

Housing First and Domestic Violence: A Way to End Family Homelessness?

Placing domestic violence survivors in housing first increases the success rate

As we reach the close of October, it is important to recognize this is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The House Wake! Access Hub, operated by The Partnership, is one of the providers in the Coordinated Access System that conducts safety assessments. These evaluations determine whether the household is fleeing or attempting to escape domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the household.

A Shift in Domestic Violence Services

Historically, emergency shelters were the sole option for survivors of domestic violence looking for safety. However, accessing a shelter did not guarantee that a survivor would receive services needed to obtain permanent housing. The search for housing is a top concern for the majority of domestic violence survivors, with a recent study finding 84 percent needed help in locating affordable housing. A shift towards rapid re-housing and Housing First occurred in the past fifteen years, resulting in the development of programs that reduce social isolation and maintain housing stability that also address survivors' safe-housing needs.

Here in Wake County, our Coordinated Access System is an integrated network of providers coordinating efforts to achieve maximum impact. It is the first step to connect individuals and families experiencing a housing crisis to eligible, appropriate and supportive housing options. The system is staffed by highly trained specialists with the most up-to-date knowledge of available resources in the homeless response system.

A Large Need

The most recent data from Interact reports that 63,647 clients and community members in Wake County received crisis intervention and safety planning, emergency shelter, individual and group counseling, bilingual counseling, court and hospital advocacy,

personal and economic empowerment case management services, community engagement and prevention. The combination of stable housing with these other services remains a valuable predictor in the client's success to overcome domestic violence issues.

As one of the first agencies to adopt a Housing First program for survivors of domestic violence, The Washington State Coalition against Domestic Violence designed The Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHP) project, built on the belief that housing is a right and includes three components:

1. survivor-informed, trauma-informed, mobile advocacy
2. flexible funding
3. community engagement

An evaluation of the DVHP found that most (93%) of the 235 participants who received DVHF services for at least six months retained their housing during that time. Ninety-one percent of the 173 participants who received services for at least 12 months retained permanent housing, and 96% of the 121 participants who received services for at least 18 months retained permanent housing.

Additional research found that many similarities exist between the Housing First model and tenants of domestic violence advocacy. As an advocate for safe and affordable housing, the Partnership believes domestic violence providers should consider adopting the Housing First model to meet the needs of domestic violence survivors. This could help bring North Carolina one step closer to ending family homelessness.

If you are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness due to domestic violence, please contact the House Wake! Access Hub at 919-443-0096 or Interact's 24-hour crisis hotline at 866-291-0855.

