

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOUSING FIRST MODEL IN CALIFORNIA

A MULTIPRONGED EVALUATION

OCTOBER, 2019

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Blue Shield of California Foundation
California Office of Emergency Services
California Partnership to End Domestic Violence
And all participating agencies

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
DV Housing First Model.....	iv

Multipronged Evaluation of DV Housing First in CA: Executive Summary

Background	2
Overview of the Multipronged Evaluation Process.....	3
Key Findings of the Multipronged Evaluation.....	4
Recommendations.....	6

DV Housing First: A Statewide Evaluation

Flexible Financial Assistance	2
Demographics	6
Flexible Financial Assistance.....	7
Housing Impact	10
Conclusion.....	12
Client Feedback about the Model	13
Background	14
Evaluation Process	14
Sample	15
Survey Findings	17
Conclusion.....	22
References.....	23

DV Housing First: An In-depth Longitudinal Evaluation of Rainbow Services

Background	1
Evaluation Process.....	2
Rainbow Services Housing Program	3
Participant Characteristics	4

Results 7

Recommendations..... 24

Conclusion 25

References 27

DV Housing First: An Examination of the Community Engagement Pillar

Background 1

Evaluation Process..... 2

Findings 3

Conclusion 12

NEWS: An Exemplar of the DV Housing First Model

Background 1

Evaluation Process..... 1

Exemplary Implementation of the DVHF Model..... 2

Conclusion 12

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOUSING FIRST MODEL

The impact of both domestic violence and homelessness can be so deep and multigenerational that it often takes years for families to recover (Black, Sussman, & Unger, 2010; Cutuli, Montgomery, Evans-Chase, & Culhane, 2017). However, there is emerging evidence that mobile advocacy and flexible financial assistance have multiple positive impacts on survivors and their children (Mbilinyi, 2015; Rollins, et al., 2012; Sullivan, Bomsta, & Hacskaylo, 2019; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). The Domestic Violence Housing First model is an innovative approach that focuses on helping survivors obtain and/or maintain safe and stable housing as quickly as possible through the use of flexible financial assistance, survivor-driven advocacy, and community engagement. This model aims to meet survivors' individual and unique needs to attain housing stability and safety. Promising evidence for the DV Housing First model suggests that this brief but intensive intervention may prevent homelessness and further abuse, and interrupt a negative trajectory for survivors and their children.



The DV Housing First model encompasses three main pillars to help promote housing stability, well-being, and safety for survivors and their families: (1) Survivor-driven, trauma informed, mobile advocacy (2) Flexible financial assistance and (3) Community engagement (Sullivan & Olsen, 2016). Advocates meet survivors' diverse needs through flexible, individualized, and survivor-centered services.



Survivor-driven, Trauma-informed, Mobile Advocacy

Advocates and survivors work together to address the needs identified by survivors that will help them obtain and maintain housing stability. Survivors lead the process rather than working on pre-determined goals promoted by agencies. Another key aspect is that advocates are mobile – working in the community and meeting where it is safest and most convenient for survivors. Mobile advocacy also includes accompanying survivors as they obtain community resources. Additionally, advocates focus on the survivors' strengths, while understanding and recognizing how abuse and trauma may impact their everyday lives. By promoting survivor safety and choice while building trust, advocates provide trauma-informed advocacy. Through this collaborative process, survivors maintain control in rebuilding their lives by defining their journey.



Flexible Financial Assistance

Survivors and advocates work collaboratively to determine the level of flexible financial assistance needed to meet their unique needs. Survivors may need assistance with issues directly related to housing, such as rental assistance, move-in costs, utility assistance, and debt assistance. They may also need assistance with issues that are not traditionally viewed as being associated with housing costs but that may have a profound impact on housing stability -- such as transportation assistance, legal services, childcare costs, employment, education, or relocation services. There are no financial caps to this assistance and financial support can change based on survivors' changing or varying needs. This flexibility is critical to help survivors stay in their own homes or attain new safe and stable housing.



Community Engagement

Advocates actively engage community members who can support survivors' safety, housing stability, and well-being. Advocates actively form partnerships with community members, so that survivors have knowledge about, and connection to a variety of services they may need. These community connections may be with landlords, auto repair shops, employers, schools, furniture shops, and mental health services among others. Forming these community partnerships may also have an impact on the community as they promote community awareness around the intersection of domestic violence and housing instability.

MULTIPRONGED EVALUATION OF DV HOUSING FIRST IN CALIFORNIA:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OCTOBER, 2019

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California Partnership to End Domestic Violence
And all participating agencies

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BACKGROUND

The Domestic Violence Housing First model is an innovative approach to supporting the housing and financial stability of domestic violence survivors and their families. It focuses on helping survivors obtain safe and stable housing as quickly as possible through the use of flexible financial assistance, survivor-driven advocacy, and community engagement. This model aims to meet survivors' individual and unique needs to attain housing stability and safety. Early evidence for the DV Housing First model suggests that this brief but intensive intervention may prevent homelessness and further abuse and interrupt a negative trajectory for survivors and their children.

The DV Housing First model encompasses three main pillars to help promote housing stability, well-being, and safety for survivors and their families, which are (1) Survivor-driven, trauma-informed, mobile advocacy (2) Flexible financial assistance; and (3) Community engagement (Sullivan & Olsen, 2016). Advocates meet survivors' diverse needs through flexible, individualized, and survivor-centered services.



Survivor-driven, trauma-informed, mobile advocacy



Advocates focus on addressing the needs identified by survivors rather than on pre-determined needs promoted by agencies. Advocates are mobile and are trained in trauma-informed practice.

Flexible funding assistance



Many survivors need not only safe and stable housing, but also temporary financial assistance. They may need assistance with issues directly related to housing or funds that are crucial to housing stability, safety, or well-being. Funds are targeted to support survivors so they can rebuild their lives.

Community engagement



Advocates proactively and creatively engage with housing providers, other service providers, and key community members in order to promote a positive and supportive community response to survivors.

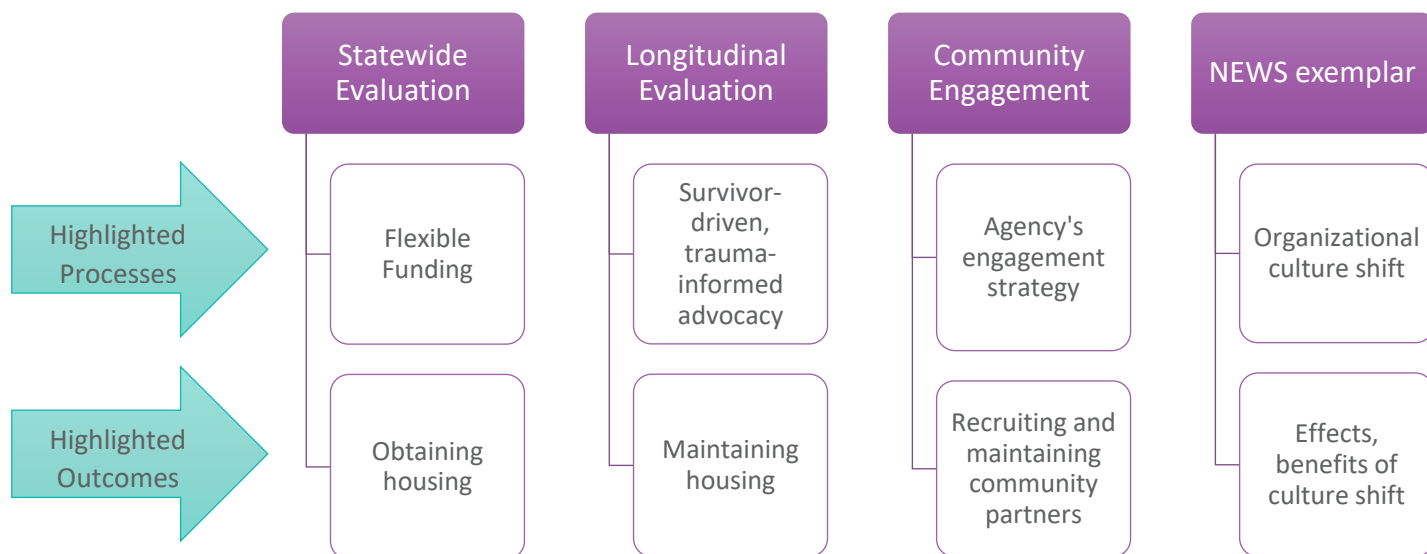
OVERVIEW OF THE MULTIPRONGED EVALUATION PROCESS

By 2017, the Victim Services and Public Safety Branch of the California Governor's Office for Emergency Services (Cal OES) had funded a total of 33 non-profit agencies across the state to implement the DV Housing First model. California is also the first state to dedicate federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds toward DV Housing First. While interest in using VOCA dollars for this model is increasing nationwide, empirical support for their use is sorely needed.

Building on Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence's (WSCADV) early evaluation evidence as well as preliminary evidence from a recent process evaluation of the DV Housing First model in California, the evaluation team conducted a multipronged evaluation that included:

- I. A **statewide evaluation** that tracked the implementation of DV Housing First flexible funding for 19 of the 33 agencies implementing the program.
- II. An **in-depth longitudinal evaluation** of Rainbow Services, a Los Angeles-based organization implementing the DV Housing First model.
- III. An examination of the **community engagement** pillar of the DV Housing First model.
- IV. A **review of NEWS**, a domestic violence agency serving as an exemplar of the implementation of the three DV Housing First pillars.

Each prong of the evaluation revealed specific processes and outcomes that emerged as critical to the model's implementation. The figure below highlights these processes and outcomes.



KEY FINDINGS OF THE MULTIPRONGED EVALUATION

Each evaluation prong revealed specific insights about the way the DV Housing First model is being implemented in California, elaborated on in the remainder of the report. The following are a few key findings highlighted from each evaluation prong.



Statewide Evaluation

The statewide evaluation highlighted the importance of addressing the diverse financial needs for survivors to help them obtain safe, stable housing. Nineteen agencies tracked **\$3,002,355.48** in flexible funds distributed to **925 survivors** over the course of 21 months. A total of **4,010 payments** were made to support survivors' unique needs. Although rental assistance is a critical way of supporting survivors' housing stability, agencies dedicated only 62% of the total funding toward rental assistance, using the rest of the funding on a wide range of expenses, including employment assistance, furniture, and transportation. As a result of receiving flexible funds, 425 families stayed in their own homes and 367 survivors obtained new housing, while the rest were still looking for safe and stable housing at the end of the evaluation period. Overall, **540 survivors (58%) were able to use the flexible financial assistance to prevent homelessness.**

In addition to tracking the use of flexible funds, agencies distributed **273 identical client feedback surveys** that were sent directly and anonymously to the evaluation team. Surveys were completed in English (59%), Spanish (29%), and Korean (12%). Clients reported that their advocate was **very focused on their strengths** (95%), **flexible about meeting location** (92%), and helped them **meet their housing goals** (90%). These surveys support the implementation of the core pillars of the DV Housing First model statewide.



Longitudinal Evaluation

Rainbow Services, located in the greater Los Angeles area, is dedicated to providing trauma-informed, client-centered services to survivors of domestic violence. **36 survivors** receiving services from Rainbow Services participated in **four interviews across nine months**. At the time of the first interview, all survivors were housed and had been working with a housing advocate for at least six months.

Follow-up interviews highlighted the advocacy skills and activities that helped survivors maintain safe, stable housing with flexible funds. Survivors' ability to use funds to prioritize housing stability gave them a new **sense of pride and dignity**. Services were **uniquely tailored** such that regardless of degree of need or unique circumstances, everyone reported their needs were met, and advocates helped restore a sense of dignity through

their **survivor-driven, trauma-informed interpersonal interactions**. The social support provided through **mutually supportive relationships** emerged as especially important for survivors' healing journey after obtaining safe housing.



Community Engagement Pillar

In-depth interviews were conducted with **five community partners** working with Rainbow Services, including two private landlords, two property managers, and one auto repair shop owner, as well as two Rainbow Services housing team members.

Community partners were invested in promoting a sense of community by supporting survivors. With new partners, Rainbow's housing team allows genuine trust to develop organically with **creative and proactive** approaches. Further, Rainbow's housing team maintains relationships by adapting to partner feedback, engaging them personally, and offering gestures of appreciation. Community partners advised other similar agencies to consider an **advisory role for landlords** and highlight the **positive impact of the agencies' work on survivors and communities**.



NEWS Exemplar

NEWS, an agency providing services for domestic and sexual abuse survivors in the Napa Valley area, was highlighted for its **exemplary implementation** of the DV Housing First model. A landlord, a property manager, the housing team, program director, executive director, and five survivors were interviewed to understand the **organizational processes** involved in their successful implementation of the model.

NEWS' promotes a consideration of **survivors' overall wellbeing and wholeness** and each advocate works with a relatively small number of families to ensure they provide the services survivors' need to see long-term improvements in their lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The multipronged evaluation design allowed for each of the core components of the DV Housing First model to be considered. The evaluation results revealed unique processes and outcomes regarding the successful implementation of each of the core model components:

- **Flexible financial assistance** can be critical to effectively meeting survivors' unique and diverse needs to maintain their current housing and/or obtain safe and stable housing. Flexible funds may be used to help survivors and their families **prevent homelessness** and support their ability to maintain housing stability.
- Advocates' ability to pair **flexible funds with trauma-informed, survivor-driven mobile advocacy** is essential to help survivors obtain and maintain housing. Survivors especially valued **social support** after obtaining housing, which should be tailored throughout the healing journey.
- Leadership and staff must implement **innovative strategies** to establish and maintain relationships with community partners that can provide housing and other support to survivors. **Proactive and responsive communication** that accounts for needs of community partners is essential to developing and maintaining trusting collaboration.
- An organizational structure that allows for **flexible work schedules** and promotes **ongoing training and staff support** is necessary for the successful implementation of the DV Housing First model.
- Finally, an overall organizational culture where survivors are treated with **care and respect** by staff, advocates, and leadership is essential to supporting survivors and their families' journey toward stability, safety, and healing.

DV HOUSING FIRST: A STATEWIDE EVALUATION IN CALIFORNIA

OCTOBER, 2019

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BACKGROUND

The Domestic Violence (DV) Housing First model is designed to promote housing stability, safety, and well-being for survivors and their families. The three main pillars of the model include:

- (1) survivor-driven, trauma-informed, mobile advocacy
- (2) flexible financial assistance
- (3) community engagement



OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION PROCESS

By 2017, the Victim Services and Public Safety Branch of the California Governor's Office for Emergency Services (Cal OES) had funded a total of 33 non-profit agencies across the state to implement the DV Housing First model. All of the agencies had worked with homeless or unstably housed domestic violence survivors; however, some programs had never offered or only partially offered the DV Housing First model in the past, while others had been implementing the model for at least one year.

Although agencies had varying experience with the model, and implemented it somewhat differently, they all used flexible financial assistance to support survivors' housing stability and safety. This statewide evaluation, then, focused on agencies' use of flexible funding to examine how these funds impacted survivors' ability to obtain and sustain stable housing. In addition, because it is important to hear directly from survivors when examining program services and outcomes, the evaluation team distributed a *Client Feedback Survey* that all participating agencies agreed to use to capture survivors' experiences and measure the immediate outcomes of the DV Housing First Program.

This statewide evaluation report covers findings from 19 of the 33 agencies implementing the DV Housing First program who were participating in the:

- (1) systematic tracking of their use **flexible financial assistance**, and
- (2) Use of identical ***Client Feedback Surveys***

DV HOUSING FIRST STATEWIDE EVALUATION: FLEXIBLE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

In 2017, the Victim Services and Public Safety Branch of the California Governor's Office for Emergency Services (Cal OES) funded a total of 33 non-profit agencies across the state to implement the DV Housing First model. Of those, 19 agencies participated in a statewide evaluation funded by Blue Shield of California Foundation. Five of these participating agencies were part of the initial eight programs funded to pilot the DV Housing First model in 2016. All of the programs had worked with homeless or unstably housed domestic violence survivors in the past; however, they had not offered this model or had only partially offered it prior to receiving funding from Cal OES.

1. Family Crisis Center – Los Angeles, CA
2. Catalyst DV Services – Chico, CA
3. Community Solutions for Children, Family, and Individuals – Gilroy, CA
4. Contra Costa Family Justice Alliance – Concord, CA
5. Downtown Women's Center – Los Angeles, CA
6. East Los Angeles Women's Center – Los Angeles, CA
7. House of Ruth – Pomona, CA
8. Human Services Association – Bell Gardens, CA
9. Korean American Family Services – Los Angeles, CA
10. Lake Family Resource Center – Kelseyville, CA
11. NEWS – Napa, CA
12. Next Door Solutions – San Jose, CA
13. Rainbow Services – San Pedro, CA
14. Ruby's Place – Hayward, CA
15. SAVE – Fremont, CA
16. South Bay Community Services – Chula Vista, CA
17. WEAVE – Sacramento, CA
18. Wild Iris – Lone Pine, CA
19. WTLC – Fullerton, CA

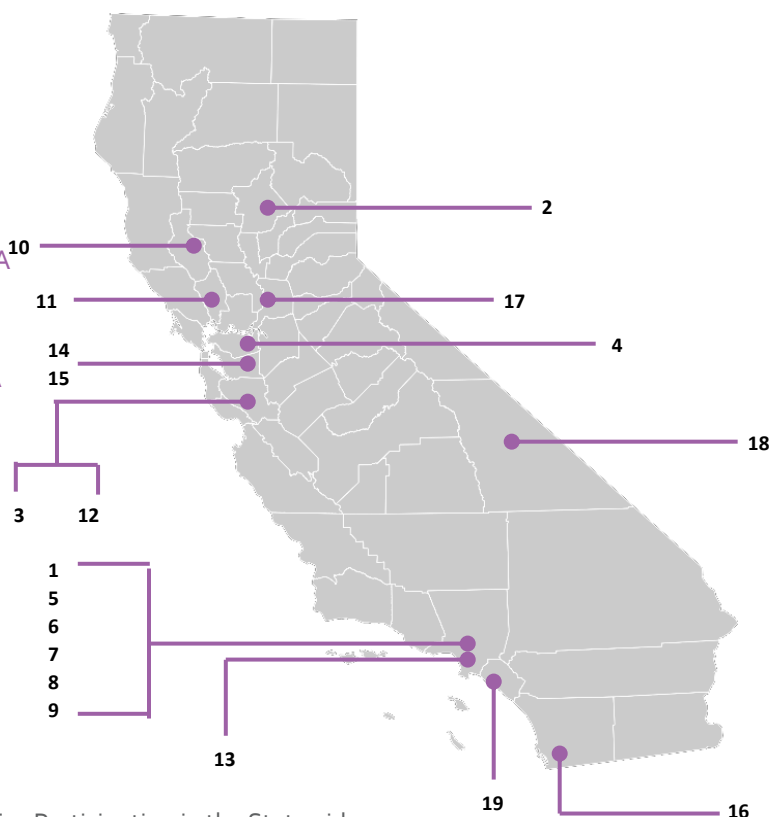
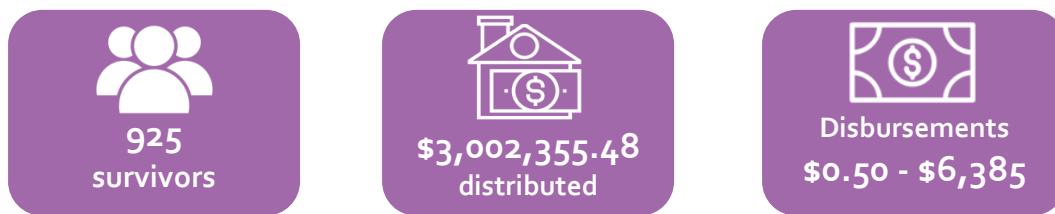


Figure 1. Agencies Participating in the Statewide Evaluation of the DVHF Model

Agencies tracked the distribution of funds to clients through an online spreadsheet provided by the evaluation team. The spreadsheet systematically tracked how much money each client received, what the funds were used for, and how the funds impacted survivors' ability to obtain or maintain stable housing.

Information was recorded between July 2017 and April 2019. As of April 2019, **\$3,002,355.48** in flexible financial assistance had been distributed to **925 survivors and their families**.



Funds disbursed **ranged from \$0.50 to \$6,385**. There were several payments under \$10.00. These smaller payments supported survivors in paying for a wide array of things: food, court parking fees, safety measures (e.g., a post office box and mail forwarding service designed to support survivors' safety), processing fees for utility payments, and bike licensing and registration fees. These payments, while small, can be key to meeting survivors' safety and stability needs. On the other hand, larger amounts are often needed to meet survivors' needs. For example, the payment of \$6,385 supported a survivor in paying for legal fees related to an eviction.

As shown by the variability of payments, the flexibility component of the DV Housing First model is critical to meet survivors' unique needs. A previous evaluation of the DV Housing First model focused on the flexible financial assistance offered through private funding (Mbilinyi, 2015). Therefore, a better understanding of California's use of federal VOCA dollars to fund a statewide implementation of the DV Housing First model, where funding was not as flexible as funding provided through private foundations, was essential.

As governmental funding will always be less flexible than private funding, this can have a direct impact on agencies' ability to support survivors' housing stability and well-being. Although California's DV Housing First funded agencies are encouraged to reach out to their contract monitor for inquiries regarding allowable VOCA expenses, there are some clear restrictions on what expenses are not allowed. For instance, mortgage and insurance (rental, car, or other) payments continue to be unallowable expenses. Understanding these restrictions is important as organizations braid private and public funding to best meet the needs of survivors in their communities.

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

In addition to tracking how flexible funding was used, agencies also documented basic demographic information about the survivors receiving funds. Almost all survivors who received flexible financial assistance identified as female (97%) and ranged in age from 18 to 65 years old or older, with the majority aged 25-44 years.

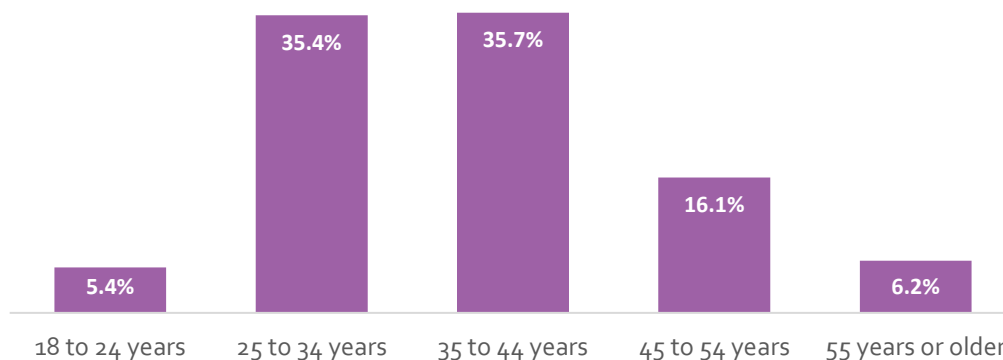


Figure 2. Participants' Age

Half of the survivors identified as Latinx/Hispanic, 21% identified as White, 17% identified as Black/African American, 6.9% as Asian, and fewer than 2% of survivors identified as Native American, Alaskan Native, or Pacific Islander. About 22% of survivors in this sample identified as non-US citizens.¹

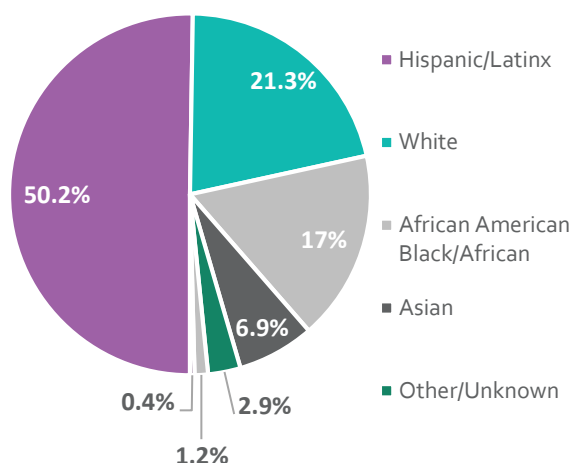


Figure 3. Participants' Race/Ethnicity

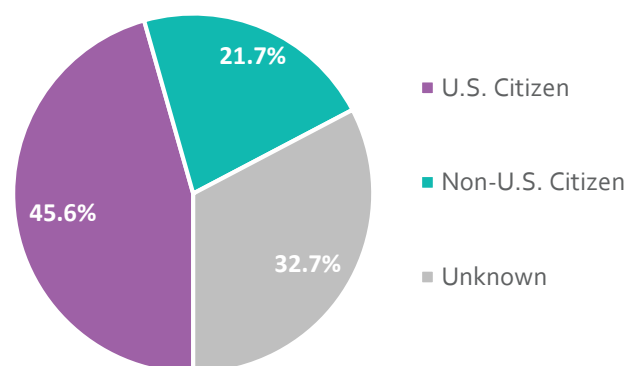


Figure 4. Participants' Immigration Status

¹ Some agencies did not collect immigration status information given potential threat to participants' confidentiality, and some participants did not want to report immigration status information to agencies.

FLEXIBLE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Advocates across the 19 agencies used flexible funding to meet the unique needs of survivors – from rental assistance and move-in costs to children’s needs and employment assistance. Since July 2017, advocates made **4,010 individual payments** disbursed to **925 survivors and their families**. Table 1 presents how funds were distributed.

Payment Type	Percent of Total	Funds	Number of Payments
Rental Assistance	61.7%	\$1,853,069.27	1856
Move-in Costs	17.1%	\$514,394.51	315
Essential Furnishings	5%	\$151,527.54	200
Transportation	3.5%	\$104,710.51	388
Debt Assistance	2.8%	\$84,624.33	98
Basic Needs	2%	\$59,347.77	389
Utility Assistance	1.7%	\$51,396.84	317
Children’s Needs	1.2%	\$37,513.39	62
Other	1%	\$30,349.57	60
Employment Assistance	0.9%	\$26,350.04	72
Moving Costs	0.8%	\$23,630.47	94
Physical/Mental Health Needs	0.7%	\$20,317.03	55
Relocation Services	0.7%	\$20,216.63	26
Legal Assistance	0.4%	\$12,734.00	19
Documentation Fees	0.3%	\$7,633.11	32
Safety Enhancement Services	0.2%	\$4,540.47	27
Total		\$3,002,355.48	4,010

Table 1. Agency Financial Tracker Use of Funds



DV Housing First funds were used for a **variety of needs** including non-traditional housing costs, such as transportation, basic needs, employment assistance, and legal assistance. **Rental assistance accounted for the largest percentage of payments** (62%) made to survivors, with move-in costs (17%) and essential furnishings (5%) following. Additionally, 3.5% of payments were used for transportation assistance, which included paying for things like gas cards, repairs, and bus/cab rides, while basic needs payments included things like food and home necessities.

"[Agency] gave me support to cover relocation costs, start budgeting and saving money for emergency, and furnish our living area and manage the rent."

– DV Housing First participant



As of April 2019, of the 925 survivors who received DVHF funds, the majority (71%) received **flexible financial assistance more than once**. Of those, individual survivors received disbursements that ranged from 2 to 36 payments. However, on average, survivors received 4 payments, about **\$3,000 in total**.

"[Agency] helped me stay in my home, so I could focus on finding employment."

– DV Housing First participant



Among those survivors receiving a one-time disbursement, almost half (46%, 123 survivors) used the financial assistance to **stay in their own home** and likely prevented undesired moves and/or homelessness. 34% of survivors (91) obtained new housing and 20% (54) were still working to get housed. Those considered 'still working to get housed' could be homeless, living in shelter, or transitional housing and may have received additional funding after the completion of the evaluation period.

The **flexibility component** in receiving and distributing DV Housing First flexible funding continues to be instrumental in meeting the diversity of survivors' needs, as illustrated by the following survivor experiences:

Flexible Financial Assistance: Homeless to Housed

Mariela (not her real name) was homeless when she started working with a non-profit agency in Los Angeles. The agency supported her with DV Housing First flexible financial assistance to pay for move-in costs and first month's rent of her new housing. The following month, she needed financial support for furniture assistance and rental assistance in order to stay in her new home. Due to changing circumstances and need, three months later, Mariela received help with move-in costs for a new home. Due to the flexibility and immediate disbursement of the funds, Mariela and her family avoided moving back into homelessness and were able to move into another home. In total, Mariela received about \$5,000 in five separate payments to support her in her journey toward housing stability.

Flexible Financial Assistance: Stay in Own Home

Ana (not her real name) was housed and wished to stay in her home. She worked with a non-profit agency in the greater San Francisco area to receive advocacy and financial support to help her stay in her home. Her first four payments were across four months and helped her with utility and rental debt, as well as basic needs for food and gas. This debt assistance helped her catch up with rent. The following month, she received funds to help with her current month's rent. Due to changing circumstances, she received help with rent two months later; and in another two months, she received help with her utilities. She received about \$3,000 over eight separate payments to cover these costs. Due to this support, she was able to avoid any unwanted moves and stay in her home.

"Housing First purchased my home a security system and put in motion- triggered floodlights on the side, back, and the car port of my home. I felt safer going home after these were installed."

– DV Housing First participant

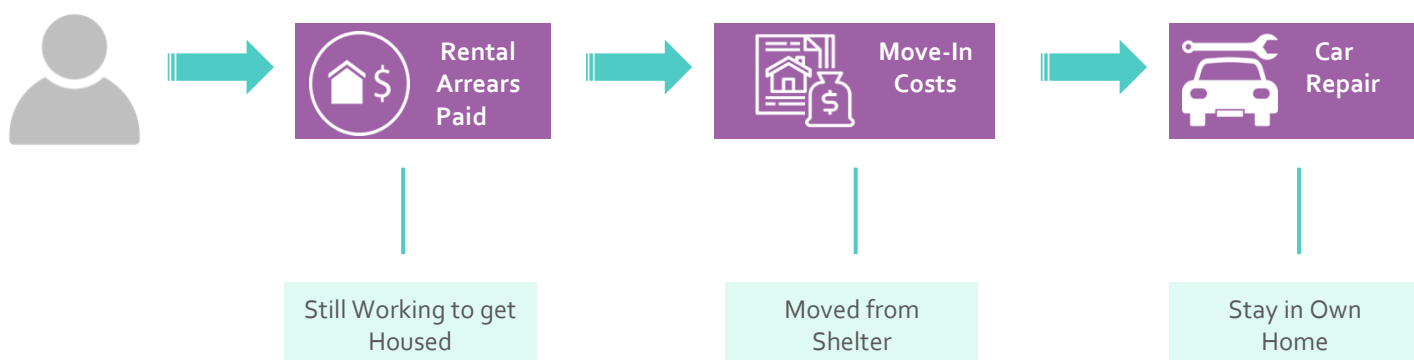
HOUSING IMPACT

Each of the 19 participating agencies recorded the 'immediate impact' of flexible funding on survivors' housing stability on an online spreadsheet provided by the evaluation team. Agencies could record a housing impact as one of the following:



- still working to get housed
- stay in own home
- moved from homelessness to housed
- moved from one home to another
- moved from shelter to housed
- moved from transitional housing to permanent housing

While some funding resulted in a survivor immediately obtaining new housing or staying housed, in other situations, the funding was used to remove a housing barrier (coded as 'still working to get housed'). For example, a survivor living in shelter and looking for a new home for their family might need to pay previous rental debt before being able to secure new housing. An agency might pay rental arrears that were preventing them from renting a new home. This specific disbursement would be recorded as 'still working to get housed,' since paying rental debt is critical to attaining new housing and because the survivor has not moved into new housing yet. Once the survivor applies for housing, she might need financial support to cover application fees and move-in costs. The outcome of these payments would then be recorded as 'moved from shelter to housed'. A few months later, if the survivor's car broke down, the agency might pay for car repairs, so the survivor does not lose her job. This payment would be tracked as helping the survivor and their family 'stay in their own home.'



As a direct result of receiving flexible financial assistance, **540 (58%) survivors used funds to prevent homelessness.**

The vast majority of these payments were used to help survivors stay in their own home or move from one home to another, so survivors never became homeless at any time. Survivors used their flexible financial assistance for a wide range of expenses, including rental and utility arrears,

transportation needs, and rental assistance. Homelessness prevention not only allows families to avoid entering into the homelessness system, but survivors and their children are able to secure housing stability and focus on their overall safety, well-being, and their journey forward.



58%
Prevented
Homelessness



46%
Stayed in Their
Homes

Of the 540 survivors who avoided homelessness, DV Housing First flexible funding helped **425 survivors stay in their own homes.** These survivors and their children were able to remain stably housed and avoid homelessness or any other unwanted moves with use of these funds. Given California's housing crisis, including a severe shortage of affordable housing and increasing housing costs, financial

assistance that gives survivors the option to stay in their current home while minimizing the risk of becoming homeless is critical (Taylor, 2015).

Further, **367 (40%) survivors were able to obtain new housing.** Most survivors and their families moved out of homelessness, while others moved from one home to another, or from transitional housing into a new, safe, stable home.

Survivors often needed further assistance after moving to a new home in order to maintain their new housing. Of the 367 families who moved to a new home, 75% needed at least one more disbursement of financial assistance to maintain their housing stability.



40%
Obtained
New Housing

Over the course of the evaluation period, 1.5% (14 survivors) became homeless at some point during their journey towards housing stability, and as of April 2019, 138 survivors and their families (15%) were still looking for safe and stable housing.

"I was on the verge of becoming homeless. Thanks to the [DVHF] program, I am able to keep a roof over my children's heads."

— DV Housing First participant

CONCLUSION

A critical component of the DV Housing First model is being able to provide flexible financial assistance to support survivors and their unique and diverse needs in order to help them obtain or maintain housing. These findings demonstrate that the use of flexible funding can have a profound impact on survivors' immediate and long-term housing stability.

While California's use of VOCA funding to implement the DV Housing First is innovative, governmental funding remains less flexible than private funding, and this proved difficult for some agencies. Further, since the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime had only recently begun allowing VOCA funds to be used for housing needs, there was uncertainty at the local and state level about which costs would be reimbursable. Over time, organizations implementing DV Housing First in California have gained increasing clarity regarding what expenses are permitted. This has allowed advocates to use funding more flexibly and creatively toward essential, yet non-traditional housing costs.

To illustrate, the importance of knowing how funds can and cannot be spent, the DV Housing First agencies that participated in a recent process evaluation reported not having a guide to help determine what were allowable expenses. Therefore, agencies used the vast majority of their funding (85%) on rental assistance. In contrast, agencies in the current evaluation received a guide of allowable expenses that helped clarify how DV Housing First funding could be used. Although rental assistance continued to be an important way of supporting survivors' housing stability, agencies dedicated only 62% of the total funding toward rental assistance, using the rest of the funding on a wide range of expenses, including employment assistance, furniture, and car repairs.

The flexibility and clarity of this funding is key because it allows advocates to remain survivor-centered in their advocacy approach and provide as much funding and as many times as needed. This is an important approach to meeting survivors' unique and individual needs in their journey toward housing stability, safety, and healing.

"They helped me with my deposit, furniture, and beds, living room set, dinner set, and dressers. They help me with diapers and clothing for my 1-year old. We have not had any of these items in years."

– DV Housing First participant



DV HOUSING FIRST STATEWIDE EVALUATION:

CLIENT FEEDBACK ABOUT THE MODEL

As part of the statewide evaluation of the DV Housing First model, the 19 non-profit agencies participating in the systematic tracking of their use of flexible financial assistance also used identical anonymous *Client Feedback Surveys* to capture survivors' experiences and measure the immediate outcomes of the DV Housing First Program.

The *Client Feedback Survey* was developed during the 2017 DV Housing First Process Evaluation. The evaluation team asked participating agencies to share with them any surveys that had been used to gather feedback from clients. A draft survey was created using questions from these surveys and presented at a roundtable with all agencies. At that time, one of the programs participating in the process evaluation shared a feedback survey they had been successfully using in English and Spanish. The survey included most of the items needed to evaluate whether the core components of the DV Housing First model had been met and captured the experiences of survivors as a result of their participation in the program. Therefore, the evaluation team made minor changes to the survey and all agencies agreed to pilot the survey for a few months. The data was analyzed and presented to representatives from each agency. The findings suggested that these surveys captured meaningful, useful information about the DV Housing First program, so they were used during the statewide evaluation.

Since the *Client Feedback Survey* had been successfully piloted in Spanish and English, the evaluation team provided the survey in both languages to all organizations participating in the current evaluation. Additionally, Korean Family Services, an organization that predominately serves Korean survivors, led the translation of the survey into Korean to ensure that Korean-speaking clients had the opportunity to provide feedback in their preferred language.

EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation team offered a training webinar to introduce staff to the *Client Feedback Surveys*, after which the evaluators scheduled individual phone or video calls with each agency to have a more in-depth discussion on how agencies were planning to distribute, collect, and return the surveys. Most agencies decided to have one staff member, who did not provide direct services (e.g., administrative assistant, intern, or volunteer), distribute and collect the surveys. Some agencies provided the survey with a pre-addressed envelope to the agency. Other agencies offered their clients a quiet, private space to fill out the surveys and had a sealed envelope or locked box near the front desk for clients to return the survey. Once collected, the designated staff member at each agency either mailed the completed surveys or periodically scanned and sent the surveys to the evaluation team via a password protected cloud-based storage folder.

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Between July 2018 and March 2019, **273 Client Feedback Surveys** were completed by 19 participating agencies and returned to the evaluation team. The majority of the participants (97%) identified as female. 51% of participants were between the ages of 30 and 44, 22% were between 18 and 29 years old, and 27% were 45 years old or older.

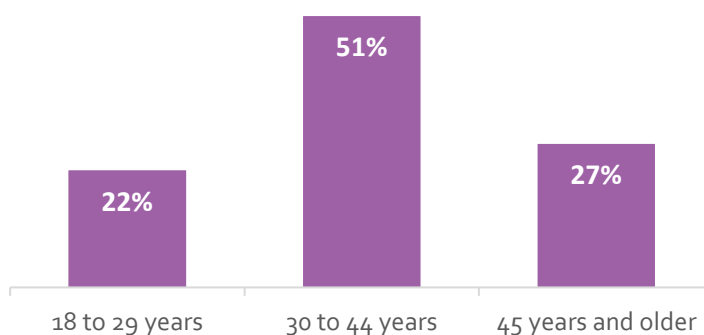
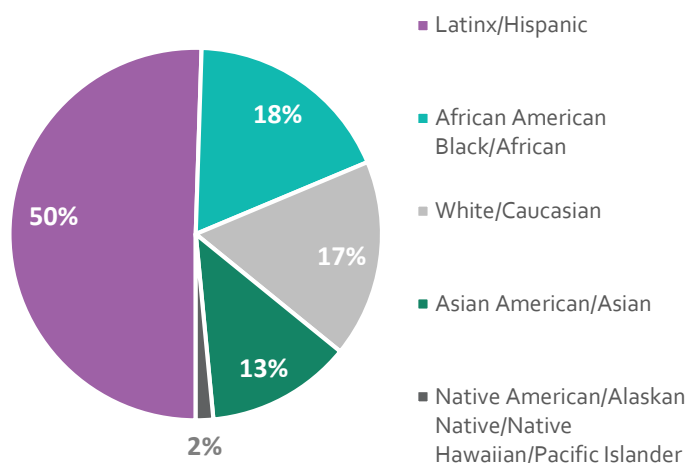


Figure 5. Participants' age



Exactly half the participants identified as Latinx/Hispanic, and most of the remaining participants identified either as African American (18%), White (17%), or Asian/Asian American (13%).

Figure 6. Participants' race/ethnicity

When the survey was administered, 51% of the participants had been working with a DV Housing First advocate for three to six months, 28% had been in the program for seven to twelve months, and the rest had been receiving services for less than three months.

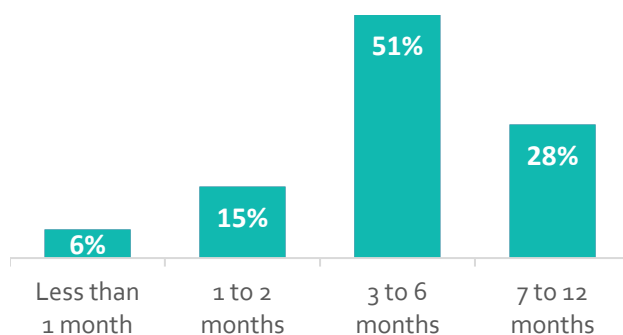


Figure 7. Length of time working with a DV Housing First advocate

Of the 273 surveys returned, 59% were in English, 29% in Spanish, and 12% in Korean. The number of surveys submitted varied widely between the agencies, likely due to the size of the organization and the number of clients available to participate. However, on average, each participating agency returned 14 *Client Feedback Surveys*.

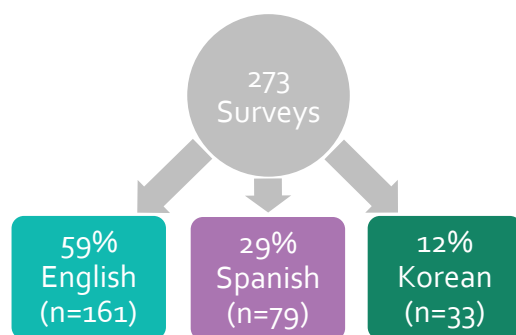


Figure 8. Percent and number of *Client Feedback Surveys* in each language

SURVEY FINDINGS



Support from Advocate

Clients were asked about the support they received from DV Housing First advocates while they were receiving services. On a four-point scale from 'not at all' to 'very much,' the vast majority of participants reported **feeling very supported** by their advocate and feeling that their advocate was very **focused on their strengths** (95%). The majority of participants also felt their advocate was **flexible about where they met** (92%) and helped them reach their short-term **housing goals** (90%).

Support from Advocate				
Question	Not at All	A Little	Somewhat	Very Much
I felt supported by my advocate n=273	0%	1%	4%	95%
My advocate focused on my strengths n=269	0%	1%	4%	95%
My advocate was flexible with meeting location (came to me): home, work, etc.... n= 269	1.5%	0.5%	6%	92%
My advocate helped me reach my short-term housing goals n=267	1%	2%	7%	90%
My advocate referred me to other community resources n=267	1%	2%	8%	89%
My advocate did safety planning with me n=267	2%	2%	9%	87%
My advocate went with me to other agencies or services n=255	13%	4%	12%	71%

Survivors overwhelmingly expressed their gratitude for being met with **compassion and dignity** when seeking services, as one English-speaking survivor described:

"This is my first time in 51 years ever needing assistance and support of any kind. Topics such as any type of abuse can be humiliating to admit to oneself, let alone air the information to a total stranger. Both advocates were excellent listeners, resourceful, generous, and compassionate. I can't thank them or the program enough and I look forward to volunteering there 2 years after I am discharged!"

– DV Housing First participant



Personal Strengths and Skills

Survivors were also asked if they felt that their advocates helped them gain strengths and skills while receiving DV Housing First services. The majority of participants (85%) reported feeling they “very much” had more **ways to plan for their safety** because of their work with their advocate. Further, 83% felt they were very aware that the abuse and control their partner used was not their fault.

Personal Strengths and Skills				
Question	Not at All	A Little	Somewhat	Very Much
I have more ways to plan for my safety n=268	0.5%	4.5%	10%	85%
I know the abuse and control my partner used was not my fault n=263	3%	3%	11%	83%
I was able to work on my well-being and overall health n=267	1%	3%	14%	82%
I have a greater understanding of the financial power and control my partner used/uses in our relationship n=259	4%	5%	10%	81%
I am aware of the other services the agency provides...support groups, hotline, legal, etc.... n=267	1%	5%	13%	81%
I feel more hopeful about the future n=272	1%	4%	15%	80%
I am better able to reach my goals n=271	1%	4%	18%	77%
I know more about community and/or social resources I may need n=268	1%	7%	16%	76%
I have more supports in my community n=265	2%	8%	19%	71%
I know about the community resources I might need n=227	1%	6%	22%	71%
I am financially more stable n=262	4%	13%	24%	59%

Participants also indicated that they felt **more connected to community resources** as a result of their involvement in the DV Housing First program.

"The DV Housing First program] helped me have a solid financial housing plan to ensure I can save to be able to pay my rent on time every month for the remaining of my lease."

– DV Housing First participant

76% of participants indicated that they had a much better understanding of the **resources available** to them in their communities. Additionally, over half of participants (59%) felt very strongly that they were **more financially stable** than before receiving services. As one survivor mentioned, receiving tailored advocacy was essential to feeling more financially stable and maintaining her housing.



Housing Stability and Safety

The central aim of the DV Housing First model is to support survivors in obtaining safe and stable housing. 88% of participants indicated they were able to **remain in their home or obtain safe housing**, and 85% shared that they felt they were much better able to **plan for their safety** as a result of their involvement in the DV Housing First program. As one participant mentioned:

"Housing first helped me move into a new apartment. My ex continued to abuse me and break into my home demanding entry. Now, he has no knowledge of where I live. And my son and I are SAFE."

– DV Housing First participant

Housing Stability				
Question	Not at All	A Little	Somewhat	Very Much
I was able to either remain in my home or secure safe housing (Other than shelter or transitional housing) n=260	1%	1%	10%	88%
I know more about how to budget to help me stay housed n=265	2%	4%	14%	80%

Similarly, 80% of participants shared that they are **better able to budget** to help maintain their housing. For participants, this can be a **life changing experience**, as one Spanish-speaking participant shared:

"Gracias a este programa pude teniendo un lugar para vivir; yo y mis 2 hijos; Gracias a este programa pude solventar otros gastos que no estaban en mis planes. gracias a este programa pude sobrevivir a todo. Y me enseñaron a llevar y administrar más mi dinero."

(Thanks to this program I have a place to live for me and my two kids. Thanks to this program I have settled other costs that were not in my plans. Thanks to this program I have been able to survive everything. They have also taught me to carry and manage my money better.)

– Spanish-speaking DV Housing First participant



Culturally Specific Results

Although the majority of survivors expressed feeling extremely satisfied with the services they received and the skills they gained as a result of their participation in the DV Housing First program, there was a noteworthy difference between English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, and Korean-speaking participants.

Spanish- and Korean-speaking participants indicated that their **advocate accompanied them to other agencies or services** at a higher rate than did English-speaking participants. It is clear that agencies working with survivors who have limited English proficiency were able to effectively help them navigate multiple systems.

This survivor-centered approach is critical when providing culturally and contextually relevant advocacy services to immigrant survivors, particularly in the current sociopolitical climate where anti-immigration rhetoric and policies are on the rise.

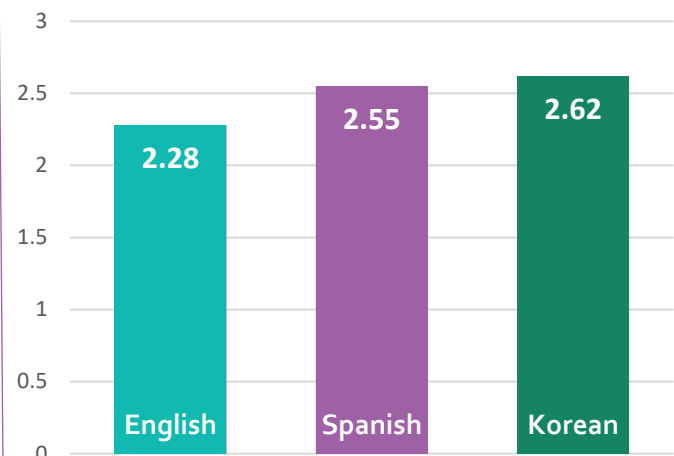


Figure 9. Average agreement with the statement “My advocate went with me to other agencies and services” by language. Responses could range from 0 (not at all) to 3 (very much).

“[Me ayudaron] hablando por teléfono, acudiendo a citas, llenando formularios y aplicaciones...Realmente son muy buenos en lo que hacen. Dios les bendiga!”

(They helped me with talking on the phone, coming to meetings, filling out forms and applications...They are truly very good at what they do. God bless them!)

—Spanish speaking DV Housing First participant

“내가 진정으로 감사하는 직원들을 지원합니다. 그들이 그렇게 도움되는 법적,정서적,금융,산업 및육”

(I truly appreciate the staff and their support. They’ve been so helpful with legal, emotional, financial, occupational, and childcare.)

—Korean speaking DV Housing First participant



Participants' Continuing Goals

The majority of survey respondents were still receiving DV Housing First services when they completed the survey and reported they were hoping to continue receiving advocacy and financial assistance. Participants' reported needs that ranged from transportation issues (e.g., car payments, repairs) to housing stability concerns (e.g., rental and utility arrears, finding housing, move-in costs).



Participant Suggestions

Although results from the *Client Feedback Survey* were quite positive, participants shared some thoughts on how agencies could improve the DV Housing First program.

The majority of survivors mentioned the need to find more affordable housing in their communities. Participants suggested increasing the number of advocates in each agency to better provide a wider range of services for clients. Participants also reported needing more help with employment, immigration, and legal issues.

Other Participant Suggestions

- ✓ Provide a full list of services offered by agency
- ✓ Offer more legal advocacy
- ✓ Create a housing list for seniors
- ✓ Offer counseling for children
- ✓ Provide childcare assistance for children with special needs

CONCLUSION

The results from the *Client Feedback Survey* demonstrate overwhelmingly positive outcomes for the DV Housing First model. The majority of survivors reported that they were able to find or remain in safe housing and were able to gain and reinforce skills that promoted their housing stability and safety. Many survivors shared the multiple and unique challenges they faced as they engaged in their **healing journey**. Advocates' compassionate, unwavering support, and their use of flexible financial assistance was crucial for survivors to obtain safe and stable housing, improve their financial and employment situation, and promote the wellbeing of their whole family. As one participant shared:

*"I wanted to pursue my education from the university, which is very expensive. And I could not afford a car because I have a bad credit report as I have unpaid medical bill debt that my abusive partner refused to pay for me. I am a cancer survivor and I have a special needs adult son. It is very tough getting by financially, that I sometimes felt it may be better to tolerate the abuse than to suffer financially. But I am grateful to the workers in [agency] who helped me a lot. Particularly I would like to thank [advocate] who helped me a lot finding a safe house to live in for me and my children. She is an inspiration for me, and many other women like me. She is very kind and caring and understanding. She will make you feel that you did the right thing and she is always there for us. I also like to thank the donors who fund [agency] - **your every dollar counts to giving a new hope, safe place, and a second chance to grow up as a human with human dignity.** Imagine your dollar going to uplift the life of women who otherwise live in unsafe houses, where they lead [the] life of a caged bird."*

– DV Housing First participant

This report includes a review of DV Housing First funds used until the end of this evaluation tracking period (April 2019). Each agency participating in this statewide evaluation is continuing to receive flexible funding and technical assistance through the end of 2019.

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

OCTOBER, 2019

PREPARED FOR:

Blue Shield of California Foundation
California Office of Emergency Services
California Partnership to End Domestic Violence
And all participating agencies

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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.

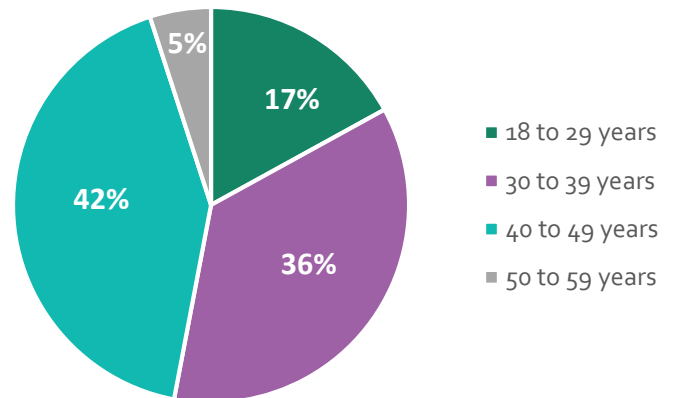


Figure 1. Participants' ages (n=36)

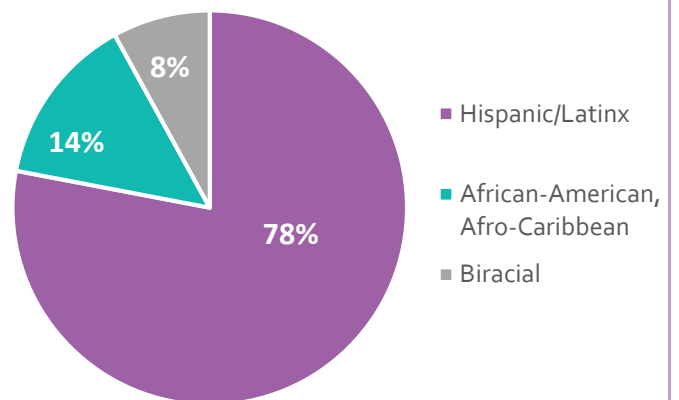


Figure 2. Participants' racial identities (n=36)

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

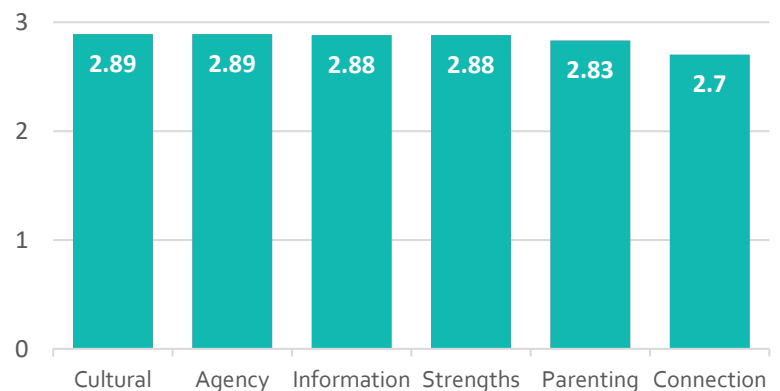


Figure 3. Average agreement with each subscale of the Trauma-Informed Practice Scale (Goodman et al., 2016). Response options ranged from 0 = not at all to 3 = very much.

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.

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 victima 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.

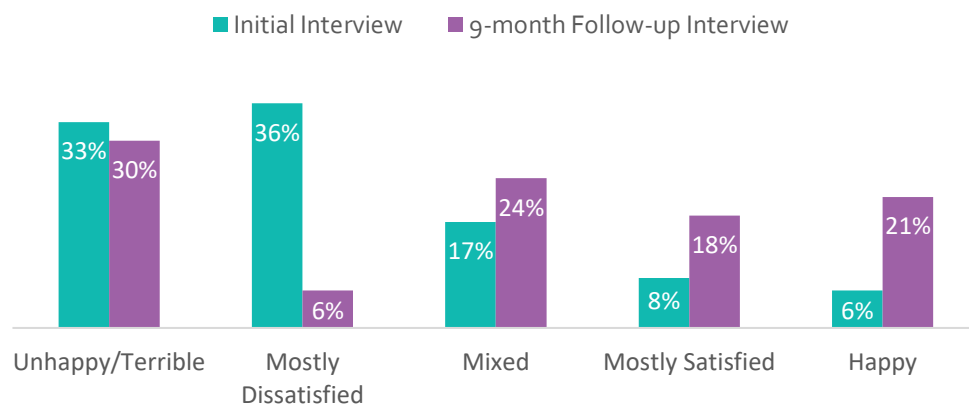


Figure 5. Participants' feelings about current income at the initial and at the 9-month follow-up interview.

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:

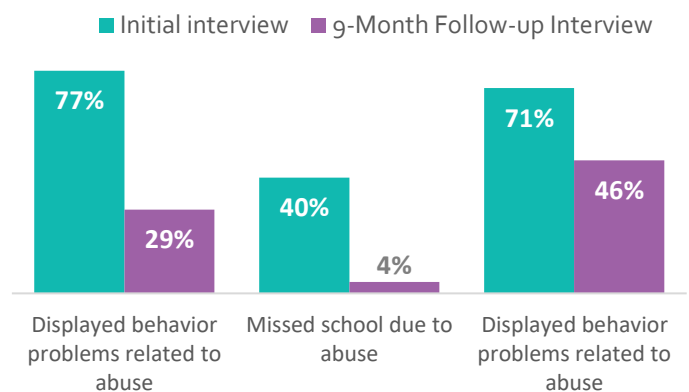


Figure 6. Children's experiences at initial and 9-month follow-up interviews.

"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."

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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DV HOUSING FIRST:

AN EXAMINATION OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PILLAR

OCTOBER, 2019

PREPARED FOR:

Blue Shield of California Foundation
California Office of Emergency Services
California Partnership to End Domestic Violence
And all participating agencies

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BACKGROUND

The Domestic Violence (DV) Housing First model is designed to promote housing stability, safety, and well-being for survivors and their families. The three main pillars of the model include:

- (1) survivor-driven, trauma-informed, mobile advocacy
- (2) flexible financial assistance
- (3) community engagement



The DV Housing First community engagement pillar includes proactive engagement between advocates and community members who can support the safety, stability, and wellbeing of survivors. Successful community outreach is critical to the model's success; however, there is limited information regarding engagement and maintenance strategies that promote mutual beneficial relationships between agencies and community members.

As part of the evaluation of the DV Housing First model in California, in-depth interviews were conducted with key community members in one community to better understand the implementation of the community engagement pillar. The central aim of these interviews was to explore innovative practices related to the successful engagement of community partners and how community partners view their relationship with a DV agency.

Rainbow Services, based in Los Angeles, California, agreed to participate in an in-depth longitudinal evaluation to examine the potential impact of the DV Housing First model on domestic violence survivors' safety, housing stability, and well-being. Rainbow Services collaborates with local business owners, landlords, and property managers who share a commitment to supporting the safety, stability, and well-being of people in need in their community. Therefore, their innovative and successful outreach and engagement practices may provide a useful guide to organizations interested in developing similar partnerships.

EVALUATION PROCESS

Rainbow Services' leadership and staff compiled a list of property managers, private landlords, and business owners they currently partner with, as well as their contact information. The evaluation team contacted each community partner and invited them to participate in an interview at a location convenient to them, to share their experiences working with Rainbow Services.

Prior to interviews with community partners, the evaluation team met with Rainbow Services' housing team to gather more information regarding their implementation of the DV Housing First model, particularly as it relates to the community engagement pillar. These conversations provided the evaluation team with critical background information that informed the interview questions for community partners.

The evaluation team met with five community partners for individual face-to-face interviews. Two partners were private landlords, two were property managers, and one was an auto repair shop owner. Interviews ranged from 24 - 54 minutes and were all conducted in English.

During this process, it became evident that Rainbow Services' leadership and staff prioritize forming strong relationships with their community partners. They promote a sense of community that honors the unique characteristics of their community. Overall, community partners all shared that they strongly believe that everyone at Rainbow Services cares deeply about their clients and aims to provide immediate financial support and quality services.

"I never remind them [about the rent], they actually call me and say, 'We're working on it,' they update me. I do have somebody's name, the ladies, and their response is so good. I call them, and they pick up right away. I don't have to wait a day or 4 days."

– Private Landlord

Given some of the challenges associated with forming and maintaining community partnerships, it is important to highlight some of Rainbow Services' successful relationship building and maintenance strategies, as well as their recommendations for those pursuing similar partnerships.

FINDINGS



Relationship-Building Strategies

Rainbow Services' housing team is active in the outreach and engagement of community partners, while also being aware that in small communities, it is important to **respect and protect survivors' privacy**. The housing team is extremely careful when navigating their relationships with community partners and avoid disclosing that they are working with survivors of domestic violence up front. They want their clients to be able to build substantive relationships with their landlord or property manager based on their good tenancy. Therefore, the housing team only discloses that they work with survivors to potential community partners if necessary, and then only discloses certain information with the client's permission. One private landlord reflected on his experience getting connected with Rainbow Services' housing team:

"When they explained who they are, I did my research and found out that they're a pretty good group that helps women that have been abused. I told them, 'yeah, no problem.'"

— Private Landlord

This echoes the experience of most of the community partners, who searched online or visited the agency to gather more information about the organization's mission and services. However, the housing team advocates for participants' safety needs directly with landlords when needed. For example, one landlord shared that he was approached by a housing advocate shortly after one of his tenants moved in. The advocate shared some of the survivor's current safety concerns. Because of his research on the values of the organization and his sense of community, he changed the locks and installed new blinds free of charge. Despite not leading with survivors'

stories, Rainbow Services' community partners valued knowing that the organization was **committed to improving the lives of people in need** in their community.

The housing team described the following key relationship-building strategies they use when forming relationships with community partners:

1. **Allow a genuine, trusting collaboration to develop organically**
2. **Be creative and proactive**
3. **Inform partners of timely payment processes**

Rainbow Services' overarching approach to forging strong partnerships is centered around establishing a trusting relationship grounded in **shared values**. For example, when the housing team reached out to an auto repair and maintenance shop owner, they bonded over their shared value to make a positive difference in their community. The shop owner came up with several specific services they could offer at a discounted rate and has since asked other auto shop owners in the area to also honor their arrangement if they are unable to complete the repair needed at their location.

Further, it became clear that these engagement efforts are **thoughtful, intentional, and organized**. One member of the housing team described the process she created to ensure they could track and meet their community partners' needs:

"I created this little log of who I'm calling every month, what the notes were, if they have vacancies, if they have friends who had vacancies...just asking a bunch of questions [like] if they got the rent on time, if they had any complaints about the tenant, or communication with each other, if they wanted more from Rainbow or if they wanted less."

– Housing Team Advocate

These detailed records have strengthened Rainbow Services' network of community partners. Not only do they have strong, long-lasting community partnerships with local landlords, property managers, and businesses, but they also continue to **develop community partnerships because of existing relationships**. In fact, landlords and business owners frequently tell their colleagues about the benefits of partnering with Rainbow Services. For example, one landlord shared

that he had recently told his friend, another landlord, about the organization: *"I told him too and I think they're working together now or trying to work together."*

The housing team also underscored the importance of allowing the relationship to form organically, and clearly communicates their intention to be **collaborative, honest, and available** when community partners reach out.

"Just wanted to make sure that they understood that we were a service that could support this individual buying this product. And whatever you need – let us know.... There's an intention to collaborate [with partners], but never like this is what we want or how we want it."

– Housing Team Advocate

One of the housing advocates described how they forged a strong partnership with a nearby refurbished appliances store to illustrate just how **proactive and creative** their outreach efforts are:

"Being able to tell them [participants], 'just go here' because it was literally down the street. That's why that happened and then [the store] was flexible. They provided delivery with different payment, they don't charge for delivery, they let us pay whenever we're ready."

Rainbow Services' Trauma-Informed Approach

"The trauma-informed approach, I think, is appropriate even when interacting with these entities because we don't know, right? We don't know what has happened in the past so we're building from scratch a relationship. ...They could be successful and have access to things but that doesn't mean that they didn't have their own experiences. So, I'm aware of that. That was kind of exciting too, to be able to practice and sort of implement [a trauma-informed approach] and help my advocates implement it too because I definitely know it takes practice and awareness."

– Housing Team Advocate

Rainbow Services' housing team understands that community partners may be wary of third-party payers due to their experiences with time-consuming mandatory inspections that may delay payments for lengthy periods of time or result in unpredictable inspection reports. Anticipating these concerns, the housing team overtly emphasizes that they do not require inspections and that payments are streamlined to ensure they are made on time. Further, they reassure community partners that they will be available if they need to reach out for any reason. These efforts promote a trusting relationship with landlords and property managers alike, as one housing team advocate described:

"Knowing we're going to be the holders of providing payments, providing resources to get to [the] location, being available to them, mediating things if things went wrong...so being available to the survivor, but also being available for them if things come up with survivors."

– Housing Team Advocate

Additionally, the leadership at Rainbow Services has created a culture that promotes the use of a **respectful, caring, and trauma-informed approach** in all interactions, including when forging relationships with community members. For example, the sidebar box on page 5 details how a housing team supervisor described her use of a trauma-informed approach when reaching out and establishing relationships with people in the community.

Relationship building strategies that include **detailed tracking of the needs and concerns of community partners** are critical in establishing strong partnerships. As described by Rainbow's staff and their partners, creating and maintaining open and proactive communication systems strengthened the network of current and potential partners. Throughout the process of building relationships, the housing team aims to understand the values that they share with community partners and organically build a sense of community.



Relationship Maintenance Strategies

Rainbow Services' leadership and staff also implement thoughtful and intentional strategies to maintain strong partnerships with community members. Their commitment to developing an infrastructure that supports the needs of their community partners is clear. To that end, Rainbow Services' housing team highlighted their main strategies for maintaining positive relationships with community partners:

1. **Respect preferred communication styles of community partners**
2. **Engage with partners on a personal level**
3. **Share gestures of appreciation**

For example, the housing team created and distributed an **online survey** intended for landlords and property managers to provide feedback and suggestions regarding their partnership with Rainbow Services. In addition, the housing team calls landlords monthly to ensure the payments were successful. These **regular check-ins** have revealed that landlords need clarity regarding the breakdown and timeline of payments. In response, the housing team has implemented a new system to clarify payments:

*"When I would make monthly calls, they would say, 'Oh, well, I do have a question' and they would ask their question. Back then I was calling every single month making sure they were getting the checks and the participants were giving them their checks, and the landlord said he wished we would have told him when the assistance would be done because he was expecting a check [from us]. **So, we created rental breakdowns that we would send the landlords and we would give to the participant.** So, we have those now because I was like, 'Oh, you're right, you should know when it's going to end or if we change the amount or what's going on.'"*

– Housing Team Advocate

The housing team also underscored that it was important to understand that different community partners may have **different communication preferences**. For example, private landlords tend to prioritize rental transactions and are focused on making sure their mortgage payments were made on time. On the other hand, property managers are typically more interested in building community connections and maintaining tenancy, so they are more likely to be interested in maintaining ongoing communication with the housing team. Understanding these different perspectives is key to ensuring a trusting and open relationship with a variety of housing providers. Respecting and honoring different communication preferences demonstrates **flexibility and empathy**, which encourages all parties to maintain the relationship. In other words, the housing team partners with community members who may prefer limited communication, but who remain committed to supporting the stability and wellbeing of survivors.

"Landlords that would house one or two [survivors] would also just continue to provide us with their vacancies, and that's how we kept in touch with them."

– Housing Team Advocate

It is also evident that Rainbow's housing team fosters **personal relationships** with partners that promotes a strong sense of community and trust. For example, one of the housing advocates described a recent interaction with a community partner in which he reached out to ask for guidance on an issue unrelated to his tenant.

Rainbow Services also engages in **thoughtful gestures of appreciation** as

"I got a landlord who asked me about potential job openings for his daughter that was moving back out to California. Interesting ask, but I said, 'Okay, I'll take it on,' there was something specific he wanted. So, I said, 'I have access to something like that, so let me send that to you.' I knew 'that's not your role,' I knew he could ask someone else, but [I thought], 'you have him on the phone and he has you on the phone and there's a reason why he's asking you.' I felt not sure he has access to someone else he can ask. ... So those things are important when we are responsive to what they're saying or asking of us."

– Housing Team Advocate

another strategy for maintaining positive partnerships. For example, in February, the housing team sent a poem of appreciation to landlords that included quotes from survivors about the impact of safer, more stable housing on their lives. The housing team intends to continue holiday mailings that express their ongoing appreciation for the landlords and property managers in the community.

Rainbow's strategies that were developed to build relationships with community partners translated easily into strategies to maintain those relationships. During the relationship building phase, the housing team develops empathy for community partners' priorities and preferences and adapts their communication styles accordingly. The housing team allowed themselves to relate on a personal level to community partners, which strengthens their professional partnership. Finally, lighthearted, fun notes of appreciation that include survivors' voices let community partners know they are valued and appreciated.



Recommendations

To assist other agencies in developing and maintaining community relationships, the housing team and their community partners offered some recommendations based on their experience navigating challenges. These recommendations aim to best support the needs of survivors when identifying and maintaining safe and stable housing.

Rainbow Services' housing team's recommendations include:

1. **Be consistent, approachable, and honest**
2. **Respond quickly if a community partner reaches out**
3. **Ensure that community partners' needs are met**

Rainbow's housing team emphasized the importance of **being kind and approachable** when reaching out to potential community partners to establish a genuine connection. One of the housing advocates shared:

"Be really friendly. Find any little thing that you can connect with them on. ... You just have to be understanding that they're people too."

– Housing Team Advocate

"We did all this stuff, but just being really unique on how to reach them. There was this community homeless thing, like a meeting and I e-mail blasted all of our landlords seeing if they wanted to go."

– Housing Team Advocate

Additionally, the housing team recognized the importance of **being available** to their community partners. To ensure community partners never have problems reaching someone from Rainbow Services, they provide the contact information of several staff members. The housing team also periodically shares local community events they plan to attend so that partners have the option to meet them around the community as well.

The housing team also reflected on the importance of understanding the perspectives and needs of their community partners and ensuring that those were met. For example, landlords are typically focused on making sure payments are made on time so that they can make their mortgages. Local businesses need to promote a constant flow of customers to make a profit. The housing team credits their success to acknowledging different perspectives and priorities and being able to tailor their approach to reassure each partner that they can streamline processes to meet their individual needs.

Community partners' recommendations include:

1. **Create an advisory role for landlords and property managers**
2. **Highlight the impact of the organizations' services on survivors, their families and their community**
3. **Prioritize flexible, responsive, and honest communication**

Community partners suggested the implementation of an **advisory role for partnering landlords and property managers** so that organizations can understand the needs of local housing providers better. An advisory group could offer insight into property management priorities and increase the effectiveness of community housing supports. Further, it may prevent miscommunication and delays in tenancy. As one community partner explained:

"Maybe to run their operations a little smoother, so they could get the knowledge. I'm not sure if those individuals own units or property, they might not know all the ends of the contracts or why landlords are requiring this or why are they asking for this. But they do need somebody like that. It would make their organization a step above the rest."

– Private Landlord

Community partners all shared that it was important to them to partner with Rainbow Services and other organizations that share a **commitment to their community**. This common value was particularly evident when some landlords chose to lower the rent for Rainbow tenants to help them become more stable. One landlord explained:

"I decided to do that because of her situation and what Rainbow represents. I took a loss. So, trying to help the community more."

Another landlord described his choice to charge less rent as fairly straightforward:

"I take [a] risk if I can help somebody."

Highlighting **shared community building values** may promote strong partnerships with people in the community who can support the stability and wellbeing of survivors and their families. For example, a local business partner with a background in social services offered her unique perspective:

"Be proactive, go to those businesses and say - cold call them - and say, 'Hey, this is who we are, this is what we do, would you be interested in partnering with us?' And ask for that discount. And I think that's hard for a lot of people in social services because they're not salespeople. And that's been a hard transition for me in this business, being a salesperson."

– Local Business Partner

Partners' backgrounds and experiences impact their values in unanticipated ways, contributing to an overall sense of community. A local landlord illustrated just how **deeply personal** his commitment to community building and housing stability is:

"I came to this country too with only \$8. \$24 total, \$8 apiece, my wife and two kids. So, I remember my days. I've got a very soft heart for people, a very soft heart. It's not that I say that, it's that I do it. I don't tell anybody what I do, it's from my heart."

CONCLUSION

The housing team at Rainbow Services and the landlords, property managers, and businesses they partner with share similar values and goals. To promote housing stability in their community, they have **developed and maintained relationships that support community building** and highlight the valuable contributions that everyone can make towards supporting survivors and their families. Promoting relationships grounded on these shared values offers an entry to building **flexible communication and empathetic relationships**. As the housing team demonstrated responsiveness in meeting the needs of community partners, those community partners developed responsiveness to the needs of survivors. By nurturing the community engagement pillar of the DV Housing First model, survivors and their children may receive the support they need for their housing stability, safety, and well-being.

NEWS:

AN EXEMPLAR OF THE DV HOUSING FIRST MODEL

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BACKGROUND

In 2017, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) funded 33 non-profit agencies to implement the Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) model. The DVHF model focuses on helping survivors get into safe and stable housing as quickly as possible and providing ongoing supportive services to help them move forward with their lives.

As part of a statewide evaluation of the DVHF model, NEWS is being highlighted as an exemplar of their outstanding work in the three pillars of the model. NEWS, located in Napa Valley, California, is dedicated to providing safety, hope, healing, and empowerment for survivors of domestic and sexual abuse. NEWS is equally committed to promoting safe communities and social change through prevention, intervention, education, and advocacy.

EVALUATION PROCESS

The NEWS leadership and staff graciously agreed to provide the evaluation team with more in-depth information of how the DVHF model works in their agency in order to help us offer guidelines to other organizations. The evaluation team initially visited NEWS to better understand the organization's implementation of the model. After developing an initial understanding of the practices that support the success of the DVHF model through informal meetings with leadership and staff, we met with a local landlord and a property manager who have close partnerships with NEWS.

On a follow up visit, we gathered more in-depth information about the organizational structures that support the model and obtained survivor testimonials. We interviewed the NEWS' Housing Team (two advocates and one supervisor), Program Director, and Executive Director. Further, we interviewed five survivors, three of whom were Spanish speaking. Interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish, depending on survivor preference.

What became evident, after reviewing all of this information, is that NEWS' leadership not only provides the resources and flexibility to allow for the model to work well, but they also promote the pillars of the model throughout all of their programs.

EXEMPLARY IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DVHF MODEL



Pillars of the Domestic Violence Housing First Model



Survivor-driven, Trauma-informed, Mobile Advocacy

A central component of the DVHF model is a focus on addressing the needs identified by survivors rather than on pre-determined needs promoted by agencies. Advocates are mobile, working with survivors in the community, rather than solely working in their offices. Another critical component is that advocacy continues as long as survivors need support. Advocates work with survivors on a myriad of issues (e.g., employment, legal support, immigration, health, children's needs) while also working with them to obtain housing stability.

Mobile advocacy is a particularly important aspect of the DVHF approach. Advocates work out in the community, meeting survivors in the locations of their choice. This can be at the park, in a coffee shop, or at the survivor's home. When meeting in the community and having informal conversations, advocates are better able to understand survivors' contexts and even notice some needs that survivors might not have mentioned yet. Mobile advocacy also includes accompanying survivors as they obtain community resources, whether that means searching together in the community for housing, employment, or going together to appointments. These flexible meetings allow advocates to demonstrate to survivors that they intend to walk their journey with them and build a trusting relationship.

EXAMPLE OF ADVOCACY IN ACTION

A NEWS advocate began working with Maria (not her real name), a Spanish-speaking immigrant who was a mother of two and also pregnant. Because of language barriers and experiencing a high-risk pregnancy, Maria needed a great deal of support, and her advocate went with her to apply for housing in the community. The advocate also helped finding her a bed, lamps, clothes, counseling services, help with her child's school, and transportation. After they found her a home, NEWS helped with rent until Maria was able to support her family on her own. Throughout their time together the advocate was proactive and emotionally supportive, leading Maria to note:

*"No tengo familia aquí pero no me siento sola. Me siento apoyada."
(I don't have any family here, but I don't feel alone. I feel supported.)*



How NEWS supports this pillar

NEWS' organizational climate is structured to support this pillar in clear and important ways. The leadership offers **ongoing training** to all staff, and **weekly supervision meetings**. In these weekly meetings, they provide consistent supervision and support, offering suggestions without micromanaging direct service staff.

A common occurrence related by multiple advocates across the nation is the experience of feeling frustrated when survivors make decisions that advocates might consider unsafe or unwise. The leadership at NEWS recognizes that this is an all-too-common experience and so they encourage staff to openly discuss these concerns in safe and supportive supervision meetings where they reinforce the importance of survivor-driven advocacy. Through this flexible approach, the leadership conveys an important message of trust, support, and flexibility to their staff.

As a result, direct service providers and supervisors alike are unbounded in their thinking about the supportive services they offer their clients. They do not think only in terms of housing and safety; they also consider survivors' **overall wellbeing and wholeness**. Further, they recognize how difficult it can be to go through all of these processes alone. Advocates maintain **flexible work schedules**, working evenings and weekends when necessary. The leadership fully supports advocates' flexible schedules and trusts that they are doing what needs to be done to provide effective advocacy.

A NEWS advocate shared this example: “Client comes here, and we’re already driving to [neighboring city]. I said, ‘Do you have everything that they asked you for?’ She said, ‘Well, they said I needed the \$100 and then the \$30 for the credit fee, and it had to be in a money order.’ I said, ‘Did you bring it?’ She’s like, ‘No, I don’t have any money.’ She’s like, ‘I barely have any gas.’ I was just like, ‘Oh, my gosh, this is something I needed to know before we left the office.’ We came back to the office. I ran over to Nicole and said, ‘Hey, Nicole, this is what happened.’ I said, ‘Do you have petty cash, or can I pay for this money order and then get reimbursed because it’s an emergency. We’re already late for her appointment.’ She’s like, ‘Yeah, I have petty cash.’ She gave me \$40 and then I dropped off the client for her appointment, ran over to Walmart, got a money order, ran back, and here’s the money order.”

A survivor shared: “[Advocate’s name] is like, ‘Let me know the next time you go into court? I’m going to go with you and give you emotional support.’ I honestly, I’m tearing up. They’re so good. They’re . . . I have an incredible amount of family and friend support. Even with that, I don’t know how anybody could get through this kind of situation without this kind of help. They’ve helped with everything. They’re just so kind the whole time that they do it. [Advocate]’s been helping me with my housing a lot lately. Like I said, they were like, ‘Okay, you have kind of affordable housing right now. You just need help paying for it, so you can stay there.’ We kind of identified a plan for me workwise to get on my feet financially over a course of six months or a year.”

Advocates at NEWS walk **side by side** with survivors, often assisting them with navigating systems. They give rides to appointments and walk them through court procedures, how to get a driver’s license or car registration, how to open a bank account, or how to get their children registered in school. One survivor explained she did not know what to do when she moved into her new apartment because she had never lived on her own before. She described how important it was that her advocate helped her navigate the process:

“We went around to each thing. I had no idea, like, ‘Oh, what is it that you do when you move in to a place?’ She came with me to the signing. We went to the PG&E and gas. It turns out that the apartment pays water and garbage. All I have to pay is electricity. She came with me. It made it easier.”

-NEWS survivor

NEWS advocates described the collaborative nature of their work, expressing the importance of feeling supported by their supervisor and the organization’s leadership. They also have the freedom and authority to make decisions when they are out in the community without being micromanaged. For instance, if an advocate is out all day

with a family, they might stop to get something to eat for lunch and pay for the family. NEWS trusts that advocates are making thoughtful decisions to provide the services families need, and **reimburses them for their mileage and expenses**.

The Housing Team at NEWS is in **close and regular contact**, sharing one office among the three team members. Although sharing an office might have a downside (e.g., not enough private space to meet with clients), advocates expressed their satisfaction with having opportunities to brainstorm and bounce ideas off each other. Further, advocates can discuss their caseloads and consult with their supervisor when needed. Advocates also mentioned that sharing an office led to them getting to know each other better on a personal level, which has led to greater feelings of support.

Advocates implementing the DVHF model at NEWS have relatively **small caseloads**. The Housing Team supervisor, who provided direct services for many years, understands that having a high caseload does not allow enough time for an advocate to provide the services that a family might need. Therefore, she monitors each advocate's caseload, not allowing it to exceed 10 families (with some flexibility depending on the complexity of services provided). This decision is not made lightly and is emotionally difficult for the team, as this means they often have a waitlist. However, they believe it is critical to provide clients with the level of services they actually need in order to see **long-term improvements** in their lives.

AN ADVOCATE'S STORY

"I have my client that came in the other day. I've been trying to tell her that, you know, make her see that the custody agreement that she agreed on in mediation is not working, and the guy is still taking advantage of her. She needs to fix the mediation agreement to something better. She's just, 'I'm just worried, I'm scared.' She doesn't have status, he does. He always threatened to take the kids away. When we meet, you know, 'How are you doing? How are the kids doing?' 'Well, they're not doing good. They're not happy with Dad.' 'What are you going to do about it?' 'Yeah, I know, but . . .' those types of things. Just working through it, until she's ready. A couple of weeks ago when we met, she's like, 'Well, where do I have to file?' because her original case is in Napa, but she lives in [nearby city] now. I said, 'Okay, let me find out for you.' I went down to the court and I said, 'This is the situation. Where does she need to file?' They're like, 'Okay, well, the case is out of Napa. It stays in Napa until she asks for it to be relocated.' I said, 'Okay, if we want to change it, what do I need?' They gave me a template, and 'Just fill it out with the declaration, then return. We can get the process started of another court case.' So, brought that information to her. I said, 'All I need from you to start off, if you're serious about it, is write me a declaration in Spanish, what's been going on since this agreement came to light. What are all the issues that have been going on and why do you want to change your agreement? Once you have that in writing, then we'll make another appointment. I'll translate it to English. We'll fill out this document, but then you're going to have to take a morning off from work so that we can go down to the courthouse and file this paperwork.' She's just like, 'Okay.'"



Flexible Financial Assistance

Another pillar of the DVHF model involves providing flexible financial assistance to survivors. As each survivor is unique in their needs, supports, experiences, and concerns, having funds designated to meeting diverse needs is critically important. Survivors may need assistance with issues directly related to housing such as security deposits, rental assistance, and help clearing rental or utility arrears. They may also need financial assistance with issues that are seemingly not as directly related to housing but that can have a profound impact on housing stability, for example: help repairing their cars so that they do not lose their job, childcare costs, work uniforms and permits, or help repairing bad credit (often destroyed by abuser).

NEWS' homelessness prevention efforts are critical to helping survivors obtain housing stability. These efforts focus on helping survivors remain in their homes whenever possible. Napa, like many other communities in California, is characterized by low rental supply, with extremely high prices. The leadership team and advocates at NEWS are therefore very creative in their use of flexible funds to help survivors stay in their own homes, if that is what survivors prefer, which can prevent them from becoming homeless.



How NEWS supports this pillar

NEWS dedicated approximately \$425,000 in flexible funding to the DVHF program over 21 months. NEWS organized their budget into four main categories of financial assistance:

1. **Prevention/low-touch:** clients needing financial support for 0 – 3 months
2. **Short-term:** clients needing financial support for 4 – 6 months
3. **Mid-term:** clients needing financial support for 7 – 12 months
4. **Long-term:** clients needing financial support from more than 12 months

It is important to note that NEWS uses these categories as a general guide and organizational tool, making changes to the amounts allocated to each category as needed. This flexibility allows them to monitor their use of funding while also ensuring that they provide the financial assistance their clients need.

The Housing Team at NEWS also makes concerted efforts to **braid multiple funding sources** in order to provide survivors with the financial support they need. They use the “less flexible” funds first (e.g., governmental funding that may only pay for rent) and collaborate with community partners to help cover or reduce costs in order to save the

DVHF flexible funding for the remaining costs. Advocates have used the DVHF flexible financial assistance to help survivors with a wide range of issues that can help them stay in their own home and avoid further housing instability and/or homelessness, such as: temporary rental and utility assistance, debt assistance, and help changing locks in the home. In the last year, NEWS has helped 49 families stay in their own homes and 44 families obtain new safe and stable housing.

EXAMPLE OF FLEXIBLE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE IN ACTION

Angela (not her real name) and her teenage daughter had been living in a tent since arriving in Napa after fleeing an extremely violent husband from another state. When she had gone to apply for welfare and food assistance, Angela disclosed the domestic violence and they referred her to NEWS. They had also denied her assistance because she lacked a piece of documentation she had needed. A NEWS advocate took her back to the office and got her the assistance she had requested.

The NEWS shelter was full when they first met Angela, so they helped her and her daughter get into the nearby family shelter but continued providing services to them and working on finding permanent housing. In talking with Angela, NEWS staff asked what her dreams and hopes were for the future, and she mentioned that she loved cooking. A culinary class was being offered locally, and they helped Angela get into that course. While she was taking that course, they continued helping her find housing. Angela had been evicted from her home in the other state, but NEWS managed to find them an apartment after about three months. NEWS paid all of the rent for the first few months and then paid less and less over the next few months as Angela finished culinary school and got employment. Angela not only completed the program but graduated top of her class. Her daughter began doing well in school and actually was excelling on a sports team and making friends.

Also, during this time, NEWS helped Angela and her daughter with a number of other issues. For example, Angela needed a California driver's license, so she could drive to her school and new job. However, she had outstanding tickets from her prior state that needed to be paid in order to get the driver's license. NEWS braided funds from a variety of sources to pay off her fines and fees; an advocate called the court in the other state and also did what was necessary to get her bench warrant dismissed. Then she immediately got her license. NEWS staff estimated that taking care of all of these expenses cost approximately \$3,000 but as one noted, "it changed the trajectory of two people's lives forever."

It became clear through many conversations with advocates and clients that NEWS advocates are extremely creative and resourceful in their work. They have multiple conversations with survivors, attentively listening to their needs in order to offer help before survivors have to ask. As one survivor described:

"They kind of assessed what I needed. They were like, 'Okay, we can see that housing is going to be a big deal.' They also gave me a lot of emotional support. They've helped with everything, I mean, stuff I didn't even know I needed help with. They were like, 'You're probably going to need help with this.' They are so good at what they do. When my kids went back to school this year, they called me a month before school started and said, 'Okay, we have backpacks filled with supplies for your kids. We've thought about this also. Do they need haircuts? Do they need shoes?'... I honestly, I'm tearing up. They're so good."

-NEWS survivor



Community Engagement

The final pillar of the DVHF model includes **proactive engagement** between advocates and people in the community who can support the safety, stability, and well-being of survivors. With regard to housing, it is critical to forge **mutually beneficial relationships** with landlords and property managers. NEWS has successfully engaged landlords and property managers to house survivors that might not meet traditional rental requirements (e.g., high credit scores, income that is at least three times the rent, clear background checks).



How NEWS supports this pillar

The leadership at NEWS fully supports their staff in their community engagement efforts. NEWS encourages staff to go out and meet with community partners, including other service providers, private landlords, and property managers to create and maintain strong community partnerships.

NEWS collaborates and partners with several private landlords and property managers in the area. A landlord and a property manager with whom NEWS has a longstanding partnership agreed that it is beneficial to prioritize NEWS clients for four overarching reasons. They are confident that NEWS staff will:

1. Be diligent about referring clients that are likely to succeed in a unit,
2. Ensure that rent is paid on time,
3. Openly and honestly communicate with them when issues arise, and
4. Provide ongoing support to survivors in their units, which decreases turnover.

These characteristics are fundamental to successfully engaging property managers who might be concerned with vacancies but who are also risk-averse. NEWS' commitment to the ongoing support of their clients sets them apart from many other agencies and was noted by both a landlord and a property manager as the key reason they collaborate with them.

Advocates are also active in **establishing and maintaining relationships with community partners**. For example, one advocate recently noticed that many survivors have issues with their cars breaking down because they do not have experience in automobile maintenance. She proactively contacted a local mechanic to see if they would be willing to do a periodic workshop for survivors on how to check a vehicle's oil, tire pressure, etc. The mechanic agreed and the interest in this has been high.

EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

Leticia, an immigrant mother of 4, was connected with NEWS after her abuser's arrest. At the time, Leticia was not employed. Her partner had not been paying the rent, so after a few months, Leticia and her children lost their housing. The family then sought shelter at NEWS. During their time at shelter, Leticia obtained employment. The Housing Team then helped her find a house that would be big enough for her family through an engaged landlord committed to providing support to families in need. Leticia received support filling out the applications and visiting the house prior to move-in. The Housing Team helped her move, provided rental assistance, and helped pay her bills for a few months while Leticia got back on her feet.

As is often the case, the impact of severe and ongoing trauma resurfaced for the family, and one of Leticia's children began struggling with depression. The Housing Team offered their support, often checking in with Leticia and the children. They identified activities that would help the child feel better (at the child's direction), and then facilitated her access to them.

Leticia was employed at a company with a flexible schedule, but still struggled to make ends meet. Her supervisor mentioned that if she obtained her own equipment for her job, she could increase her hourly wage from \$15 to \$25 per hour. Leticia was sure she could not afford the \$500 piece of equipment but mentioned it to her advocate in passing. Soon after, Leticia received a call from her advocate saying that NEWS would be able to provide her with the equipment she needed. This allowed Leticia to fully get back on her feet and cover all her bills.

Note: minor details edited to protect the survivor's anonymity.

Beyond the three pillars of the DVHF model, **NEWS has created a culture where every survivor is treated with care and respect**, from the front desk staff to the executive director. The evaluation team noticed this when they visited the program, and all survivors that the evaluation team interviewed reflected on how they felt from the moment they entered the offices. Survivors receive the message that they are welcomed and appreciated, always greeted warmly with big smiles.

*"Sometimes I feel bad asking for help,
but they always tell me **they are here to help.**"*

*"Just when you walk in, even the way they greet you...they'll offer you a beverage...It's just like, I don't know, you just feel like they're happy that you're here, and that you're not bothering them, and everyone the way that they speak is very . . . I don't know what it is. It's just a demeanor, I guess. I feel, especially contrasted with places like the welfare office or court where you really are on the defense. Like, 'What do you want? Prove it. Where's your documents?' They're never like that here. They're like, 'Okay, we can work with that. Don't worry about it.' I guess it's a little thing, but it is...it's just **the way that they talk is like you're a real person.***

They're happy that you're here.

*Every single person that I've met here had that same [warmth]. Yeah, **they're so respectful**, too. Especially coming out of situation like that. You're so used to being disrespected, and you go in the court process and they're very disrespectful.*

*You know, you come here, **they just give you such dignity and just care.** It's really amazing."*

-NEWS survivor

CONCLUSION

NEWS has been highlighted here because they are excelling at providing the three pillars of the DVHF model:



Survivor-driven, trauma-informed mobile advocacy



Flexible financial assistance



Community engagement

Providing these model components takes more than a knowledgeable and skilled staff, although that is critical to its success. Beyond this, though, organizations must have the **structure, culture and protocols** in place for this model to work. This brief document was created to detail some of the important elements that we believe are critical for the DVHF model to succeed.

"They are like angels. They have given me so much. I don't know what I would do without them. They have helped me so much. They even call me and ask, 'how are the kids, do you need anything?'...They are like angels."

-NEWS survivor

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