

Safe and Affordable Housing

Battered women with little money face many barriers to finding safe and affordable housing. Over the past 25 years, the number of low-cost housing units nationwide has decreased, federal funding for low-income housing has declined, and wages have not kept pace with skyrocketing housing costs (See J. Daskal's *In Search of Shelter: The Growing Shortage of Affordable Rental Housing*, published in 1995 by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities.) For many battered women, a history of abuse creates additional barriers, including damaged credit, poor landlord references (possibly including past evictions), and no money for security or utility deposits.

These realities require advocates to ask critical questions about their work. What *are* the consequences of this altered landscape for domestic violence programs and coalitions? How can domestic violence organizations respond to battered women's basic human needs? There is no single best strategy or innovation. Programs at the state and local level must determine new directions for policy advocacy and direct practice, considering both the expertise and constraints of their organizations and the issues presented by battered women. The following describes the efforts of a state welfare agency, a community-based domestic violence program, and two state domestic violence coalitions toward increasing housing options for battered women.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Funds Support Transitional Housing

In August, 1999, the Michigan Family Independence Agency (FIA, state welfare department) set aside \$3 million of its federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant to fund transitional supportive housing for adult victims of domestic violence and their children. Grants were initially awarded for one-year, and were then extended in 2000.

The Michigan FIA defines transitional supportive housing as "safe, decent, single family housing coupled with case managed supportive services that assists TANF eligible domestic violence survivors and their children to maintain safe, affordable, permanent housing within 24 months [of receiving services]." Fifteen domestic violence programs across the state receive this funding, some of which had previously provided transitional housing services, and others for which this was a new program. The housing services available to women vary, and include scattered site apartments, facility-based units, and rental subsidies. Technical assistance is available to the providers through a series of training opportunities offered by the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board (MDVPTB).

In the Summer 2001, the MDVPTB, administratively housed in the Michigan FIA, conducted a study to determine the technical assistance and capacity-building needs of transitional housing program staff, and the supportive service needs as expressed by battered women. The Board plans to issue a report with the goal of developing a model for providing transitional supportive services to battered women. For more information, contact Debi Cain at the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board of the Michigan Family Independence Agency, 517-373-8144 or at caind@state.mi.us.

The *Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence* Policy and Practice Paper Series has published several housing reports, including:

Paper #2: *Innovative Strategies to Provide Housing for Battered Women*, and

Paper #8: *Federal Housing and Domestic Violence: Introduction to Programs, Policies and Advocacy Opportunities*

These papers and others on poverty, welfare, and economic development are available on the Internet at: http://www.vawnet.org/vnl/library/general/bcs_apub.htm, or by calling the NRC at 800-537-2238.

In January, 1999, the Domestic Violence Intervention Program (DVIP) – a community-based emergency multi-agency committee named WHEN (Women's Housing and Economic Needs) to help low-income

battered women and families. DVIP had considered developing transitional housing, but determined that this would not address the dire need for more safe, permanent, and affordable housing in the community.

WHEN members included representatives from the shelter, a transitional housing program, the substance abuse agency, welfare office, public housing authority, and community mental health agency. Committee members spent the initial few months building relationships by agreeing upon a mission, clarifying needs, and learning more about housing programs and policies that affect local families. In the first year WHEN members developed a tenant certification training program for individuals in need of good landlord references and provided public testimony to city officials about the housing barriers facing battered women.

In 2000, the WHEN committee merged with the Johnson County Local Homeless Coordinating Board (LHCB) as that group re-organized to increase its community visibility and influence. Also in 2000, DVIP joined a special initiative of the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence and received technical assistance from *Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence* staff to organize a community-wide, one-day economic summit as a strategy for increasing battered women's economic options.

To plan for this summit, DVIP staff organized a steering committee of LHCB members, battered

tate Coalitions Address Housing Policies

In 2000, the New Mexico Coalition Against Domestic Violence collaborated with homeless service providers to establish a new statewide not-for-profit organization, the New Mexico Homeless Task Force. The Task Force links domestic violence and homeless programs through the common purpose of improved policy advocacy and increased funding to support services for homeless persons, including battered women seeking emergency shelter. For more information about this effort, call Agnes Maldonado at 505-246-9240.

In 2000, the state of South Dakota forfeited more than \$1 million in federal Department of Housing and Urban Development block grant money because it failed to produce the required Consolidated Plan. In response, concerned advocates from a cross-section of groups – including domestic violence, legal services, community action agencies, public health, and education – joined forces with the state housing agency to produce the plan. As a result, the state received funds in 2001. The South Dakota Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault participated in this advocacy effort because it recognized that these funds help battered women. For more information about the Coalition's involvement in this effort, call Verlaine Gullickson at 605-945-0869.

women, social service staff, and a city housing planner. After several planning meetings, committee members agreed that the summit should address efforts to develop more affordable permanent housing for low-income families.

Over 30 people from a cross-section of the community attended the April 2001 **From Vision to Action: An Economic Summit**, including a non-profit housing developer, director of the Iowa Finance Authority, formerly homeless persons and housing advocates.

Members of the Local Homeless Coordinating Board embraced the issues and ideas raised at the economic summit. In June 2001, the Board accepted a proposal to address barriers that impede the development of permanent, affordable housing for low-income households, and organized three sub-groups to address the major issues identified, including changing community attitudes about low-income families, improving public policies, and increasing financial resources.

Due to this collaborative effort, DVIP staff also are more familiar with community resources and have built relationships with social service staff in order to better assist low-income women who need services and advocacy. For more information about this work, call Angie Madsen, DVIP, at 319-351-1043.

Let us know what you think of this newsletter. Any suggestions on topics to cover?
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