

LIGHTLY EDITED FILE

Weekly Meeting – Flexible Funding

June 25th, 2020

National Alliance for Safe Housing (NASH)

Remote

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>> Suzanne Marcus: Hello, and welcome, everyone, to the Domestic Violence, Housing, and Technical Assistance Consortium's COVID-19 weekly special topic series.

Today we're discussing how direct cash assistance to help survivors maintain housing stability, otherwise known as flex funding, is utilized to address the economic, housing, and safety needs of survivors, which we all know are all exacerbated by COVID-19.

Today we have with us Shelby Lowrey-Lyonais from LifeWire, a domestic violence housing program in King County, Washington, and she'll share with you how they're finding it an effective strategy for addressing the expanding and deepening COVID-related needs for survivors.

Then we'll hear from Jennifer DeCarli and Jenise Jenkins from the New York City's Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-based Violence, along with their partner Shobana Powell from Sanctuary for Families who will share how they are distributing flexible funds to directly support survivors in across New York City through funding provided by the mayor's fund to advance COVID-19 emergency relief fund.

We're also joined by my Kris Billhardt from the National Alliance for Safe Housing and Marium Durrani from the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, who will help facilitate the discussion.

And my name is Suzanne Marcus.

Please add your questions in the comment box.

We really want this to be a discussion.

So encourage you to put your questions in the comment box, and we will be leaving ample for Q&A at the end of the presentation.

I also want to mention that you'll receive a link to a survey at the end of the webinar.

And I encourage you to take a minute to fill it out if you can.

DVHTAC is very interested to know how all of you in the field are coping with COVID-19 and the innovative strategies you're using and the barriers you're facing so that we can be responsive in our technical assistance.

Also, I want to mention that this webinar will be recorded.

Okay, Jenny, if you could advance.

I want to share with you a little bit about the Domestic Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium.

We're a group of TA providers with experience at the intersection of domestic violence and sexual assault and housing and homelessness, and we're funded through a collaboration of federal agencies -- [audio cut out]

[background noise]

Prime at DOJ, the Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs at HUD.

And the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Jenny, if you could advance.

Thank you.

Before we begin, we want to help set the context for this discussion.

Given that the intersectionality of domestic violence and sexual assault, homelessness and housing and COVID-19 create profound disparities that impact our work and the people we work with.

The Center for Court Innovation, SPARC, Supporting Partnerships for Anti-racist Communities, studied eight communities across the United States to understand racial inequities in homelessness and found that in total, 78% of people experiencing homelessness were people of color, and by comparison, the general population of the U.S. was 74% white, 12% Black, and 17% Hispanic/Latinx, rates of American Indian/Alaskan

Native homelessness were also disproportionately high, three to eight times higher than their proportion of the general population.

And through SPARC's work, DV, IPV, and SV, were a common thread across genders and age ranges of people of color experiencing homelessness.

An infographic on this intersection that you can find a link in the chat box, we'll place for you.

It's hot off the press.

We're excited to share it.

Next slide, please.

We also know that COVID-19 is impacting communities of color at much higher rates.

As of April 28th, Black Americans are dying at 2.6 times the rate of whites, or 26 deaths per 100,000 people.

And many states are effectively erasing Native Americans from their data sets by classifying them as "Other," state tracking by demographics -- by demographic, have found severely disparity rates of infection or death, excuse me.

Next slide, please.

And research suggests that racial residential segregation is a fundamental cause of health disparities.

Communities of color disproportionately live in neighborhoods that are further from grocery stores and medical facilities due to historical racial discrimination and redlining in housing policies. And many people of color live in federally assisted housing, including public housing and Section 8 programs that are often in segregated neighborhoods with less investments.

Next slide.

It is within this context that we're working to address survivors' safety, economic, and housing needs. And we'll now pivot to our speakers to discuss how flex funding is proving to be an innovative strategy providing support, particularly to survivors, who are unable to access or marginalized by mainstream services.

So with that, I'll introduce Shelby Lowrey-Lyonais to discuss their work at LifeWire in King County, Washington.

>> Shelby Lowrey-Lyonais: Thank you so much, Suzanne.

Hi, everyone.

This is Shelby Lowrey-Lyonais again from LifeWire.

I have a ton of information that I want to try to get to -- get through in this short amount of time, so I'm

gonna go as quickly as I can, but please do put questions in the chat and totally happy to provide my contact information at the end if anyone has any follow-up questions or anything that they'd love to chat and figure out with me.

I wanted to start by just giving a little bit of history on LifeWire and the journey with flexible fund that LifeWire has had and really talk about the things that we learned over the years, and talk really about the journey from where we started and where we are now with COVID.

And so I also do want to preface that LifeWire has been utilizing flex funds for many, many years far before I even came to the agency.

And the philosophy and framework of using flex funds had already been pretty grounded when I came in about five years ago, and the pieces that I've really been a part of since being here at LifeWire is really building on those foundations and fine-tuning the way that we're doing things and constantly trying to do them better and do them more equitably.

So LifeWire was part of a pilot project back in 2018 with the Bill and Melinda Gates organization, we are one of four organizations that agreed to participate in this project and to accept a fairly large pot of funds,

and at first, the agency was not really sure what we were going to do with them, and hadn't really decided, you know, how are we gonna spend these funds and what model are we gonna use?

And at the time it's important to know that we were already set up with a pretty strong infrastructure to do something new and to try something new and different and innovative and at the time, we had already had established some pretty unique models of our transitional program, our shelter program, and rental assistance programs for survivors that were pretty unheard of and unique at the time that we do still have at the agency, our shelter is a model that is set up in a master leasing situation with individual units, and our transitional program specifically serves survivors who are also experiencing or wanting support around substance use.

So it really made sense for LifeWire to take on this new project, and we were already really used to thinking about housing models pretty differently.

So at the time we really asked ourselves, what is still a gap?

What can these programs that we already have not do that we are really still seeing as a need?

And we decided at that time that just having flex funds

to be able to pay for and do things that these other programs couldn't was exactly what we wanted, and we really wanted to be able to, you know, sit in front of a survivor and just say, what do you need to keep you and your family safe or more stable, and what does that look like to you and how can we help you get there? And getting those funds really, you know, now we have the money to back up those questions to survivors. So I do also always like to be transparent that it was very rocky the first few years, as is any new thing that an agency is trying.

I think that before really becoming the trauma-informed DVHF, you know, housing-first focused model that we function under now, we were really siloed at the time. Both between the direct service programs and the other departments at the agency, but also within direct service teams, things were very fragmented.

There was very little communication going on between services and the finance department, for example.

Or the shelter team and the community advocacy team.

So we noticed really, really early on that that was not gonna work and that the departments were really, really, really going to all need to collaborate with one another and be invested in this work together.

So since then, and over the years, we've noticed a lot

of really important considerations.

And like I said, constantly working to try and make this better.

We, again, like I just said, we really very, very quickly learned that the teams needed to function a lot more fluidly.

And we recognized that the entire agency really needed to be behind the survivor-driven, trauma-informed, equity-based framework.

It really needed to be internalized.

There needed to be buy-in from every corner of the agency from the top all the way to the bottom.

And we asked ourselves, you know, how can we provide services like this if we aren't engaging with each other like this?

And so we really needed these frameworks and these philosophies and these values to stick, and we needed that information and that knowledge to really be instilled and passed down to new advocates as they started and as new folks entered the agency.

We have always really valued letting the survivors make the choices that work for them.

The most important question I think we've continued to ask ourselves over the years is, what does equity look like when talking about flex funds, and serving

survivors in general?

How are we reducing barriers to give access to the most marginalized?

How do we avoid being gate keepers of these funds?

How are we prioritizing the use of these funds?

You know, how do we make decisions?

How are we making sure that we are reducing biases in every way that -- when we're making decisions?

Another crucial piece I always like to emphasize is the really, really strong communication that is needed between the services part of the organization and the finance department.

The finance department really does, again, need to be bought into this same framework and be invested in the work.

From -- I would say that one of the big -- one of the things that has made this most successful at LifeWire is our finance team and the relationship that we've been able to build over the years.

Our finance team deeply understands the services that we are offering, advocacy, what it looks like.

They deeply understand the needs of survivors, the reality of the situations that they're facing.

They have an intimate knowledge of the funding streams and they'll really support us in being flexible and

creative, and knowing, you know, how can we spend the money in the most creative and innovative ways while also still getting the funders the invoices and the documentation that they need?

I, you know, go to my finance director pretty frequently and say, here's a survivor's need. I have no idea how we're gonna get around this documentation requirement.

What can we do?

And she's the first one in there like, okay, well, this requirement, we could do it like this.

They're constantly, you know, on board with us in supporting survivors the best that they can as well. Diverse flexible methods of payments are something I would also really want to emphasize.

Having as many different options for advocates or staff members to be getting money out as quickly as possible, whether that's checks, whether that's company credit cards, whether that's access to cash, utilizing cash apps at your agency, it really will, you know, this will give agencies the freedom to really reimagine what advocacy can look like and really push advocates to think about, what does flexibility really look like and what do survivors need?

So we did quickly see how magical it was to really be

able to stand in front of someone and say, what do you need, and then actually be able to do it.

And so since 2008, we have really worked on fine-tuning this, like I said.

Working on the infrastructure, the policies and the procedures, the different processes, and then really focused to staffing and making sure advocates are skilled and trained, because, yes, this money is phenomenal, but it's really that advocacy paired with the money that brings such success and great outcomes. It's that advocacy, that support, that other human being on the ground with survivors.

So for now, we have kind of shifted a little bit.

We are very, very privileged and very lucky to about where we are at with flexible funds.

At this point in agency, we have a dedicated advocate that does oversee our entire portfolio of flexible funds, the disbursement, the tracking, the reconciling. All direct service staff are trained on the use of flexible funds.

All advocates have access to these funds any time they are working with a survivor or speaking with a survivor on our help line.

They can pretty quickly do a request and then do the check request, get the cash out the door, make a credit

card payment online, and we do have specific processes and, you know, a couple of forms that we do use and tracking and logging procedures that I would be always happy to chat with anyone about how this could look for your agency.

And then when I'm thinking about -- when I think about how we make decisions and how we really view the use of flex funds, I think the thing that sticks out the most to me is just being low-barrier, and I think really thinking about race, identity, and access to resources, to access our flex funds, we are not requiring I.D., social security number, you know, proof of employment letters.

We recognize that that is a huge barrier for not only folks fleeing violence but oftentimes for undocumented populations.

We don't require that someone need to come in person to the office to meet us physically, to sign any form for us.

We also realize that access to transportation and child care and time off to be able to come into this office or stop by are all privileges that a lot of folks do not have.

And so we also really keep at the forefront of our minds that we are too a system and systems are and

historically have been oppressive and racist.

And they -- that -- unnecessary barriers get put up for Black, Indigenous and other persons of color, so a big part of the prioritization is really based in this marginalization framework and safety is a huge part of this.

We think about who historically and currently has had the least access to resources and services, that and that has been, again, Black, Indigenous and other persons of color, and less access to resources often means less access to safety.

So like the conversations that we are having with the survivors we're working with is just really exploring what's gonna work for them.

How will this aid in your long-term stability?

Is this a sustainable option for you?

Will this provide a bridge to stability for you?

Do, you know, what advocacy pieces or other support do you really need that gonna support with this in the long run?

Do you need connections to job search, employment navigators?

We can help support moving to that new location.

So it's so much about that advocacy piece.

And we really do try to connect people would resources

to bring in that community engagement piece.

And to braid together resources to maximize the impact any chance we get, so if someone, for example, calls in for energy assistance they're needing, we know that in our part of the county, there are energy assistance programs that exist for a lot of different folks, and so we might talk to them about that, see if they'd tried to utilize that, and say to them, there's this great resource over here, do you have the access and ability to apply for it?

And then we can look at using some of our funds that we would have used on the utility for something else.

Doe need some foods or basic needs or any other bills covered right now?

So really, being creative, I truly believe that you can tie most things to housing or stability.

Whether that's fixing of a car, whether that is legal or immigration fees to be able to obtain work status, whether that's a moving truck, whether that's gas money, there are so many ways to tie things to housing and to stability.

They all really impact one another.

So with the infrastructure that was already in place, it really did make our transition into COVID a lot less destabilizing and chaotic than it has been for a lot of

other to folks.

We had so many processes in place already to get money out the door pretty quickly without having -- without needing someone to come in and do anything.

So it has allowed us to really, really keep functioning really, really well.

We haven't had to shift much, but we have seen a bit of trends or patterns in the needs that are coming up for survivors right now during COVID.

We have definitely had to limit the types of things that we're wanting to prioritize.

I would say that normally, really, we'd consider any type of request in normal times and try and figure out a way to meet any sort of need that a survivor has, and for right now we have had to kind of shift over to prioritizing five main needs because the increase has just been so significant and the number of calls that we're receiving with everyone being out of work and impacted by COVID, we've had to really prioritize things like past due rent, health and medical type stuff for folks who are at high risk of COVID or have been exposed to COVID.

We've had to really prioritize unique safety needs and making sure folks have access to a safe cell phone or Internet access to be able to apply for unemployment or

apply for the resources that they're needing.

A lot of folks have needed cell phones for us to get them Trac phones for them to be able to even to text or call their advocate safely because they are now stuck at home with their abusive partner and do not have access to a safe phone or computer right now.

We've seen a huge increase in basic needs across the board.

We have done so many gift cards and purchases for food, for gas money, for cleaning supplies, for masks, for just all those things that are very, very expensive and a lot of folks do not have access to them.

We have utilized a lot of E-gift cards being creative with using apps like Instacart or Amazon Fresh that can deliver groceries to anybody who might not have the act to get to a grocery store.

So really trying to be as creative as possible and still getting that money out the door.

We have had to -- a lot of leasing offices and apartment complexes have been closed or the offices have not been open and they have not been accepting, you know, rent checks or checks or money orders like they normally do, we've had to figure out how we can get rent payments to landlords for survivors, and that's looked like online ACH bank transfer payments

and increase in the use of promissory letters that we're using to pledge these different amounts until their leasing offices open back up.

So a lot of shifts, and we lastly, really want to focus on too just the increased attention in how we're serving the undocumented populations.

This crisis is obviously hitting a lot of that population extremely hard.

And when thinking about who did not have access to the stimulus checks, who are not eligible for most of the mainstream resources, and we're having a lot of conversations with those folks around the fear of the public charge rule, and what it means to them, and the fear that they carry to reach out for rent assistance, for food assistance, for their families.

So we're really, really trying to focus our energy and funds on that population right now.

And, again, being creative in how we can get the funds out.

We work with a lot of folks who often live in non-traditional living situations, so they might not object a lease or be the primary lease holder or they might be living with a friend or family member who is undocumented that is not comfortable sharing any information or filling out a W-9 form for us.

And so we really try to figure out, okay, how can we maybe go get a money order instead?

Or how could we go get someone maybe some Visa gift cards and support with the bills, and cell phone bills and everything else right now so they can dedicate the funds they do have towards getting those rent amounts covered.

So lastly, really just want to emphasize, flexibility, flexibility, flexibility.

It is so key.

When going after funds, or grant opportunities, it's so important to diversify your funds and the options that you have as much as possible so you can really build up a diverse portfolio where the most needs can be met.

For example, we are really lucky to have several different pots of flex funding at this time.

And so we're often really able to say, okay, this pot of funding can really pay for this type of thing, but not this type of thing, but, oh, we have this other pot over here that is a lot more flexible and we can pay for things, or we might have a private donation that is specifically aimed to serve the LGBTQ community.

And I think it's just such a unique time right now that we are in and thinking about flex funds and access to cash assistance, I've been thinking so much about, you

know, how the federal government, even with the current administration, gave -- while concerns and problematic in some ways, gave no strings attached money to millions of families in the United States.

And, you know, in some ways kind of just used a few funds framework or housing first framework in that people need money right now, so give it to them without putting up a ton of barriers or deciding whether those people deserve the money or worrying what they might go spend that money on.

And I'm really, really hopeful that this could be a bit of turning point and that a lot more attention can really be focused on why access to quick cash assistance and flexible funds are just so crucial in the lives of survivors.

Thank you all so much.

>> Suzanne Marcus: Thank you, Shelby.

That was really interesting and helpful to hear how a program like yours that's been well established pivots to meet this need or these new needs.

And so now I want to turn the presentation over to what exciting work is going on in New York City.

Jennifer DeCarli and Jenise Jenkins are with the New York City Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-based Violence.

And Shobana Powell is with sanctuary for families.

They have a newly established flew fund program to serve survivors city-wide.

Specifically to address the COVID crisis.

So with that, I will turn it over to you all.

>> Thank you so much, Suzanne.

This is Jennifer DeCarli and I'm going to start our presentation.

First I just want to thank all of you for inviting us to participate today, and, Shelby, thank you for sharing so much wisdom and knowledge.

We have much to learn from you as we stand up a brand-new flexible funding program in New York City, and I mean brand-new.

We launched on June 15th.

So we are completely not well established.

And a pilot program.

And we really look forward to continuing conversations with Shelby and learning from her wisdom and years of experience.

As Suzanne said, I work at the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-based Violence, we say "End DGBV" for short.

Which are I'm sure folks know on the call, really, you know, one-shop models of supportive services for

survivors of gender-based and domestic violence.

We have 40 community based organizations that work out of those centers and we work very closely with Sanctuary for Families.

So my role today is in the next, like, three to four minutes just to give a background on how we received this funding and how we quickly set up the program in partnership with sanctuary.

And then I'm gonna hand it over to my colleagues, Jenise Jenkins and of Shobana Powell.

So my office received this funding through private particulars as part of the mayor's fund to advance New York City.

As everyone knows and has heard in the news, New York City really was the epicenter of the COVID crisis in March and our private funders really were wanting to help and really help the most vulnerable populations.

So we received a generous donation in a private funder through our city's COVID emergency financial relief fund, which was part of our mayor's fund to advance New York City.

And it was really geared toward helping survivors of domestic and gender bases violence, the most vulnerable populations who had needs that were exacerbated by

COVID.

And those needs were in the categories of safety needs, housing needs and financial needs.

And the purpose was to quickly stand up a program that could get money out to those survivors in a very low-barrier, client-victim-centered philosophy.

And we had been really -- we were really thrilled to receive this funding but to also do it in partnership with Sanctuary.

Our office had been looking to receive funding for years, because we've been so awed and, you know, really amazed by the work going on in Washington and really this new best practice of helping the most vulnerable find safety and stability through these creative programs.

So we've been trying to stand up a program and we were really, you know, it sounds odd to say lucky with the COVID crisis, but we were really thrilled to be able to stand this program up in response to what was going on in New York City with COVID.

So what makes New York City's program so unique is that at the Family Justice Centers, we work in partnership with over 40 agencies on site.

We also have another 30 to 40 agencies that work in community.

And we have worked very closely with them as well.

And so we needed to stand up this program quickly and partner with a CBO who could really be the kind of city contracted direct service provider of this program.

But receiving applications from all of those programs.

So Sanctuary for Families is doing that work with us.

They've been a long-standing partner and Shobana will talk more about what they do, but they are receiving applications on for these micro grants.

The funding allows to provide approximately an average of \$1,500 to 200 survivors for those immediate safety, housing, and financial needs, but to receive applications from all of our on and off site partners evident New York City Family Justice Centers which is about as I said 80 partners.

So that is quite a -- kind of a lift.

And as I said, we launched -- we received the funding in March/April.

We announced it in May and we stood up the program on June 15th.

So we've only been accepting applications for about a week and a half.

And we're really trying to adhere to the philosophy of client victim-centered, and so I'll turn to it over to Shobana now to give you some more details on how it's

been going.

>> Yeah, sure, thanks, everyone, for here.

My name is Shobana Powell.

I am of the director our micro grant program.

I work at Sanctuary for Families and we're a large anti-gender-based violence organization in New York City, like Jen was saying, we are working really closely with the mayor's office.

This is, like, a great example partnership I think where emailing and talking almost every day.

Working it out.

But just to give you all an updated of where we're at, I'm just gonna talk a little bit about where we're at data-wise, case examples, how we include survivors, and then Jenise is gonna talk about kind of measuring our impact.

So I was just checking because I had a note that we had 80 applications before this webinar started.

And then I checked just now, and we're up to 82.

So that's the way it's -- 83, so that's the way it's going.

So it's been about seven business days?

And we have 83 applications.

And we just hit \$150,000 in requested funds, which is half of our full amount that we have.

So it has been really interesting rolling out and we're not surprised that people are applying because the need is there and we have fierce advocates.

But it's a lot.

So we're happy.

We're just trying to make it work.

Just to give you a little bit of a break-down on that.

A lot of our applications, we're happy to say, are coming from smaller culturally specific organizations in New York City, which was one of our hopes, was that we could get this funding out to organizations that don't typically have the same privilege and access that our larger orgs do, and a lot of the survivors that we're serving are undocumented, so they're not able to meet a lot of their needs because they don't qualify for public support to meet those needs.

So we're really happy about that and it kind of ties to what was being spoken about earlier around equity and access and race.

And I'm hoping that we're gonna be able to be pulling some of the data on exact percentages and break down by different disparities.

So to give you Guys some case examples.

It actually on my end, I feel like I have the best job because I get to be looking at all the applications and

interacting with the service providers.

And it has been fun because the providers are amazing.

That's not surprising.

But it's kind of nice.

I'm a clinician myself and I'm like there are so many others out there like me.

And I call the provider, and I'm like, hey, can we talk this through?

I don't know how we can pay for this need, because like they were saying earlier, we can't get the tax I.D. from the landlord, they're unwilling.

Okay, let's talk about what else we can pay for.

And also just hearing how hard providers are working with their clients to advocate for them, to get these needs met, by the time they get to us, it's not like they've done nothing.

They've tried everything and I'm, like, floored by the case plans they had in place and their plans for the future.

So that's been really nice.

But just to share some actual examples.

Of just kind of, like, creative needs that we've been meeting already in seven days.

We had a survivor who, her abuse was -- it involved her toilet, so her toilet was damaged and so we were able

to pay for a new toilet for her as well as dog food for her therapy dog which is something that, you know, most programs are not set up to pay for.

It doesn't fit into a box.

I don't think most people have on their list toilet and dog food as essential needs, but they really are essential needs.

So that was really exciting.

And then another one was we had a client who was a burn victim, and it affected her eyesight, and she really quickly needed glasses in order to function, and we were able to meet that need very quickly.

It's hot out in New York City.

And another survivor needed an air conditioner, because her child had severe medical conditions, and they had just moved out of housing with the partner who was causing harm, and so we were able to get that air conditioner for that client.

Let's see.

They're all fun.

There's lots of good ones.

I have a whole list.

Another one that I thought was interesting and kind of culturally relevant was a client was able to divorce her partner in -- under Sharia law but was not able to

divorce her partner under U.S. law due to COVID-19 and issues getting into the courts.

And so she was able to move out, but she's having some financial issues because she hasn't been able to access that divorce, so we were able to help with furniture.

And then another one that I thought was interesting was just a classic case of I think what we see a lot with survivors.

We had a client who just has so many needs to the point where she didn't know what to ask for.

And so it's been kind of a team effort between me, the provider, and one of my colleagues who's been doing our purchasing, to help come up with what those needs are because the client needs everything and she's so humble, and she's like, no, I don't think I need that, or that sounds too expensive, and so kind of working through, no, you really do need clothes for yourself as well as your kids.

And kind of doing some of that back and forth.

And then the last one I'll share because I have so many, is I think a good example during COVID-19, people need laptops right now in order to work.

And to be connected to society.

We know isolation is so important to combat for survivors.

We have a survivor who they -- the abuser was controlling her laptop access and was able to view what she was doing on there.

And to the point where, like, she would have to -- she had a plan with a service provider that for this 15-minute break, she could step out of the house and call the service provider to just have some connection to the outside world.

And so we were able to purchase a laptop for her so that she could have one that's safe.

And we were able to deliver it to her work, which is a safer place, because otherwise her abuser would have been able to access the laptop.

So that was, like, a really interesting and I think creative one.

And the last thing I want to say on that is also to that partnership with your finance team, I literally was just emailing back and forth with them.

We have a survivor who, the invoice for her rent does not match the name on there.

It does not match her name because it's under her father's name who is her abuser.

But she needs to pay rent.

Normally, we would need the room mate or the landlord to send us a little memo that says, oh, this person

lives here even though their name isn't on the invoice. Well, for her case, that's not safe because the father has connections with the landlord.

There's just no way to make that happen.

And so it kind of took -- it's an interesting chain of advocacy, where the provider's advocating with me and then I'm advocating with our finance team tanned it really worked out because they are trauma informed and I explained there's a safety issue and they said you know what?

Yeah.

We're okay with the provider can just send you an email that says, yes, that client lives there, let's just do that.

And I think it was, like, just a good example of how we can break down barriers if we do have a team effort.

And then the last thing I want to say, just is on survivor inclusion.

Jen and Jenise, I don't know if you know this, but I'm doing my -- currently working on my dissertation on how organizations often re-exploit or socially exploit survivors in our attempts to have the survivor voice included in our work.

And so I'm kind of doing my research and my work around replacing that exploitation with equity.

So what does survivor equity look like?

And we're really trying to implement that in the work that we're doing on this project.

So we had have a paid survivor consultant who is an expert not only because of their lived experience but also their work in the field, and then also he's an LGBTQ, plus rights activist and an immigrant rights activist so he has been informing and consulting kind of on our whole process and project, and really giving us some good feedback from that perspective, and that's not to say that people on our team are not survivors. We know a lot of people in this field are survivors but there is that unique perspective of someone who has taken that risk of disclosing their survivorship and are able to inform from that perspective of someone who has gone through the process and gone through the services before.

So he's been really helpful in kind of guiding us and saying, even if someone's just applying online on behalf of their client, the wording that you use in that application is how the client -- or how the provider's gonna speak to that client.

So it really does matter.

So that I think has been really beautiful.

Yeah, I see Kathy put the hashtag

#EquityNotExploitation.

I like that.

So I'm gonna pass it over to Jenise to talk about how we're measuring the impact of this whole project.

>> Jenise Jenkins: Thanks, Shobana, and thank you all who have joined today.

As mentioned, I'm Jenise Jenkins and I work for "End DGBV."

And I, along with Jennifer, help to oversee the operations and programs of our Family Justice Centers. And so want to give you some information about the way we are evaluating and provide -- and collecting data on our very new program.

And so with this being a very new program, and New York City, you know, flex funding being a new strategy, New York City is using city-wide, to support survivors, we knew from the onset that we needed to be able to demonstrate not only the need but also the impact of our program.

We at "End DGBV" and along with Shobana and many other of our providers really believe in this model.

And so we want others to believe in it as well.

And so we knew for sure that we needed to do some evaluation of our program so that we can prove how great of a resource this -- and strategy for supporting

survivors this really is.

And so we wanted to do a few things.

We -- in our evaluation.

And collection of data.

We wanted to kind of demonstrate of course the needs, as I mentioned, so that we can broaden the program, create future programs, have this be really a widely used tool for supporting survivors.

We also wanted to understand better who we were serving, you know, understanding that we would be supporting survivors of the domestic and gender-based violence, and we really wanted to just kind of better understand what their needs were, what were the barriers around their housing and financial stability. And then of course we wanted to be able to enhance our program model, it being very new and very much a pilot, you know, we are kind of and almost kind of building the ship as we go.

We wanted to be able to take a look post-pilot, to see how we can -- and even actually as we're going, and as we're building, we want to kind of immediate feedback from survivors, from providers, on how we can improve the model that we've created so that we are better serving survivors.

And so in this process, we are engaging both providers

and clients, and so both will be asked to participate in a survey.

For survivors, the survey will be anonymous and voluntary.

And so there's no mandate or requirement for them to receive -- to take the survey in order to receive the funding.

And so we -- it was important for us to make that very clear.

To survivors when they -- and providers, so they can share this information with the clients that they would be applying for.

But it was important for us to get this information out to survivors.

So hopefully to increase their willingness to -- to participate in the survey.

But also just wanting to make sure that we are moving in our principles and philosophies in making sure that we are best -- using best practices in supporting survivors through this program.

And even in our survey.

And so we plan to have a -- there's three surveys.

Very short surveys, but three of them.

One at the initial stage, so right after a survivor or, sorry, a provider submits an application on behalf of a

survivor, we want to be able to reach out to that survivor and just get a kind of basic understanding of what some of their past and current financial and housing situations are, and some of the barriers that they faced in obtaining stable housing, and securing finance and economic stability.

And then -- and so that's our initial survey, kind of our pre-survey.

And then we wanted to just get a -- a quick kind of immediate impact review, and quick feedback loop from survivors, and so we plan to do a one-month as well as a three-month survey, and so that's one month following receipt of the funding, the micro-grant, and then three months after receiving the micro-grant.

And so we're asking survivors to participate in those two surveys.

And those surveys, very similar to each other, will really kind of help us to understand how the micro-grant program helped to improve their financial and housing situation, how it met their needs, around safety, their comments and feedback on program satisfaction, so really understanding from them, you know, what were the pieces of this program that worked really well for them, and what were some of the pieces that didn't?

So, for example, you know, did they receive the money -- the micro-grant fast enough?

Was it in a time frame that was expeditious and swift?

So we want to get a better understanding of things like that.

Were they treated with respect when the service provider was helping them to fill out the -- the application?

And if there was any need for us to help connect them to additional services for ongoing support.

And then lastly, we want to understand if this helped to improve their kind of well-being.

So not only improving safety, but just also their general well-being, so their mental health, that of them and their children.

And so as Shobana mentioned, we have a survivor consultant who is helping us.

On this project and giving us some honest feedback.

On how we're wording the application, and as well as how we're wording our survey questions.

And so it's been extremely helpful in that.

And so we're trying to reframe and rephrase questions to eliminate bias and survivor blaming, so instead of asking, for example, do you -- do you think you'll be able to pay your rent next month?

You know, after receiving this grant.

Maybe the question needs to be rephrased, and asked as, do you need help to pay future rent?

And so really kind of looking at how we're asking the questions, before we begin to roll this out is really important to us.

And so we're hoping through this, we'll be able to get some really helpful information to really demonstrate that New York City is operating a very new strategy, new program, that is really impacting survivors' lives, the lives of them and their families, and in a way that we hadn't been before.

And that this model could be replicated across the city, through different organizations and agencies that are serving survivors, and so we're really hoping in this will prove that.

And then we're also we're hoping to get more funding. Our funding is limited, with this being a pilot.

And so we're hoping that through this survey, we will prove that there is a real need to scale this program.

And so we're hoping that we can entice other funders to -- to support the work that we're doing, and hopefully, like Shelby mentioned -- will bring about a real diversity of funding.

So that we can be even more creative and helping

survivors through this flex funding micro-grant program.

Thank you.

>> Suzanne Marcus: Great, thank you, Jenise.

And thanks to all four of you.

What a rich conversation.

This is Kris Billhardt from NASH, long-time fan of flex funding, and it's just been a great conversation and we're so happy to hear from your different perspectives.

How much you have in common in terms of values behind your programs.

And how flexible you're being in the way that the money gets spent down.

We have a few questions in the chat, and we actually had -- some questions that people sent in when they registered for today's session.

And many of them, surprise, surprise, fall into the category of funding.

[Laughter]

So you mentioned, folks from New York City, that you had a grant from your mayor's office, that the mayor made some funding set aside specifically for this, and you're seeking other ways to get it funded and keep it going.

So maybe this question is more for you, Shelby, you did mention wanting to have diversified funding that you can go to for different purposes when requests come in. Can you talk a little bit about what some of the funding sources are for your program?

>> Shelby Lowrey-Lyonais: Yes, of course.

So LifeWire currently has -- ah -- about seven or eight different pots of flexible funding.

They do come from a variety of different areas or levels.

We get a couple of different private donations, absolutely.

We get a specific private donation from the Pride Foundation, specifically to serve LGBTQ survivors.

We get a couple of different pots from local cities in our county.

So that is coming directly from the human services commission at those cities.

Specifically to serve the LGBTQ community.

We have one county source of prevention style flexible funds.

We get a grant from the local chapter of United Way, the Seattle King County United Way, and then we also, the last big one I can think of is our VOCA enhanced flex funds, so that would be access going through your

state VOCA office.

>> Kris Billhardt: That's great.

Thank you, Shelby.

And yeah, we didn't want to mention about VOCA that the Final Rule expanded the allowable uses of funds, and many states, sometimes through their state domestic or sexual violence coalition have managed to set up programs with that funding that really have allowed a lot of the victim service providers to expand their ability to provide direct assistance for housing and flex funds is a huge part of that.

So some of you may live in states where that's occurred.

Washington State of course is one.

California, Pennsylvania, Colorado, others around the country.

So those of you who are interested in acquiring flex funds can certainly join with your state coalitions, and other providers, to advocate with your state VOCA administrator to direct some of the funds that come to the state through VOCA.

>> Kris, could I add something?

>> Kris Billhardt: Sure.

>> Yeah, I just want to say too, I would really encourage folks just to be super flexible -- or sorry,

super -- hmm, I think the thing that I always think of is even when we are applying for, whether it's county, whether it's city, whether it's state, whether it's even like federal HUD C.O.C. funds, I think it's always great to see how flexible the funder that you're going after funds through will be, and I think any time we're applying for a rapid rehousing program, a rental assistance program, whatever kind of housing program or funding source it is, we always try to include in those applications some sort of pot of flexibility and I know that even with the HUD rapid rehousing program that we have, they, too, allow us to have a tiny pot of what they call client assistance dollars, that are obviously not as flexible as the private donation types of funds are gonna be because it is HUD, federal government funds, but I think just really being creative in any opportunity you have to potentially put in applications or request for some or all of that money to be as flexible as possible.

>> Kris Billhardt: Exactly.

Yeah, included as a line item in budgets that you're putting in to many of your funders, and it also spreads the word about how -- what an important resource this is.

And how essential it is to the work that you're doing.

And coupled with the advocacy that they might be also funding you to do.

So, yes, great creativity.

And we did have one question about whether individual donors support your flex program.

You mentioned one -- well, you certainly mentioned private donors, Shelby.

But I'm wondering, is there a capacity in your program to accept individual donations for flex needs survivors may have?

>> Shelby Lowrey-Lyonais: Yeah, absolutely.

And I think that really goes back to, along with creating that really good relationship with your finance department that, really good relationship you can build with also your fundraising, the fundraising folks at your agency, and really solid communication of, like, what are the survivors needing, and helping your fundraising department really be able to talk about flexible funds, and to be able to kind of market this way of doing things.

We do get occasional private donations from local community members that hear about our services.

Or maybe they're friends of board members.

So we can accept donations like that.

I think I've definitely seen an uptick of those

donations since COVID, because a lot of folks are like, how can we get involved?

And I know a family member of a staff member just a few weeks ago donated \$10,000 and specifically wanted that funding to only be used for gift cards for gas and groceries, and so that was 10,000 that'd we were able to put pretty quickly into a pot that just is gonna be able to go to food and basic needs.

So, yes.

Totally.

>> Kris Billhardt: Yeah, I think it's true that a lot of individual donors want to know, my dollars went to this person, or, you know, certainly they don't know what person, but it went for a specific need, and it feels like it made quite an impact that they were able to help make happen.

So thanks for that.

I'm wondering -- there's another question about whether -- what your standard procedures are when paying people directly.

So what the funds are going right to the survivor, how do you handle that?

And also, there was a question about disaster relief payments and how you handle that tax-wise.

So either the New York City folks or Shelby.

Have anything to say about those?

Questions?

>> Wanted to give the New York folks a chance.

I'm happy to talk about, wanted to give the other folks a chance.

We -- typically, our first attempt is always to pay vendors directly.

We do limit giving funding directly to clients or participants.

The one kind of exception to that is with our cash -- any cash needs.

And so like I mentioned, we have credit cards, checks, and cash are probably the three main primary payment methods we use.

Ideally we're gonna pay a vendor directly, so we're trying to make payments directly to the utility action, to the landlord, to the car mechanic, to the whoever directly.

For check payments, which is the most preferred type of payment, the one form that is required or document process that's required is obtaining a completed W-9 form, which is a standard IRS document.

It is -- can be filled out really, really quickly, and so most landlords and most businesses and entities and individuals are fairly comfortable filling those out

and giving it to us, and then if for some reason, they are not comfortable or, like, I know we've paid, like, GM or Chrysler, and I'm never gonna get someone on the phone that's gonna give me Amazon's W-9.

So for those type of things we go to credit card payments or try and make an online or over the phone credit card payment.

And then if that is not an option, cash is kind of the third thing that we try and that's typically where we see direct distribution to survivors happening, and the one thing that we do internally is just to have one simple form be signed, basically showing that that money was handed off from a staff member to the survivor directly, as kind of a checks and balances.

So if I'm going to meet someone or they're stopping by and I'm gonna be handing them cash, I have them sign a really quick form, just their signature and date that shows I they did receive that money from me.

And we'll oftentimes send pictures of that or email those forms if they can't come in person to sign it, and they can even respond and say, yes, I received this money or something like that.

>> Kris Billhardt: Perfect.

Thank you so much, and time has flown.

I want to thank everybody for attending today.

I mentioned just a couple of really quick resources.

In the chat.

You'll see that we've got flex funding FAQ that was developed in partnership between National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith and Credit and the Washington State Coalition.

You can get the link to it right there in the chat.

We also have put together a document that details all the parameters around the C.A.R.E.S. funding, the different funding that came down in that act, and what it can be used for.

And we can send that out in follow-up information.

And the last little plug really quickly is the slide you see in front of you right now is a reminder about that short survey that Suzanne mentioned at the front of the, you can link to it right there from the slide and that would really help us know what's going on in the field and what the needs are.

We're looking at how we can pull together a huge bank of information that's gonna help everybody out there responding to COVID, and then moving through COVID.

When we do get to do that.

[Laughter]

So thanks, everybody, so much for being here today.

We hope you got something from this webinar.

I know that I did.

And we'll be back again with a next session.

I think we're taking a break next week because of the 4th of July holiday.

But we'll be back in early July with our next COVID-related special topic session.

Thanks, everybody.

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