

Rapid Re-Housing with Domestic Violence Survivors

2012 Regional Trainings with Virginia DV Programs

Kris Billhardt, VOA Oregon – Home Free

kbillhardt@voaor.org

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WELCOME!

Today's Aim:

To strengthen the capacity of Virginia's DV (and homeless/housing) providers to design and enact effective rapid re-housing services for domestic violence survivors.

Responding to Housing Needs: Not New to DV Movement

- We've been in the business of housing for over 40 years
- Immediate refuge from violence was necessary first emphasis
- Transitional housing programs (usually site-based) grew to respond to longer-term needs
- Now: Many innovations emerging nationwide
- New models don't eradicate need for immediate safety options – or suitability of site-based housing for some
- Rapid Re-housing an effective addition to the continuum of housing responses for survivors

Housing and DV: Inextricably Linked

- Finding and keeping housing one of greatest barriers faced by women who leave abusers
- Very common – especially among poor women - to remain in or return to abusive relationships to avoid homelessness
- DV impacts many areas of survivors' lives that can raise risk of instability (physical & mental health, employment, education, social supports)
- The DV shelter system is under immense strain because families can't access housing

Permanent Housing Solutions are Key to Ending DV

- Housing instability may affect women's and children's health outcomes over and above the impact of violence
- Women who secure housing and stay connected to DV advocates reduce chances of re-victimization and report higher quality of life
- DV survivors whose housing stabilization improves are significantly safer and less reliant on emergency services.

Must Survivors Always Lose Their Homes to Get Safe?

- With flexible dollars, housing responses can support survivors to stay in their own housing if they can do so safely
- Many survivors receive emergency help to set up new housing after fleeing abuse but struggle to maintain it
- Others “double up” but can only stay temporarily (especially common in some cultural communities)
- Some become homeless on cyclical basis when they can’t access the right resources

SHARE Study

- Collaborative Community Based Research
 - What's the role of housing stability in preventing re-victimization and reducing negative health outcomes of DV survivors and their children?
 - Effectiveness of housing-first model for DV survivors
 - Cost of services

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

Baseline Findings

- **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
- Low levels of “**literal**” homelessness, but high housing instability

Housing Instability at Baseline

Higher Housing Instability correlated with

- Higher PTSD
- Higher danger levels
- Higher depression levels
- More absences from work/school
- Higher use of emergency medical care
- Poorer quality of life

What Happened to Housing Instability Over Time?

- On average, women reported 4.65 risk factors at baseline (higher number indicating greater risk, possible scores 1-10).
- Their housing stability improved significantly:
Nearly 80% fewer moves. Number of days in emergency housing dropped by 78%; mean HII decreased to 2.41.
- 82% of the women who were stably housed at 6 months remained stably housed at the 18-month interview.

Dramatic Positive Changes Over 18 Months

- Women and children were safer:
Number of women reporting extreme danger dropped from 237 to 24.
- Women had better quality of life and were better able to succeed in day-to-day-life
 - *Missed fewer days of work*
 - *Greater job stability, improved income*
 - *Decrease in problematic alcohol/drug use*
- Women had improved health and mental health
 - *25% fewer met criterion for clinical depression*
 - *22% fewer had symptoms of PTSD*
 - *General health improved slightly (4.2%)*

Dramatic Positive Changes for Children

- Children's school attendance improved
 - *Fewer missed days of school overall*
 - *Nearly 30% drop in missing school due to DV*
- Children were more likely to be maintaining their school performance
- Children exhibited fewer behavior problems

What Made the Biggest Difference Overall?

By Frequency of Selection as Most Important

1. Having Housing
2. Support from advocate/agency
3. Myself/my own determination/faith
4. Strategies to distance perpetrator
5. Support from family and friends
6. SHARE Project

Program Example: Home Free

- HUD grant in 1998 was our entry into RRH
- Found that even high-barrier survivors were getting/keeping housing
- Connections forged with landlords and housing authority opened many doors program-wide
- We were sold! Wholly re-designed our program and expanded our long-term advocacy and housing services

Home Free's Housing Program in a Nutshell

- Scattered-site model staffed by mobile advocates
- Earmarked funds for rental subsidy and flexible financial assistance
- Capacity: 70-120 households/yr
- Usual duration of services: 6-9 months financial assistance (step-down), up to two years advocacy
- Shorter-term assistance also provided to support stabilization goals

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 to build positive history

Services Include:

- Danger Assessment and ongoing safety planning
- Systems navigation and accompaniment
- Housing search, advocacy with landlords
- Employment access support
- Rental subsidy and other financial assistance
- Links to civil legal and immigration law services
- Direct services for children, parenting support
- Financial empowerment and RentWell classes
- Emotional support around trauma, DV issues

FY 12/12 Housing Retention

- Follow-ups conducted following exit from services
- 72 of 74 HH (97%) were still safely housed at three-month follow-up
- 55 of 57 HH (96%) were still safely housed at six-month follow-up
- 32 of 32 HH (100%) were still safely housed 12 months following exit from services
- 60% of households who exited in FY 11/12 had achieved a significant increase in ability to self-advocate

Critical Elements in DV-Specific RRH Programs

- Building in safety for participants and advocates
- Acknowledging that high housing barriers will often be a reality as a result of DV
- Knowing the fair housing laws that impact survivors
- Ensuring fidelity to VAWA: confidentiality and voluntary services
- Ensuring access by survivors not using shelter system, including cultural communities
- Using a trauma-informed approach
- Building partnership with the homeless/housing field

DESIGN DECISIONS

Environmental Scan

What is most needed in your community, and what resources can you leverage?

- Is there a local Housing Authority and Homeless/Housing system, or are you “the only game in town?”
 - *Partnerships can stretch dollars and help you focus on gaps*
- Are DV shelters always full, stays longer?
 - *Priority may be moving HH out more quickly with housing help*
- Are survivors not using shelter who need housing help?
 - *Who’s at risk? Cultural communities? Survivors staying in abuse to avoid homelessness?*

Flexibility: How Much Do We Have?

What do your resources allow you to do?

- Do eligibility requirements restrict services?
 - *Many DV survivors dangerously or unstably housed, but not homeless*
- How much available staff time, and how mobile?
 - *Time for Landlord cultivation/systems intervention often critical with DV survivors*
- Direct assistance funds: rent assistance only, or can we help cover other financial needs?
 - *Past debt, damage, late fees, etc. may necessitate additional flexible funds*

Level of Financial Assistance

Common Wisdom on Rental Assistance:

- Provide only what's necessary to stabilize housing; amount and duration of subsidy needed will vary from household to household
- Program limitations on amount/duration will impact how many you can help
- Two common approaches:
 - Subsidy based on severity of the housing barriers
 - Set amount (or maximum amount) per household

“I've taken women onto my caseload who seemed less than ideal who have blown me away by their dedication to make the most of this opportunity. It has never been my experience that people don't want their situation to change. There are no undeserving survivors.”

- Home Free Advocate

Assessing for New Enrollees

- Referral form/conversation with survivor provides basics about income, barriers, history, and goals.
- Based on level of barriers we anticipate in taking on the new HH, we assess:
 - Whether we have adequate staff time available
 - Given already committed dollars, whether we have the available funds
 - How the anticipated time commitment to this household fits with our commitment to try to provide a “balanced” participant load to our housing advocates

“Screening In”

- Broad eligibility
- Aim: Set people up to be successful, clearly outline expectations and available services
- Honest exchange about how she may fare in rental market with her particular barriers
- Survivor considers her needs, makes informed decision about fit
- Ideal Result: Services are chosen – or rejected - by participant

Assessing Housing Stability

Stability assessment generally

includes:

- *An exploration of the current housing situation*
- *A discussion of the household's preferences*
- *The household's skills, resources and resilience to overcome barriers*
- *Identification of household's barriers to maintaining their current or new housing*

Barriers Assessment

- Income and housing affordability
- Criminal history
- Credit history
- Behavioral health issues
- Housing history
 - Previous eviction
 - Previous non-renewal of lease
 - Landlord references

Impact of DV on Prospects as a Tenant

- Spotty employment history
- Arrest history
- Bad credit or very little experience with handling money
- Evictions, history of “running out on” leases
- Arrears; damage to apartment, unpaid utilities
- On Housing Authority’s “Do Not Rent To” list
- May have pet she couldn’t leave behind
- Doesn’t “present well” due to trauma

When We Might Say “No”

- Long-term plan that survivor isn't willing to alter (Ex. Pursue education program w graduation in several years; travel out of state for some months before beginning housing search., etc.)
- Deep debt that will likely be impossible to pay down in time for her to assume costs of her apartment
- Survivor needs longer period before working on income development (Ex. To enter MH/Chemical Dependency treatment)
- Improving future prospects means “cleaning up” warrants now

BEYOND NUTS AND BOLTS

Access to RRH Services

Presentation at shelter sometimes serves as the primary qualifying event for housing services – BUT:

- Only a small percentage of DV survivors ever go to shelters
- Few women, especially with young children , live on the streets and so aren't counted as homeless
- Many survivors remain in extreme dangerous relationships in order to avoid homelessness
- Many people in non-mainstream cultural groups avoid shelters and other social services and instead stay with family and friends
- Survivors who flee and can't sustain their housing are highly vulnerable to return and re-assault

Housing Location Considerations

- What's affordable isn't always safe
- Living in high-crime neighborhoods can trigger PTSD and trade one form of danger for another
- Reality: In many communities, housing choices are severely limited
- Safe radius outside of abuser's known stomping grounds important consideration
- Safety planning around neighborhood issues essential
- Long-term plan can include goal to move once positive rental history is established and income improves

The Landlord: Cultivating An Ally

- Landlords are business people; see cost, property damage, police presence, noise complaints, potential court proceedings, and unreliable tenants
- Essential work of DV program is to ensure landlord receives information that reframes her/his concept of DV survivor
- Reinforcing legal obligations one route, but creating empathy for survivor as a victim of crime may be more effective
- Landlords can come to see themselves as allies and critical parts of survivors safety plans

Making the Case with Landlords

- Appeal to business sense: Participants are good tenants
Provide your housing retention stats!
- Survivors want to live in safety and provide stability for their children
Outline ways in which your program will be there in support
- Help survivor prepare for being considered favorably
***Get screening criteria in advance to assess potential problems;
“This is something you’ll find when you screen me, and this is my plan to address it.”***
- Apartment managers have tremendous discretion; it pays to outline extenuating circumstances and appeal for leeway
- HUD’s Rent Reasonable Tool can help negotiate lower rent

Other Landlord Inducements

- Connections to or provision of Tenant Education programs can also enhance survivor's prospects on rental market
- Landlord guarantees provide additional assurances
- Relationship with your program can enhance LL's reputation as a socially responsible business
 - *Note: Fair Housing Laws do not prohibit landlords from prioritizing clients of certain social services programs as long as those programs are inclusive of all protected classes under Fair Housing Law. Seek legal advice for more information.*

Advocacy/Financial Assistance within Confidentiality Law

- Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) requires broad and consistent consideration of survivor's privacy rights
- All direct advocacy and payment to vendors requires a Release of Information if you're a DV provider
- "Reasonably time-limited" requirement: Virginia has adopted a 15-30 day standard, which may be challenging for long-term services
- Progressing from direct in-person advocacy to coaching/prepping survivor can ease need for constant ROI renewals

Staffing Considerations

- Some RRH programs separate staff by specialization (Housing Locator, Income Benefits Coordinator, Case Manager)
- Some RRH case managers don't themselves provide direct services but act as linkage person to community services
- These models may not be within capacity of DV programs, especially when starting up
- Additional consideration: DV survivors are often entangled in many systems and further fragmentation may be more confusing
- DV RRH advocate can be cohering force, navigator AND direct services provider – AND increase agency capacity

Critical Partnerships for DV RRH Programs

- Homeless/housing providers and DV providers need each other!
- Tenant advocacy groups, housing authority, and housing developers have MUCH to teach us
- May need for even deeper connections to usual DV systems partners: civil legal, law enforcement, immigration legal, child welfare, etc.
- Housing retention hinges on income development; get to know WorkSource system, Voc Rehab, employers
- Trauma-Informed mental health services and chemical dependency treatment providers can be key to successful retention

HOUSING LAW AND DV

Housing Law and DV Survivors

Violence Against Women Act

- Applies only to assisted housing: public housing, Section 8 Project-Based housing, and Section 8 Vouchers
- Does not apply to Tribal Housing Authorities or rural subsidized housing projects (though they can choose to adopt its provisions)
- Covers victim and family members (except abuser)
- Can't be denied housing based on being a victim of DV, or evicted because of violence done to her
- Housing Authority or LL can bifurcate the lease and evict abuser
- Vouchers: If survivor needs to move because of DV, can keep voucher
- If in Public Housing: Can ask for transfer for safety reasons
- Survivors can self-certify to prove they fall under VAWA protections

Housing Law and DV Survivors

Fair Housing Act

- Applies to ALL housing providers, including shelters and motels that function as housing
- All applicants must be screened on same consistent fact-based criteria - and in chronological order
- DV Protections fall under sex discrimination: Women cannot be treated differently than male tenants
- DV victims can't be evicted/denied if LL doesn't evict other victims of crime
- LL cannot impose different conditions of rental upon learning of abuse history
- LL can devise own screening criteria (including priority to clients of certain social services programs) as long as it isn't discriminatory and is applied consistently

Virginia-Specific Law

- Protective orders can grant possession of premises – or suitable alternative housing provided by respondent - to petitioner
- Protective orders can enjoin respondent to provide utilities
- Lease cannot be terminated solely due to act of family violence
 - Must provide written documentation and abuser must be barred by court order*
- Landlord can be asked to change locks or permit survivor to if court order bars abuser (except if order is ex parte)
- Established Address Confidentiality Program

VOLUNTARY SERVICES

“Our program doesn’t expect people to live in a way that we wouldn’t live our own lives. It seems to be a fairly radical concept in a lot of circles.”

- Home Free Advocate

Unintended Consequences of Mandatory Services

- May conflict with participant's ability to access natural support systems
- Participant may spend a lot of energy learning how to please staff rather than working on goals
- For trauma victims/survivors, mandates feel reminiscent of abuser's control
- Expectation of high level of disclosure can feel intrusive, may be culturally inappropriate, and can set people up to lie

Underpinnings of Voluntary Services

- Belief that people want change to happen is key
- Given choices/opportunity, participants will work far harder to ensure their safety and success
- If your services are meaningful toward participants' goals, they will chose engagement
- Removing “enforcement” from role of advocate allows new kind of relationship with participants

Voluntary Services Doesn't Mean No Services!

- You CAN ask things of participants
- You CAN intervene if people are making harmful choices
- You CAN have rules and program requirements
- You CAN terminate participants from your program
- Participants DO want your help and services and will elect ways to participate

Voluntary Services Models:

- Individualize the way services are delivered in recognition that survivors are experts in their own lives
- Are goal-based, but participant defines success
- Require honest assessment of rules and policies (necessary? respectful? effective?)
- Aim for non-intrusiveness into people's lives

Voluntary Services Models:

- Invite participant's input in selecting services helpful to them and which information they want to share
- Provide clear, consistent information about program expectations
- Rely on natural consequences as the best teacher
- Acknowledge that even though experts in the field, we don't know what's best for everyone

Working in Partnership with Survivors

- Minimally intrusive intake process; focus is on info needed to begin the work together
- Survivor is helped to develop her plan and selects services she needs
- Regular check-ins focus on progress in goal plan and problem-solving ideas around barriers
- Participants share other concerns at own discretion; having this choice invites honesty, relationship that's more genuine and less power-based

“People are really forthright because we don’t set up situations where they have to lie to us or lose access to services by asking for help around stigmatized issues. One woman told me that she smoked pot daily to cope and hadn’t followed through with treatment for her anxiety and depression; we were able to talk about whether she wanted to take that on and what she’d need in place to do so.”

- Home Free Advocate

“I have a participant who is thinking about trying to have a relationship of some sort with her abuser in the future. We talked about how our program doesn't have an expectation that she never have contact with her abuser again and that if she wanted to explore how to have contact that would feel safe to her that we could talk about that. She's been in more regular contact since that conversation than ever before.”

-Home Free Advocate

MOBILE ADVOCACY AND HOME VISITING

“Taking the time to do home visits, going with people to court or other places communicates ‘I’m here for YOU’ and makes a connection that is unique. Other services survivors are having to navigate just aren’t structured that way.”

-Home Free Advocate

Services Can Happen Anywhere

- Operating in confidential locations has in some ways hidden our WORK away from the community
- Face-to-face relationships with other community providers enhance understanding of each other's "lenses"
- Fluidity in advocate's day to provide for time in the community promotes connection to networks and the bigger picture
- Good connections across disciplines (child welfare, courts, WorkSource, police, etc.) also provides a route to services for survivors not using hotlines or shelters

An Approach That Makes Sense

- Face-to-face contact with landlords and service providers leads to more effective advocacy and systems savvy
- Home is safe space and comfort zone – for kids, too!
- Shifts burden of logistics, cost from survivor to program
- After isolation of DV, having a visitor can be a “welcome sense of social normalcy”
- Participants often proud of and excited about their new homes and want to share it
- Fewer missed appointments; easier for advocate to be on time, establishes consistent and reliable contact

It's the Survivor's Call...

“I have some participants who love to have me in their home and want to have all of our visits there. Others want to meet at a coffee shop or somewhere else. We also talk about what they want to talk about too; we always talk about rent stuff, but they lead the conversations. “

- Home Free Advocate

“Sometimes you’re just going to have to drink that cup of tea if you want to build trust, and that’s ok!”

- Home Free Advocate

Some Challenges

- Survivors may feel they need to clean house for you, offer you food, or “host” you
- Sometimes survivor isn’t home when you get there, or doesn’t really want you in their space
- You can’t bring all the resources available at the office
- If survivor is in shared housing, hard to have privacy
- Children are often curious and want to be in on the visit
- May see things you’ll have to have hard conversations about

“I think the more I learned about domestic violence, the more I realized that I am not really the person at risk.”

- Home Free Advocate

Safety for Staff AND Survivors

- Discuss where it's best to have visits that are safe and comfortable for survivor
- Safety planning is key to all service delivery – whether in office, shelter, survivor's home, or community
- Know ahead of time what to say/do if you encounter the abuser or friends/family of survivor
- Avoid doing home visits if:
 - Abuser knows housing location and is not staying away
 - Abuser's behavior includes stalking/following survivor
- Ensure your program knows where you are
- At court: arrive early, request officer/security escort

“I try to think about how I would want someone to act in my own home visit and then present that way.”

- Home Free Advocate

Planning is Key!

- Bring water with you, avoid visits near a mealtime
- Clarify the visit's purpose (not an inspection!). Don't comment on how the place looks (unless to compliment)
- Bring a folder with things you might need, but don't take up a lot of space
- Give yourself extra time to get there so you are not stressed
- Look "civilian;" don't carry a clipboard or display your agency logo on stuff you bring to the visit

Experienced Mobile Advocates Also Said...

- “I’ve had folks say I’m the only ‘guest’ they have, especially when they’ve relocated.”
- “I feel like when I am more fearful, it’s a good sign to do some self-care around Vicarious Trauma.”
- “Hands down it is what participants prefer.”

SOME FINAL ELEMENTS

Managing Direct Assistance Funds

- Clear and user-friendly systems for advocates to access funds are important
 - *Survivors may operate on crisis-management basis and quick access often necessary*
- Advocate involvement in assessing spend-down and enrollment of new households
 - *Advocate will have best sense of whether funds set aside for HH needs to be revisited to achieve retention*
- Checks and Balances: Copies of bills/lease in participant files, tracking expenditures
 - *Clear file standards, sample file*

Participant Load

Balanced participant load stretches dollars, staff time, and reduces staff overload

- Ideally, advocates have a mix of households in terms of
 - Low-Moderate-High Barriers
 - Services timeline (beginning/in-progress/finishing up)
 - Self-advocacy levels
- With mixed participant load, Home Free standard is 8-12 households per full time advocate
- Encourage advocates to signal when load is too light/heavy

Other Considerations

- Cell phones and mileage reimbursement are a must!
- If large portion of advocate's time is spent in the field, connection to the "mother ship" is critical (team meetings, retreats, etc)
- Variety in assigned responsibilities is helpful in staff retention
- Connection to bigger picture/social change aspects of the work enhances continued investment
- Organizational change is supported through careful communication with whole staff about how new services fit programmatically, how to refer, success stories, etc.
- How can RRH approaches (mobile advocacy, flexible funds, etc) be introduced in other program areas?

“I can’t begin to describe how wonderful it feels to spend the bulk of my time being helpful to people in a way that they determine they need help! I no longer spend a significant portion of my day having conversations with people that were awkward for me and must have felt humiliating and defeating to them.”

- Home Free Advocate

DEFINING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

Common Outcomes Assessed in RRH Programs

- Reduced period of homelessness (Hearth: Housed in 30 days or less)
- Housing retained 6 months after exit
- Reduced returns to shelter

Of Particular Interest with DV Survivors

- Has safety increased?
 - *Ex. Danger Assessment Scale (DAS) – Training Required!*
- Is housing more stable?
 - *Ex. SHARE Study's Housing Instability Index (HII)*
- Has survivor increased self-advocacy skills?
 - *Ex. Home Free's Milestones*
- Participant Feedback and Self-Assessment
 - *Ex. Home Free's Participant Feedback Form*
- Demographic Trends
 - *Ex. Increase in underserved populations?*

WHAT'S NEXT?

The Last Word

“You’ve allowed us to end the DV and homelessness life we were in and guided us to safety, with the trust that you would be there to help in the transition. Thanks for being willing to take the journey with us.”

- Home Free Participant