

# HOUSING OPTIONS FOR SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

*NOTE: Freedom Network USA refers to individuals impacted by the crime of human trafficking as survivors. We understand that organizations may refer to survivors in different terms such as a participant or client. We choose the word survivor as a term of empowerment. Additionally, we refer to professionals in the anti-trafficking field as service providers to encompass the wide array of professions and roles.*

In the United States, access to safe and affordable housing is a challenge, especially for survivors of human trafficking. This fact sheet provides a broad overview of options that may be available in the categories of Emergency, Transitional, and Permanent Housing, as well as considerations to keep in mind as you connect a survivor to potential resources. Service providers are encouraged to address the housing needs of survivors on an individual basis. One size does not fit all when it comes to housing. As a service provider, your program may not be able to house survivors and may rely on collaboration with community partners to meet the housing needs of survivors. By establishing relationships with local partners, you will have more access to resources and the survivor can choose the best fit for their situation.

## KEY TERM: HOUSING FIRST

Housing First is designed to move people into permanent housing as quickly as possible. Similar to low-barrier access, the Housing First approach eliminates requirements like sobriety and mandatory program participation.

Service providers can learn more and assess their program's alignment with a Housing First model using the [United States Interagency Council on Homelessness \(USICH\) Housing First Checklist](#).

## EMERGENCY SHELTERS

Emergency and short-term shelters are generally designed for crisis situations. They provide immediate housing, but only for a limited period of time and often in shared bedrooms with limited privacy. While services provided by emergency shelters may meet the basic, immediate needs of individuals experiencing homelessness, they require the individual and service provider to begin working immediately to identify different longer-term housing solutions.

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## Homeless Shelters

[Homeless shelters](#) provide temporary shelter for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. They are typically operated by a nonprofit organization, government agency, or faith-based organization. Most shelters can only hold a fraction of the local homeless population, and they often allow residents to stay in the shelter only in the evenings.

## Domestic Violence Shelters

Domestic violence shelters provide temporary housing to individuals and their children fleeing domestic violence and, in some cases, human trafficking. These shelters may have more resources and training specific to survivors of violence than homeless shelters. It is important to note that most domestic violence shelters primarily serve women. To find a domestic violence shelter in your community, visit the [National Network to End Domestic Violence](#) website.

As a service provider, you can partner with your local domestic violence shelter to provide mutual support and cross-training. Survivors often have experienced other types of violence, such as child abuse, domestic violence or sexual assault, and may benefit from the resources made available through different programs. Engage the survivor by explaining what options may be available to them and allow them to choose.

### KEY TERM: POLYVICTIMIZATION

Survivors of trafficking may have experienced other forms of trauma and violence, such as family violence, child abuse, domestic violence, or sexual assault. It is important for service providers to be aware of the intersections of human trafficking and other crimes.

Survivors may be eligible for additional services due to their polyvictimization. Service providers can explore available options with the survivor and allow them to choose what services they would like to access.

To learn more about effective collaboration with domestic violence programs, read the [Guide for Anti-Trafficking Programs Working with Domestic Violence Shelters](#).

## Human Trafficking Shelters

Human trafficking shelters provide temporary housing to individuals fleeing human trafficking situations. These shelters are not common and most have beds available only for female sex trafficking survivors. Contact the [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#) to find a human trafficking shelter to connect and develop an ongoing partnership to provide mutual support and referrals.

## Hotel Vouchers

Some local governments, nonprofit organizations, and faith-based organizations provide vouchers for individuals or families to stay in a hotel when other immediate shelter options are not available. Service providers can provide hotel vouchers with their own funds and/or partner with local programs that provide vouchers.

[Safe Shelter Collaborative](#) has a [Safe Night](#) app that can help programs raise funds to cover hotel nights. Confidentiality is always a priority; therefore, it is important to discuss considerations of a hotel stay with the survivor and develop an appropriate safety plan to include who to communicate with in case of an emergency. Coordination of services, such as case management, with a local victim services program is also important to ensure the survivor is supported.

## WHICH PROGRAM IS BEST?

It is important to note that some shelters and housing programs have policies and practices that may be re-traumatizing to survivors or exclude certain survivors. It can be useful to learn about the program's eligibility, resources, policies, and practices. Present this information to the survivor to assess, as a team, which program and housing option is the best fit. You may also consider providing training about trauma-informed services to programs in your community.

## TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Transitional housing programs can provide temporary housing, generally along with supportive services, to individuals and/or families. Housing ranges from shared rooms to individual apartments. Programs are usually between six months to two years, allowing residents to build their savings and identify and secure permanent housing options. Often, transitional housing programs can be accessed through referrals from homeless or domestic violence shelters.

## RENTAL ASSISTANCE

Rental assistance programs provide full or partial rent payments to support a survivor in entering or maintaining their own private unit or apartment. Rental assistance is time-limited and will vary depending on the parameters of each program or agency. Survivors who have, or likely will have an income in the near future, could be a good fit to receive rental assistance.

The lease for a unit can be held by the survivor or by the anti-trafficking program. There can be pros and challenges to both. Some anti-trafficking programs take on the primary lease of an apartment unit and sublease to the survivor, in order to remove challenges for survivors in "leasing up." Landlords may refuse to lease directly to survivors who have a criminal record, limited or no credit history, or no current income. By holding the lease, the program can facilitate the leasing process, however, this requires organizational buy in and potentially oversight of the unit. Other programs develop [partnerships with landlords](#) who waive their regular requirements for those referred by the agency. A potential advantage of the survivor having the lease in their name is to gain rental and credit history. However, a survivor should ultimately make that decision.

## Leveraging Anti-Trafficking Funds

Your program may be able to use [Office for Victims of Crime](#) (OVC), [Trafficking Victim Assistance Program](#) (TVAP), [Domestic Victims of Human Trafficking Program](#) (DVHT) or other anti-trafficking grant funding to support survivors with temporary rental assistance to access or maintain housing. Some survivors may need their full rent paid and while others may only need a certain percentage. Some survivors may need assistance with the deposit and first month's rent, while others may need support for several months (for example, those waiting for a T Visa). Programs are encouraged to have flexibility and provide support to meet the individual needs of survivors. Because these programs are time-limited, it is critical to discuss a long-term plan with the survivor.

## Continuums of Care and Rapid Re-Housing

[Continuums of Care \(CoC\)](#) are local entities that develop a collaborative approach to end homelessness. Funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), CoC's fund [Rapid Re-Housing](#) rental assistance programs which often include supportive services such as housing placement and case management. Rapid Re-Housing is time-limited, usually a few months, therefore service providers should develop a plan for longer-term housing stability.

## PERMANENT HOUSING

Permanent housing has no definite time limit, although the survivor usually has a lease in their own name that may specify a specific term. There are two main categories of permanent housing programs: tenant-based rental assistance - where a program subsidizes the survivor wherever they are housed; and affordable developments - where the unit itself has a subsidy that reduces the rent. Some permanent housing options include supportive services, such as mental health and case management. Permanent housing programs typically have long wait times, so it is best to start the application process as soon as possible.

### Tenant-Based Rental Assistance: Housing Choice Voucher Program

The [Housing Choice Voucher program](#) (known as Section 8) is a HUD-funded rent subsidy that provides housing vouchers to [low-income families](#). Families typically pay 30% of their income for rent and utilities, and the voucher provides a subsidy for the remaining rent. Importantly, the voucher can travel with the family to any rental unit in the Public Housing Authority's (PHAs) jurisdiction. The waitlists are managed by the local PHA and average between 7-10 years. PHA's may have localized priorities, which may include trafficking survivors. The application and approval process varies by PHA. To apply, find the contact information of your local PHA on the [HUD website](#).

### Affordable Developments: Conventional Public Housing

Conventional public housing units are funded by HUD and managed by local PHAs. The apartments are usually targeted to very low-income individuals and families. Generally, the local PHA maintains the waitlist for public housing, and individuals pay 30% of adjusted income in rent. Public housing may include supportive services and can be accessed by contacting your local PHA.

## Affordable Developments: Project-based Section 8

Project-based Section 8 housing assistance is similar to conventional public housing, except it is privately owned and operated. HUD provides a rental subsidy to affordable apartment communities owned by private landlords to help pay low-income tenants' rent. Project-based vouchers are attached to a specific unit and usually do not move with the individual or family. This program has eligibility and rent subsidy level requirements similar to conventional public housing. Project-based Section 8 housing may include supportive services and can be accessed by contacting the property owner or manager. You can find more information by contacting your local PHA.

## Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is a long-term housing program through HUD that has extensive case management services attached. PSH is targeted at people who are chronically homeless and can be funded in a variety of ways. When the program is full, the local Continuum of Care creates and manages a waitlist. Learn more at [hud.gov](http://hud.gov).

## TIPS AND CONSIDERATIONS

### Immigration Status Requirements

Many of the HUD-funded programs listed above and some of the Rural Development programs are limited to US citizens, legal permanent residents, and other eligible noncitizens. Eligible non-citizens often include survivors of trafficking who have a T Visa, VAWA self-petitioners, and refugees or asylees. Families with mixed immigration status (families with eligible and ineligible noncitizens) may also qualify for HUD-funded programs. Contact your local housing authority or CoC to understand the eligibility requirements for each program.

### Waitlists and Preferences

Many housing assistance programs have long waitlists; for example, the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program waitlist can be 7-10 years long. Additionally, there are open and closed waitlists. If the waitlist is closed, a person is not able to apply. Some PHAs have preferences for crime victims, which may benefit victims of trafficking. Service providers should keep an eye out for waitlist openings and preferences at their local Public Housing Authority (PHA). Connect with your local PHA to learn more.

### General Considerations

Deciding which housing assistance program best fits an individual survivor must be determined on a case-by-case basis and in collaboration with the survivor. For example, the HCV program might not be the best fit for a survivor in need of an immediate housing option. Service providers need to ensure that survivors understand all available options and can choose the best fit for themselves.