

# ACROSS THE CONTINUUM:

RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOUSING FOR SURVIVORS OF  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN FLORIDA

## **Executive Summary**

The problem of homelessness in Florida has become a central focus for the state. Florida has the third highest number of homeless people in the nation and it also has one of the highest rates of domestic violence. Survivors of domestic abuse are often forgotten in the homeless continuum because, by the very nature of what they are experiencing, they must remain hidden. This document was created to address the housing needs of survivors of domestic abuse throughout Florida. FCADV is the statewide membership organization for Florida's 42 certified domestic violence centers, and is the primary representative of survivors of domestic violence in the public policy arena. Members share the goal of ending domestic violence through community education, public policy development, and services for survivors and their children. FCADV is governed by a Board of Directors, and its mission is to create a violence-free world by empowering women and children through the elimination of personal and institutional violence and oppression against all people. It is critical that a comprehensive, statewide plan be developed for survivors of domestic abuse and their children with their unique needs in mind. Without housing, many survivors are forced to stay or return to the only home they have, with their abuser. FCADV, its member programs' and allied organizations throughout the state must collaborate to not only ensure that the survivors of domestic violence and their children have adequate housing and that housing is readily available so that they can flee the abuser safely, but also ensure that the housing be provided in ways that meet their unique needs and situations.

Here are some startling statistics:

- Between 22 and 57% of all homeless women report that domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, 38% of all victims of domestic violence become homeless at some point in their lives.<sup>2</sup> A victim of domestic violence will often leave an abuser multiple times before finally escaping the violence, therefore, experiencing multiple periods of homelessness.<sup>3</sup>
- Over 90% of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives, and 63% have been victims of intimate partner violence as adults.<sup>4</sup> In a 2006 report by the U. S. Conference of Mayors, 44% of the cities surveyed identified domestic violence as the primary cause of homelessness.<sup>5</sup>
- Over 80% of survivors entering shelters identified "finding housing I can afford" as a need, second only to "safety for myself" (85%).<sup>6</sup>

## **The Need**

The problem of domestic abuse in Florida is a devastating one. It is estimated that 1,560,000 women are victimized annually in Florida <sup>7, 10, 11</sup>. It accounts for 15% of all crime and 20% of all homicides in Florida <sup>12</sup>. The economic impact is different from that of traditional homelessness but nonetheless staggering. The costs to businesses, the criminal justice system, medical and mental health care costs, and child abuse are estimated to be **\$3,503,745,762** annually<sup>7</sup>.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, domestic abuse is the immediate cause of homelessness for many women. Studies also suggest that many women experiencing homelessness are survivors of domestic abuse, even if it is not the current cause of their homelessness, further supporting the correlation between domestic abuse and homelessness.<sup>8</sup>

Survivors of domestic abuse are affected by a unique type of homelessness. Unlike many who are homeless because they have been evicted or displaced, survivors have fled their homes in order to be safe. At the time they leave, they are often in the most danger of being killed. Finding safe immediate housing and ultimately long term housing requires help from providers who understand the circumstances that created their homelessness in the first place.

Survivors need specialized housing services in order to remain safe and gain independence from their abuser. Abusers often isolate survivors from support networks and financial resources in order to control them. Abusers commonly sabotage a victim's economic stability, making victims more vulnerable to homelessness when they make the decision to flee. Many survivors have trouble finding rental properties because they may have poor credit, rental, and employment histories as a result of their abuse.

The continuum of housing options that should be provided differs from someone who is homeless for economic or other reasons. Housing options should address the safety, economic and physical recovery needs of the individual survivor and their children and pets. This recommended continuum starts with Homeward Bound and ends with Affordable Permanent Supportive Housing.

## **Safety First, Housing Second**

Survivors of domestic abuse have both short and long term housing needs. Immediately, survivors may require safe short term housing away from their abuser. Ultimately, the family requires access to safe, stable, affordable permanent housing. A strong investment in affordable housing is crucial to this population so that the survivors and their families are able to leave the shelter system as quickly as possible, without returning to their abusers. Providers must have the capacity to address safety issues, as well as provide the empowerment based programmatic philosophy and legal protection necessary to keep families safe and alive.

***For these reasons, it is recommended that housing options for survivors of domestic abuse should only be delivered by or in partnership with agencies that are state certified and specialize in the delivery of domestic abuse services.***

Certified agencies have confidential locations with legal protections, including staff with privilege to safeguard the survivors and their children. Survivors are also offered specialized services such as relocation and injunctions. Additionally, unlike other housing providers, certified centers provide protections around information that might be used by the abuser to locate the survivor.

## **Homeward Bound**

Abusers often isolate and alienate survivors from their family and support network. They may move their partner away from family to further isolate them. Sending a survivor home to family is often an option if they have been isolated and they want to relocate out of area. A certified advocate can work with the survivor on reunification with their family. A plan must be made to address safety during travel.

## **Emergency Shelter**

The most dangerous time for a survivor is immediately after they have left their abuser. In Central Florida, 80-90% of victims who are killed had left or were in the process of leaving their abuser. Emergency shelters, as defined by HUD, are typically one night of shelter with no additional overlay services. Due to safety concerns this type of housing is not recommended for survivors in danger.<sup>9</sup>

### **Short-Term or Temporary housing**

The average length of stay at one of Florida's certified domestic violence centers is 45 days. Under the HUD definition, all certified domestic violence centers in the Florida continuum fall under this category. This type of housing serves the needs of those in lethal danger that have left the abuser but are still at risk. Due to state legislation, only programs operated by State Certified Centers are protected by law. This protection provides confidentiality of the location, criminal penalties for coming on property without permission and additional safe guards to protect those living there. These programs are also designed to address the trauma that victims of crime who have had to flee and are still in danger face. All aspects of service delivery are designed and state regulated to ensure that those who have suffered from abuse have the environment needed to feel safe and regain a sense of control.

Since the time that a survivor leaves is the most dangerous, it is strongly recommended that all survivors in danger be placed ONLY with State certified providers. Well-meaning providers who are not certified may be unaware of the unique challenges involved in the escape and the subsequent danger of an abuser who is hunting the survivor. By offering shelter, they jeopardize not only the survivor but other residents and staff at their facilities. Also, by moving a survivor too quickly into other housing, they risk the abuser finding them and forcing them to flee their new home, facing homelessness once again.

There are currently 1908 emergency shelter beds available across the state and eleven of Florida's 42 certified domestic violence centers have expansion plans to add an additional 278 beds to serve an additional 2200 survivors and their children each year.

### **Rapid Rehousing**

Approximately 50% of survivors in Florida are employed at the time that they flee their abuser<sup>13</sup>. For this reason, rapid rehousing for those survivors who have been able to continue employment and who can be immediately rehoused safely is a good option for many. Short term supportive services are needed as survivors regain their independence and address ongoing safety issues. Domestic Abuse providers offer outreach services at no cost to survivors of domestic abuse. These services can easily be utilized by those taking advantage of rapid rehousing however specialized advocacy services for Rapid Rehousing is recommended.

## **Transitional Housing**

Due to lack of affordable housing and adequate permanent supportive housing, many survivors find themselves staying in the domestic abuse center or moving into a transitional housing program. Due to safety issues or medical concerns, it may not be possible for a survivor to leave the protected environment of a center within 90 days.

Pregnant women fleeing an abusive relationship may be unable to gain employment until after they give birth. They also need time for post-partum recovery. In these cases transitional housing is best done in conjunction with a secure daycare center that can accommodate children.

Because of the trauma that the survivor and their family have experienced, the ability to move out of a communal environment as quickly as possible is preferable. Transition and mobility is hard on children who have already been uprooted and traumatized. The priority must be getting children and their parents into a stable environment where they can grow their support network.

For safety and stability reasons, traditional, communal housing *is not appropriate or safe* for survivors of domestic abuse. Clustering survivors in unsecured, publically accessible location makes it a target for every abuser who is looking for their partner. This type of housing creates a dangerous environment not only for survivors but for the staff working there as well. Transitional housing should keep these safety factors in mind and it is recommended that this type of housing only be offered to those needing continued protection at a State certified center. There are currently 759 transitional housing beds located at certified centers in Florida.

## **Permanent Supportive Housing**

Helping survivors and their families stabilize in a safe environment as quickly as possible is the goal. Providers must work with housing providers to advocate for survivors since many have had their credit history destroyed as part of the economic abuse. In addition, they may need ongoing support to address safety in the workplace. Rental assistance allows the survivor to rebuild their resources and enables them to live independently. Due to the danger of “clustered site housing”, permanent supportive housing for survivors should be community based, scattered site housing except under special circumstances.

While many women who experience domestic abuse need only short-term support, others face numerous barriers to achieving independence free from abuse and require long-term permanent supportive housing and a variety of support services. These survivors may

have medical or other disabilities that put them at greater risk for being re-abused and should be provided services that meet these needs. This could be in an apartment type of housing with additional security to ensure their safety.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. The community should include domestic abuse survivors as a category of homeless as they assess numbers, need and allocation of funds.
2. Every person seeking services from a homeless services provider should be screened to determine if they are in immediate danger from their intimate partner. If they are in danger, they should immediately be connected with a local state certified domestic violence center.
3. Safe, short term housing (also known as emergency shelter) for survivors in danger or who have just left their abuser should only be provided by a state certified domestic violence center.
4. Housing options for survivors of domestic violence should only be delivered by or in partnership with agencies that are state certified and specialize in the delivery of domestic violence services. Funders should request a formal MOU to verify the partnership.
5. The majority of housing should be focused a combination of Rapid Rehousing and Community Based Supportive Housing. For safety reasons, transitional housing should only be provided onsite at a state certified facility.
6. All housing options should be operated with safety as a priority and with a programmatic empowerment based philosophy.
7. Homeless services providers shall not require victim service providers<sup>14</sup> to enter personally identifying information about clients into an Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)<sup>15</sup>.

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**Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence**

425 Office Plaza Drive  
Tallahassee, FL 32301  
850.425.2749  
[www.fcadv.org](http://www.fcadv.org)

**Harbor House of Central Florida, Inc.**

PO Box 680748  
Orlando, FL 32868  
407.886.2244  
[CWick@harborhousefl.com](mailto:CWick@harborhousefl.com)  
[www.harborhousefl.com](http://www.harborhousefl.com)

**Media Contact**

Leisa Wiseman, Director, Communications and Government Affairs, FCADV  
[Wiseman\\_Leisa@fcadv.org](mailto:Wiseman_Leisa@fcadv.org)

To learn information about each of **Florida's certified domestic violence centers** go to the following link: <http://www.fcadv.org/centers>.

**Florida Domestic Violence Hotline**

1.800.500.1119  
1.800.621.4202 (TDD)  
Florida Relay 711

This document was created in partnership by the following agencies:



## DEFINITIONS

**Survivor of domestic violence:** HUD defines of a victim of domestic abuse as a victim of a crime of violence committed by a current or former spouse of the victim, by a person with whom the victim shares a child in common, by a person who is cohabitating with or has cohabited with the victim as a spouse, by a person similarly situated to a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction receiving grant monies, or by any other person against an adult or youth victim who is protected from that person's acts under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction.

**State Certified Domestic Abuse Center:** Authorized under Chapter 39.903 F.S, Florida's 42 certified domestic violence centers provide crisis intervention and support services to adult victims of domestic violence and their children free of charge, 24 hours a day, 7-days a week. Services include emergency shelter, 24-hour crisis and information hotline, safety planning, counseling, case management, child assessments, information and referrals, education for community awareness, and training for law enforcement and other professionals. Many centers also provide legal and court advocacy, transportation, relocation assistance, life skills training, transitional housing, daycare, outreach services, rape crisis intervention, and prevention programs in local schools.

**Homeward Bound:** Provides transportation assistance to individuals who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This assistance helps them return to their home communities or to employment opportunities elsewhere.

**Emergency Shelter-**Individuals and Families defined as Homeless under the following categories are eligible for assistance in ES projects:

- Category 1 – Literally Homeless
- Category 2 – Imminent Risk of Homeless
- Category 3 – Homeless Under Other Federal Statutes
- Category 4 – Fleeing/Attempting to Flee DV

**Short Term Housing:** Short-term facilities are intended to provide temporary shelter to eligible individuals to prevent homelessness and allow an opportunity to develop an individualized housing and service plan to guide the client's linkage to permanent housing.

**Rapid Re-Housing:** Funds for housing relocation and stabilization services (including rental application fees, security deposits, utility deposits or payments, last month's rent and housing search and placement activities). Funds may also be used for short-or medium-term rental assistance for those who are at-risk of becoming homeless or transitioning to stable housing. Individuals defined as Homeless under the following categories are eligible for assistance in RRH projects:

- Category 1 – Literally Homeless
- Category 4 – Fleeing/Attempting to Flee DV (where the individual or family also meets the criteria for Category 1) The Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program will provide financial assistance and services to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless and help those who are experiencing homelessness to be quickly re-housed and stabilized. The funds under this program are intended to target individuals and families who would be homeless but for this assistance. The funds will provide for a variety of assistance, including: short-term or medium-term rental assistance and housing relocation and stabilization services, including such activities as

mediation, credit counseling, security or utility deposits, utility payments, moving cost assistance, and case management. At least 60 percent of funds must be spent within two years; all funds must be spent within three years. Reporting requirements will be presented in the forthcoming notice.

**Permanent Supportive Housing:** Individuals and families defined as Homeless under the following categories are eligible for assistance in PSH projects:

- Category 1 – Literally Homeless
- Category 4 – Fleeing/Attempting to Flee DV

**Transitional Housing:** Individuals and families defined as Homeless under the following categories are eligible for assistance in TH projects:

- Category 1 – Literally Homeless
- Category 2 – Imminent Risk of Homeless
- Category 3\* – Homeless Under Other Federal Statutes
- Category 4 – Fleeing/Attempting to Flee DV

**Affordable Housing:** For families who pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing is considered cost burdened and may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care. An estimated 12 million renter and homeowner households now pay more than 50 percent of their annual incomes for housing. A family with one full-time worker earning the minimum wage cannot afford the local fair-market rent for a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in the United States.

## REFERENCES

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- 6 Eleanor Lyon and Shannon Lane, *Meeting Survivor's Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences*, Feb 18, 2009.
- 7 Texas Health Resources, *Domestic Violence Cost Calculator*
- 8 National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, *Transitional Housing Services for Victims of Domestic Violence Report*.
- 9 ALCU Women's Rights Project, *Domestic Violence and Homelessness*.
- 10 2012 Bureau of Labor Statistics for Florida. [http://www.bls.gov/oes/2012/may/oes\\_fl.htm#00-0000](http://www.bls.gov/oes/2012/may/oes_fl.htm#00-0000)
- 11 2010 US Census Report for Florida
- 12 2012 State of Florida Uniform Crime Report
- 13 Statewide ALICE database
- <sup>14</sup> *Victim Service Provider: A nonprofit or nongovernmental organization including rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, domestic violence transitional housing programs, and other programs whose primary mission is to provide services to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Victim service providers that are funded under HUD's Supportive Housing Program are instructed not to disclose personally identifying data about any client for purposes of HMIS, per the requirements of the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005 (Pub. L. 109-162) (VAWA)* Text in italics is directly quoted from the regulations that can be found at: <https://www.onecpd.info/resource/1220/final-hmis-data-standards/>