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>> Hello, and welcome to Policy and Advocacy in Action, a channel of NRCDV radio. My name is Miriam Durrani and today I will be speaking to Kendra Gritsch from the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence about how to meet the needs of all survivors and some innovative work happening in Washington State. Thank you, Kendra, for joining me today. Let's get right to the questions. Kendra, can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what your role is?

>> Sure. So my name is Kendra Gritsch and I am with the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. And I work on our housing project here, specifically on the domestic violence housing initiative and supporting our domestic violence programs in Washington State who are implementing this approach.

>> Can you tell us a little bit about what's happening in Washington State and I know you mentioned your Housing First initiative. Could you explain to listeners a little bit about what that initiative is?

>> Sure. So Housing First is based on the philosophy that housing is a right and that folks are more successful in becoming stable long-term if they have Housing First and then services and support. So it is really difficult for folks to get a job, go to school, or seek other important supports if spending their time and energy trying to find a safe place to sleep at night or a place to call home. We know that domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children, and often survivors are in a really tough situation where they're choosing between a violent home or no home at all. We really wanted to take a look at this in Washington State and eliminate domestic violence as a reason to stay in abusive relationships and so we decided to see how this Housing First approach could work for survivors. It does look a little different from the traditional Housing First approach because survivors who are homeless or stably housed they need homes but they are also seeking safety and in the domestic violence Housing First model advocates are providing three things. Survivor driven, trauma-informed, mobile advocacy, flexible financial assistance, and engaging in their community, both in terms of developing relationships with landlords. Local businesses are also working with survivors to connect or reconnect to their community of support.

The DV Housing First model was originally piloted in Washington State and that was nine years ago, and since then a lot of our programs are taking this on as an approach that really supports survivors. And also just want to acknowledge that there are other states who are doing this work, including California, Colorado, and it's just sort of, like, taking steam across the nation at this point.

>> Wow, that sounds like such an interesting initiative and there's so many interesting things happening in different states. So I know we're here today to talk about, you know, the variety of different needs that survivors have when they're seeking services. So I know you mentioned a little bit when you were talking about the Housing First initiative, but can you talk about ways that programs in Washington are

meeting the variety of needs that survivors have?

>> Mm-hmm yeah. So the domestic violence Housing First approach really focuses not just on letting survivors lead their process towards being stable but also works to expanding services that are available to survivors who are seeking safer and more stable housing. There's really no one size that fits all approach. Survivors lives are complex and what might be really helpful to one survivor might not be helpful to others. So the more options we have available, the more we can meet the needs of folks.

We also know that safety and healing look different. So someone might need their locks changed in order to feel safe to stay in their own home. Someone else might need legal assistance to deal with a custody case. Someone might need their car repaired so they can get to work, perhaps their abusers slashed their car so they couldn't get to work. When you can't get to work, it's hard to make money to be stable. You know, someone else might want to relocate but they want to make sure it's in the same school district so they can stay connected to their school support network. So I mean, that's just a lot of examples, and there are many, many more. What the approach really means is that advocates can work with survivors on what they need and what they identify as what they need versus giving a survivor a menu of services and just hoping that an item on that menu is something that they need. What we have seen from programs and what programs are seeing as the more options that are available to meet people's needs, the more their needs can be met, and because the approach pairs with flexible financial assistance like with flexibility and advocacy, advocates are now really able to successfully support folks that they may not have been able to do before, whether it's due to a structure, like a structure or a facility, so people have things that they can sort of folks, immigrants, larger families.

There's a really great story that came out of one of our DV Housing First programs that was able to help a Native-American survivor and her children and the grandma stay safely in their own home. The grandma was providing childcare so the survivor could work. So we just thought, like, well what would happen if they would have had to move in to a shelter, for example, that would have meant the survivor wouldn't have had the child care she needed to go to work and the grandma may have put in to a position of being unstable and that would have just, you know, caused even more uprooting of the family and potentially more trauma for the children who were already, you know, dealing with the aftermath with violent situation.

>> Wow. What a great story. We know that childcare can be so important for survivors and it can mean the difference between going to work and not going to work and managing all of the responsibilities. Yeah, super interesting. Thanks for sharing.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> So I know, Kendra, you talked a little bit earlier about the menu of options and, you know, I think when we talked about survivor safety awhile ago, it's kind of evolved, so the menu of options seems much broader than just kind of that traditional idea of emergency shelter. Can you talk about, you know, is that still the main focus? Has it really evolved from there?

>> Yeah. So you know, I think that what we know is that the world has changed dramatically since the domestic violence movement has begun, and so when we start looking at that, we started thinking about, like, do the services that we constructed decades ago respond to the needs that survivors, like, currently have. Emergency shelter and emergency housing solutions is really important for a lot of survivors and their children and they're critical and life saving, but, again, it's not for everyone. I think what -- what we have heard survivors say is that communal shelter can be really challenging. Sharing space with others who are going through trauma can be really hard. And then there's always the question, you know, relating back to the, you know, the story I told of, like, what do people do if they need to live with their mother or if they have pets or they have big families that they want to stay in the same school and then also just, you know, totally removing someone from their location also often results removing all of their networks and it's not a long-term solution. So when I talk about options and

what the Housing First approach has meant, it is asking survivors, you know, making sure you're asking them, like, what is your housing situation like and making sure that they know that shelter isn't the only option. And when that question starts being asked, it's amazing what survivors say. So some survivors say actually I don't -- I don't need shelter, I need rental assistance, I need my locks changed, I need help getting a job, I need help getting into a new place. So that's, you know, asking that question is actually resulting in different answers, and as we move -- we're moving into this approach, I think that we're actually able to address those different needs that survivors are saying that they have.

>> That's fantastic. You know, I think it's so important that you highlighted that, you know, everyone has really different needs and people know what they need best oftentimes. Something that I want to pull out that you said, you talked about the complexities of sharing, you know, communal space with folks who are experiencing or have experienced trauma. I think we often hear, like, trauma-informed services as often a buzzword and kind of a phrase and people say that they're engaging in trauma-informed services. So how do you feel, like, programs could actually engage in trauma-informed services and how do you define that term for you?

>> So from a program perspective, having more options available is trauma-informed, it means that people can get the support around the things that matter most to them and advocacy practice, it looks like understanding what trauma is how it can show up in those day to day advocacy interactions and then being flexible in your response around that. So an example I think we can all relate to in advocacy is think, you know, the situation where you're working with a survivor that doesn't show up to an appointment on time or they don't show up at all and a trauma-informed approach to that would be to not make assumptions or develop opinions about why that survivor didn't show up but to come from a place of understanding curiosity and openness and having the conversation with the survivor about what would make it easier for them the next time because maybe it's meeting them out in the community so they don't have to get on a bus and risk running in to an abuser or being in other situation that is are triggering for them.

>> Great, yeah. I think that's such a valuable approach to take, you know, when interacting with anyone. So I know that you talked about the Housing First model, housing, again, the services that go along with that and the menu of options. Things seem to be going really well, but can you talk about, you know, what sorts of challenges you're seeing overall or in your state or in certain programs?

>> Yeah. So I think some of the challenges that we can all relate to is just the general lack of affordable housing and lack of housing available and this is something that is happening in Washington, it's happening across the country. Also low or stagnant wages so the cost of housing and wages are just not keeping up with each other. We also know that there's just more needs than there are resources available, and I just want to highlight that a little bit because when we're talking about this DV Housing First approach and we're really deeply engaging with people around what they need and it's open and flexible, sometimes that means that the time spent with survivors is much longer because it's not just housing, it's housing and then the support to help people become stable long-term. So we're, you know, in this interesting situation where there is just so much more need than there are resources available and advocates are trying to negotiate that all the time, and that looks different from program to program. Some programs are deciding that they want to work with as many people as possible and then knowing that that's just not going to provide that in-depth long-term support. And then there are some programs who are deciding to work with a few people but a lot deeper and that's a challenge attention that is very front and center. And then, you know, what we know about survivors is that a lot of times when they're coming out of the situation, they have experienced economic abuse, they might have no rental history or a really bad rental history due to the violence. We also see that, you know, some survivors don't have job skills, they don't have a job history, they might have a criminal background and so that's why the advocacy is so important, is negotiating those things with landlords. A lot of times landlords discriminate against survivors, discriminate based off of race and so having sort of advocates there to help negotiate those situations can address some of those challenges.

>> Great. That's really helpful. We know advocates, you know, do their best, and we've seen a lot of advocates get really creative with the way that is they help survivors. So I'm glad you shared all of that. So --

>> Mm-hmm.

>> Is there any advice that you'd give to those listening to the podcast, you know, if they're facing challenges, you know, meeting the needs of their community or challenges in their housing market, challenges in supportive services, what are some of the best practices, what do you want people to know?

>> Well, when I think about advocacy, you know, I think about both supporting survivors on the individual level but also the importance of advocates and doing that more like system levels advocacy. So when I talked about some of the systems challenges around affordable housing wages, I think that advocates have a really important role to play in communicating to policy makers, whether it's local, state, federal, about the challenges that survivors are facing and using those real life stories. So that's, you know, one thing that I think advocates could really do to address those larger systems challenges. And in terms of like the take away for folks, and I said this earlier, just that we all, you know, make assumptions about what survivors need, whether it be housing or safety but the more flexibility and options that we can show up with when we're working with survivors the closer we can get to communities where people can be healthy and safe and the advocacies is a really important piece to that work and that everyone is deserving of services and support and that's, you know, that's the work that we're doing. We also have a lot of tools and information on the WSCADV webpage, WSCADV.org, around DV Housing First, tips and tools on how to do it, what programs are doing, examples of it, and then also a lot of data and evidence to backup how this approach can be successful when working with survivors.

>> Great. Thank you so much, Kendra. I know you talked about the importance of advocacy, so my last question for you is, are there any stories that you -- any other stories you that want to share with the listeners, anything that's made an impact on you?

>> There are so many stories, I have to figure out which.

[LAUGHTER]

>> I know. Survivors --

>> So many stories from folks.

>> So many stories of resiliency.

>> Yeah.

>> And creativity.

>> Yeah.

>> And inspiration.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> It's hard to pick just one but.

>> Yeah. I'll -- you know, one of the questions that we get a lot is around safety and I think that there's -- it's a reworking of the skills when you're talking with survivors about safety outside of the traditional emergency shelter structure and advocates, you know, are afraid, and rightly so, of what are the safety concerns of survivors if they're out in the community and so there's a story that came out of like out of the Olympic Peninsula which is very western Washington where there was a survivor who was working with a program and go into a home with her own with a private landlord and had just this history of always having to move, because no matter what she did, the abuser found her and her children. And lo and behold, like, one key she got a note on her door and it was, you know, this person saying like, I know where you live. And she decided like I, you know, I am going to figure out how to be safe here. And she was able to communicate with the local police department because that was a thing that felt safe for her, they're close by, the advocacy program was close by, her neighbors knew what was going on, so she created this community of support that allowed her and her children to not have to uproot themselves again and move but she could feel safe and knew she had people to rely on. And I

think ultimately what we want to see from our communities is our communities are healthy and supporting each other so that when advocacy goes away that people can still be successful and safe in their lives.

>> That is truly an inspirational and phenomenal story, Kendra. Thank you so much for sharing that. So thank you to everyone for listening to our broadcast today and to my guest, Kendra Gritsch. She did mention the Washington State Coalition website which is WSCADV.org if you want to learn more about their work. And to hear more NRCDV podcasts and access additional resources, feel free to visit us at NRCDV.org. You can also follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at NRCDV. Policy and Advocacy in Action is an NRCDV radio podcast product brought to you by the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. Support is provided by the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families - Family and Youth Services Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official use of the U.S. Department of Health and human services. Thanks again. Bye.