

RESEARCH BRIEF

'There's Just All These Moving Parts:' Helping Domestic Violence Survivors Obtain Housing

Sullivan, C.M., López-Zerón, G., Bomsta, H., & Menard, A. (2018)
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Advocates working with domestic violence (DV) survivors to obtain housing are committed to the principles of Housing First and Rapid Rehousing that recommend getting clients into permanent housing as quickly as possible (Baker et al., 2010; Sullivan & Olsen, 2016). They struggle, however, with how “as quickly as possible” may be defined by funders and policy makers who do not fully understand the intricacies of their efforts. In this time of decreasing resources, funders are expecting programs to serve an increasing number of survivors, putting advocates in the precarious position of feeling that they lack the time to provide the effort needed to adequately serve survivors with multiple needs. The purpose of this study was to better understand the complexities involved in helping IPV survivors obtain safe and stable housing.

In-depth interviews with 11 advocates illustrated how time-consuming and complicated it can be to successfully house IPV survivors. Four of the advocates were white, three were Latina, two were African American, one was Native American, and one was Asian. Their ages ranged from mid-20s to mid-50s and they had worked as advocates from 2.5 to 16 years (average 8 years). Three worked in culturally specific agencies (focused on immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ communities, and immigrant Latinas, respectively). They worked in agencies located in large urban cities, a university town, mid-sized cities, and small, rural communities.

Advocates were asked to reflect on a recent case in which they were successful in obtaining housing with a survivor, and to choose a case that was representative of their work (e.g., not an outlier).

The length of time that it took to stably house a survivor ranged from two months to two years.

In the very beginning it was very intensive. Daily communication. You know, probably five to eight hours a week for that particular person... And then it becomes more diffuse to where you've got three or four people supporting her. But probably several hours a week. And then as we brought in other agencies, for example the transitional housing agency that worked with her, we were able to back off a little bit. But still there was always that constant support.

Every advocate noted that housing was only one of the issues they were working on with each of their clients. In addition to safety, economic issues, and trauma, they were also focusing on issues such as their clients' disabilities, immigration concerns, transgender discrimination, veteran status, or children's needs. Although every survivor's situation was different, all of the issues were interconnected. An important implication of this study, then, is that funding priorities should reward efforts that attend to the complex needs of survivors, in order to attain long-term success. Quickly housing a survivor, without also addressing the myriad issues they are facing that might jeopardize that housing, may not even be possible with some survivors and may sabotage the likelihood of long-term success for others. It will take well-resourced communities working well together to end the serious plague of homelessness for IPV survivors and their families.



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