

MULTIPRONGED EVALUATION OF DV HOUSING FIRST IN CALIFORNIA:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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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 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.

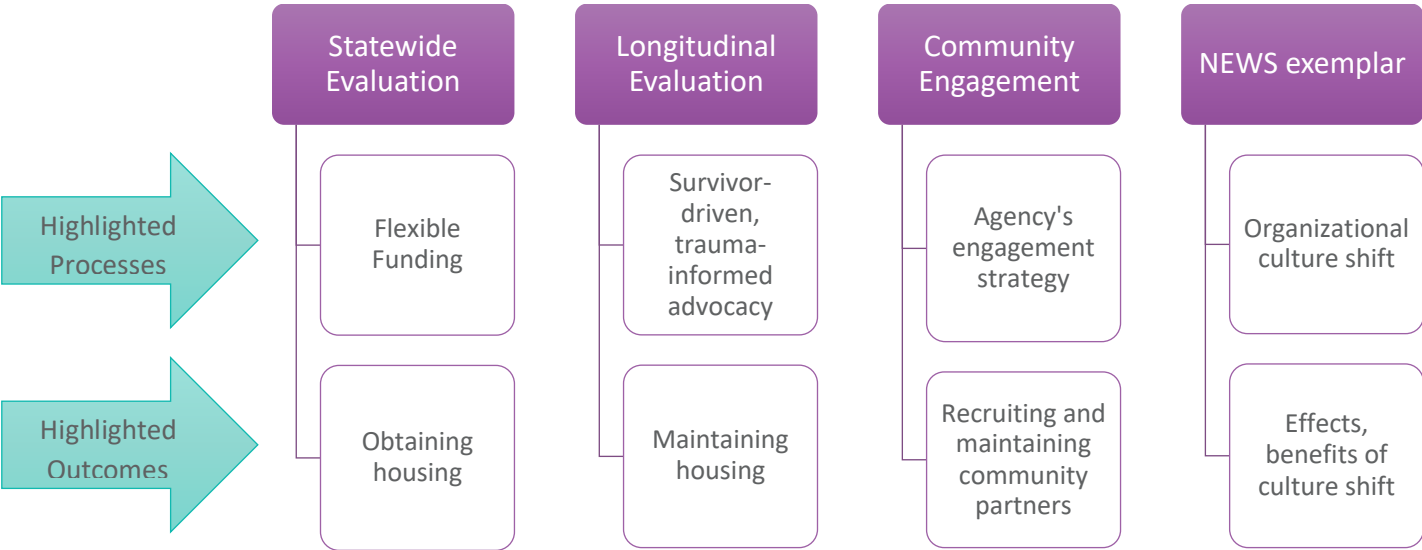
OVERVIEW OF THE MULTIPRONGED EVALUATION PROCESS

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.

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