

Voluntary Services at Home Free: A Participant-Driven Approach

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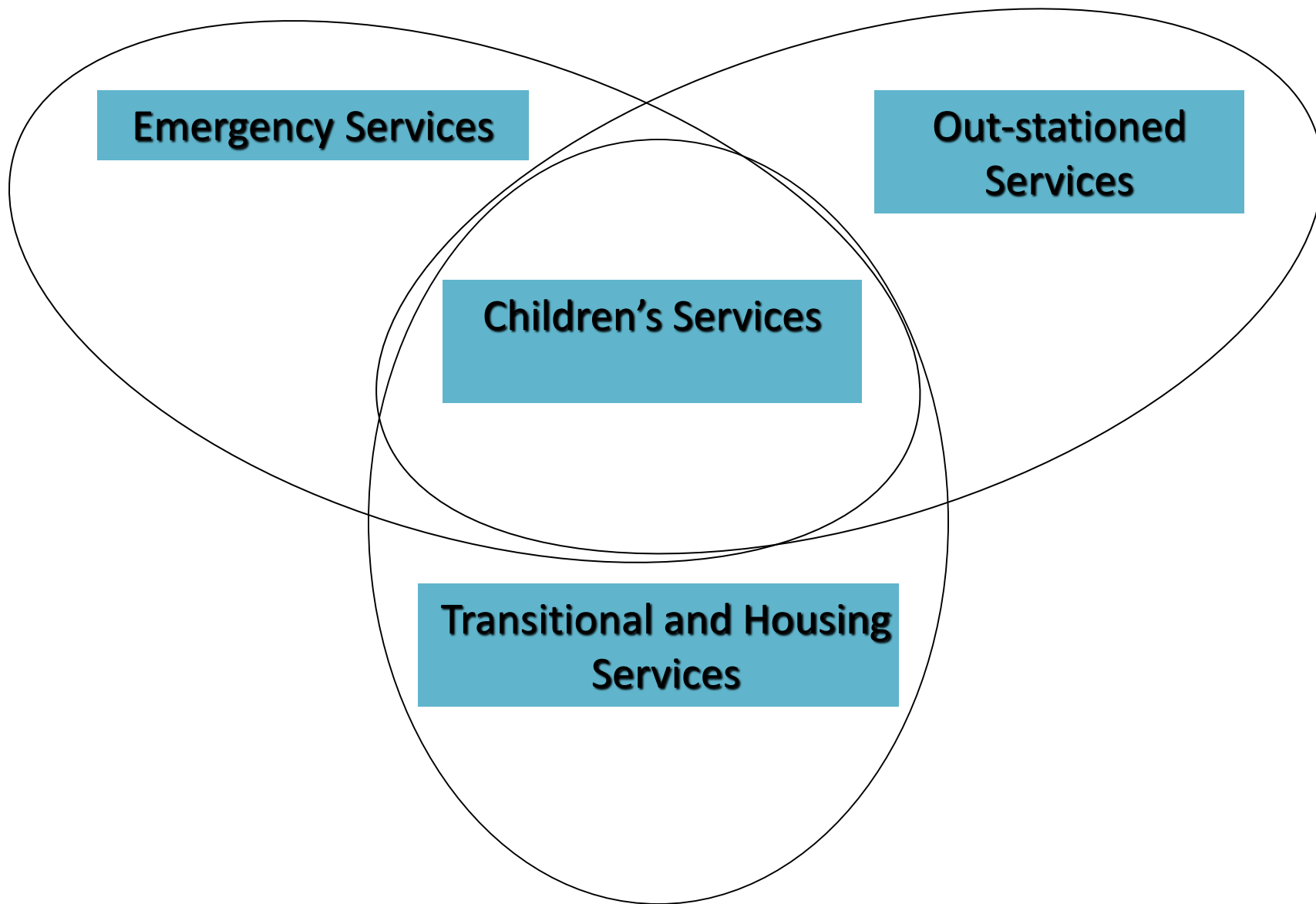
VOA Oregon – Home Free

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Home Free Program

- Roots: Shelter for homeless women and children (1926)
- Incorporated DV services in early 1970's
- Opened second location to house non-residential services in 1998
- Began employing mobile advocacy and home visits
- 2003: Closed shelter and redesigned program to fully non-residential model
- Today: Services routinely provided in 8 different community-based settings, through home visits, and through mobile advocacy



Keeping it Real

“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

Arriving at Our Approach

- Non-residential programs allowed innovation and sprung us from “the box” of rule-based models
- Observed that negative feedback at shelter almost always around compulsory services/rules that took away choice
- Voluntary services better fit our mission; choice and self-determination is what our movement is all about
- Saw great outcomes without “carrot-and-stick” approach (people still worked on goals!)
- Found that services need to be highly individualized in order to make sense for any given household
- OVW introduced language barring mandatory services

Lesson Learned: Required Support Groups

“I’ve had participants who waited until almost the close of our work together to start attending support groups and then find the groups to be very helpful. I wonder if they would find the groups less helpful if they were forced to access them before they were ready.”

- Home Free Advocate

Unintended Consequences of Rule-Based Approaches

- 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

Do Prerequisites Ensure Success?

“Maybe having required services or hoops people have to jump through to prove that they deserve help is an attempt to see how successful someone may be in maintaining their own housing. Ability to hoop-jump doesn't seem to be very good predictor of success in housing to me. “

- Home Free Housing Advocate

De-Bunking the Myth: 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

Because You Just Never Know...

“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

Voluntary Services Models:

- Can work with a variety of people – including high-barrier households
- Individualize the way services are delivered in recognition that people 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
- Invite participants to have input about services in which they'll participate and information they will 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

Underpinnings of Voluntary Services

- Believing 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

Setting the Tone: Screen IN, Not OUT

- Extremely broad eligibility
- Aim is to set people up to be successful; expectations clearly outlined and available services described
- Prospective participant considers her needs, makes informed decision about fit
- Result: services are *chosen* by participant

Owning Her Own Program

“I learned to trust people and to carry my own weight. Thanks for opening my eyes to myself, and that I really need to take responsibility of my own.”

- Home Free Participant

Building a Working Partnership

- Intake aimed at minimal intrusiveness; focus is on info needed to begin the work together
- With survivor's goal and program's resources in mind, survivor is helped to develop her plan and selects services she needs
- Regular check-ins about goal plan, with focus on successes and problem-solving ideas about addressing barriers
- Participants share at their discretion; having this choice invites honesty and relationship that's more genuine and less power-based

Authentic Relationships Promote Ability to Impact

“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

Authentic Relationships Promote Ability to Impact

“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 Visits

- Accessibility and effectiveness of services is enhanced when available in community- and home-based settings
- Reducing barriers (transportation, childcare, intimidation and fear) key to engagement
- Participants dictate what the contact looks like; can include accompaniment, home visits, meeting at coffee shop, etc.
- Siting advocates in cross-disciplinary settings (child welfare, courts, WorkSource, jail, self-sufficiency, police, etc.) provides multiple access points

Services Can Happen Anywhere

“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 Housing Advocate

Invested Staff

“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

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