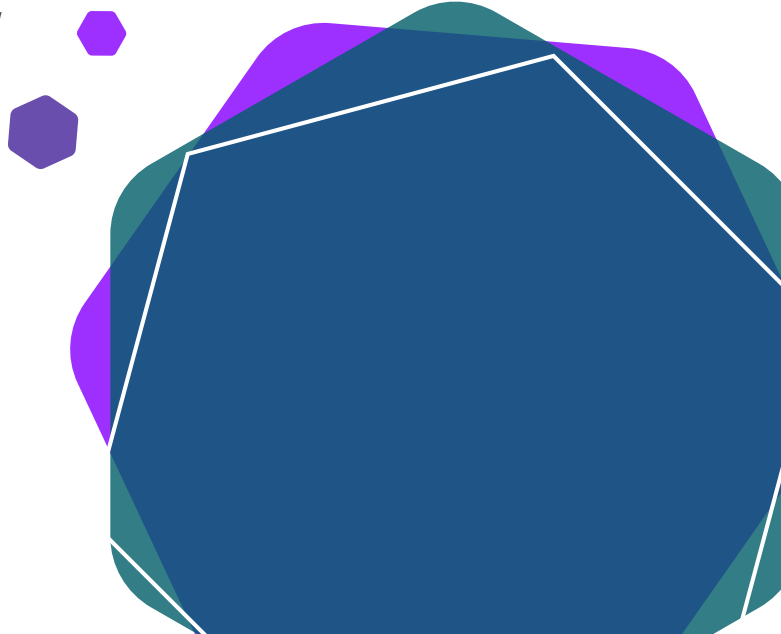


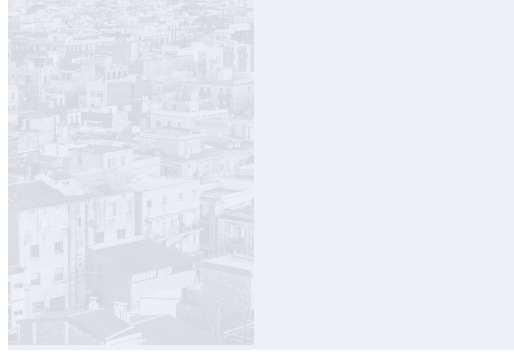
Coburn Place: An Exemplar of the Domestic Violence Transitional Housing Model

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Dear Colleagues,

In 1994, when I began in the field of domestic violence, the work looked very different. Survivors were called victims and the field was still commonly referred to as “the Battered Women’s Movement.” Emergency shelters were thought to be the intervention solution. Demerits were given to grown women for missing curfew, or for not participating in mandated programs and they were exited from their safe beds. Intersectionality was not the norm. Transgender, lesbian, and male survivors were not broadly considered in program design nor service delivery.

The field needed to evolve.

Coburn Place’s journey-to-now has been a practice in trust, authenticity, and accountability. And we still have more growth to do. A commitment to the evolution of our program models has been paramount, along with an unwavering desire to ensure the “how” is as important as “what” we do.

Many of our colleagues are working passionately in prevention: moving the needle by demanding equality and justice in public policy and social norms. Colleagues in intervention are working fervently to provide services to those already impacted by abuse. We all hope that one day we will have eliminated the need for our own jobs.

Prevention and intervention must be survivor-centered and trauma-informed. If not, what is the point? We would continue to be part of the paternal patriarchy that thinks it knows better what “victims” need instead of trusting the expert guidance of survivors.

Survivors deserve, and ought to be able to expect, that services and the organizations who provide those services are ever striving to be as excellent and authentic as possible. These intentional designs, highlighted in this report, can be replicated by any other organization doing this work. It will be the easiest, hard thing—or the hardest, easy thing—your organization might undertake. These decisions intentionally impacted Coburn Place’s “what” but more importantly, they impacted our “how.”

Each of the five central pillars of what makes Coburn Place’s Transitional Housing (TH) program model exemplary are the result of strategic decision-making outlined in the

timeline mapping our intentional evolution. These strategies must be fully committed to from an organization's top down leadership to be successfully integrated. Recruit board members, volunteers, and staff who can catch this vision. To Executive Directors: If you are not willing to be the catalyst for change, your program's success will be limited – as is true in all aspects of our missions' impact.

As the leader, I had to be the unwavering champion for voluntary services when sister programs were sure I had lost my mind. I had to show the Board that forgoing collecting tenant rent in lieu of encouraging survivors to save for their permanent housing was a good investment. I had to be innovative and invite innovation. I had to ask for advice, hire people smarter than me, and invest in developing and retaining talent. I had to try, fail, and adjust. I had to commit to getting and integrating survivor feedback. I had to talk to funders, community partners, and donors about why and how we do what we do. I had to restructure the organization to make sure the infrastructure will support it.

I had to study trends and read about what's working in other places and ponder whether they might work here. I had to visit other programs and go to conferences and workshops to learn and know more. I had to offer staff retreats and safe spaces to manage change and process emotions. I had to commit to ensuring that our work culture was, and always is, authentic to our mission, vision, values, and identity statement. I have to be willing to lead from three different time zones – the past, the present, and the future. Don't expect your team to do this without you. You have to lead them through this evolution. If you lead them fearlessly, believing fully in survivor-centered, voluntary, and trauma-informed approaches, committing to them that their work place is as authentic and predictable as the service delivery model, they will follow you.

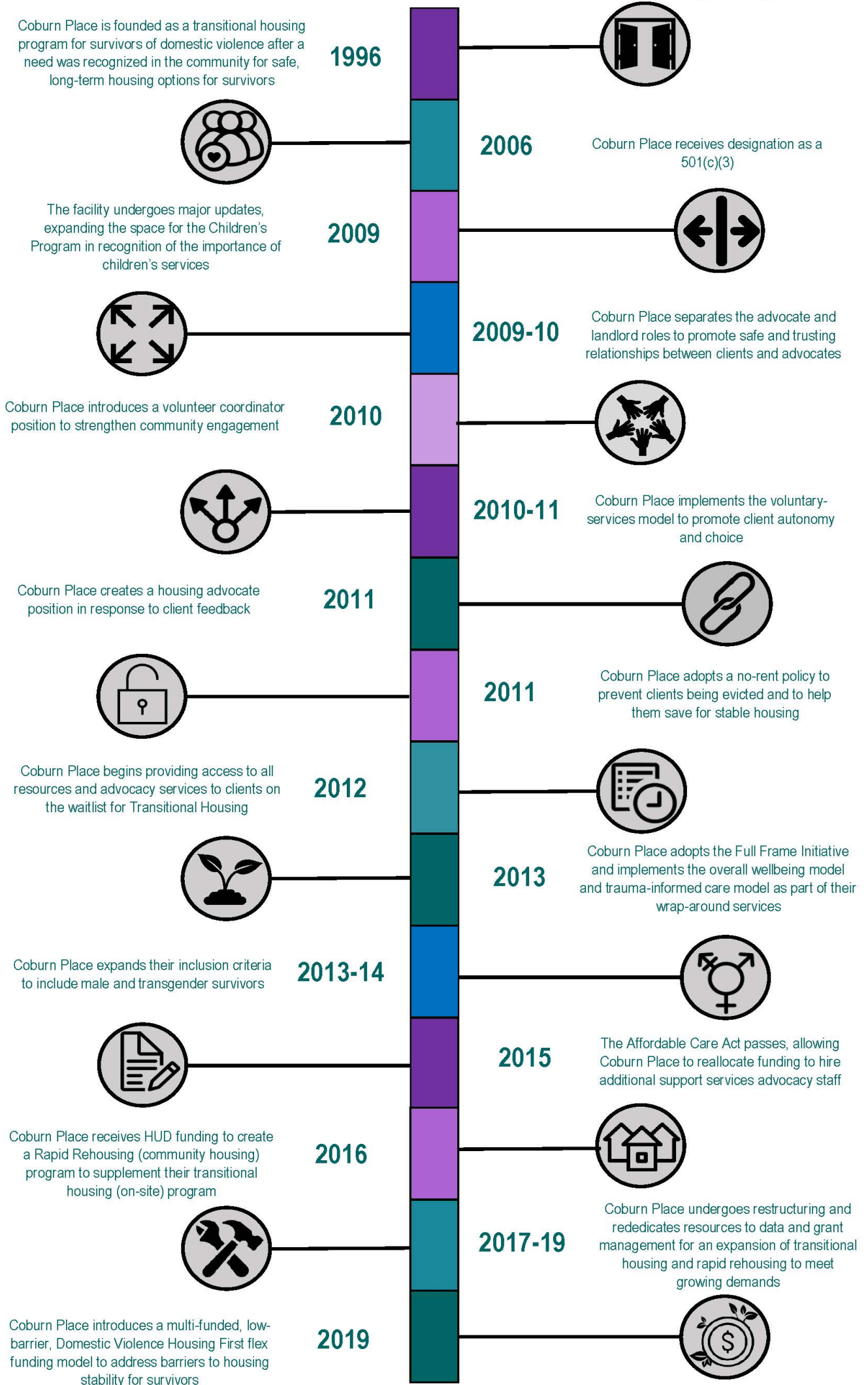
I'm humbled and proud to be part of this continual evolution. I hope you find this helpful. Doing this work is among the greatest honors of my life. I look forward to hearing if you implement any of these similar strategies and how they are impacting survivors' safety, stability, and wellbeing in your own communities.



Julia Kathary

Coburn Place Executive Director

The Evolution of Coburn Place's Transitional Housing Program



BACKGROUND

While limited research has indicated that domestic violence transitional housing (DV TH) programs may be helpful to DV survivors and their families (Mekolichick & Choulnard, 2008; Melbin, Sullivan & Cain, 2003; Wendt & Baker, 2013), little is known about how such programs work in practice. Each program is unique but most are based on a voluntary services model and offer safe and secure housing for survivors for up to two years. The Domestic Violence Transitional Housing (DV TH) model was created to provide survivors with the time needed to heal from trauma and to secure the resources needed to obtain and sustain safe and affordable housing (Berman, 2016).

The purpose of this project was to “look inside the black box” of DV TH by documenting the philosophy, structure and functions of one program with a strong reputation. Coburn Place, a registered 501(c)(3) organization, is the largest and most comprehensive DV TH program in Indianapolis, Indiana, and they welcomed having their agency documented in this report. Coburn Place was founded in 1996 as a DV TH program in the face of the growing need for safe, long-term housing options for survivors of domestic violence. Since its inception, the DV TH program at Coburn Place has undergone a

series of changes resulting in the well-rounded and comprehensive program it is today. Key strategic decisions which broadened the reach and shaped the direction of the transitional housing program include:

- Offering a highly secure residential facility;
- Eliminating financial obligations imposed on residents;
- Eliminating dual role relationships which can compromise effective advocacy;
- Strengthening and diversifying advocacy services, particularly around housing;
- Reducing barriers to entry into DV TH, including substance use and mental health assessments;
- Providing access to advocacy services and resources prior to entry and after exit from DV TH;
- Adopting voluntary participation and trauma informed care policies;
- Adopting a holistic approach to housing permanency to include survivors' healing and personal wellbeing needs;
- Supplementing the DV TH program with Rapid Rehousing (community housing) and flexible funding; and
- Creating a culture of self-determination and room for professional growth for staff

DOCUMENTATION PROCESS

In order to understand how Coburn Place was designed to work, how it works in practice, and how it is perceived by survivors, we collected information from three sources:

1. Program protocols, manuals, and other written documents provided information about program structures and processes. Specifically, we examined how survivors are expected to access the DV TH program, as well as key features of the program, exit processes, and desired outcomes.

2. Staff interviews: 14 Coburn Place staff were interviewed about their work. They described

their responsibilities and provided examples of their work with program participants, demonstrating the values and principles that exemplify their TH program.

3. Program participant interviews: 9 survivors were interviewed about their experiences of entry into the DV TH program, participation in the program, outcomes, and recommendations.

This report explores the inner workings of Coburn Place, with the goal of detailing how DV TH programs operate to assist domestic violence survivors in healing from trauma and ultimately obtaining safe and stable housing.



The Coburn Place Domestic Violence Transitional Housing Program

The mission:
to *empower victims* of
intimate partner violence
to live as survivors

The DV TH program at Coburn Place provides survivors with free, safe and supported housing for up to 24 months. The DV TH program has 35 apartments (15 studio, 15 two-bedroom, and 5 three-bedroom) which are allotted to program participants based on family size. The program is structured to eliminate barriers to achieving independence and self-sufficiency, and is built on 5 pillars which together facilitate recovery from traumatic experiences:

1. Maximizing safety
2. Eliminating service and financial mandates
3. Building trusting relationships
4. Comprehensive and flexible advocacy and programming; and a
5. Staff culture of self-determination and growth

Staffing

Coburn Place is organized into three branches: mission impact, operations and finance, and development and mission advancement. Supported by the operations and finance and development teams, the mission impact team executes the mission of Coburn Place: to empower people impacted by interpersonal abuse. The mission impact team consists of staff members directly involved in providing and managing services.

Within Coburn Place's transitional housing program, the staff team is comprised of two types of advocates: housing advocates and wellbeing advocates. While housing advocates work to address barriers which directly impede survivors' ability to obtain housing, wellbeing advocates work alongside them to address issues which may not seem immediately related to the goal of achieving housing permanency

such as transportation, health, exercise, educations, employment, etc. They work to support the survivors' entire person, including connectedness, stability, and safety. The mission impact team also includes a residential property director, focused on the day to day operations and enforcement of DV TH apartment rental regulations. The property director does not engage in direct advocacy with program participants.

The development team includes a donations and volunteer coordinator who works closely with the property director and direct service advocates, collecting and making necessary resources available. Volunteers play a critical role at Coburn Place, with some volunteers working side-by-side with staff providing direct services. Other volunteers participate in property upkeep and improvement, furnishing DV TH apartments, helping with special events, and organizing donations.

In the following sections, we describe the structure and function of the DV TH program in greater detail, starting with how survivors enter the program, the services and supports they receive within it, what happens upon program exit, and the values and rationale behind these structures and functions.

Initial Contact

During the first contact with a survivor, typically via phone, Coburn Place staff ask a series of questions to determine the survivor's

immediate needs and eligibility for participation in the DV TH program. Coburn place minimizes barriers to entry into the program by eliminating most inclusion and exclusion criteria and providing additional support where external barriers exist. One program participant shared her experience as follows,

“When I say they are great, they are great. There were times that my cousin was at work and couldn't take me to do my intake or meet up with them, and they would come out to the area that I was at, near whoever's house I was at, to meet up at a restaurant down the street or something like that.”

To be accepted into the DV TH program, survivors need to be homeless or at risk of homelessness due to domestic violence, and meet household income limits identified on Coburn Place's website (Coburn Place, 2019). These are primarily funder driven criteria for participation in the program. Based on the information gathered, advocates set up a meeting with eligible program participants to conduct a safety assessment and to offer information about their community-based housing program and their transitional housing program. If survivors meet eligibility criteria, the advocate assists them in submitting applications to one or both programs. The community-based housing (CBH) program is a more recent addition to the suite of programs offered by Coburn Place and supplements the on-site DV TH program. CBH is a Rapid Rehousing program that offers rental and utility

assistance for up to twelve months, with the expectation that the survivor can then stay in that permanent housing while paying for it themselves at the end of the program.

Waitlist

Once the DV TH application is submitted, survivors are placed on a waitlist based on family size for one of three different apartment types: studio, two-bedroom or three-bedroom apartments. It takes between a few months to a year for program applicants to be assigned an apartment. While on the waitlist, they are eligible to receive housing advocacy, wellness advocacy, participate in the children's program, and receive all other adult services.



Participant in Focus

Candace (pseudonym) sought transitional housing at Coburn Place. Candace's child was in the care of Child Protective Services (CPS) because of domestic violence. While on the waitlist for transitional housing, Candace worked with the housing advocate, was provided financial assistance for a security deposit, and secured housing. Following this, Candace was able to return to full time employment, which allowed her to regain custody of her child.

Participation in other programs while waiting to enter DV TH facilitates social connectedness

and development of a rich support network and is an integral part of Coburn Place's overall model. Program participants reported particularly benefitting from the safety net of ongoing access to Coburn Place's food pantry and household goods even after exit from the program. One survivor said,

"They put me on their waitlist and provided me with food, hygiene items, things I may need while I waited on their waitlist to come into their program physically... they would keep me informed of different events and their different domestic violence classes that they had on their calendar each month... I could reach out to them for bus passes, for food, for hygiene items."

Coburn Place staff may hasten the entry into transitional housing for survivors in extremely vulnerable circumstances. For example, one participant explained,

"I was pregnant, really pregnant when I applied. I had left my son's father who had become very abusive during the pregnancy. His dad was still on the run from the police so they wanted me to stay in the shelter, they didn't want me to live on my own because they were worried about safety precautions. But I knew that I didn't want my son to be born into an emergency shelter because my daughter and I got really sick because of the germs there and didn't want my baby to be born into that. It was crazy because their waitlist was about a year long and I knew that they went by circumstances. They called me a week after my son was born to tell me that I could move in."

Because of me being pregnant, they took that into consideration. Thankfully. When you look online, there is really nothing else like Coburn. It was my one chance.”

Entering Transitional Housing

Every DV TH apartment at Coburn Place is furnished and stocked with food and essential household goods. A robust donations and volunteer program, overseen and organized by a dedicated coordinator, makes this possible. Community volunteers, both corporate and individual, invest their time in painting the walls, selecting, cleaning and moving furniture, decorating apartments, and stocking apartments with groceries and toiletries.

The DV TH program aims to offer a space survivors can come to in times of chaos, to stabilize and be safe until they are ready to move to permanent housing. One advocate described it as *“a starting place to breathe again and figure out who they are and ultimately start working on their barriers one by one.* One program participant said:

“It’s 360 degrees of wholeness. So they want to make sure that from the time that you get here, to the time that you leave, you are adequately equipped with the tools that you need to provide safe and stable housing, and a safe and stable lifestyle, for you and your children.”

Steps taken to provide program participants with such stability include minimizing housing

barriers (e.g., expunging criminal records, paying off past rent), minimizing activity demands, relationship building, and ongoing access to services and resources before, during and after exit. One survivor mentioned that the Coburn Place staff extend their trauma-awareness to children.

“[Children’s advocate] was really nice. She really cared to know what did [daughter] see, what does she struggle with, and having that component really helped to know that – not only are they going to watch my kid, but they’re aware of what she’s experienced and the trauma that she’s dealing with, and they’re equipped to deal with that.”



Participant in Focus

Sarah (pseudonym) approached Coburn Place for housing assistance after fleeing a physically abusive partner. After moving into transitional housing at Coburn Place, Sarah did not leave the apartment for several months and did not speak to anyone including her neighbors. Sarah’s primary advocate intermittently visited Sarah’s apartment, brought her favorite snacks, engaged in general conversation, provided information regarding available events on the Coburn Place calendar, and introduced staff members to Sarah. Over time, the relationships with the therapist and advocate allowed her to initiate contact with others.

The Central Pillars of the DV TH Program in Practice

After synthesizing all of the information gleaned from agency records, staff interviews and survivor interviews, the evaluation team identified the following five pillars of Coburn Place's DV TH program:

1. Maximizing safety;
2. Eliminating service and financial mandates;
3. Building trusting relationships;
4. Comprehensive and flexible advocacy and programming; and a
5. Staff culture of self-determination and growth

Maximizing Safety

A core feature of DV TH programs is to provide a secure environment for survivors who are still in danger from the person who abused them. Coburn Place is a gated community equipped with a myriad of safety features, including a secure buzzer entry system and cameras in the common areas of the property. All survivors referred to feeling safe and learning ways to keep themselves safe as an important benefit of the program. One survivor described a sense of safety as one of the things she valued most about the facility.

“Basically, the fact that you have somewhere safe to go. Not being hit, and just – this is the best thing. It’s surrounded, so no one can just walk in and out. That’s the best thing to me is having somewhere safe to be, and you don’t have to worry about crazy people.”

Another said,

“The most helpful part was not having to worry about being stuck out, stranded out [with] me trying to work. Having them in a safe place. Not having to worry about, “Oh, I’m going to work. When I get home, where’s my kids gonna be?”

Eliminating Financial and Participation Mandates

Transitional housing programs are typically built on the voluntary-services model, wherein no aspect of programming is mandated and survivors make their own decisions about what to attend. Coburn Place staff attempt to promote survivor autonomy by ensuring that participation is at the discretion of the survivor, while providing information and encouraging residents to participate in services. One advocate explained,

“I always tell my ladies when they first move in, I always tell them the benefits of case management and the benefits of engaging in programming, and I just explain to them that the most successful residents engage in programming. And I just tell them what that looks like, and I tell them, give them examples.”

Many survivors appreciated the autonomy ensured by this model. One survivor stated this clearly by saying,

“I would feel like I was almost institutionalized if they tried to make me do something... I’m living here by choice. If they tried to tell me ‘You gotta

do this, you gotta do this,' then I'd probably end up leaving."

These policies are intended to counter any experiences which may mimic structures of control experienced by survivors in traumatic contexts. This includes maximizing freedom and minimizing the financial, time, and personal resource demands placed upon program participants. Coburn Place takes this one step further and exempts survivors from paying rent and utility bills during their stay, allowing them to save or spend money toward achieving financial and housing stability and to focus on other aspects of their lives. One program participant said,

"That relieves a big weight off you because you don't have to worry about rent. You don't have to worry about how you going to pay this, how you going to pay that. Even if you do – because for me, I don't have income – even if you do have income, they still don't charge you. They allow you to use that as an opportunity to save and to build yourself financially where you can maybe purchase a car, or maybe pay off some debt that you have, or you can maybe use that as, you know, means to get permanent housing or get better housing when you leave here."

The rent-free living policy emerged out of the recognition that the enforcement of rental payments replicates the issues that lead survivors to seek transitional housing services in the first place and undermines advocacy efforts. Demanding rent – even a small amount

"I would feel like I was almost institutionalized if they tried to make me do something... I'm living here by choice."



– sometimes had also led to having to evict survivors from the program, which Coburn Place staff felt was antithetical to their mission. Figure 2 depicts a timeline of the evolution of critical programmatic policies such as this.

Building Trusting Relationships

An important component of the DV TH program is an emphasis on building strong relationships. Policies and expectations are in place regarding building trust and respect with community organizations and community members, as well as among staff and volunteers, and especially with program participants. One survivor said the most important part of Coburn Place's TH program was, *"Feeling like I'm loved, feeling like my kids are loved, feeling like there's no obstacles I can't overcome, feeling like there's someone here for me."* The program participants we spoke to described the staff as non-judgmental and caring about them and their families. One participant said,

"I think my own experience of going back to an abuser while I was here... because we're still adults and we have our own choices. I feel like if they would have pressed too hard on 'are you sure you're not talking to him?' or you know, once I did go back, like punishing me or being more strict with me because of it ... If they would have

been more aggressive safety-wise, it would have pushed me away or made me more secretive.”

Another said,

“Out of everything at Coburn, she [advocate] made the biggest difference in my life. ... When I first came to Coburn, I didn't really have anybody to support my son or love on him... [Advocate] just loved on him and would offer to take him around. She would carry him around the building... She was just always available, and I felt like she was always going the extra mile to make sure me and my kids were taken care of.”

Such a relationship-based approach to advocacy is considered best practice in the field of domestic violence (Goodman, Fauci, Sullivan, DiGiovanni, & Wilson, 2016). An additional and less commonly seen step taken by Coburn Place has been the creation of distinct but connected staff positions for housing advocacy, wellbeing advocacy and residential oversight (property management). One staff member said,

“Advocates will never give lease violations because it needs to always be clear that they're on the client's side. The advocate can go to the lease violation meeting, but they will be an advocate for the client not the program.”

While the enforcement of some rules may be unavoidable in a setting such as this, it can often undermine efforts to promote self-determination among survivors. The separation of these roles at Coburn Place thus prevents


unintentional damage to the survivor-advocate relationship by ensuring that the 'difficult conversations' that advocates have with program participants are always in the interests of survivors and not on behalf of the organization.

Comprehensive and Flexible Advocacy

The fourth pillar of the DV TH program is comprehensive and flexible advocacy. A survivor's stay in the transitional housing program can last up to 24 months, during which time they and their families have access to all of Coburn Place's programming that focuses on wellbeing, skill-building, and addressing housing barriers. As previously mentioned, the presence of distinct housing and wellbeing advocates facilitates comprehensive advocacy. Additionally, a massive volunteer labor force provides program participants with holistic experiences, programming and events including holiday parties, children's educational programming and family entertainment, all of which promote survivor wellbeing. Further, advocates utilize their flexible funding program to help eliminate survivors' financial challenges – that range from unpaid parking tickets to paying off prior evictions and housing debt. This funding is made possible primarily through donor contributions.

Adult Services

Adult services. Coburn Place is committed to providing holistic services and supports to survivors, and this often involves collaborating

"You now start feeling a part of something, feeling cared about, feeling like you do matter." 

with other community agencies. Advocates and supervisors work with survivors to identify programming needs or gaps, and then liaise with community partners to bring relevant resources to Coburn Place. One example given was, *"If they don't have health insurance, [they] will call Enroll Indiana and have someone come out and enroll them"* Several survivors mentioned liking the family classes where they could spend time with their children. Some mentioned cooking classes, domestic violence support groups, and art therapy. One survivor said,

"They have like domestic violence groups. They have different types of groups. Like, people come up here for health reasons. That's the type of stuff I never would have knew or never would have thought of if I hadn't been here... Because you can talk to people about what you been through, and you ain't got to just hold it in. You know what I mean? That brought relief to me because I was able to talk about it."

Advocacy at Coburn Place includes creating an environment of shared involvement and abundance. Survivors highlighted their appreciation for end-of-year and holiday season events including food assistance around Thanksgiving and Christmas, and help with costumes around Halloween. Volunteers help plan and set up these events, including

providing food, decorations and coordination. One survivor said,

"They're [Coburn Place] always involved with stuff. Like during holidays, they have dinners and parties. They have different things going on in the community that they're in partnership with or they're connected to in some way. So, we're always invited to different events and different things going on in the community around holidays, and so that makes your holiday time enjoyable. That makes it a good experience instead of if you're homeless or you're in a shelter somewhere that doesn't have the scope or doesn't have all of the things Coburn has. You now start feeling a part of something, feeling cared about, feeling like you do matter."

Children's Services

The children's program focuses on the wellbeing of youth and gives parents the time to care for themselves, including participating in onsite programming. It allows time for survivors who are parents to take care of other tasks by providing a safe and educational space for the youth. One staff member summed up the children's program by saying, *"It is a time for them to heal at their own pace. For both parents and children."* This includes afterschool and summer programming that offers a variety of activities, such as tutoring, arts and crafts, and Kids' Club. Many staff identified the children's program as a core part of the transitional housing program. A staff member said, *"It's amazing how many kids have never been to the zoo or museum. By providing those*

camps, we are giving parents the opportunity to pursue those self-development things for adults like employment and school.” Many survivors echoed the benefits of the Children’s Program for their children and strengthened the whole DV TH program. When talking about how the Children’s Program allowed survivors time to work on themselves, one survivor said,

“When we had workout classes, they would open the playroom so the kids could come downstairs so that we had the opportunity to take care of ourselves. The play room would be open so we could get tutoring – and this is for the parents – so that the kids could get tutoring while the parents could go to finance classes, so the parents could go to counseling, or group or whatever we needed to do, the playroom was open. It had great hours. The staff was amazing.”

Several participants who had children indicated that Coburn Place had created a home and sense of family for their children where they felt like they were providing their children with everything they needed to live a normal and full life, not deprived of any opportunities.

Staffing Culture: Self-Determination and Professional Growth

The final component of the DV TH program is a culture of staff self-determination and room for professional growth. Conversations with staff revealed that aspects of the job like flexible work hours, having the freedom to meet

survivors wherever they needed to, and providing whatever individualized and creative support they needed, are valued aspects of the staff experience. The structure of Coburn Place allows for professional growth and frequently hires or promotes candidates from within the organization into new roles. One staff member said,

“I can do outside-the-box, non-traditional case management. I love that I can structure my case management for every single resident...I had a lady in our program who was a minister in her former life. This [the domestic violence] made her feel unsafe and not welcome at her church anymore, and we started talking about religion, and so we would find a bible study and do that together as part of case management. Another young lady from India [didn’t] know anything about the busing system. We had to get out and learn how to ride the bus system together. We have one lady who is working on some immigration things and getting a divorce, and we spent some time in court last week.”

Exiting Transitional Housing

Survivors leave the DV TH program either by moving into alternate housing or, in rare cases,



“I can do outside-the-box case management. I love that I can structure my case management for every single resident.”



being asked to leave due to lease violations. Exit from the program does not imply termination of any other services. Survivors are asked to complete some paperwork with their wellbeing advocates before exit. When exiting the program, survivors are welcome to take the furniture and small appliances from their Coburn Place apartment to their new residence.

Several program participants who spoke with us identified this as an aspect of the program that they most valued.

“When I left, I left with my apartment. All of it, everything in my unit. I got to see firsthand what the donations do, and I don’t think I would ever donate to anyone else... There’s no program I’ve ever heard of where you leave and you can take everything with you. The furniture, the appliances, you can take everything. You take everything as long as they have the resources available... I was fortunate enough to be able to take my apartment so that for my girls, it was just like moving from one apartment to the next. It was still home. So they weren’t missing out on anything.”

This is an atypical feature among transitional housing programs and serves to further the goal of minimizing barriers to stability, particularly

“The furniture, the appliances, you can take everything... For my girls, it was just like moving from one apartment to the next. It was still home.”



during transitions. Offering access to furniture as survivors transition into permanent housing is made possible by the donations and volunteer program which receives and refurbishes empty apartments for incoming DV TH residents. One of Coburn Place’s funding requirements (from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) is to document if participants of the DV TH program exited the DV TH program into “permanent,” “temporary,” or “other” housing. Permanent housing includes renting or owning with or without subsidy, staying or living with friends or family permanently, or entering a permanent housing program such as rapid rehousing (aka. Community based housing). Community-based housing can serve as a steppingstone in survivors’ path to self-sufficiency.

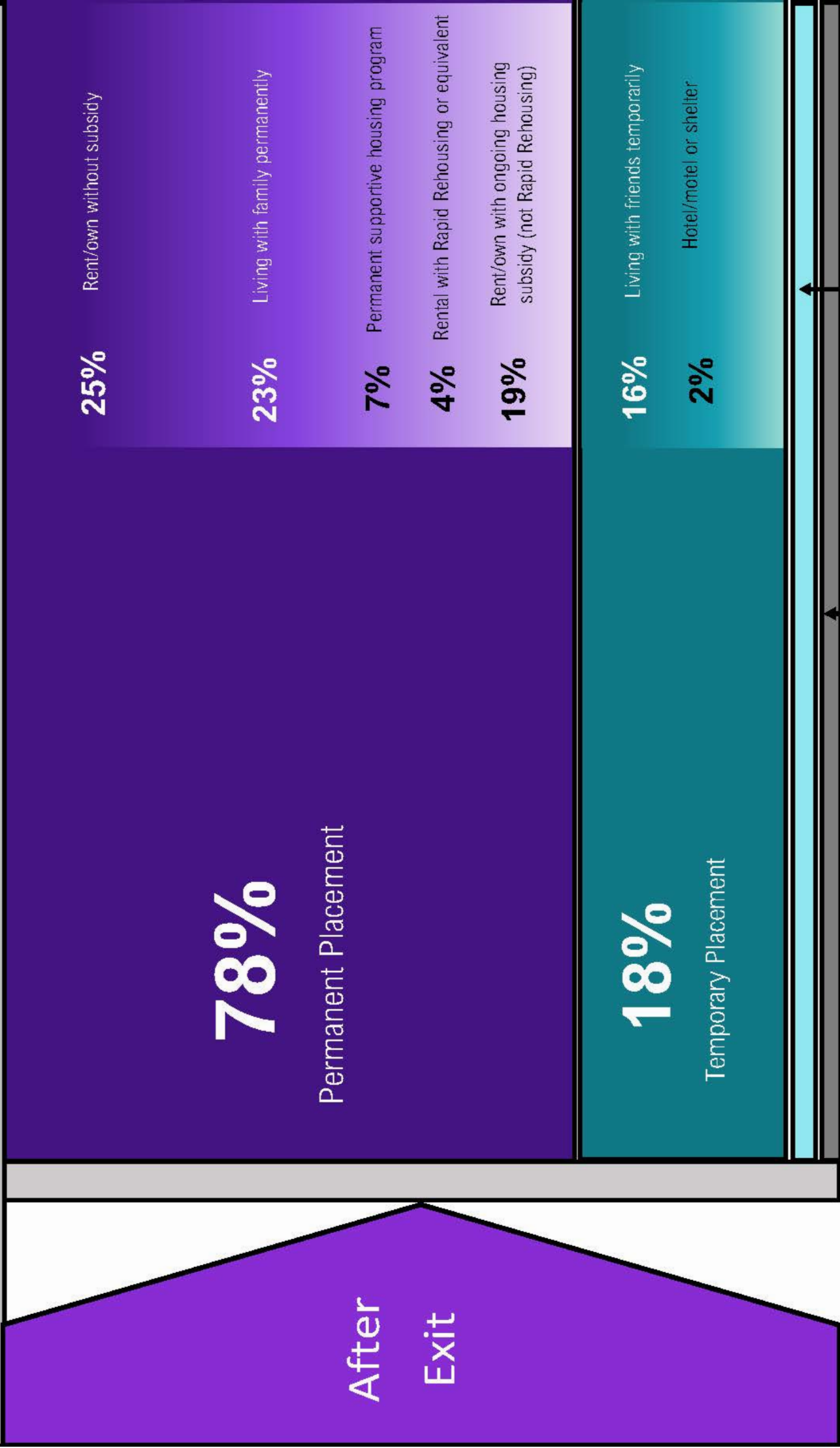
As seen on the exit diagram (Figure 2), 4% of survivors exit from transitional housing into the community-based housing program. Temporary housing includes living with friends or family temporarily, or living in an institutional setting such as jail or a substance abuse treatment facility.

Housing outcomes: Where do clients go after DV TH?

Between 2015 and the first quarter of 2019, 121 survivors exited Coburn Place’s DV TH program. Each of the 35 apartments in Coburn Place turns over approximately once every year. The majority (78%) of survivors leaving Coburn Place’s TH program enter permanent situations, with a quarter (25%) renting or owning without

Where Survivors Go After Exiting DV TH

Based on the 121 survivors who exited the Transitional Housing Program at Coburn Place from 2015-early 2019. Approximately 36 survivors exit annually.



a subsidy, and nearly a quarter (23%) leaving the TH program to live permanently with friends or family. Just under a fifth (18%) of survivors exit into a temporary placement, mostly living with friends or family temporarily.

Programmatic Challenges

The process of setting up and running a human services program is dynamic, involving evolution of policies and procedures governing the program. For example, in exploring the history of the program, we learned that two critical elements of this program, namely the introduction of rent-free living and the separation of residential management from advocacy roles, were the result of staff having observed adverse outcomes for program participants. Ongoing awareness of challenges, and the willingness to try new things to resolve them, are critical to the success of any program. In this section we capture a few ongoing challenges with which Coburn Place staff and leadership wrestle.

Challenges with the Voluntary Service Model

Some staff acknowledged challenges in preserving survivor choice while also providing encouragement to participate in services. One advocate talked about the

challenges in the voluntary-services model by saying,

“Some people just show that they need a little more push than others. Some people will have that desire and will run with it, and some need a bit more structure added to their situation. Where maybe it should be mandated that they meet with someone, not to control their situation or take their mastery away from them, but to pour into them.”

Some survivors we spoke to, particularly those who had benefited from services like individual and group therapy and workshops, felt that setting boundaries and expectations around participation in services would benefit everyone who entered the program. Some also expressed frustration and felt that those who did not actively engage in programming adversely impacted the experiences of those who did. At the same time, many survivors noted the importance of the voluntary service model in helping them feel respected and in control of their own destinies.

Challenges with the Low Barrier Model

Although entry criteria associated with substance use and mental health status were eliminated in the spirit of reducing barriers to entry, conversations with staff revealed that this may place a greater burden on the program since they were not equipped to provide substance abuse or mental health

treatment. It further seemed to some staff that the benefit of the program to participants with significant substance abuse and mental health issues may be less than for those without such issues.



Participant in Focus

Alicia (pseudonym) entered the TH program with an undiagnosed chronic medical condition that affects the central nervous system and mental health concerns. Alicia was fleeing an abuser and had a limited support system. Alicia experienced extreme paranoia, fled from the program once, was hospitalized twice and given heavy medication. The time required for Alicia's care was extensive with the staff taking turns sitting with the survivor in her apartment and helping to feed her. Eventually, Alicia was transferred to an assisted living facility where the survivor could stay with ample medical care and support.

Balancing Structure and Self Determination

Although the program attempts to minimize externally imposed boundaries, the conditions of living in an apartment complex with common areas shared with other DV TH residents necessitates the imposition of some rules. When entering the transitional housing apartments, program participants receive lease agreements (rent-free) and a resident handbook of rules. Some prominent rules affecting

residents' day to day living include: Guests must be off the property by 9:00pm unless overnight has been approved; and smoking inside the building is not allowed. There are designated smoking areas behind the building with no time restrictions. The residents share certain common areas like the computer lab, exercise room and laundry room. In general, program participants had mixed opinions regarding day to day residential rules and regulations, including but not restricted to smoking. The regulations that provided some survivors with a sense of safety and security caused others difficulty. For example, some survivors with kids preferred the 9pm curfew for guests, and others did not. For those with additional challenges like mental health diagnosis and substance use challenges, adhering to these residential lease regulations may prove more challenging. This is particularly problematic in a setting where most participants in the program have trauma histories, and disturbances can derail recovery. For example, one survivor who coped with multiple traumatic incidents by smoking was eventually evicted from the facility for failure to comply with the facility's no smoking policy.

Summary and Conclusions

While limited evidence has recognized the importance and value of transitional housing for domestic violence survivors, we have yet to fully understand the components which render a DV TH program effective. In this documentation of the Coburn Place Transitional Housing model, we set out to identify key components of one DV TH program that is viewed as being quite effective. We triangulated three sources of information -- program protocols and manuals, staff reports, and survivor interviews to achieve that goal. We then took our conclusions back to Coburn Place staff for their feedback and additional input.

The complementary data sources revealed five pillars guiding the program:

- maximizing safety;
- eliminating service and financial mandates;
- building trusting relationships;
- comprehensive and flexible advocacy and programming; and
- a staff culture of self-determination and growth.

Each of these pillars was characterized by intentional policies and structures designed to facilitate positive outcomes for survivors. Some of Coburn Place's policies are typical of

many DV TH programs, including minimal barriers to entry, voluntary services, safety measures, and providing services for children. Other components that are less typical but that likely positively impact the program's effectiveness are: the flexible service length (up to 24 months), rent-free living, separation of managerial and advocacy roles, emphasis on staff self-determination and growth, and the incredibly strong support they receive from the community. For example, having distinct staff positions for housing advocacy, wellness advocacy, and property management roles directly facilitated the development of trusting relationships with advocates by ensuring that compliance with property regulations did not interfere with the ongoing advocate-survivor relationship. Further, Coburn Place recognized that each of these roles requires different skill sets, knowledge and prior experience. Similarly, the elimination of rental obligations, in conjunction with the emphasis on financial education for survivors, was designed to increase the likelihood of DV TH residents transitioning into permanent housing by supporting their ability to resolve debts, take care of necessary expenses (e.g. health) and save money. The intentional attention to program participants' healing and personal wellbeing needs through the appointment of wellbeing advocates separate from the housing advocates ensures the provision of comprehensive advocacy. From a staffing perspective, Coburn Place supports advocates in making their own decisions

regarding the boundaries of advocacy. For example, advocacy can include accompanying a survivor on a bus ride or going to a religious service with them. On an administrative and systemic level, Coburn Place leadership makes an effort to offer pathways for professional growth and promotions within the organization, which promotes self-determination and growth.

Beyond the core policies and structures internal to the agency, the success of the DV TH program appears to be heavily influenced by strong community support. Many of the elements of this program require resources that are provided by a large fleet of dedicated volunteers as well as through community donations. Approximately nine years ago Coburn Place made the intentional decision to invest more heavily in their volunteer program and to build stronger relationships with volunteers and donors. This effort has paid off, with Coburn Place boasting 1,000 – 2,000 volunteers annually. Half of those volunteers also donate funds to the agency. The formalized integration of the volunteer program into the staffing plan of the organization has also facilitated long-term relationship building and retention of volunteers. In our conversations, we heard many examples of volunteers who had become staff, former staff continuing to support the organization, and of donors wanting to increase their involvement with the agency. This is a testament to Coburn Place's emphasis on building trusting relationships, both within and beyond their organization.

Some of the policies guiding the DV TH program require staff to engage in a balancing act in order to have the desired impact for program participants. For example, the commitment to voluntary services was made from the perspective that the system should not duplicate the power structures that characterize abusive relationships. However, as staff have discovered, they must walk the tightrope of intentionally providing encouragement and motivation while being careful not to impose upon or coerce program participants. Similarly, Coburn Place does not exclude survivors who are struggling with substance abuse or mental illness from their program, but this presents specific challenges for staff to deal with within the apartment complex so that all residents feel safe and supported.

This project was not an outcome evaluation of Coburn Place's DV TH program, so our conclusions are preliminary and based on having gained a deeper understanding of how the agency does its work and what they hope to accomplish. Coburn Place has an impressive housing placement rate: 78% of the program participants move from DV TH into permanent housing, and another 18% move into temporary housing (generally designed to lead to permanent housing). Staff and participants agreed that this success is likely due to the comprehensive and holistic advocacy provided throughout survivors' stay in the program, the fact that they do not pay rent while in the program, and the supportive atmosphere

created by Coburn Place. The evaluation team was especially impressed with Coburn Place staff's willingness to continually examine what is working and not working for survivors, and to adjust their services and expectations accordingly. Providing survivor-centered and trauma-informed services is complicated, time-consuming, and requires a deep commitment to ongoing learning and growth on the part of staff. Coburn Place embodies that commitment and practice, which likely leads to their inspiring success rate.

"We're all in this together. We're all family, and we lift each other up."

- Coburn Place staff member

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