

DV HOUSING FIRST: AN IN-DEPTH LONGITUDINAL EVALUATION OF RAINBOW SERVICES

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PREPARED FOR:

Blue Shield of California Foundation
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BACKGROUND

California is a leading state nationally to dedicate federal Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) funds toward the implementation of the Domestic Violence (DV) Housing First model. In 2016, eight agencies piloted the DV Housing First model and by 2017, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) had funded a total of 33 non-profit agencies to implement the program.

The DV Housing First model is an innovative approach that focuses on helping survivors obtain safe and stable housing as quickly as possible with the use of flexible funds, while providing ongoing supportive services in an effort to improve the overall safety and well-being of domestic violence survivors and their families (Sullivan & Olsen, 2017).

As part of a multipronged evaluation of DV Housing First in California, Rainbow Services is being highlighted as a case study due to their careful and successful implementation of the DV Housing First model. Rainbow Services, located in the greater Los Angeles, California area, is dedicated to providing trauma-informed, client-centered services to survivors of domestic violence. Rainbow Services is committed to offering support to anyone impacted by domestic violence and empowering survivors to move beyond trauma, towards safety and stability. Rainbow's advocates, staff, and leadership promote a culture of warmth and kindness that permeates their every interaction with survivors.

In 2017, Rainbow Services participated in a process evaluation of the DV Housing First model in California. Their leadership and staff then kindly agreed to participate in this longitudinal evaluation to examine how the DV Housing First model may impact survivors' housing and economic stability, safety, and well-being. There has been increasing attention on all that needs to happen to help survivors obtain safe and stable housing, but there is still limited information on what survivors need to maintain their housing. This report highlights the high-quality services that Rainbow Services' staff provides to help survivors obtain *and* maintain their housing.

EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation team collaborated with Rainbow Services' housing team to identify eligible survivors for this longitudinal evaluation. Eligible survivors included Rainbow Services' clients who (1) were receiving services from Rainbow's housing team at the time of recruitment for the study and (2) had received DV Housing First services for at least six months.

Rainbow Services' staff identified 48 survivors who were receiving DV Housing First services. A member from Rainbow's housing team contacted all survivors to invite them to hear more about the evaluation study. Of those, six survivors were not interested in participating in the evaluation or were unable to be contacted. Once a DV Housing First participant agreed to hear more about the study, a member of the evaluation team contacted them and provided detailed information about the study. If the survivor agreed to participate, the initial interview was scheduled at a time and place that was convenient for the participant. Of 42 eligible survivors, four declined to participate and two canceled their appointments prior to their initial interview. This report, then, is based on 36 Rainbow Services' clients.

Survivors were invited to participate in four interviews across nine months, with interviews conducted every three months. Interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish, depending on survivor preference. Participants were paid \$50 for each of the interviews.

Retention:

3-month follow up	100%
6-month follow up	97%
9-month follow up	92%

During the interviews, detailed information was collected about survivors' backgrounds, housing and safety obstacles, and services they received. Quantitative and qualitative questions were included to better understand survivors' experiences, particularly about their safety and stability over time. Agency data was also collected for more information about the services they provided, complementing the data obtained from survivors participating in the study.

RAINBOW SERVICES HOUSING PROGRAM

Rainbow Services is committed to addressing the multiple barriers DV survivors and their families encounter in obtaining and maintaining safe and stable housing. They offer survivors a spectrum of housing services and resources, from emergency shelter and transitional housing programs to the permanent housing programs such as DV Housing First.

Rainbow's housing team works collaboratively with staff, advocates, and case managers to offer survivors a full array of supportive services available, including: case management, support groups, individual counseling, legal advocacy, and children's services. Further, Rainbow's housing advocates pair trauma-informed, survivor centered advocacy with flexible financial assistance to support survivors seeking safe and stable housing.

As part of the DV Housing First program, survivors work closely with the housing team to stay in their own home, if they prefer, or to seek new safe and stable housing. Once housed, advocates continue to work with survivors and their families to ensure they receive the support they need to maintain their housing and meet their goals. Flexible financial assistance is critical to support survivors' unique housing needs. Rainbow Services' participants have used flexible financial assistance for a wide range of needs after obtaining housing, such as transportation costs, education support, debt and rental assistance.

*"The housing team has helped me get back into school and get my education. **The housing team helped me get ahead in life.** If I couldn't pay for school, how could I pay for housing? Education isn't cheap, and it needs to come out-of-pocket. And she helped me pay for school so that I could continue pay for housing as well. She provided financial support to pay for housing for 6 months. Because she was able to help me pay for housing, I was able to use the money I had for other things I needed like diapers, basic needs, and clothing."*

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

The 36 survivors enrolled in the evaluation ranged in age from 22 to 57 years old, with 78% being between 30 and 49 years old. The majority of survivors (89%) identified as female and heterosexual. See Figure 1 for full age information.

Most of survivors in the sample were Hispanic/Latinx (78%). Five participants were African American or Afro Caribbean (14%). Three participants were multiracial. Slightly over half of survivors (58%) reported Spanish as their primary language. All survivors were offered the opportunity to be interviewed in Spanish; however, some Latinx Spanish-speaking survivors preferred to be interviewed in English. In total, 53% of survivors were interviewed in English. Figure 2 includes participants' racial identity information.

The majority of participants (58%) were non-U.S. citizens at the first interview. By the final, 9-month follow-up interview, one had obtained citizenship and two were no longer participating in the study. Of the noncitizens at the first interview, approximately one-third were permanent residents and about 40% had work authorizations. About half of noncitizens had either applied for or obtained a U visa.

There was considerable variability in participants' education levels: 8% of survivors completed bachelor's degrees or higher, and 36% had completed associate degrees,

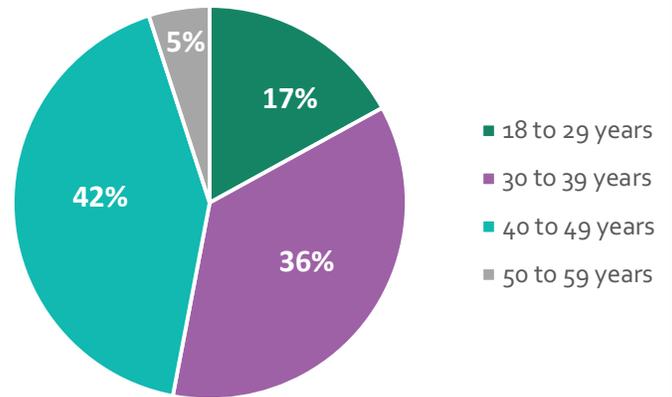


Figure 1. Participants' ages (n=36)

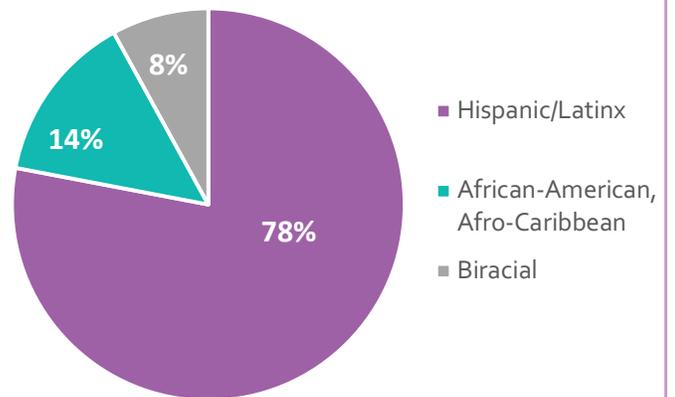


Figure 2. Participants' racial identities (n=36)

some college or vocational training. Approximately half of survivors had completed a high school education or equivalent. Survivors were also asked about children under the age of 18 for whom they were responsible. Almost all survivors (89%) had between one and five children.

Additionally, survivors also rated their overall health on a scale from poor to excellent. Half of survivors rated their overall health as “good”, “very good” or “excellent.” A small percentage (17%) considered themselves to have a physical disability or disabling condition, and all of them reported that it interfered with their daily functioning to some degree. Twenty survivors (56%) reported experiencing some type of mental health issue; the most common being anxiety (95%) and/or depression (85%). Almost all survivors (85%) reported that their mental health interfered with their daily functioning at least a little.



Housing Stability

Survivors reported on their housing status prior to working with the housing team at Rainbow Services. Most (67%) had experienced homelessness at least once at some point in their lifetimes. Prior to receiving housing services, only ten survivors (25%) were living in a house or apartment they rented. Eight percent reported living in the abuser’s home, 28% were living in a friend or relative’s home, and the remaining 37% were living in shelter, a DV or transitional living facility, or were homeless.

At the time of the first interview, all survivors had received DV Housing First services for at least 12 months. The majority of survivors (86%) were living in a house or apartment they were renting, three more were living in someone else’s home paying rent, and the remaining two survivors were living in someone else’s home and not responsible for paying rent. Some survivors were receiving Section 8 assistance (28%) and most (77%) were confident they would be able to stay in their current housing in the next three months.

Although most survivors had obtained safe housing, they reported numerous housing barriers during their initial interview. Survivors identified rent unaffordability (81%), paying a security deposit (83%), having poor or no credit (78%), and being unemployed (69%) as ‘big problems’ when seeking housing. Further, about half of survivors had recently had to borrow money to pay rent.



Financial Stability

At the time of participants' first interview, over half (64%) were employed at least part time or seasonally. The remaining survivors were looking for work (19%) or unemployed and not looking for work (17%). Of the 23 survivors who were working, five were salaried with an average take-home salary of \$1,320/month. The average hourly wage for the remaining survivors ranged between \$10-\$35 per hour, with a median of \$12.25/hour. About half of survivors had lost a job in the prior year. Of those, almost all had lost a job due to the abuse they were experiencing.

Participants were asked about external services they were receiving to support financial stability and 19 survivors (53%) reported receiving food stamps. Additionally, 36% of survivors received Calworks, approximately 17% received social security or disability assistance, and one survivor received unemployment assistance. Six survivors (17%) were receiving child support.

Survivors identified the most difficult expenses as debts (93%), childcare (89%), and rent (72%). Approximately one quarter of survivors reported significant difficulty in paying for virtually every expense or bill. Although most survivors (74%) anticipated not being able to meet basic needs at some point in the next three months, over half (64%) still reported being better off financially after working with the Rainbow housing team.



Rainbow Services Advocacy

All survivors who participated in the evaluation had received services from Rainbow and had been connected to general case management and housing services. At the start of the evaluation period, survivors were primarily hoping for legal assistance (72%), counseling (86%), increased social support (75%) and housing (58%).

RESULTS

The DV Housing First model is structured to decrease barriers for survivors to quickly access needed resources. The combination of flexible financial assistance and advocacy services is intended to support survivors to obtain new housing, and then to be able to maintain housing stability by increasing financial stability and safety for families.



Survivor-Driven, Trauma-Informed Services

Participants consistently recognized and shared that Rainbow Services' staff were sensitive and attentive to their needs as survivors, mentioning specific ways in which advocates and staff integrate a trauma-informed approach to all their interactions with survivors and their families. From immediate reception at the front door, to advocates, to the finance office staff who processed flexible funding, it is evident that a trauma-informed approach permeates Rainbow Services' culture.

Once engaged in services, survivors felt their priorities and preferences were respected and that they were offered unconditional positive regard. For survivors, this was a clear contrast to other agencies or services they had received and was especially empowering. Overall, survivors felt safe and cared for by Rainbow Services' staff and described a process by which their **dignity is restored through respectful, trauma-informed services.**

Throughout the evaluation period, survivors rated their experiences with Rainbow Services consistently high on the different aspects of trauma-informed practices. Participants expressed satisfaction with the agency's respect for their culture, agency and autonomy, and their access to information on the impact of trauma on their lives and the lives of their children.

Survivors also reported that the agency staff emphasized their strengths and was very responsive to their unique needs, including their parenting needs and need to connect with supportive relationships. See Figure 3.

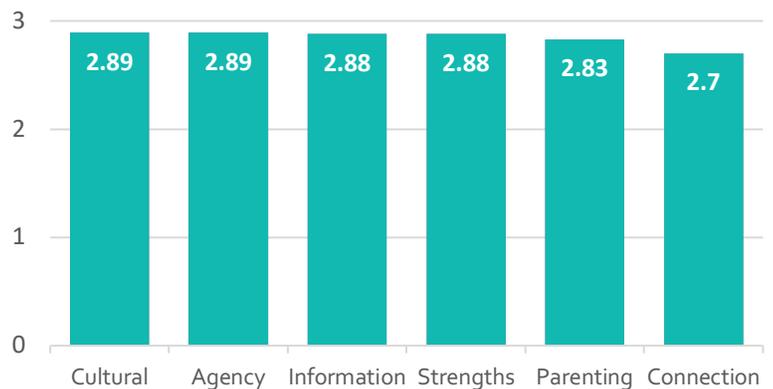


Figure 3. Average agreement with each subscale of the Trauma-Informed Practice Scale (Goodman et al., 2016). Response options ranged from 0 = not at all to 3 = very much.

In addition to expressing satisfaction with Rainbow Services' staff and overall agency, survivors reported feeling that their advocates were able to **support them physically and emotionally throughout their healing journey**. Survivors rated their experiences with their advocates consistently positively over time, highlighting Rainbow's efforts to provide advocacy services that were survivor-driven and respectful of survivors' goals and needs. Specific items measuring advocates' attention to survivors' unique needs are reported in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Average agreement with survivor-driven advocacy items. Response options ranged from 0 = not at all to 3 = very much.

Often abuse leaves survivors feeling little confidence in their own decision making. Therefore, Rainbow Services' advocates emphasized **their trust in survivors' choices** and respect for their dignity, which laid a foundation for survivors to rebuild their confidence. As one survivor expressed:

"Él [intercesor] da sugerencias y dice que si yo me siento cómoda con lo que él sugiere lo hacemos, si no, él respeta lo que yo quiero hacer."

[He [advocate] gave me suggestions and asked how comfortable I am with the suggestions, and if I said no, he respected what I want to do.]

Another survivor reflected on how her advocate's trauma-informed approach supported her in setting and achieving goals without feeling stigmatized:

*"It [Rainbow Services] is one of the few places that is trauma-informed and it plays out in all the spaces - how groups go, how individual counseling goes, how many interactions with [case manager] went. I came in going, 'Okay, I need to do this and that and I want to do them all right now,' but at the same time she was also like, 'I get you, I respect you, but at the same time, that's a lot, but let's talk about your priorities - so we can start somewhere. Let's pick a thing and work on it.' **It took away the stigma that I've experienced at other places.**"*

Survivors explained that the support they received around their basic needs helped them maintain safety and stability, but it was also caring, kind, and considerate. For example, some families who experienced food insecurity recalled a food pantry offered by Rainbow Services. When they needed food, they were able to access the pantry, no questions asked. The pantry stocked food from organic grocers, and survivors received gift cards for restaurants that they felt went beyond what they expected.

Rainbow advocates also **did not expect survivors to have to ask for everything they needed**. For instance, Rainbow staff contacted families when they had clothing donations for children. Parents expressed a deep sense of gratitude that advocates knew their families well enough to contact them if they had clothing to offer that would fit the children or check if they needed school or winter clothing. These experiences illustrate how survivors felt cared for by agency staff overall, and they suggest the impact of quality resources on restoring survivors' dignity.

"I saw them trying, you know? Where they didn't have to do that...They didn't have to go out of their way. ...for them to give food gift cards, for like, nice places - I can understand McDonald's, but they gave me good restaurants. So, I took that as these people really do care about their clients. So, it made me look at life differently, like there are good people out there, there are people that actually care..."

The DV Housing First’s survivor-driven advocacy pillar allows advocates to provide uniquely tailored approaches and services to each survivor. Just over half (58%) of survivors were noncitizens, and differences were expected in the experiences between citizens and noncitizens. However, while important differences emerged in the specific services needed (e.g., noncitizens needed more immigration and legal services; Spanish-speaking Latinx survivors experienced difficulties obtaining housing due to language barriers), no differences emerged between the number of needs met by advocates, or survivors’ satisfaction with services. This highlights **Rainbow’s exceptional implementation of the DV Housing First’s flexible, tailored, survivor-driven approach to advocacy** that can meet survivors where they are in their healing journey to meet their unique needs.

"Even if they don't provide that service or something, they would do their best to get me what I needed. A good example is: I had a laptop, but the cord for it was chewed up and messed up already. They went out of their way to buy me a cord for my computer and I was able to go online and look for apartments. They were willing to buy me a cord. Usually people would say, 'That's kind of your problem.' But they went out of their way to buy that for me. It's things like that that I really love [about] Rainbow."

Another area that Rainbow Services’ trauma-informed practices were especially meaningful were in the counseling and support groups offered for survivors. Participants expressed how helpful those resources were during their time receiving services at Rainbow. However, participants also expressed wanting **more ongoing psychosocial and emotional support after exiting services**. Survivors often reported that they had no other access to trauma-informed counseling or support after exiting services, which made the program exit feel abrupt. At the end of the evaluation period, many survivors reported feeling that although they had outgrown the support group, they still needed a safe and supportive space to connect with other survivors.



Advocacy Services

At the start of the evaluation period in June 2018, the majority of participants were housed and still receiving services. Almost all (94%) of survivors were either living in a house or apartment they rented or were paying rent in someone's home. Further, 29 survivors were still receiving supportive services, and seven had exited services. Of those receiving services, 24 were still receiving general case management, and 14 were receiving DV Housing First services (as some were receiving both). Therefore, the results of this evaluation offer insight into the types of services that advocates provide to help survivors maintain stability and safety; and survivors' perceptions about their services, stability, and safety.

According to agency records, survivors had been receiving housing services from Rainbow Services' housing team for an average of 12 months when the evaluation started, and general case management for an average of 21 months.

As noted earlier, Rainbow Services provides an array of direct services to survivors, including services related to safety, housing, finances, social support, and counseling. **94% of survivors had most, if not all, of their needs met by Rainbow Services.**

Overall, survivors were overwhelmingly satisfied with their advocates' time and efforts. As shown in Table 1, advocates helped survivors meet many of their needs, particularly financial and housing needs. The vast majority of survivors (86%) remained very satisfied with Rainbow services during the course of the evaluation. In addition to overall satisfaction, they also appreciated being treated with warmth and genuine care.

Advocates were also surveyed around the 6-month follow-up interview about the services they had provided to clients. Advocate data confirmed participants' description of services received. Advocates reported that they helped most survivors with negotiating with landlords (83%), budgeting (63%), and searching for housing (60%). Further, advocates reported providing advocacy services for 30 minutes or less per week for about half of the survivors, and 30 minutes to one hour of advocacy weekly for 43% of survivors. Most advocacy services were conducted in person or over the phone (voice or text) and only about 20% of survivors drove anywhere with the advocate. Overall, survivors felt satisfied with the amount of time the advocate put toward working with them, with only three participants (8%) indicating they would have liked more time together.

Table 1. Participants' Needs at Initial Interview and Whether They Were Met.

	Survivors reporting need (n)	Percent reporting need was met by advocates (n)
<i>Staying or getting safe</i>	35	97% (34)
<i>Housing</i>	34	97% (33)
<i>Finances</i>	34	94% (32)
<i>Social Support</i>	33	94% (31)
<i>Counseling</i>	34	88% (30)
<i>Legal Assistance</i>	28	82% (23)
<i>Food</i>	24	92% (22)
<i>Childcare</i>	22	96% (21)
<i>Clothing</i>	22	96% (21)
<i>Other material goods & services</i>	22	82% (18)
<i>Support with Child(ren) issues</i>	22	100% (14)
<i>Immigration Issues</i>	15	80% (12)
<i>Education</i>	10	70% (7)
<i>Employment</i>	12	58% (7)
<i>Healthcare</i>	6	33% (2)

*"I'm very satisfied because they've just helped me in so many ways. Like they gave me a place to be when I was in danger [for] me and my kids. **They've helped with food, with shelter, with clothing, financially, emotional and moral support....** And for me, the main part, is they seem **so genuine**. I've been to other programs and they're kind of like, 'Oh, get people in and just get 'em out.' I don't feel like they're pushing me – 'We helped you, now you have your own place, now you can't come here anymore.' So, I find that they're very inclusive. They don't just get people in and out, you know? They care to see where you're going to go, where you've been, how you're doing, if you do need any extra support. So, I appreciate that."*

Survivors recognized that their housing team advocate was coaching them towards self-advocacy and skills that would contribute to their long-term stability. Survivors were therefore determined to learn how to maintain and eventually improve their housing and financial position. Consistently over time, survivors reported positive personal outcomes as a result of their work with their Rainbow advocate, including learning how to identify and meet personal and family needs, understanding the impact of domestic violence on themselves and their children, as well as feeling safer and more hopeful about the future. Advocates clearly **modeled skills that increased survivors' confidence** in searching for available housing, communicating with landlords or property managers, and budgeting to maintain secured housing, as one participant described:

"I think it's only impacted [my life] in a good way to show me how they were very persistent and looking for places, and what I had to do for myself was look. So, they kind of modeled: "We're helping you and we're showing you what to do. So, when you're out there looking for housing, you gotta just keep searching, 'cause somebody's going to give you housing, but if you just give up, no' While [my advocate] was doing her thing, I found this place, [with] that kind of motivation and drive."

The DV Housing First model integrates flexible financial assistance and advocacy to promote long-term housing stability and safety. However, the needs of Latinx Spanish-speaking survivors varied slightly and required advocates to have **a flexible advocacy approach to ensure that they were providing culturally and contextually relevant services** to participants.

Some survivors expressed reluctance to accept financial assistance beyond an immediate need or crisis (e.g., accepting only assistance for one month's rent). Advocates supported survivors in their choices, while continuing to offer alternative options like flexible funds that would help survivors build long-term stability. Latinx Spanish-speaking survivors described "saving" services for later emergencies as a way to create a safety net for themselves.

One survivor described how the advocate encouraged her to accept the financial assistance, and she refused because she wanted to save the money in case of an unforeseen future need:

“Y ya fue que me pagaron y yo dije que solamente necesito este mes para yo poder ponerme al día con los pagos. Porque si no, el otro mes voy a estar también igual, que me va a faltar. Y cuando acabé le dije ‘ya está bien, porque no quiero’. Me dijo, ‘Tienes seis meses, te podemos dar la ayuda.’ Pero ahorita ya lo puedo pagar, dije, mejor paro y si necesito otra vez, llamo.”

[Then I received the money, and I said to them that I only needed that month so I can be on track with my payments. Because if not, next month was going to be the same for me, I was going to be short of money again. And when it was over, I said that is ok, because I don’t want it. She told me, you have 6 more months, we can give you the help. But right now, I can pay. So I thought, I will stop and if I need it again, I can call.]

Latinx Spanish-speaking survivors also reported that language barriers often impacted their ability to obtain housing, and advocates were crucial in helping them navigate the rental process overall. For example, one participant shared that it was critical to have an advocate who could communicate directly with landlords:

“Estuvimos sin vivienda [por 13 meses] y agarramos departamento gracias a Rainbow, a [intercesora]. Porque ella hablaba. En ese tiempo mi inglés era bien difícil entonces ella hablaba por mí. Ella hablaba en los departamentos por mí.”

[We were homeless for [13 months] and we found an apartment thanks to Rainbow, to [advocate]. Because she talked. At that time my English was not good, so she talked for me. She talked [with landlords] at the apartments for me.]

All participants reported a strong belief that Rainbow Services' staff cares deeply about survivors. Many participants mentioned that they believe that advocacy is "not just their job," and that the work they do reflects **genuine empathy and concern for survivors' well-being**. Further, 31 survivors (86%) reported receiving social support from their advocate, as this survivor described:

*"They've helped us find ourselves and it's all been done from a place of **respect for our individual needs and with kindness**. And what more can I ask? I think the staff have gone above and beyond, on many occasions, to support my family and our individual needs, as they've changed."*



Housing and Financial Stability

The DV Housing First model promotes a financial strategy to achieve housing stability, which is designed to promote both financial and housing stability outcomes for survivors. Housing and financial stability are undoubtedly interrelated when considering the overall well-being of survivors and their families. During the course of the evaluation, it became clear that Rainbow Services centered their advocacy efforts **to promote both the housing and financial stability** of survivors they work with.

*"They came in like 'Let's take care of it. So, your first two months, we got you covered. Just make sure they accept third party checks. And for a certain amount of time, we'll keep going and we'll wean you off eventually so that you can stand on your own two feet.' So that was huge support **when you're trying to transition, to stand on your own and you got all these bills you're trying to deal with, at the same time you're trying to maintain housing for yourself, your kids, and groceries and all that. It's hard, it's a crazy balancing act...I think they ended up helping me, maybe almost a year, maybe 9 or 8 months, but they helped significantly. It was so helpful.**"*

Although most survivors were housed by their initial interview, close to half (47%) reported living in an undesired living situation in the past three months. Many survivors described housing that was not ideal (e.g., too small, too expensive, unsafe). By the end of the evaluation period, nine months later, only 26% of survivors reported living in an undesired situation in the previous three months. This indicates that Rainbow provided ongoing housing advocacy *after survivors obtained housing* to improve their living situation.

Further, survivors identified a number of financial barriers that impacted their ability to obtain and maintain adequate housing. Most participants faced immediate barriers as a result of DV, including credit records impacted by economic abuse, and a lack of competitive work history. For Spanish-speaking Latinx survivors, financial difficulties can be intensified when paired with language barriers and concerns about not having a credit history, as one participant shared:

*"Sería lo **financiero**... y también como lo que hablamos al principio, sentirse uno rechazado, cuando uno está buscando apartamento, por el idioma.... Siendo uno víctima de violencia doméstica porque uno se siente, sabe que no va a llenar los requisitos para que a uno le renten el apartamento. La gente se queda ahí como, porque yo digo que algunas que ni quieren. Algunas participantes que decían 'no les puedo hablar, no me van a aceptar, no tengo crédito'...."*

[It would be financial...and as we talked before, to feel rejected when one is looking for an apartment, because of the language barrier... being a victim of domestic violence, because I can feel it, I know I will not be able to fulfill the requirements for renting the apartment. People stay where they are, I think, even when they don't want to. Some participants would say, 'I can't ask, they won't accept me, I have no credit'...]

Participants also described the challenge of a limited employment history when working on their financial stability, as one survivor shared:

"I'm new to work. I've always been a homemaker. So, it was really hard going out there with no experience, no school background, no trade or anything. So, I guess that was the most difficult part because I had to find a job that would help me pay my bills, food, and things for kids."

Additionally, survivors identified exclusionary policies in affordable housing that restricted access for noncitizens and families with financial support from housing programs. Rainbow Services' housing team addressed that barrier by **connecting survivors to more private landlords and property managers** that partnered with Rainbow and were also committed to the well-being of families in their community.

Families also faced challenges with under- and unemployment throughout the evaluation period, frequently resulting in unpredictable or insufficient monthly incomes. Some specific employment barriers were shared by survivors. Some noncitizens were waiting for work permits, and many survivors were concerned that they lacked competitive job skills, especially regarding technological skills. A few survivors were unable to maintain employment due to mental health needs or transportation challenges. Survivors with children also discussed difficulties around needing to be available to take children to or from school, to doctor's appointments, or other obligations they could not fulfill with part-time or full-time shift work.

Rainbow Services' advocates provided **survivor-driven employment advocacy**, with one survivor sharing that her advocate helped her build a business plan and create and distribute flyers promoting her new business. During the course of the evaluation period, advocates continued to support survivors with their employment goals. At their initial interview, only 36% of survivors were mostly satisfied, happy, or extremely happy with their current employment, and this increased to about half of survivors nine months later.

When considered in the context of their overall monthly income, only 14% were happy or mostly satisfied at their initial interview, but by their last interview, about half of participants reported feeling at least mostly satisfied with their current income (see Figure 5). This increase suggests that some families were beginning to

build more financial stability by the end of the evaluation period, however, under- and unemployment remain big obstacles to stability.

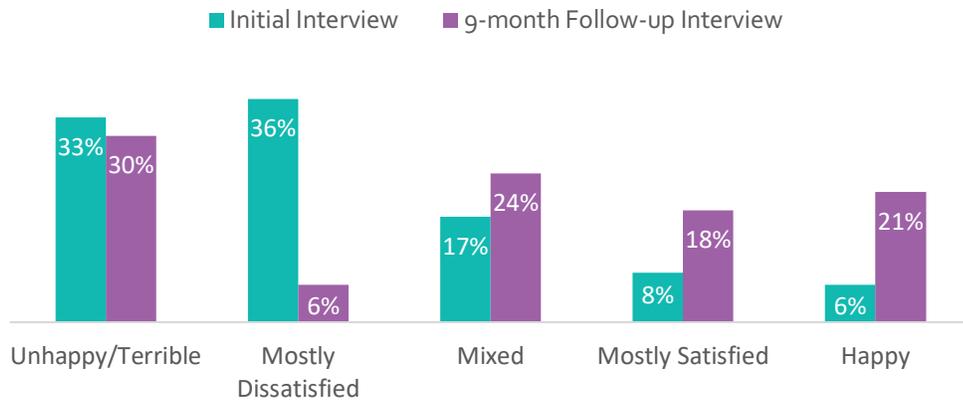


Figure 5. Participants' feelings about current income at the initial and at the 9-month follow-up interview.

Regardless of income, all families prioritized paying rent in order to develop better financial health and maintain housing stability. One of the biggest barriers to families searching for new housing is the impact of cycles of poverty systemically keeping them from moving ahead. Many families had to choose between which bills to pay in full and which ones to pay only partially. All of participants reported often making these tradeoffs, which typically resulted in high fees and interests on their accounts.

"I have to work and I pay 100% of the rent, which is \$2000. The other day they cut my gas, I didn't know that I didn't pay the gas. I paid the rent, but I didn't pay the gas. So they disconnected my gas because it's either the gas or the housing, and I went all in on the housing. ...the kids have homework, they have to go to the library because I haven't paid [cable/internet] either, until I get paid again. So, yeah, it's difficult."

Even though these tradeoffs made other aspects of their financial stability more difficult, survivors also shared feelings of independence and empowerment in being able to choose housing stability and considered it was part of the process of **rebuilding housing and financial stability**.

Participants referenced the importance of being able to access flexible funding to maintain their housing and safety. For instance, one survivor described how she felt supported through the housing process overall, helping her establish stability:

"I ended up safe and not homeless. I got all the support I needed to do that and it wasn't, 'Okay, here's a thing, go fly.' It lasted more than a year. Not too many people in our lives are able to sustain that kind of support. I don't know very many programs that sustain that kind of support. Even though things got bumpy, had I not had that leading me here - it wouldn't have been the same."

By the end of the evaluation period, only 11 (32%) survivors were still receiving flexible financial assistance. However, all survivors shared that they were **more confident in their ability to maintain housing stability without flexible financial assistance** than at the beginning of the evaluation. Further, survivors expressed less concern that they would be homeless without the flexible funds.

Although survivors gained experience managing their budget to prevent homelessness, most reported having no leftover money to cover all of their other expenses at the end of the month. This left survivors with a lingering concern about whether they would be able to afford their expenses in the future without any support from Rainbow Services. That being said, survivors reflected positively about their housing and wellbeing. Many survivors shared that they considered that **housing stability allowed them to commit to steady employment opportunities, and allowed their children to attend the same school, have dedicated spaces for homework, and for safe playtime with friends.**

Over the course of the 9-month evaluation, survivors moved from believing Rainbow's financial assistance should only be used to alleviate crisis, towards believing the flexible funds should be used to help survivors attain long-term stability. That shift paired with Rainbow's warm and supportive advocacy approach allowed survivors to feel comfortable to return to services throughout the evaluation period, if they needed support.



Survivors and their Children

Most of the survivors (86%) were parenting children under 18. Although the interview was primarily about the parental survivor, some data was collected about how their children were impacted by the abuse. In addition, the impact of becoming safely and stably housed on their children was freely discussed by survivors during their interviews.

"I'm paid up until July and I'm stable and safe and there's no reason for me not to stay [in current housing]. It means that I can close my door and my kids have a safe bed to sleep, a warm bed to sleep, they have food if they're hungry, they have entertainment, they don't need for anything...they're good."

77% of survivors reported their children were experiencing behavioral problems due to abuse in the three months before the initial interview. Nine months later, only 29% of survivors reported their children were experiencing behavioral problems in the previous three months. Additionally, 40% of survivors said their children had missed school in the three months prior to the first interview due to the abuse, and only one survivor reported their child missed school in the last three months of the evaluation period.

Prior to the first interview, 71% of survivors felt their children's behavior was better since working with Rainbow Services. By their final interview, that number decreased to 46% (see Figure 6). One parent's ongoing needs may help explain why fewer survivors felt their children's behavior was better:

"My son, he's been having new behaviors. I've already talked to my daughter's therapist and she referred me for him to get a therapist as well. I talked to his teachers and talked to the school district to see if they could evaluate him. I know with the whole trauma they had, he was still small, but when they get older, they start remembering I guess or acting out. I think it's due to that."

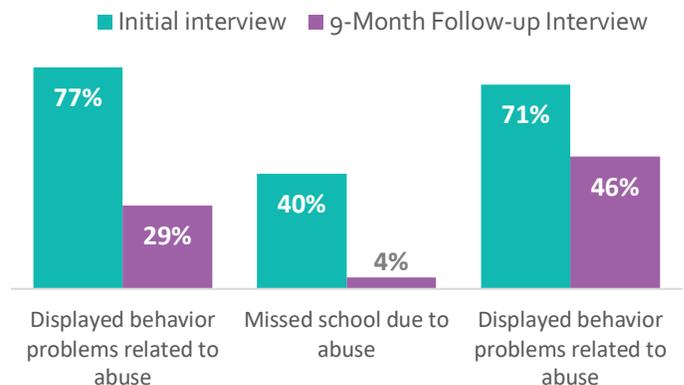


Figure 6. Children's experiences at initial and 9-month follow-up interviews.

Survivors considered that their family's housing stability allowed their children to regain emotional stability as well. They were now able to attend the same school, to have dedicated spaces for homework and for safe playtime with friends. Some survivors reflected on the general developmental benefits for their children to live in safe, stable housing, but one survivor gave a poignant reflection on the immediate benefits of stable housing:

"My son, even though he has those typical teenage issues, he's comfortable. His friends come over and his friends call me mom. When I was younger, I wanted the type of house that I went to go visit, and I kind of feel that right now. And that just makes me feel happy."



Importance of Social Support

One of the most impactful aspects of safety and stability that emerged throughout this evaluation was **the importance of social support for survivors**, particularly after survivors were stably housed. It became clear that social support is a critical aspect of survivors' healing process.

When survivors referred to the social support they received from Rainbow Services, they typically identified two sources of meaningful support (outside the emotional support from their advocate): (1) the weekly facilitated support group in which they could share current successes and challenges with fellow survivors, and (2) the information they received about the impact of domestic violence on them and their children. Survivors consistently described the domestic violence education as lifechanging at each time point. In addition, survivors felt they were better able to parent their children with the new knowledge and parenting information they received from their advocates and in support group.

The support group was clearly a central part of survivors' social support network. In support group, survivors did not feel pressured to explain the circumstances that led to their current challenges, and they felt encouraged by others' progress. Survivors reflected on the value of connecting with other survivors in the group, as one participant expressed:

*"Those connections, I couldn't have made anywhere else and I got to share that experience with other women who have gone through the same experience. I had that opportunity because of Rainbow. **The lessons that were taught in group sessions were lifechanging.** I didn't know it wasn't my fault until the sessions. The DV education overall was life-changing."*

Survivors shared that they often hesitated to share their experiences with people who did not share their experiences with domestic violence because they did not want to 'traumatize' people in casual conversation by accidentally sharing details of their experience. One participant expressed her desire to find a community of survivors to connect with:

"I feel like I need to keep myself in a community of people I can do that to, it's kind of, you know, safe to share and not harmful or damaging to them. And maybe even a little validating. I need to find that."

Some participants described feeling as though they eventually outgrew the support group. One survivor reflected: *"I think that the group support that exists is probably good for the first six months to a year while somebody's in crisis mode and everything's in transition. Once you start trying to settle back into a regular life, the group becomes less relatable."* Another survivor articulated the feeling of not belonging to the group anymore, *"Like I moved on from that domestic [violence] life, and I feel like people in there are still going through it. So, I feel like I'm going to be an outsider, not part of the group."*

Although survivors felt they no longer belonged to the group in the way they once did, they expressed **a desire to connect with other support networks** or other external resources that could be sources of emotional and psychosocial support. The loss of the support group community was especially difficult for Spanish-speaking Latinx participants who experienced multiple housing and financial challenges. The cultural value of social support was much more central to their overall quality of life, and therefore the loss of the support group was even more profound. As one participant expressed:

*“No es lo mismo que cuando vienes aquí y todas hemos pasado por lo mismo. **Te identificas, nos entendemos entre todas.** Y ponle, que a lo mejor, cuando salimos de aquí y a lo mejor no nos hablamos nadie del grupo, pero mientras estamos adentro, como sientes el apoyo de todas. Entonces ya no. Dejas de venir aquí y es frustrante porque ya no hay, o sea, tienes problemas, pero pues ya tu sola te los aguantas. O sea, no tienes a quien contarle ni a quien, o sea, ni quien te entienda, ni quien te escuche, nada. Te tienes que aguantar y ya no más seguir y ya.”*

*[It is not the same when you come here, and everyone has been in the same situation that you have. **You relate, we understand each other.** And maybe when you leave here, no one in this group will talk with each other again, but when you are in the group you feel supported by everyone. And when you stop coming, it is frustrating because there is no one. You have your problems, but you have to bear them yourself. There is no one to talk about them with, no one who understands, or listens, or anything. You have to bear it yourself and keep going, and that's it.]*

Social Support and Children

Participants also describe the multiple ways in which Rainbow Services' staff and advocates supported them in their parenting efforts and offered support to their children. One of the most impactful ways Rainbow Services made their support group accessible was by **providing childcare during the group sessions, which was crucial for survivors' sense of community**. Many survivors were grateful for the information they received on the impact of domestic violence on their children. However, those vital connections were also a reason the loss of support group upon exiting services was distressing. For example, one survivor who had not received services in the past three months was struggling with how to support her teenage son when she observed externalizing behaviors and expressed missing the input and feedback from her advocate. She expressed:

"Sometimes you need some feedback because sometimes the things in your head is not as huge or there are solutions to some problems that I'm not seeing. Just general support and feedback with having a sixteen-year-old son that's also aggressive and shows tendencies to be possessive towards his girlfriend."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Survivors were overwhelmingly satisfied with the advocacy they received from Rainbow Services and had had most of their needs met. In fact, **61% of survivors had all of their needs met by the time the evaluation period started**. However, survivors offered insight into ways Rainbow Services could strengthen their existing services or develop new, supportive, survivor-driven services.

The evaluation team met with a small group of participating survivors to discuss the evaluation findings and ensure their accuracy. None of the attending survivors were still receiving services. The meeting was held without Rainbow staff present, and all content and discussion was shared in both Spanish and English for a fully bilingual conversation. Survivors expressed gratitude for the opportunity to reunite with each other and reflect on their experiences receiving services at Rainbow. Through the interviews and this meeting, survivors identified the following three recommendations ancillary to the implementation of the DV Housing First program:

1. Offer focused support groups for multiple stages of healing

The support group facilitated by Rainbow Services was deeply valued by survivors. They noted how important it was for them to be able to communicate about trauma and share skills and information to move forward with each other. However, they relayed a concern that the support group decreases in effectiveness and relevance as they come out of crisis. The consistency of positive interaction was central to their healing journey. Therefore, survivors would like to be able to maintain that consistent positive support. They suggested offering additional support groups with less emphasis on crisis management and more on well-being and connection.

2. Establish referrals for external trauma-informed support

Survivors repeatedly shared their own recommendation for Rainbow Services to implement a system for referring survivors to trauma-informed services after they exit Rainbow's programs. Survivors recognized the value of maintaining trauma-informed services in their healing journey, but had very few resources for finding supportive mental health options that they felt comfortable with outside of Rainbow Services.

3. Create peer support pathway

The rich discussion of the evaluation findings produced a clear recommendation from survivors: Implement a *peer support pathway* for survivors to have a way to give back to the agency, share the knowledge and resources they have gained with other survivors, and continue their healing journey. Survivors expressed missing being able to support and connect with each other. As one participant succinctly expressed, *"Not being able to connect with others is quite sad. I really think helping others would also help my healing."*

CONCLUSION

This longitudinal evaluation examined how the DV Housing First model may impact survivors' housing and economic stability, safety, and well-being by following a small group of survivors for nine months who had received advocacy and flexible financial assistance services from Rainbow Services. Survivors were interviewed every three months regarding their housing and financial stability, their experiences with the Housing Team at Rainbow Services, and other aspects of well-being in their lives.

Evaluation findings offer unique insight into the implementation of DV Housing First model, since all survivors were housed by the start of the evaluation period. This created an opportunity to understand more about the needs of survivors and advocacy services required to *maintain* or increase housing safety and stability.

Rainbow Services' successful implementation of the model highlights the importance and impact of survivor-driven, trauma-informed advocacy after survivors obtain safe housing. Survivors often need advocacy services around employment, transportation, and support with their expenses in order to regain financial stability. Further, social support is a critical piece of survivors' healing journey, often involved strengthening their needs and individuals and parents.

Rainbow Services' intentional efforts to provide a welcoming, trauma-informed environment provides a safe space for families to begin their healing journey. Advocates and staff all embody survivor-driven values that allow them to respectfully meet survivors where they are and support them as they identify their priorities and goals to maintain their housing and financial stability.

During the course of the evaluation, it was evident that advocates were able to meet survivors' diverse needs in a culturally and contextually relevant way, which was vital to survivors' satisfaction, safety, and peace. Advocates' consistency in implementing trauma-informed services that respected survivors' autonomy and choices contributed to a trusting relationship and supported survivors' safety and well-being. This kind and compassionate stance may serve as the foundation of support that is needed for survivors and their families to begin to build the lives they desire for themselves and their children.

"The housing situation a child lives in impacts their self-esteem, development, growth, and it's helped me in my own growth, my sense of self-esteem, and how I'm able to provide a safe, nurturing, comfortable environment for me and my boys. This may have not been so easy to do without the help of the Housing Team at Rainbow."

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