

Domestic Violence Coordinated Housing Assessment and Placement

Context:

Survivors of domestic violence and their children face unique barriers to housing. Many survivors have experienced economic abuse by their abusive partner. They are often limited in the locations and types of housing they can access because of their unique safety and confidentiality needs, and many housing/ homelessness assistance programs have barriers that inadvertently exclude victims of violence. Survivors may have no access to family finances. They may have been prohibited from working, and have had their credit scores destroyed by the abuser. They may have been forced into criminal activity by their abuser, or arrested as the perpetrator of violence when acting in self-defense. Survivors may experience discrimination in accessing or maintaining housing based on the violent and criminal actions of their abusers. They may experience unfair eviction because of violence against them, or because they have filed for a civil protection order. They may have physical and cognitive disabilities as a result of the violence.¹

In order to effectively assess and address these and other barriers, staff working with survivors on housing placement need specialized training and experience with domestic violence advocacy, knowledge of local domestic violence housing and related resources, relationships with local landlords who will rent to survivors, and a network of relationships in the local domestic violence advocacy and broader homeless, social service, behavioral health, and legal systems.

Background: The Need for a Dedicated Coordination Entry System for Domestic Violence Survivors in King County

Federal Context:

In 2012, under the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HEARTH), the Department of Housing and Urban Development mandated that all communities receiving HUD Continuum of Care and Emergency Solutions Grant funds implement a coordinated entry and assessment process. The purpose of this process is “to provide the quickest access to the most appropriate housing to every household experiencing or at-risk of homelessness through a standardized assessment and referral process,” and to “help communities prioritize assistance based on vulnerability and severity of service needs to ensure that people who need assistance the most can receive it in a timely manner.” HUD identified survivors of domestic violence as a population that should access housing services through a coordinated assessment process. With feedback from the public and special populations, HUD published a notice that it is appropriate for communities to establish a comparable CE process “including different access points and screening and assessment tools,” for victims of DV and SA.

King County Context:

In April 2012, King County launched a coordinated entry and assessment process for people seeking shelter, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, rental assistance and permanent housing. Initially, thirty agencies and ninety programs participated, including all of the domestic violence housing providers in King County. Domestic violence emergency shelters were not included.

All homeless providers, and people seeking homeless housing services, experienced, and (and many continue to experience) major problems with the coordinated entry system. For example, the initial referral process focused primarily on filling vacant units rather than making effective referrals for families. More than one quarter of families who were DV providers and the survivors they served experienced additional challenges in the process. Due to the complexity of domestic violence, the immediate and longer-term safety needs of survivors were not factored into placement decisions. The prioritization tools used to assess people’s vulnerability level did not factor in dangers and vulnerabilities caused by the domestic violence. The transitional housing units of some domestic violence programs sat empty for several months at a time, while families in DV shelter programs waited months to access transitional housing. Families who had no need for culturally specific services were placed in culturally specific transitional programs, taking up very limited spaces that were specifically designed to meet the needs of immigrant and refugee and deaf survivors.

In December 2014, a report on the King County Coordinated Entry System² noted that special populations, including domestic violence survivors “do not get referred in a timely fashion to openings that are intended to be provided in a timely fashion to support reunification or safety.” Following the release of that report, the Coalition Ending Gender Based Violence³ and its member agencies successfully advocated with King County Community Services Division and the Committee to End Homelessness to provide a waiver to allow domestic violence programs in King County to create a specialized process to better serve survivors and their children. In April 2015, domestic violence providers implemented their own process of coordinating referrals to domestic violence housing services, with strong linkages to the County’s Coordinated Entry for All system. This is consistent with HUD requirements for coordinated entry, which allow communities to “establish a separate access point or points for households fleeing domestic violence.”⁴

Currently, all domestic violence housing program providers in King County use a common application form. When a domestic violence housing provider has one or more openings available, they send notice of the opening(s) to all of the domestic violence advocacy programs in the county. Advocates working with survivors in high need of the housing services offered by the agency with the opening fill out the application with the survivor. **The housing provider collects applications for at least two weeks, and prioritizes applicants based on a number of factors. The housing provider contacts prioritized survivors for placement.** DV housing providers meet on a monthly basis to coordinate efforts, problem solve, and share resources.

In January 2017, HUD [published a notice](#) establishing additional requirements for a CoC and centralized Coordinated Assessment System that establishes new requirements that CoC and recipients of CoC funding must meet related to the development and use of a coordinated entry system. This notice also indicated that each CoC is expected to establish or update its coordinated entry process in accordance with the rule by January 2018. The [Coordinated Entry Requirements and Checklist of Essential Elements](#) and [Coordinated Entry Core Elements Guidebook](#) outlines the elements required by HUD for main and parallel coordinated entry.

From August 2017-April 2018, DV housing providers in King County worked on developing a Domestic Violence Coordinated Entry (DVCE) system that would comply with HUD requirements. DV Housing providers acknowledged that the current process could be improved. Two options arose from this work (see document Domestic Violence Coordinated Entry Process In King County: Two Options) both requiring a financial investment. A significant level of funding and staffing would be needed to create a separate, parallel, DV Coordinated Entry System. DV service providers and staff from King County and All Home agreed that funding this parallel system was not the highest priority for limited homelessness services funding. However, a much more modest level of funding could provide core staffing to coordinate, enhance, and improve DV providers' application and placement processes, and be a more active resource for training and integration with the mainstream homelessness system. In February 2019, [HUD announced awards for new FY 2018 CoC Projects](#) including bonus dollars dedicated to domestic violence. The King County CoC was awarded \$173,000 for Domestic Violence Coordinated Entry, dedicated to providing funds for at Housing Coordination Position at the Coalition Ending Gender Based Violence **to provide training across dv and housing/homeless providers, create better linkages with the main homelessness and coordinate entry systems, and coordinate, improve and build on the DVCE process established by DV Housing providers.**

¹ https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/AG-2017/2017AG_Ch06-S01_Housing-Needs-of-Victims-of-Domestic-Violence.pdf

² http://allhomekc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Focus_Strategies_Final_report.pdf

³ <https://endgv.org>

⁴ <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Coordinated-Entry-and-Victim-Service-Providers-FAQs.pdf>