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# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOUSING FIRST NEWSLETTER

## *January - March 2011*

### Greetings!

Since the last newsletter, Eastside Domestic Violence Program, Family Resource Center of Lincoln County, WomenCare Shelter, YWCA of Kitsap County & Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence were graciously hosted by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for the Domestic Violence Cohort meeting. Together, we shared what we learned with each other and continued to recognize the value in advocating for survivors through the Domestic Violence Housing First pilot project.

This Newsletter provides you the insight of advocates on their *Successes, Lessons Learned, Challenges and Moving Forward* from the January - March 2011 quarterly check-in. We continue to be thrilled by your insight and your creativity in advocacy.

Sincerely,

Linda Olsen,  
Ankita Patel &  
Wendi Siebold.



### *SUCCESSSES*

The Domestic Violence Housing First pilot project was developed to meet the unique housing needs of domestic violence survivors. It gives the advocates the flexibility necessary to address the evolving safety needs of individual survivors. Advocates reported being able to “take the time [they] need and get to know the survivor and what their needs are,” and that “this has been a great program for the women and children we serve. It is respectful, flexible and really meets people where they are at.” This project truly allows for “client tailored advocacy.”

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This flexible funding approach allows advocates to eliminate lack of housing options as a reason for survivor to stay in abusive relationships.

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Advocates assist survivors to **find and retain housing**, eliminating the chances of homelessness or other costly financial changes.

“We are able to KEEP people in housing for smaller amounts of money - avoiding costly shelter/ kids changing schools/losing jobs.”

Advocates engage with housing providers on domestic violence issues, **increasing more awareness and opportunities** for affordable housing for survivors.

“The leasing agent was unwilling to allow the survivor to get out of the lease but was willing to let the survivor move into another unit.” Advocates were able to educate the leasing agent about domestic violence laws that protect the survivor and the safety implications of the survivor staying in the same area given that the abuser knew where she lived and had broken into her unit.

Advocates are providing **tailored, mobile advocacy**, allowing survivors to rely on advocates for their individual needs.

“A survivor was being stalked by her ex-husband and needed to move instantly. The abuser found her for the sixth time.” Advocates were able to utilize protections available under law when negotiating with the leasing agent to get out of a lease.



Advocates provide **practical, temporary financial assistance**, which allows survivors to become self-sufficient.

“We were recently able to help a survivor move out of shelter into her own house and we were able to help her with things like towels, cleaning supplies, silverware, and a few other basics...By helping with a few of the basics this participant was able to pay her first months rent on her own.”

Advocates were able to **close the gaps in the system** due to budget cuts, preventing huge repercussions for survivors.

“This project gives us the ability to assist clients, which has been invaluable during the time where funding is being cut, such as TANF or GAU, or whether it is preventing huge repercussions for survivors. Life happens and when you have no savings, even the most careful of budgeting can sometimes fall apart. For example, paying for a survivor’s car that was repossessed with her rent money in it or paying for medications that are no longer covered by insurance can give survivors the hope to continue getting their life in order.”

As of April 2011, the four domestic violence programs were working with a total of 113 clients

There were 30 NEW client intakes during the first quarter of 2011 (between January 1 - March 31, 2011), which represents 26.5% of the total client population across programs.

There are now a TOTAL of 143 clients who have entered the Domestic Violence Housing First program; In 2010 there were 113 clients, and in the first quarter of 2011 there are 30 new clients

The successes of this “program has been a huge gift to the domestic violence survivors in our community. Surviving a relationship of power and control often times leaves deep financial holes for people to fill. Truly getting safe and free from abuse, takes a lot of time and money. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funds are so versatile that we have been able to met people’s needs based on what they see those needs to be. We can use our flexibility to fill in the gaps or keep the building blocks in place for survivors as they move forward.”

Survivors have shared their experiences and appreciation with Domestic Violence Housing First Advocates:

"It would be so easy to call him, he has money. I just don't want to have to, he tried to kill me. I haven't talked to him in 6 months."

"I thank you and appreciate all your help paying my rent. People like me, need your support."

Advocates feel more aligned with the mission of the domestic violence movement when they hear positive feedback from survivors. They are able to work with survivors with “incredibly diverse needs” because their agencies can offer tangible and realistic support to survivors to “get safe and stay safe.”

## LESSONS LEARNED

Advocates continue to fulfill unmet needs and reflect on the lessons that they have learned through the Domestic Violence Housing First Project.

*Advocates learned that the time investment in building relationships with private landlords and public housing agencies increased their understanding of domestic violence and willingness to rent to survivors.*

Examples include:

“We have good relationships with our landlords and they are flexible and willing to work with our program. When we paid rent for a survivor for 2 months, the landlord worked with our fiscal department and arrangements were made to deposit the money into the landlord’s bank account. This eliminated some of the hassle of giving a check to the survivor or mailing the check to the landlord, which would have made her rent late.”

“A woman with three children had difficulty finding housing due to bad credit and a past eviction. When she chose to share her story with a potential landlord, the landlord was able to connect with the survivor due to her own experiences. This survivor was able to obtain housing after sharing her story.”

While some survivors were previously denied housing because of domestic violence, some private owners and landlords were excited about the Domestic Violence Housing First program and made exceptions for survivors. A private owner rented half of a house to a survivor and her kids even though they had previously only rented the house to family members. This place was conveniently located near a school and had a yard.

“I worked with a private landlord to get a client moved in a room they were renting. She was incredibly supportive to the client being a survivor and wanted to get her in as soon as possible. The landlord waived a few deposits she normally charged tenants. We were able to collaborate on the move in costs and get this survivor into a safe house quickly. While talking with the landlord, she requested some information for a teen family member needing some support for an abusive relationship she was in.”

“We work well with the County Homeless Service Center. Their HMIS Coordinator has trained all of our staff on HMIS. She is there to problem solve with us when we need it. She has come to the shelter to assist us with the process.”

“The longer the program goes, the more private landlords get on board- it's great!”

Advocates stated that they have to continue to work with landlords in education and awareness. Some landlords were unwilling to work with survivors, and others are not accessible to advocates because they lived out of town. When there was a lack of awareness, landlords were unwilling to rent or assist survivors.



*Advocates learned that focusing on housing first and increasing the ability for survivors to retain housing helped with overall advocacy.*

housing in order for her children to come home. With the help of the program, she continues to remain in her housing and the children have been returned to their home.”

“We were able to pay rent for a survivor for 2 months. Unexpected bills and fewer hours at work meant that she was not going to be able to make ends meet. Covering her rent for 2 months allowed her to pay her bills and stay in her home.”

“A survivor struggled with finding a job that paid well so she took many part-time jobs. Her motivation was to retain her housing because she was working with CPS to have her children returned. She knew that she needed to maintain

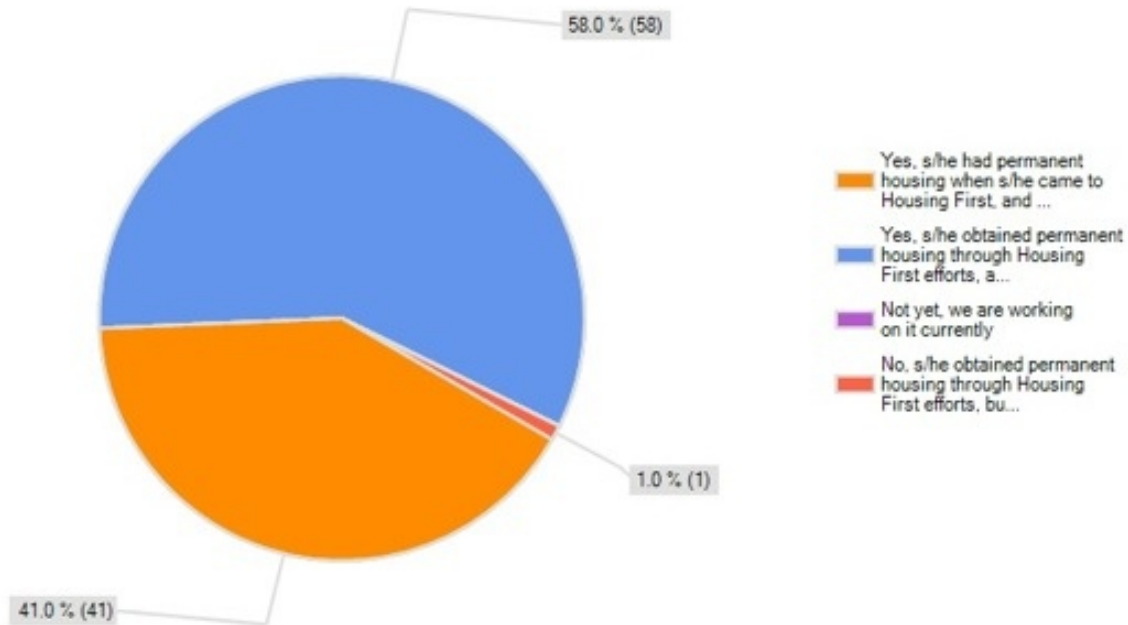


A survivor with a Section 8 voucher was living with her children in an apartment. Recent

involvement with CPS included her children being removed from the home because the survivor's mental health was questioned and CPS thought it would be better if the kids were not in her custody for the time being. While she reported the changes to both DSHS and the Housing Authority, there had been a lag in adjusting her portion of rent. Her income had been reduced, but her rent was still based on the children being in the home. The survivor fell back on paying her rent but we were able to support her in retaining her housing by paying the difference she owed. Her rent was adjusted for the following month and she was able to stay in her home. She had been living there for seven years and it was the one stable thing she has had.

At the end of the quarterly check in (April 2011), advocates report that all clients are currently in permanent housing, except one. The one client who is not in permanent housing is staying with family/friends.

**Is s/he currently in permanent housing?**



**HOUSING SITUATION**

**HOW DO THE NEW CLIENTS COMPARE TO THOSE INCLUDED IN THE LAST CHECK-IN?**

A greater percentage of survivors are receiving services and flexible funding to remain in their own home. This option allows survivors to:

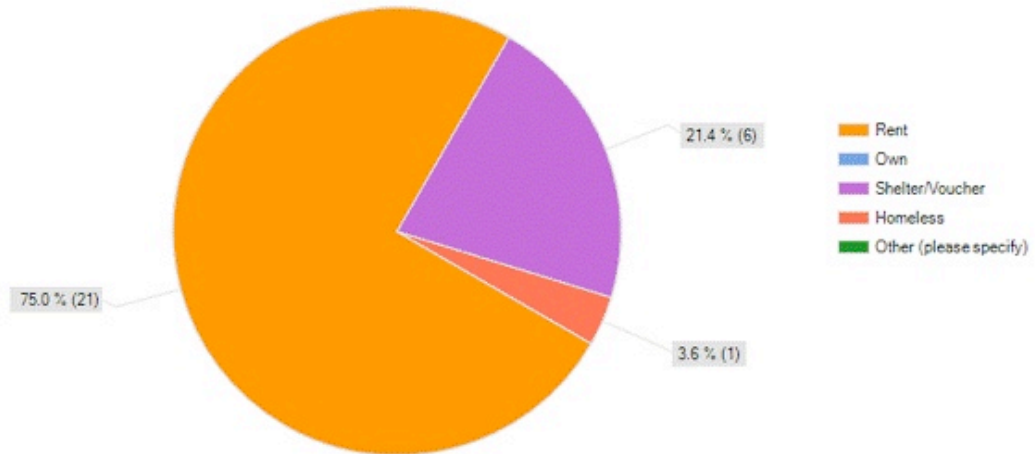
- stay in their own homes, reducing the chances of homelessness, *and*
- stay safe, causing less disruption in the lives of survivors and their children.

80% of the new clients in 2011 had permanent housing upon program entry, compared to 49.6% of clients who had entered the program prior to January 1, 2011.

A higher number of new clients (new as of April 2011 check-in) are renters compared to clients in 2010. 75% of new 2011 clients were renting at time of intake, compared to 47.8% of clients who entered the program prior to January 1, 2011.

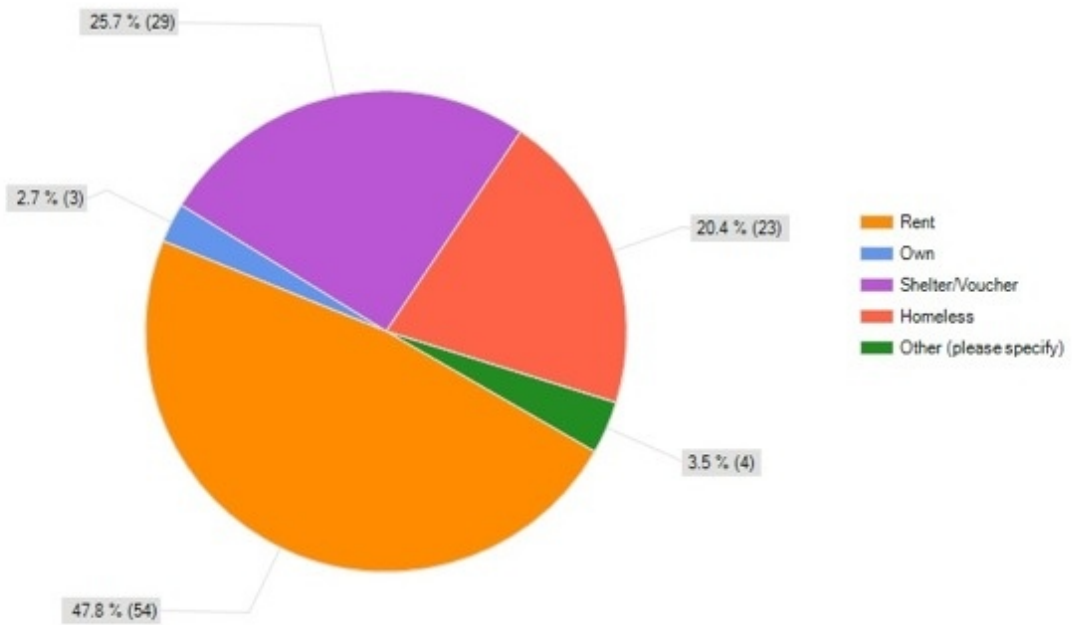
Only one new 2011 client identified as "homeless" as opposed to 20.4% (23 clients) who entered the program prior to January 1, 2011. A similar percentage came from a shelter or were using vouchers (21.4% of new clients; compared to 25% of clients already in the program).

**New clients Jan-March 2011: What was her/his living situation when s/he first came into contact with the Housing First program?**



**CLIENTS IN PROGRAM PRIOR TO JANUARY 1, 2011.**

**What was her living situation when she first came into contact with the Housing First program?**



## CHALLENGES

While the Domestic Violence Housing First pilot program has many successes, advocates face challenges due to a lack of resources or gaps in the system.

*Advocates identified that a lack of resources contributed to some of the housing challenges in their community. Sometimes they did not have enough funds, other times they simply did not have housing options for survivors.*



Public housing authorities have lengthy waiting lists. “The biggest challenge [for survivors to obtain housing] is that the list is closed and has been for several years.”

Shelter Plus Care is a HUD housing program for people with disabilities. While there are many survivors are qualified, they are often not considered for this housing resource.

The lack of Section 8 availability and subsidized housing continues to be a challenge for advocates and the families they support.

*Advocates also cited conflicting and overwhelming system barriers for survivors, adding to the housing challenges.*

When CPS is involved, survivors have a hard time making choices about their safety and housing. If they stay with the abuser, CPS can take the children away due to the violence; but if the survivor leaves, CPS may take the children away due to dynamics that accompany the lack of housing. “None of these women get TANF as they don't have their kids and rely on student aid and general assistance.....which is not enough to rent a 3 or 4 bedroom apartment or house. Oftentimes it seems this is the last 'hoop' they have to 'jump' through in order to get their children home having complied with treatment, counseling, UAs, parenting classes, domestic violence education, onwards and etc. Without help they'd be lucky to get into a studio or a room much less something family-sized.”

It was challenging to obtain a large unit for a woman while her children were in CPS custody. “We've had to advocate heavily on the side of clients with our homeless housing provider (who provides us with matching funds) to allow a single person into a large home.” This process is not streamlined and it requires advocates to obtain documentation that CPS intends to return the children to their mother once permanent housing is obtained, which may be against CPS policies to provide written documentation.

Health care coverage through an abuser can be a challenge for a survivor when there are medical issues. Flexible dollars could be used to pay for medications and procedures independently from the insurance coverage, but cannot really be used safely to contribute toward the deductible on an insurance policy.

Sometimes the survivor's fear of failure or lack of energy to pursue hopes and dreams can be a barrier and frustrating for advocates. Trauma-informed approaches to advocacy can help an advocate work with survivors immobilized by stress, anxiety, depression, and fear.

## MOVING FORWARD...

When advocates were asked what this project would look like if it could accommodate survivors with a variety of different issues, they said:

- Advocate capacity is not always able to accommodate higher needs survivors when chemical dependency and mental health issues are present. Partnerships with the relevant organizations need to be cultivated in a way that services may be offered but not required for housing. There is a hard balance between supporting women's choices and what resources and access to mental health agencies and drug/alcohol treatment programs are available to survivors and domestic violence programs.
- Having enough income to rent housing that is not subsidized is a barrier.
- "I think we already bring people in as much as we can. If we had more funding we could reach out to more communities and offer more assistance. I have a vision of being able to offer a little more than what people are asking for. It would be wonderful to offer more financial support for people to truly feel stable. Without the funds, it's hard to really go in-depth with peoples' needs."

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## CALENDAR

### July

11th - 22nd: Quarterly Check-In

### September

7th - 8th: Cohort #1 meeting,

8th: Cohort #2 meeting,

9th: Domestic Violence Housing First Symposium.

STAY TUNED!!



Washington Domestic Violence Housing First project is funded and administered by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Project partners include Eastside Domestic Violence Program, Family Resource Center of Lincoln County, WomenCare Shelter, YWCA of Kitsap County & Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence.