

Recommendations to the D.C. Interagency Council on Homelessness

Prepared by the ICH Women's Task Force

January 23, 2018

Introduction

At the February 2017 meeting of the ICH Strategic Planning Committee, Kris Thompson (Calvary Women's Services), Wanda Steptoe (NEW), Tom Fredericksen and Jose Lucio (TCP) presented on "Women and Homelessness" to begin a discussion of ways to better meet the needs of unaccompanied women by the homeless services and domestic violence services in DC. In response, ICH approved the formation of a Women's Task Force with the understanding that it would offer a report and recommendations to ICH by the end of 2017.

The Women's Task Force committed to (1) completing a needs assessment to better inform and ground policy and planning in women's lived experiences, (2) creating a forum for greater cooperation and coordination between the domestic violence and homeless service providers, (3) promoting best practices for service providers offering housing and support services to those fleeing domestic violence, stalking and/or sexual assault, and (4) strengthening the housing and services available to unaccompanied women.

Priority Concerns

The Women's Task Force focused its work on four primary concerns.

- **Women's Needs Assessment:** designing and conducting a comprehensive needs assessment that would offer a deeper look at the lived experiences of women and inform policy development and planning
- **Women's Access to Housing (CAHP):** engaging and informing the CAHP process to achieve parity in housing placements and the completion of VI-SPDAT assessments in a trauma-informed manner; ensuring more meaningful engagement by homeless services and victims services providers in the CAHP process
- **Women's Access to Low-Barrier Shelter:** engaging and informing the work of ERSO in the development of the Winter Plan and ensuring low-barrier shelter access beyond seasonal expansions (year-round availability)
- **Intersection of Domestic Violence and Homelessness:** raising awareness and promoting best practices in addressing domestic violence within the homeless services system and in collaboration with domestic violence providers and system; participating in system efforts to make intake and assessment forms and processes more trauma-informed



Recommendations

Based on the results of the 2017 DC Women's Needs Assessment and the input from over 40 women and men representing 30 agencies (homeless services providers, victim's services providers, and government partners), the Women's Task Force recommends the following next steps to the ICH.

- 1. Establish the Women's Task Force as an on-going committee of the ICH.** The Women's Task Force (WTF) is the only forum for coordination and collaboration between homeless service providers and domestic violence providers serving unaccompanied women. It continues to serve a coordinating role in identifying gaps in services and generating ideas to close those gaps.

- 2. Ensure the CoC's compliance with the HUD mandate regarding the homeless system's response to domestic violence.** The Women's Task Force will continue to play a critical role in helping the CoC meet HUD's mandate that it demonstrate local efforts to (1) address the needs of individuals and families fleeing domestic violence, (2) use available data about domestic violence to assess the scope of community needs related to domestic violence and homelessness, and (3) develop safety and planning protocols for use in coordinated assessment. WTF will also continue to participate in the work of the DHS Office of Policy & Program Support and the DC Coalition against Domestic Violence housing work group.

- 3. Conduct an annual Women's Needs Assessment** in conjunction with The Community Partnership. The WTF will coordinate the timeline and ensure collaboration by women's providers in the assessment design and implementation.

- 4. Make Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women a Priority.** Use the expertise of domestic violence providers and homeless services providers to ensure models of housing and service provision that are trauma-informed, follow best practices for serving women who have experienced physical, sexual and/or emotional violence, offer appropriate system-wide policies and protocols, and respond to the specific needs of women experiencing domestic violence during CAHP system housing placement.

- 5. Ensure gender parity in the CAHP system** by working with the CAHP Committees and women's housing and service providers to:
 - Create more access points for women for coordinated assessment
 - Provide specific and on-going training for women's providers on the VI-SPDAT assessment tool and the overall CAHP system, focusing on creating a trauma-informed assessment process for women
 - Work with the CAHP team to ensure parity for women in housing placements. Work with the team to determine if the recent prioritization updates improve any imbalance in housing matches or if additional changes are required
 - Address the specific needs of women as Transitional Housing comes into the CAHP system
 - Explore creative permanent housing models, such as shared housing, for women
 - Identify specific outreach services targeted for women

6. Immediately address women's needs for year-round access to Temporary Shelter and Transitional Housing

- Use the relevant findings from the needs assessment and other data collection to identify the housing and service gaps and to generate additional resources to close those gaps
- Engage with domestic violence providers to coordinate women's access to temporary and transitional housing when they are fleeing domestic violence
- Ensure access to housing (low-barrier, transitional and permanent) with specialized services that address women's mental illness and substance abuse and avoid women spending extended time on the street or in emergency shelter
- Strengthen coordination between domestic violence and homeless service systems to ensure that women in temporary DV shelters can gain access to the housing resources available through CAHP
- Actively participate in the ERSO meetings with a focus on addressing women's needs in the Winter Plan, specifically the need for single gender emergency shelter

7. Support the shared goals of the women's community and the LGBTQ+ community as outlined in the feedback from the listening sessions of DHS and the Mayor's Office of LGBTQ Affairs. Specific opportunities to improve services for unaccompanied women include creating an expertise life-line to respond to the unique needs of lesbian and bisexual women, and fostering safe space in women's shelters that recognize the special needs of transgender women and non-binary and gender nonconforming individuals.

The work of the ICH WTF and the findings of the 2017 DC Women's Needs Assessment point to the urgent need for increased funding to meet the housing and service needs of unaccompanied women. Women are experiencing violence and trauma both before and during their current episodes of homelessness. They describe being turned away for lack of emergency shelter beds and feeling unsafe in some of the places designed to serve them. They are anxious to work, but report needing employment and training opportunities. They ask for safe access to mental health services, day programs, and health care. By committing additional resources to better address the needs of women, we will be elevating the effectiveness of our whole system.

Women's Task Force Steering Committee

Co-Chair - Kris Thompson, Calvary Women's Services
Co-Chair - Wanda Steptoe, New Endeavors by Women
Kenyatta Brunson, N Street Village
Alicia Horton, Thrive DC
Sandra Jackson, House of Ruth
Marilyn Kresky-Wolf, Open Arms Housing

Jose Lucio, The Community Partnership
Lara Putach, Miriam's Kitchen
Leslye Wooley, Salvation Army
Elisabeth Young, The Community Partnership
LaToya Young, DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence