

# FAQ ON SERVICE PROVISION FOR HOUSING SURVIVORS OF TRAFFICKING

*The following questions were submitted by participants of a Listening Session hosted by Freedom Network USA and the National Survivor Network on May 21, 2019, for HUD's Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPS).*

## CHALLENGES

### **Why is it so hard to find housing for survivors?**

Trafficking survivors are a diverse group of individuals with common yet unique experiences. The anti-trafficking field is relatively young, and has previously focused on meeting emergency needs on an individual basis through case management programs. The systemic challenges of long-term housing and employment are now being addressed with an eye toward inclusive, sustainable programs that do not create a new pattern of homelessness by relying solely on short-term shelters.

Currently, accessing both publicly funded and private housing often requires criminal background, credit history, and employment history checks. Survivors are often not able to meet these requirements. Trafficking survivors may have been forced to commit criminal activities during the trafficking situation. Financial records, such as pay stubs or an employment history, are generally not available from the trafficker. Public and private housing providers may require identification documents that survivors may not have, as traffickers often take these documents. Additionally, foreign national survivors may not qualify for publicly funded housing programs due to their immigration status. Finally, due to the complexity of human trafficking, mainstream housing and homelessness programs may not feel like they are equipped to serve trafficking survivors.

### **How can we address requirements around documentation when connecting foreign nationals to safe housing?**

Foreign national survivors, including documented and undocumented people, may be eligible for some housing programs funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD has provided clarification regarding immigration status requirements for HUD's homeless assistance programs in their [July 2016 joint letter from HUD, HHS and DOJ](#) and this [Fact Sheet](#).

In the private housing market, organizations can advocate for apartment complexes and landlords to make exceptions to their requirements for renters referred by the organization. This may entail meeting with leasing managers to discuss the challenge of housing in general terms and request that exceptions be made. It is important to maintain client

confidentiality and not discuss any specific cases or individuals, but rather focus on what the organization is generally doing for the community. Additionally, some apartment complexes may accept an IRS individual taxpayer identification number (ITIN) in place of a social security number. Programs should also be aware of relevant federal and local fair housing and civil rights protections for renters.

### **What challenges do service providers face when working with homeless youth who are survivors of human trafficking?**

Service providers may need new partnerships in order to provide adequate resources for youth who are survivors of trafficking. Resources commonly needed include: transitional housing, low-barrier housing, mental health counseling, substance use treatment, peer support, and youth empowerment programs. Potential partners include National Safe Place Network providers and Runaway and Homeless Youth providers. It is critical to acknowledge survivor choice and autonomy. Survivors, including youth survivors, should be able to choose among available options and resources. Building rapport and trust with youth can be the most important, and most difficult, part of this work. By providing support centered around the needs and desires of the young person, service providers can best identify options for housing youth survivors.

## **PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES**

### **What do housing providers need to do to safely assist trafficking survivors?**

It is common for providers outside of the anti-trafficking field to feel anxious or unequipped to serve trafficking survivors. However, it's important to acknowledge that survivors have a range of experiences and may not be in physical danger from their trafficker, the trafficker may not be in the US, the trafficker may be incarcerated, and the trafficking may have ended many months or even years ago. Housing providers should partner with anti-trafficking programs in their community to ensure all survivors receive holistic services, including safety planning. Case managers and attorneys, rather than housing programs outside the anti-trafficking field, should work with the survivor to identify their level of risk and ensure any necessary safety measures are in place, without the housing provider needing to learn details about the trafficking situation.

Housing providers can promote a survivor-centered and trauma-informed environment by taking a [rights-based approach](#) to housing. Housing providers should have an understanding of [trauma-informed care practices and principles](#), as all individuals who have experienced homelessness likely have experienced some form of trauma in their lives. Survivors of trafficking, like all people, should be provided with autonomy and choice when it comes to their housing.

Housing options should provide low-barrier access to survivors. Time restrictions on service provision/eligibility should be as flexible as possible to meet the specific needs and circumstances of the individual. Finally, a housing program should not mirror a trafficking situation (e.g. locking the person in, required programming, limitation on privacy, control over daily routine, or curfews) as this makes it challenging to build trust and empower survivors.

## **How have people effectively formed partnerships with housing organizations/entities in their service areas?**

Convene key stakeholders and partners in the housing and anti-trafficking fields *together* within your community. It may also be helpful to include partners who have experience navigating housing for other specific populations (e.g. housing for veterans or refugees) to learn from their successes and challenges. Cross-train each other about available housing programs, affordable housing efforts, human trafficking in the US, needs of survivors, and available services. Meet regularly to continue the conversation and develop meaningful partnerships within your community.

Using this model, several anti-trafficking organizations are meeting housing needs in their communities. For example, Chicago has implemented a program through the Chicago Housing Authority in partnership with HUD, Administration for Children and Families, and 6 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the community to provide housing vouchers to trafficking survivors. An anti-trafficking NGO in Florida is collaborating with their local Continuum of Care to provide transitional housing to trafficking survivors with CoC funds.

## **RESOURCES**

### **What public benefits can human trafficking victims apply for to pay for their housing/shelter?**

Trafficking survivors may qualify for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Refugee Cash Assistance (foreign national survivors who have an HHS Certification Letter or Letter of Eligibility), crime victim compensation, state benefit programs, and/or support from NGOs. Survivors may also have Social Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI). This supplemental income can be used for housing expenses. Public Housing Authorities have a variety of housing options, including the [Housing Choice Voucher](#) and [Project-based Vouchers](#) funded by HUD, which have specific eligibility requirements. Additionally, HUD [homelessness assistance programs](#) are available to anyone who meets the [Federal definition](#) of homeless, including survivors who qualify under the Category 4 of [HUD's definition of homelessness](#).

## **WORKING WITH LANDLORDS**

### **How can an anti-trafficking program maintain/repair landlord relationships when a referred client has violated their lease agreement?**

The best way to maintain a positive relationship with a landlord is to educate and establish rapport. The anti-trafficking program can provide educational materials on the issue of human trafficking in the US. The program might sign the lease, pay the rent directly to the landlord, and provide education and support to the client to improve their ability to comply with the lease terms.

It may be appropriate to provide landlords with contact information for the human trafficking program staff in order to communicate any challenges. Landlords usually do not have a

third party to assist when there are landlord-tenant conflicts. The case manager can be a resource to both the survivor and the landlord when there are concerns.

**Note:** The communication should be one way. The landlord can communicate concerns to the program staff to discuss with the client, but the staff should not discuss the non-housing specific needs, challenges, and experience of the survivor with the landlord. The intent is to assist the survivor in understanding and addressing the concerns of the landlord before they escalate to eviction.

Repairing a landlord relationship can be infinitely easier if the relationship was entered into with honesty and transparency. Therefore, it is recommended that case workers and survivors be up front about any challenges they anticipate related to the leasing terms, and discuss these with the landlord in a solutions-focused manner. If a survivor needs to leave the apartment or is evicted, it is important that the process happen without additional stress or conflict. The provider can support the survivor through the eviction process, as well acknowledge the landlord's concerns, without sacrificing the chance to rent from the landlord in the future. It is helpful to this type of relationship for landlords to feel empowered and involved in their role as a change-maker by accepting ongoing referrals from the anti-trafficking program.

**Note:** The communications with the landlord should be limited to the accommodations being requested, NOT the trauma history of the survivor.

### NOTE ON CONFIDENTIALITY

Service providers working with survivors of human trafficking should not disclose information regarding the survivor's case, personal information, and whether or not an individual is a survivor.

### How do you not burn bridges with landlords when clients have less than ideal behavior?

For some survivors, this could be their first experience with independent living, and they may need support in building life skills. Apartment visits (with the survivor) and communication with landlords can help. Provide communication and information to the survivor before the placement is made, so that they understand what rules and limitations exist. Continue communication with the landlord (about the program, not the survivor) even if the survivor has discontinued case management, to demonstrate your commitment to partnership with the landlord. Offer to assist the survivor in relocating if the landlord is considering eviction, and continue to offer services and support to the survivor. Work to establish relationships with multiple landlords so that you have options and don't have to rely on only one landlord. Consider public recognition for a landlord who has provided low-barrier housing - an award from your organization or nominate them for an award from your business community.

**Note:** The communication between the program and the landlord should be one way. The landlord can communicate concerns to the program staff to discuss with the client, but the staff should not discuss the needs, challenges, and experience of the survivor with the landlord. The intent is to assist the survivor in understanding and addressing the concerns

of the landlord before they escalate to eviction. The communications with the landlord should be limited to the accommodations being requested, NOT the trauma history of the survivor.

### **What is the optimal housing model for those who suffer from substance use disorders and who have been trafficked?**

The most important part of housing survivors who have substance use disorder is that the housing provides the survivor with a feeling of safety and power. It should be a situation where they have control over their choices, freedom to come and go as they please, and access to technology so they can maintain positive social supports. Housing that attempts to control behavior or regulate their choices is a repetition of the pattern between the trafficker and the survivor. It does not support the client in discovering their own path of empowerment and healing. Therefore, it is recommended that survivors be housed in placements that adhere to housing first, low barrier, harm reduction and trauma-informed principles.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS ON RAPID RE-HOUSING**

### **Department of Housing and Urban Development:**

HUD's continuum of care program toolkit, resources on rapid re-housing

<https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/toolkit/program-components-and-eligible-costs/#rapid-re-housing>

### **National Alliance to End Homelessness:**

Toolkits and training materials on rapid re-housing

[https://endhomelessness.org/resources/?fwp\\_categories=rapid-re-housing&fwp\\_content\\_filter=toolkits-and-training-materials](https://endhomelessness.org/resources/?fwp_categories=rapid-re-housing&fwp_content_filter=toolkits-and-training-materials)

### **US Interagency Council on Homelessness:**

Blog posts and resources on rapid re-housing

<https://www.usich.gov/search/search-results/eyJyZXN1bHRfcGFnZSI6InNIYXJjaFwvc2VhcmNoLXJlc3VsdHMiLCJrZXI3b3JkcyI6IlJhcGkiFJlaG91c2luZyJ9>

### **Safe Housing Partnerships**

Domestic violence and housing technical assistance consortium

<https://safehousingpartnerships.org/>