

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR OVC ANTI-TRAFFICKING RAPID REHOUSING PROGRAMS

Rapid Rehousing is a permanent housing solution that provides temporary assistance (rental assistance and supportive services) for a period of 6-24 months. Programs often have three core components: housing identification, rent and move-in assistance, and case management services. The goal of Rapid Rehousing is to help people quickly exit homelessness and maintain permanent housing while establishing autonomy and independence. This fact sheet builds upon the core components of Rapid Rehousing to outline key considerations for operating OVC Anti-Trafficking Housing programs for survivors.

HOUSING FIRST AND VOLUNTARY SERVICES

Housing First is a methodology that prioritizes housing without pre-conditions such as sobriety, medication adherence, service engagement, etc. The principle of Housing First is that housing is a human right for all. It is similar to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and operates on the assumption that individuals experiencing homelessness cannot focus on higher needs (mental health, sobriety, employment, etc.) until their basic human needs are met.

Voluntary Services is a component of the Housing First methodology. Survivors can decide how much or how little they want to participate in case management or other services. When utilizing a Voluntary Services framework, case management participation is not a program requirement, and participants that do not choose to participate in case management are not discharged from the housing program.

FINDING A RENTAL UNIT

Master Leasing vs. Scattered Site Units

PROVIDER TIP

Voluntary Services does not mean no contact. Programs may still check in with survivors at a cadence established with the survivor (typically monthly) to assess if the survivor is still occupying the unit, how much rental assistance is needed, or if there are any unit or landlord concerns that the provider can assist with.

Curious about how to implement a Housing First framework with Voluntary Services? Schedule a technical assistance session with the FNUSA Housing TTA team!

“Master leasing” and “scattered site” refer to the types of rental units that may be used in a Rapid Rehousing program.

Rapid Rehousing programs designed to master-lease units may lease a single unit or block of units from a landlord, then sub-lease the unit to a survivor enrolled in the housing program. Survivors will hold a lease with the program rather than the landlord directly. Master leasing can be effective for program participants who may have barriers to renting directly with landlords due to background, income, or credit history. Some survivors may choose to remain in their unit at the end of program assistance by remaining in the unit while entering a new lease agreement with the landlord directly. This is called transitioning in place. Transitioning in place can be a cost-effective option for survivors who may have difficulty moving to a new unit due to moving expenses, leasing fees, etc.

Scattered site units establish a lease agreement between the landlord and program participant directly. Scattered site units can help survivors build good credit, increase autonomy, and may make it easier for survivors to transition in place at the end of their program assistance by remaining in the unit and assuming rental payments.

Landlord Engagement

Affordable units are in short supply across the country so building relationships with landlords and property management companies in your area can be pivotal. A network of relationships with landlords can increase access to rental units and potentially decrease the amount of time a survivor spends experiencing homelessness. Programs can identify and build relationships with landlords in a variety of ways including connecting with landlords your program has worked with previously to check availability, attending local landlord or apartment association meetings, or connecting with your local Public Housing Authority or homeless Continuum of Care to see if they are aware of any landlords with availability.

When working with existing or potential landlords or property management companies it is important to prioritize survivor confidentiality. This may include not sharing or limiting details about the type of program the survivor is enrolled in, why they are receiving housing assistance, and the frequency and topics of case management sessions.

Housing Choice

Another component of the Housing First methodology is housing choice. Housing choice gives survivors the autonomy to select the rental unit that best fits their unique wants, needs, and sense of safety. The unit selection process is collaborative between the housing program and the survivor, and survivors are often shown multiple units that they can select from.

For scattered site programs, housing choice can look like unit selection by the survivor based on neighborhood, building structure, management structure, etc. For master-leased programs, housing choice can look like flexibility in the survivor’s selection of the unit from those that have been master leased or master leasing at another property if a survivor does not want to live where units are currently leased.

This document was produced by the Freedom Network Training Institute under Grant Number 15POVC-23-GK-04059-HT, awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this document are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

TAILORED RENTAL ASSISTANCE

Determining Rental Contributions

Rapid Rehousing programs may determine participant and program rental contributions based on a participant's unique circumstances. Rental determinations should factor in a survivor's income, employment/education goals, utilities, other monthly bills, and household size. The process for determining rental contributions for the survivor and the program should be transparent and shared with the participant early in the program enrollment process prior to move-in. Sharing information transparently may assist survivors in regaining agency over their living situation by helping them to select the rental unit that best fits their financial circumstances and household needs.

Tapering Rental Assistance

It is uncommon that individuals entering housing programs are able to immediately assume the total financial cost associated with their housing. In addition, it is often a period when survivors are in a time of crisis and navigating significant change. Rapid Rehousing programs often contribute more financially at the beginning of a participant's lease term. As program participants build income, stability, and/or reach education or employment goals, they might begin to contribute more to the cost of rent, utilities, or both. Decreasing the program's portion of financial assistance as a participant is able to contribute more can help the participant establish routines in paying housing expenses and budgeting. Programs that provide a fixed rate over the course of a participant's program enrollment may experience instability at the end of their financial assistance if they have not become accustomed to paying rent and utilities monthly. However, it is also important to realize that circumstances may change while a survivor is receiving financial assistance. For example, they may lose their job or gain custody of a child which will impact their available funds. It is important to have flexible policies to accommodate these situations and avoid potential homelessness. Language around changes to rental contributions over the course of a participant's enrollment should be established early on and clearly outline any associated procedures.

TRANSITION PLANNING

Self-Sustaining After Assistance Ends

Transition planning can be a crucial component of a survivor's success in housing and should begin early in program enrollment. Many participants in Rapid Rehousing programs exit the program to self-sufficiency after assistance ends. Self-sufficiency in this case means that the survivor is able to pay completely the costs associated with their housing without program assistance, often within the same rental unit. If the survivor intends to transition in place at the end of their program enrollment, the financial feasibility of a unit should be considered. This can be established during the searching phase for a unit prior to move-in. Obtaining or decreasing income over the course of a participant's enrollment in the program may impact the financial feasibility of a unit. Explore a variety of housing options with each survivor such as living or a

roommate situation after assistance ends to reduce financial burden when assuming housing costs.

Long-term housing subsidies

Some Rapid Rehousing program participants may find that they need ongoing financial assistance to maintain housing after their program enrollment ends. It is important that Rapid Rehousing programs familiarize themselves and work collaboratively where possible with sources of federal, state, and local funding to increase access to ongoing housing subsidies for survivors. Some ways to access ongoing housing subsidies may be through the local homeless Continuum of Care (CoC). The Continuum of Care refers to the network of homeless services and housing providers in a specific geographical area.

Survivors entering Rapid Rehousing programs when they are chronically homeless retain their chronically homeless status while in Rapid Rehousing for the purpose of transitioning to a permanent housing subsidy within the local CoC. While most communities prioritize chronically homeless individuals for permanent housing resources, each CoC can develop its own prioritization for permanent housing resources available in the CoC. It is important to work with your local CoC to understand prioritization for permanent housing subsidies. You can find your local CoC through the HUD Exchange website at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/housing-and-homeless-assistance/homeless-help/>

Many communities also have affordable housing developments or subsidies like Housing Choice Vouchers (formerly Section 8) that survivors in Rapid Rehousing may qualify for based on their income. Affordable housing developments and Housing Choice Vouchers determine eligibility based on a variety of factors such as income, citizenship status, age, etc. It is important to know that both affordable housing developments and Housing Choice Vouchers administered by public housing authorities often have long waitlists. If a survivor wants to work toward one of these options it should be established early in transition planning.

WHAT IS CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS?

The federal department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines chronic homelessness as a homeless individual or head of household that:

- Has a disability
- Has been literally homeless for at least 12 months (in an unsheltered location, emergency shelter, or safe haven).
 - Episodes of homelessness may have been continuous for 12+ months or on at least 4 separate occasions over the past 3 years that when combined total at least 12 months.

HUD Chronically Homeless Final Rule, 2015.

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Setting Benchmarks

Establishing performance benchmarks in Rapid Rehousing programs can be key for identifying areas of improvement and making any needed process or policy changes. Performance benchmarks may be based on organizational goals, community needs, and feedback from survivors. Some frequently used benchmarks in Rapid Rehousing programs include the length of time from homelessness to housing for participants, the length of time participants remain in housing both during and after assistance ends, as well as returns to homelessness. If you would like support in developing performance benchmarks for your Rapid Rehousing program, the FNUSA Housing Training and Technical Assistance team is happy to help. Please contact housing@freedomnetworkusa.org to meet with the team.

Measuring Equity

Programs can examine equity in their housing practices by critically reviewing quantitative demographic data and identifying discrepancies. Inequities may arise in program enrollment demographics with some programs choosing to serve female identifying victims only or restricting enrollments to only those who experienced sex trafficking. Screening for sex and labor trafficking, as well as working with individuals across the gender spectrum, can be critical components of increasing equity within a housing program.

Indicators of equitable housing practices may also include participant placement locations. Inequities in placement locations may include proximity to resources, prevalence of crime, or size and quality of rental units. An example of inequitable housing practices could be trends in members of certain demographics being housed in areas where public transportation, grocery stores, and other resources are not conveniently accessible.

Qualitative Data

In addition to quantitative data, qualitative data can be a helpful tool in determining program effectiveness. Qualitative data focuses on information shared through communication or narratives, rather than numbers. It can be used to gauge participant satisfaction in programs and to identify areas of improvement. Some examples of qualitative data collection may include open-ended participant surveys that are given to a survivor during or after their enrollment in the housing program, developing an advisory board, or incorporating survivors into program decision making by seeking feedback on policies and procedures. If your program chooses to gather qualitative data it should be made clear for participants what the data will be used for and that they would be submitting it voluntarily.

More information on resources listed in this fact sheet such as Housing Choice Vouchers, working with local CoCs and Coordinated Entry, or Landlord Engagement may be found in the Freedom Network USA resource library here:

<https://freedomnetworkusa.org/training/resource-library/>