victimizations, responding to disclosures, and advocacy issues.
- Intake and statistical forms include appropriate data sets on both sexual violence and domestic violence. The agency does not necessarily need to create separate sets of paperwork, but the agency may want to broaden data collection categories on existing forms. For example, data checkboxes on victim relationship to offender needs to be much broader for sexual violence than domestic violence.
- Supportive services for shelter guests include sexual violence-specific services, such as child sexual abuse survivor support groups; education on intimate partner sexual violence, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and other forms of sexual violence; and medical and legal advocacy.
- Remember that screening and intake questions can be triggering. Tell survivors, before you begin, what will occur during intake process, why you are asking question, why you are writing them down, and what will be done with the information.
- Conduct a needs assessment *after* they have been admitted to your program. The needs assessment should not impact ability to stay in services.
- Agency uses trauma-informed service models in policy and practice. For instance, a shelter could change its rule that women must be in their rooms by 10:00 pm, knowing that bed or bedtime is a trigger for many child sexual abuse survivors and that many shelter guests are adult survivors of child sexual abuse. The universal design of trauma-informed service "means that all survivors are offered services and advocacy in a way that is effective for survivors [with multiple victimizations and needs]. If an advocacy approach improves understanding of the issues...removes barriers to services, improves cultural skills, and responds to mental health and financial needs, then it will benefit all survivors" (Davies, 2007, p. 18).

Homeless Women

In addition to survivors of multiple traumas, shelters often serve homeless women. The rates of sexual violence among the homeless, especially those with mental illness, are shockingly high (Goodman, et al., 2006). Dual/multi-service agencies and collaborations between rape crisis center and domestic violence programs can work to provide trauma-informed shelter and other services to homeless people in a variety of venues knowing that many, if not most, homeless people are survivors of violence. Coalitions have opportunities to link with statewide housing advocacy groups to advocate for sexual violence survivors. For example, coalitions can start conversations with other statewide partnerships or convene a statewide work group or task force

on the intersections of homelessness and sexual violence (this may also encourage more local level work following a similar model). Coalitions develop resources that local programs can share with housing providers around the connections between sexual violence and housing issues and needs. They can also develop a toolkit for advocates on all of these housing considerations and potential program adjustments to meet the needs of sexual violence survivors.

Checklist for Serving Homeless Sexual Violence Survivors:

- The agency looks for ways to be flexible and innovative in reaching survivors who are homeless and survivors who are struggling with addiction. Getting sober to stay in shelter is a requirement some people cannot meet. The agency regularly reviews and discusses policy and practice for methods to support chronically homeless, mentally ill, or addicted survivors.
- The agency collaborates with runaway and lock-out homeless youth organizations and shelters, homeless shelters, and programs that serve minor and adult victims of sex trafficking and exploitation to provide advocacy and shelter wherever survivors are. The agency exchanges training and technical assistance with homeless service providers and anti-trafficking organizations.
- The agency applies to funding sources to shelter homeless women who have experienced sexual violence, such as a community development block grant, United Way, and emergency shelter (McKinney-Vento).
- The agency uses funding from VOCA, a community development block grant, United Way, and emergency shelter (McKinney-Vento) to support services to homeless or near-homeless sexual violence survivors.
- Intake and assessment procedures for homeless clients include sexual (and other) violence. Intake, whether based on a form or set of interview questions, seeks to open up dialogue with shelter guests about sexual violence.
- Rape crisis centers and dual/multi-service agencies collaborate with homeless service providers and community mental health to exchange training, create community-wide protocols, and establish service agreements. Service agreements might include an advocate having regular office hours at the homeless shelter, or the domestic violence shelter inviting a public housing worker to the shelter to provide education or help survivors with housing or public benefit applications.
- The agency has a plan for providing safe, emotionally supportive shelter to male and transgendered (male- or female-identified) sexual violence survivors. Not all shelters will host male or transgendered survivors at shelter, but they can work with other service providers to provide comprehensive services. Homeless shelters are too often ill equipped to provide the trauma-specific services survivors need. While rape crisis centers and dual/multi-service agencies work with homeless shelters to provide trauma-informed services, they also should plan to provide trauma-specific shelter services to male and transgendered survivors.

Housing Advocacy for Sexual Violence Survivors

There has been a tremendous amount of work done to meet the housing needs of domestic violence survivors, and sexual assault survivors have many of the same housing and economic concerns. We can learn a lot from the work done before us, while adding specifics around how a sexual assault survivor's housing needs may also be different from what we have worked with before.

Checklist for Housing Advocacy:

- The agency is able to provide specific advocacy and information on housing issues:
 - ~Breaking a lease if survivor needs or wants to move
 - ~Negotiating a new lease if survivor needs to leave significant other, roommate, sexually violent landlord, etc
 - ~Recovering security deposits (if breaking lease is necessary or if apartment was damaged during the violence)
 - ~Avoiding eviction, if desired
- The agency is able to provide specific advocacy and information on housing issues:
 - ~Improving security and habitability of unsafe or substandard housing (including specific security needs of people with disabilities)
 - ~Maintaining Section 8 or other public housing benefits through a relocation
 - ~Enrolling in public benefits programs like Section 8 and public housing programs; Medicaid; Medicare; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; General Assistance; Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP); Childcare Assistance Program; Supplemental Security Income; Social Security Disability Insurance; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps); Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC); and other public benefits
 - ~Applying for a protective order for sexual violence survivors (if available in that state) and advocating for removal of perpetrator from the home
- The agency includes sexual violence survivors in transitional housing programs.
- The agency offers available rental assistance to sexual assault survivors.
- The agency has a relationship with public housing, private landlords, housing attorneys and legal aid attorneys, and others involved with housing matters (e.g., city council task force, if one exists, or tenant advocacy groups). The agency collaborates with these entities on sexual violence-related issues, and perhaps includes these entities in the local Sexual Assault Response Team (SART).
- The agency, whether through the agency or a contractor, can offer safety enhancement options to survivors: door and window locks, lock changes, improved lighting, cutting back bushes, or relocation funds. The agency is aware of and can offer additional safety enhancement options for survivors with disabilities. (This point by no means implies that a door lock is an absolute preventative measure, but we know these safety measures can help make substandard housing more secure and can help a survivor feel more secure).

Checklist for Housing Advocacy (continued):

- Advocates continually assess clients' housing needs over the course of providing advocacy. Advocates are prepared and able to provide housing advocacy for sexual violence survivors, such as accompanying survivors to housing-related appointments, court proceedings, and other appointments; writing letters on behalf of survivors to provide documentation of sexual violence and/or to advocate on behalf of survivors with landlords and housing authorities; researching and helping survivors to connect to various housing options.
- The agency seeks donations from hardware stores, painting contractors, etc., to help survivors refurbish their homes into less triggering, more soothing spaces.
- The agency and the coalition have connections to legal representation and advocacy for victims' legal rights in housing.

Case Study: A Stand-Alone Rape Crisis Shelter

One program has found great success in creating a stand-alone sexual assault shelter. Bobbi Gagne, the Executive Director of the Sexual Assault Crisis Team (SACT) in Barre, Vermont describes how a rural rape crisis center provides shelter to sexual violence survivors (personal communication, April 6, 2011).

As SACT was providing sexual assault services, Gagne and her colleagues were facing a challenge in sheltering sexual assault victims. The local domestic violence shelter would certainly take in sexual assault victims. However, because of the shelter's massive workload, it was difficult to build specific services to support sexual assault victims in their recovery. At the same time, Gagne's program was working to support male survivors to the same degree they were serving female survivors. Because the local domestic violence shelter could not take male survivors who needed housing, these clients were housed in hotel rooms, which created a less-than-ideal situation for ongoing client support, recovery (e.g. dealing with triggers in isolation), safety, and meeting with advocates. Gagne and her board of directors decided to seek a community block grant to create a shelter that would house individuals regardless of their gender identity. They were aware of the potential challenge around raising money to support male sexual assault victims, but they moved forward nonetheless. Gagne notes that at that point in time there were 20 animal shelters and 5 domestic violence shelters in the state of Vermont. The SACT received the community block grant to build the new shelter and bring their vision into reality (the grant was only for the purchase of the building). Gagne's goal was, and still is, to provide services for all "non-offending human beings."

Because the SACT was already providing hotline services for any victim of sexual violence regardless of their gender identity or life experience, including victims of human trafficking, they were well informed about the types of services survivors might require in a shelter setting. Gagne says that sexual assault is but one point on the very broad continuum of sexual violence. In

building and enhancing services, Gagne is mindful of child sexual abuse survivors, adult survivors, survivors who were assaulted in any circumstance and at any point in their lives. The full Board of Directors was very helpful in visioning what sexual assault victims might need broadly. The Chair worked closely with Gagne to develop the expansive vision of what a shelter focused on sexual assault survivors would be. They looked outside of the box of existing shelter services to identify the specific needs of sexual assault victims. They were careful to establish a shelter that takes issues of privacy and personal safety very seriously. For example, they recognized that the shelter would need to offer bathrooms and showers that individuals could use privately and that shelter residents would need to be able to lock their doors and be alone whenever they chose.

To make the shelter easy for survivors to use, the SACT has tried to keep facility rules to a minimum. Survivors who stay at the shelter are made to feel at home and choose daily options that help them with their healing, such as sleeping in if needed (as opposed to having to get up at a certain hour each day). All bedrooms are for solo individuals, unless there is a non-offending partner whom the survivor chooses to accompany them. SACT can offer separate-gender areas if necessary, but Gagne says mixing genders has not been an issue. From top to bottom, SACT has identified and addressed the specific needs of sexual assault survivors throughout the facility. The shelter is fully accessible to people with disabilities. The duration of each survivor's stay is flexible, and Gagne notes that survivors who are recovering from same-sex sexual violence inflicted by a partner often require a longer transition period to support them in finding new, safe housing.

When a survivor comes to the shelter, Gagne and her staff work closely to help them achieve their goals before moving out. The average stay in the shelter is 3–5 days, though individuals who are looking for new housing options or have other needs might certainly stay longer. Gagne is clear that there is no maximum time SACT permits a survivor to stay, as long as she or he is working towards their goals. The SACT also houses family members of survivors who have come to town to provide support in the immediate aftermath of an assault, as well as survivors who are returning to town to deal with legal processes and trials. It is obvious when talking with Gagne that she and her staff will work with survivors in a wide range of circumstances to provide shelter support.

The SACT created a unique service with the support of a community block grant. The community block grant was integral to the founding of the shelter, but the real success of establishing the new service was due to the commitment that the board and staff have to meeting the needs of “all non-offending human beings.” Because the board and the staff worked closely together to understand their client population and community, they were able to figure out a way to address unmet needs in a way that is meaningful to survivors. That commitment to survivors is tangible throughout every facet of the shelter. The action steps that SACT has taken will work for any type of program planning: they identified a need, determined how it fit into their organizational mission and vision, developed community and financial support, and implemented

a researched plan. The key to the success of their shelter is the commitment to make service available and accessible to all survivors, regardless of level of mobility, gender identity, race, sexual orientation, partner status, or the amount of time passed since the assault. With that holistic vision and commitment, the shelter serves every non-offending human being.

Placing the First Brick

Shelter and housing advocacy for sexual violence survivors is an exciting growth area in anti-violence work. Housing advocacy is one way to significantly meet the needs of survivors and provide holistic services to survivors. By building partnerships, we ask the broader community to join us in our response to sexual violence, which only strengthens our communities. Advocates and agencies support survivors by understanding issues and solutions in housing and shelter for recent sexual violence survivors, survivors with multiple victimizations and needs, and homeless women who are sexual violence survivors. Every home is built on a strong foundation. The strong foundation of our rape crisis centers and domestic violence programs can support innumerable sexual violence survivors as they create safe homes. The range of solutions is as broad as our field. Every sexual assault program, stand-alone or dual, has the capacity to identify an unmet need for survivors in their community, develop a vision for meeting that need in the most holistic manner possible, and then identify resources to help make it happen. The challenge for all programs is to create opportunities for strengthening the partnership between the board, staff, survivors, and community, for these partnerships sustain strong services for sexual violence survivors. Strong partnerships are the bricks and mortar in building safe spaces for recovery.

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Resources:

- National Sexual Violence Resource Center Housing and Sexual Violence: <http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/housing-and-sexual-violence>. This webpage on the NSVRC site includes a webinar and helpful publications for advocates and coalitions, such as *Opening the Door: An Advocate's Guide to Housing and Sexual Violence*.
- Resource Sharing Project: www.resourcesharingproject.org
- Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law: <http://www.povertylaw.org/>
- Sexual Assault Crisis Team of Barre, VT: <http://www.sexualassaultcrisisteam.org/>
- Trauma-Informed Care: <http://www.medicine.uiowa.edu/icmh/TraumaInformedCare.htm>
- VAWnet Special Collection on Housing and Sexual Violence: <http://snow.vawnet.org/special-collections/SVHousing.php>. This collection has many helpful resources, including *No Safe Place: Sexual Assault in the Lives of Homeless Women*. Many of the publications discuss the intersections between oppression, sexual violence, and shelter needs.
- Victim Rights Law Center: www.victimrights.org

The SACT has been generous in allowing the RSP to reprint the following client guide to the shelter. As Gagne explains, the SACT tries to keep rules and regulations to a minimum in order to allow the shelter to be a safe, useful, and attractive space for all survivors.

**The Sexual Assault Crisis Team (SACT)
Welcomes You to Safe Passage Shelter**

This guide has been created to help us at SACT, provide you with quality services and to ensure this shelter is maintained for all non-offending human beings who seek a safe place as victims/ survivors of sexual violence, regardless of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and culture or belief system.

If you have questions or concerns about these guidelines please ask your advocate to explain or answer those concerns before signing stating you have received and understand them. By signing this document, you agree that if the shelter guidelines are not followed you may be asked to leave, and could also mean you may not be allowed to stay at the shelter in the future

We have a fully accessible shelter bedroom, bathroom and shower with a bench transfer seat, and a kitchen area with a wheelchair accessible counter. We also have other special needs items on site for your comfort including a talking microwave, an electric can opener, an extra wheelchair, and a special CD player. We can also provide you with informational CD's on the entire state's Network programs, their coverage area and needed hotline numbers, how to make a victim impact statement, our victims/survivors program brochure, and other important information. These CD's are marked in Braille as well as clearly labeled to support whatever is the best way for you to receive information. This guide and the information found on the CD's can be read to you by one of our advocates, if this is easier for you, and there is no need to explain why you need the material read to you. We also have "*dragon speaks naturally*," a Braille board with tiles for communication, and a highlighted low vision computer keyboard. The phone in the accessible room has Braille labels on the keys and has large numbers for your convenience. If there is anything we have missed that could further facilitate your stay, please tell one of our staff and we will make every effort to locate the item.

There is a mobile cart provided to make your stay as comfortable as possible containing:

- tools to help you tie your shoes, and to zip or button your clothes,
- pen and pencil, cushions,
- extended handle bathing and cleaning products,
- yeast infection cream, jock itch cream, baby powder and gold bond powder
- personal care items for all genders and people of color or first Nation people including shaving cream for both, deodorant, plastic razors, personal care products, special shampoos and conditioners and lotions,
- magnifying glasses and reading aids, EZ key turners, lamp switch enlargers
- silverware holders, wet ones,
- straws and dinnerware for those who have low vision or are vision impaired

What you can expect from us:

- ❖ A card-key to let yourself in and out of the shelter.
- ❖ The emergency numbers to contact not only our hotline but also other emergency services.
- ❖ A local phone line so you can stay connected with non-offending family and arrange for services outside of what the Sexual Assault Crisis Team offers.
- ❖ A walk through of the shelter so you are familiar with the layout and where to access needed items.
- ❖ We will address you by whatever name and pronoun you provide and we will respect how you self-identify.
- ❖ We will show you where our movie and reading library are located, how to access them, and ensure there is a diverse selection for all.
- ❖ We will provide you with our resource notebook, service provider contacts, roles, and list of the services they provide.
- ❖ We will meet with you at your request to aid you in meeting the goals you set upon entering shelter.
- ❖ We will keep a list of people, who are non-offending, who you wish to have visit you at the shelter or stay for an evening meal or movie.
- ❖ We will ensure your safety, and that of others, by doing a background check on all people entering our shelter, even for a visit, to ensure they are non-offenders of violence.
- ❖ We will keep a list of any medications you are presently taking in case of an emergency, and the emergency contact numbers you provide us. These people will only be contacted per your instructions.
- ❖ We will allow you time to heal, rest, and regroup before staff will request any meetings to follow up on support needs & your goals for next steps. We only require you connect with staff once a week to ensure we are meeting your needs & goals.
- ❖ We will meet with you, and any other service providers you connect with, to identify changing needs or direction.
- ❖ We will provide shelter to any non-offending parent or family member, guardian, or care provider from whom you need additional support during your stay.
- ❖ The only time we will break your confidentiality is if you are a danger to yourself or others.

What we expect from you:

- ❖ You will make sure you have your card-key on you when you are coming and going from the shelter, even if you are stepping outside to sit or smoke. That you will ensure that only you have control over your card-key and make sure you keep the door tightly closed behind. We expect you will not leave it open, even if you are right outside the building. When you are ready to move on and leave shelter, we require you leave the key with office staff.
- ❖ Visitors, who have not been cleared to stay overnight in the shelter, must leave by 11:00 pm. You are required to return to the shelter by 11:00 pm as well and do so as to not disturb other shelter residents.
- ❖ When leaving the privacy of your bedroom, you are to be covered by a shirt and pants; pajamas are okay as long as your top and bottom are covered.
- ❖ Keep personal items in your bedroom so all common areas are comfortable for everyone.
- ❖ You will ensure your guest/s respect the rules and stay only in the common areas and they may not be in your bedroom. If you need privacy to talk, there is an area downstairs that provides a table, chairs, coffee maker, and television.

- ❖ You are expected to show respect for all who use this shelter, as is our commitment to provide safe space/safe passage for all non-offending humans. If there is an issue, please contact staff to help facilitate a peaceful resolution.
- ❖ Remember that all bathrooms are single use & be respectful of others who may require additional time to meet their special needs. We ask that you put the toilet seat down, wipe off the seat for others, and clean up the bathroom for the next person's use.
- ❖ Clean up your own dishes, cooking areas, and bring your trash down to the back porch by Monday evening; Tuesday is trash pick-up day.
- ❖ You will seek out the support and help you need and connect with the staff once a week.
- ❖ You will make necessary transportation arrangements for yourself, and your children/guests, with either non-offending people in your life or via the provided cab & bus schedules; these numbers are included in the resource list.
- ❖ You will be responsible for helping us understand how to best support you & assist you in meeting your goals.
- ❖ You will provide us with an emergency list that shows medications, doctors or other emergency support numbers and how and when we should use it.
- ❖ You will not bring alcohol or drugs into the shelter.

Client's Signature	Date	Advocates Signature	Date