



# AN EVALUATION OF TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAMS IN ILLINOIS FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND/OR HUMAN TRAFFICKING



# **An Evaluation of Transitional Housing Programs in Illinois for Victims of Domestic Violence and/or Human Trafficking**

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Victims of domestic violence<sup>1</sup> and/or human trafficking<sup>2</sup> often are forced to choose between remaining in their place of residence and safety. Research suggests domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness and housing instability for women and children in the United States (Baker, Billhard, Warren, Rollins, & Glass, 2010). Victims of human trafficking face many of the same challenges as domestic violence victims and can benefit from similar services in some instances (Shigekane, 2007). Shelter and housing services were reported as two of the most critical needs of individuals seeking domestic violence services in Illinois (DeLong, Alderden, Hiselman, & Hahn, 2016).<sup>3</sup>

Transitional housing programs pay a portion of housing costs for victims, allowing them to leave emergency shelters and safely move into more permanent residences. Best practices suggest that clients pay no more than 30 percent of their income for rent (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2013). Many transitional housing programs also offer participants counseling, employment assistance, and other support services based on clients' individual needs.

ICJIA researchers conducted a process evaluation to examine the implementation of three transitional housing program models in Illinois. This evaluation offers implications for policy and practice to improve programming and serves as a guide for future funding considerations.

Researchers sought to answer the following research questions:

- What are the programs' policies and procedures?
- How do programs employing different models operate differently?
- What are the characteristics of the clients?
- To what extent are clients satisfied with the program?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the programs?
- What barriers exist to program implementation as intended?
- To what extent do programs provide services beyond housing and/or coordinate with partner organizations to offer services beyond housing?

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<sup>1</sup> Domestic violence is defined by the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) as “the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another.” (NCADV, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 defines human trafficking as: “(A) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or (B) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.” (22 USC § 7102).

<sup>3</sup> This sample is only representative of victims seeking assistance through service providers in Illinois who utilize InfoNet, a web-based data collection and reporting system used to document services provided to victims of domestic and sexual violence, and to produce standardized program and grant-specific data reports.

## Current Study

Researchers evaluated three transitional housing programs supported with ICJIA-administered Victims of Crime Act funding. Researchers analyzed administrative data from InfoNet, a web-based, centralized statewide case management system used by state-funded domestic and sexual violence service providers in Illinois (Houston Kolnik & Hiselman, 2018). Researchers also conducted semi-structured interviews with program staff (n=9) and clients (n=13).

Researchers selected three transitional housing sites offering a range of programs with varying characteristics for the process evaluation (*Table 1*). *Appendix A* provides more detailed descriptions of each program site. Programs are referred to as Sites A, B, and C for anonymity.

Table 1  
*Selected Characteristics of Transitional Housing Program Sites*

	Site A	Site B	Site C
Location	Suburban county in Chicago area	Central Illinois	Cook County
Community Type	Suburban	Rural	Suburban/Urban
Population Served	Domestic Violence and/or Human Trafficking	Domestic Violence	Domestic Violence
Program Housing Model(s)	Scattered	Scattered	Scattered and Clustered
Number of Units	30	10	15

Source: Programs' administrative data and program staff interviews.

## Program Goals

Transitional housing programs aimed to provide victims with a safe, stable residence away from their abuser. By providing safe and stable housing, transitional housing gave clients space for healing while allowing them to define personal goals and address other challenges in their life. Programs aimed to provide participants with the tools and resources they needed to be independent and empowered when they left transitional housing.

## Program Successes

According to the research interviews, success looked different for each client based on their unique goals. Program staff as well as clients spoke highly of the work being done through transitional housing and provided many examples of successes that resulted from participation in the program.

**Stable housing.** Through the program, clients received safe and stable housing during the program period. Staff reported many clients successfully secured permanent housing by the end of the transition period. Staff members said participation in the program helped clients improve credit scores, make debt payments, build a recent rental history, and obtain landlord references to expand housing options once program participation ended.

**Advocacy with landlords.** During the interviews, program staff said developing relationships with landlords was critical to the success of transitional housing programs. Staff at all three organizations recounted instances where landlords were hesitant to work with a third-party or with a domestic violence service provider. However, program staff reported that after their advocacy on behalf of the programs and clients, the landlords who agreed to participate were highly satisfied.

**Relationships.** Participants noted that case managers were great resources for help with myriad tasks and issues and provided unwavering emotional support to clients. Staff explained that positive client relationships allowed case managers to better understand and address the needs of the population they served. In the interviews, four clients and eight staff members reported the transitional housing programs fostered community and support among participants.

## **Program Challenges**

Transitional housing programs face many challenges. Some are inherent to the model, while others may vary between communities.

**High demand.** Staff interviews revealed the three organizations maintained waiting lists for their transitional housing programs. Staff and clients described how waiting lists can be problematic, particularly for this population, because many applicants were facing homelessness or living in unstable environments, i.e., illicit drug use, crowded, noisy.

**Access to services.** Some clients reported barriers to accessing services through the program or through external referrals. Three clients also mentioned discrepancies between what they felt like was available to others in the program versus what was available for them, suggesting barriers to communication regarding available services. An issue that came up several times during the interviews was clients' challenge of continually asking for services on an as-needed basis; three clients reported feeling discouraged or burdensome when asking for the same service repeatedly.

**Property maintenance.** Many clients reported they were very satisfied with the quality of the apartments and shared examples of maintenance issues that were successfully resolved. However, six clients cited challenges with building maintenance and/or the property management staff. Some clients expressed concerns about damage to the units from prior tenants, issues with the quality of unit-specific furnishings (e.g. appliances, carpet), as well as delays in the required processes to have maintenance address issues at the properties.

**Grant administration and funding.** The most common challenges reported involved funding restrictions on certain types of assistance, such as food assistance, furnishings,

application fees, and security deposits. One staff member reported aiming to keep staffing costs to a minimum to allocate as much funding for rental assistance as possible; however, this had the effect of placing a high burden on case management staff.

**Sustainability.** Staff members from all three programs reported their transitional housing programs would not be sustainable without grant funds. Because rental assistance required such high proportions of capital investment, few options were identified by staff for their organizations to raise or otherwise acquire the funds necessary to cover a meaningful portion of participants' rental expenses. Balancing the timing of clients moving in and out with projected funding cycles posed a challenge for some of the programs.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The following are implications of the study findings and suggestions for program enhancement, but it should be recognized that they may require additional resources to implement.

**Educate on Tenant Rights and Responsibilities.** Many clients said learning about their rights and responsibilities as a tenant was a valuable aspect of the program. Programs could consider formalizing this information and creating a curriculum or workshop for participants. Information on rights and responsibilities is important for clients as they prepare to exit the program and either look for permanent housing or assume the lease of their transitional housing residence. Including information about home ownership and the mortgage process could help program participants to pursue this goal and make informed choices between renting and owning property.

**Expand and Engage Other Victim Types.** No clients were identified as victims of human trafficking in this evaluation, largely limiting the evaluation findings to domestic violence victims. However, research suggests human trafficking victims have many of the same needs as domestic violence victims (Shigekane, 2007). It would be beneficial for programs to examine their outreach efforts and determine whether there is an unmet need for services for human trafficking victims in the population they serve. Victims who experience immigration status-related barriers (e.g. limited opportunities for employment) are also likely to benefit from transitional housing programs (Clark, Wood, & Sullivan, 2018).

**Address Funding Restrictions.** In the interviews, staff commonly reported uncertainty and challenges around what can be paid for with grant funds based on the federal program requirements. Grant administrators and program staff should engage in a dialogue to identify unmet needs resulting from funding restrictions and explore potential opportunities to administer a portion of funding with greater flexibility.

**Enhance Awareness, Education, and Training.** Staff and clients noted in the interviews that some communities displayed a limited awareness of domestic violence issues, as well as a lack of information about victim needs. Continued training for program staff and other community stakeholders, such as law enforcement can help to bolster awareness and improve service delivery to this client population. Additional research should be conducted to compare

the housing trajectory and program experiences of those who experienced different types of victimization.



## Section 1: Introduction

Victims of domestic violence<sup>4</sup> and/or human trafficking<sup>5</sup> often are forced to choose between remaining in their place of residence and safety. Those victims<sup>6</sup>, potentially with their young children, fleeing an abusive or exploitive relationship may not have anywhere to safely reside. Research suggests domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness and housing instability for women and children in the United States (Baker, Billhard, Warren, Rollins, & Glass, 2010). Victims of human trafficking face many of the same challenges as domestic violence victims and can benefit from similar services in some instances (Shigekane, 2007). Shelters can offer immediate safety to both populations, but it can take on average, just over six months for a homeless family to secure stable housing (Weinreb, Rog, & Henderson, 2010). Non-emergency housing programs such as transitional housing can better address medium- and long-term outcomes for victims while providing supportive services and facilitating community reintegration.

Transitional housing programs pay a portion of housing costs for victims, allowing them to leave emergency shelters and safely move into more permanent residences. Transitional housing programs align with the “Housing First” model, which emphasizes housing as the highest priority in establishing a foundation for an individual to create or resume stability in all domains of life (Sullivan & Olsen, 2016). Rental assistance provided by transitional housing programs typically lasts from six to 24 months.

The two most common transitional housing models include:

- Scattered site: Programs assist clients in securing rentals in the private market.
- Clustered site: Programs own or rent groups of units that are available to clients (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2013).

The rent structure varies based on the program model. If a transitional housing program owns units, clients may rent directly from the program at an affordable rate. Clients in scattered site programs typically sign a lease and the program provides funds to subsidize a portion of the client’s rent. Best practices suggest that clients pay no more than 30 percent of their income for rent (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2013). Additional supportive services that are based on the client’s individual needs, such as counseling or employment assistance, are also offered to participants of transitional housing programs. In Illinois—the focus of this study—shelter and housing services were identified as two of the top 10 needs of individuals seeking

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<sup>4</sup> Domestic violence is defined by the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) as “the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another.” (NCADV, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 defines human trafficking as: “(A) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or (B) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.” (22 USC § 7102).

<sup>6</sup> We recognize that some individuals prefer terms other than “victim” (e.g. survivor). This report focuses on the impacts of an individual’s experience of victimization on their housing needs, so the term “victim” is used herein.

services for domestic violence (DeLong, Alderden, Hiselman, & Hahn, 2016).<sup>7</sup> At least 20 transitional housing programs are operating in Illinois and vary widely with respect to services offered, population served, and program capacity/operations.

In this process evaluation, researchers examined implementation of three transitional housing program models in differing Illinois communities. This evaluation offers implications for policy and practice to improve programming and guide future funding decisions.

Researchers sought to answer the following research questions:

- What are the programs' policies and procedures?
- How do programs employing different models operate differently?
- What are the characteristics of the clients?
- To what extent are clients satisfied with the program?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the programs?
- What barriers exist to program implementation as intended?
- To what extent do programs provide services beyond housing and/or coordinate with partner organizations to offer services beyond housing?

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<sup>7</sup> This sample is only representative of victims seeking assistance through service providers in Illinois who utilize InfoNet, a web-based data collection and reporting system used to document services provided to victims of domestic and sexual violence, and to produce standardized program and grant-specific data reports.

## Section 2: Literature Review

Domestic violence is one of the most common causes of homelessness and housing instability for women and families (Baker, Billhardt, Warren, Rollins, & Glass, 2010; Baker, Cook, & Norris, 2003; Homes for the Homeless & The Institute for Children and Poverty, 1998). Housing uncertainty can additionally contribute to re-victimization, especially if forced to seek alternative shelter in risky or unstable situations (Jasinski, Wesely, Mustaine, & Wright, 2002; Niolon et al., 2009). Victims may choose to stay in an abusive relationship because they have no other housing options (Menard, 2001). A longitudinal study in Canada found women<sup>8</sup> with lower incomes and those who experienced more severe abuse were more likely to leave their homes; this exemplifies the complex interaction of economic stability and severity of violence on an individual's decision to leave an abusive situation (Ponic et al., 2011). Despite an overlap in challenges faced by victims of human trafficking and domestic violence, services for these groups are not commonly combined (Roe-Sepowitz, Hickie, Dahlstedt, & Gallagher, 2014).

### Victim Needs

As domestic violence and human trafficking victims attempt to leave an abusive situation, many face financial barriers to obtaining affordable housing (Baker et al., 2003; Clark, Wood, & Sullivan, 2018). Some victims are forced to relocate to unfamiliar areas to escape abuse (Melbin, Sullivan, & Cain, 2003). This can lead to increased feelings of isolation (Baker et al., 2010). In a representative sample of California women, those who experienced intimate partner violence<sup>9</sup> were almost four times more likely to report housing instability (Pavao, Alvarez, Baumrind, Induni, & Kimerling, 2007). Individuals with little to no job experience find themselves with limited future employment prospects and income potential. This is often due to abusers not allowing them to find gainful employment or sabotaging them in the workplace (Riger & Kreiglstein, 2000). Abusers also commonly isolate their victims from family or friends, limiting the support network needed to seek a temporary place to stay (Niolon et al., 2009).

After informal supports (e.g. family, friends) are exhausted, if available, many victims turn to formal sources of support, such as domestic violence shelters (Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra, & Weintraub, 2005; Long, 2015). Some transitional housing programs require participants to first complete an emergency shelter stay.<sup>10</sup> Programs may institute this policy to provide high levels of support during the immediate crisis period and mitigate some of the initial trauma, with the aim to allow participants to maximize time in transitional housing programs for continued healing and growth (Baker et al., 2010).

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<sup>8</sup> Men and individuals with other gender identities can also be victims of domestic violence. However, the majority of subjects in the literature reviewed here and clients receiving domestic violence services in Illinois identify as women, so "women" is used here in reference to this population of victims (Houston-Kolnik & Hiselman, 2018). This is not intended to minimize or overlook the experiences of men or individuals with other gender identities who have been victimized and are seeking housing.

<sup>9</sup> Intimate partner violence is a form of domestic violence where an intimate partner displays a pattern of behavior "to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship." (National Domestic Violence Hotline, n.d.). Some studies reviewed here focus on victims of IPV specifically, while others examine the broader population of domestic violence victims.

<sup>10</sup> Emergency shelters often have maximum lengths of stay between 30 and 60 days; individual needs vary greatly with respect to length of stay (Sullivan & Virden, 2017).

Protections to prevent eviction based on the criminal actions of the abuser are lacking for victims who choose to remain in the private housing market (Lubas, 2013). Victims may be held responsible for property damage or numerous 911 calls to a residence due to the actions of their abusers, leading to potential debts or evictions that can pose challenges in acquiring other housing options (Barata & Stewart, 2010; Desmond & Valdez, 2013; Lapidus, 2003). A national survey from 2005 found that 28 percent of housing denials of victims of domestic violence were due to the violence perpetrated against them by their abusers (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty & National Network to End Domestic Violence [NNEDV], 2007).

Domestic violence and human trafficking victims may have significant mental health needs, struggling with depression, anxiety, social isolation, and/or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Baker et al., 2010; Shigekane, 2007). In a study of women who experienced intimate partner violence, many of those both in shelters and those that remained in the community demonstrated moderate to severe symptoms of PTSD (Galano, Hunter, Howell, Miller, & Graham-Bermann, 2013).<sup>11</sup> Another study found that greater housing instability is associated with more severe PTSD for victims of intimate partner violence (Rollins et al., 2012). In addition to the direct adverse effects of abuse, a lack of stable housing can cause additional negative mental and physical health outcomes for victims (e.g. due to substandard housing conditions or living without basic necessities; Daoud et al., 2016; O'Campo, Daoud, Hamilton-Wright, & Dunn, 2015). Greater housing instability was found to be associated with an increased use of hospital/emergency medical care for victims of intimate partner violence (Rollins et al., 2012).

### **Transitional Housing Programs**

Findings of a nationwide survey of 236 transitional housing programs revealed several descriptive characteristics of this type of program (Baker, Niolon, & Oliphant, 2009).

- Forty percent of the programs surveyed were in urban areas, 23 percent were in suburban areas, and 37 percent were in rural areas.
- Seventy-three percent of programs had maximum lengths of stay between one and two years.
- Approximately half of the programs surveyed had fewer than nine units.
- Programs had been operating for an average of nine years.
- Respondents reported nearly two-thirds of program funding was received through state and federal sources (Baker et al., 2009).

Many transitional housing programs no longer employ exclusionary eligibility criteria, which created barriers to clients in need, such as refusing individuals with prior felonies, substance use or severe mental health disorders, who were unwilling to cut off contact with the abuser, or who were deemed unmotivated to pursue prescribed goals (e.g. obtain full-time employment) (Baker et al., 2009; Melbin et al., 2003). Transitional housing programs that impose these barriers may unintentionally endanger victims; for example, the “Sanctuary” model, employed by some transitional housing programs in England, emphasizes victims remaining in their home, although they may prefer to move (Messing, Ward-Lasher, Thaller, & Bagwell-Gray, 2015; Netto, Pawson, & Sharp, 2009;). Program flexibility is needed to safely address victims’ unique and often complex needs and provide choice and agency to participants (Baker et al., 2010).

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<sup>11</sup> This is based on the average group score on the Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale (PDS).

Empirical research is somewhat limited on the effectiveness of transitional housing programs for victims of domestic violence and/or human trafficking. The quasi-experimental longitudinal Safe Housing and Rent Assistance Evaluation (SHARE) study compared outcomes for women receiving transitional housing and domestic violence advocacy to those that received only one of the following resources: domestic violence advocacy, housing assistance not specific to victims, or temporary (less than 60 days) emergency housing/advocacy (Glass & Rollins, 2010). While few significant differences were seen in outcomes of health and well-being between groups, the authors developed an index representing levels of housing instability, with questions that included:

- In the past six months, have you had to live somewhere that you did not want to live?
- In the past six months, have you had difficulty or were unable to pay for your housing?
- Do you expect that you will be able to stay in your current housing for the next six months?
- In the past six months, have you been served an eviction notice? (Rollins et al., 2012).

Based on this measure, higher levels of housing instability were found to be significantly associated with reduced quality of life, greater reporting of symptoms of PTSD and depression, and more absences from work or school (Rollins et al., 2012). Transitional housing programs offer stable housing, which can prevent or mitigate some adverse consequences that result from housing instability due to domestic violence (Baker et al., 2010).

The Family Options Study compared outcomes for families receiving permanent housing subsidies, project-based transitional housing, community-based rapid rehousing, and treatment as usual (Gubits et al., 2016).<sup>12</sup> Individuals who received permanent supportive housing subsidies were less likely to report experiencing intimate partner violence than the other groups; families with higher levels of psychosocial need that received transitional housing were also less likely to report intimate partner violence (Allen, 2017). Based on the study, transitional housing can provide greater support than other housing options for individuals and families with high levels of need.

Many research studies have included interviews with domestic violence victims to gain their perspectives on transitional housing programs (Baker et al., 2003; Clark et al., 2018; Clough, Draughon, Njie-Carr, Rollins, & Glass, 2014; 2014; Long, 2015; Melbin et al., 2003; O'Campo et al., 2016; Rollins et al. 2012). Findings from these studies consistently indicated transitional housing programs provide a needed service to victims of domestic violence. As suggestions for improvements, many program clients advocated for a flexible approach that is responsive to clients' individual needs instead of required services or activities (Melbin et al., 2003). Research has found transitional housing programming was most successful when services were tailored to individual needs and providers were able to provide ongoing support after a client secured housing (Clough et al.).

The rapid-rehousing model has gained popularity in the United States and there has been an increase in dedicated funding, particularly from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (Brown, Vaclavik, Watson, & Wilka, 2017). This model provides short-term rental assistance to stabilize participants and offers limited accompanying support services (Clark et al., 2018). This model has been more commonly used for general homelessness, with

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<sup>12</sup> Fifty percent of the families reported experiencing intimate partner violence at the time of baseline measurement.

very little research examining its use for victims of domestic violence (Byrne, Tregalia, Culhane, Kuhn, & Kane, 2016; Clark et al., 2018). For victims of domestic violence, immediate independent living may outpace a client's readiness to be separated from supportive services in the time directly following a crisis (Clark et al., 2018). More research is needed to study the effectiveness of different supportive housing models for crime victims, particularly for victims of domestic violence and/or human trafficking.

### Section 3: Methodology

Evaluators examined three transitional housing programs in Illinois that received funds from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) administered by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA). The evaluation was conducted between April 2018 and April 2019, with data collected between June 2018 and January 2019. Research methods included analysis of administrative program data and interviews with program staff and clients. The evaluation methods were approved by ICJIA's Institutional Review Board.

#### Data Sources

**Interviews with program clients.** Researchers interviewed current and former clients of three transitional housing programs in Illinois. Program staff at Sites A and C provided researchers contact information for clients who were willing to be contacted by phone to participate in an interview. Staff at Site B requested clients be given the option to contact research staff if they wished to take part in an interview

Eight clients from Site A and 14 clients from Site C consented to be contacted for interviews. Four clients from Site A were interviewed, one scheduled an interview but did not answer or return phone calls at the scheduled time, one did not wish to schedule an interview, one never answered or returned voicemails left by researchers, and one had a number that was disconnected. Seven clients from Site C were interviewed, one scheduled an interview but did not answer or return phone calls at the scheduled time, and six never answered or returned voicemails left by researchers. Two clients from Site B contacted researchers and were interviewed.

Researchers conducted client interviews in person (1) and via telephone (12). Verbal or written consent was obtained from all participants prior to the start of the interviews. All interviews were conducted by the primary investigator and audio-recorded. Interviews lasted between 30 and 71 minutes. Participants received a \$20 Walgreen's gift card as compensation for their time. The consent form and interview questions were translated into Spanish and a Spanish-speaking researcher was available to conduct an interview if a research subject stated that preference; however, no interviewees expressed a preference to conduct the interview in Spanish.

The interview schedule included 46 questions focusing on client experiences with the program (26), satisfaction with staff and services (6), and demographic information (14). *Table 1* provides demographic information about the sample of clients interviewed. A three-year retrospective housing history was also conducted to gather information on participants' prior housing arrangements. Fifteen questions were adapted from prior evaluations of programming for victims of domestic violence (Mbilinyi & Kreiter, 2013; Sullivan, 2009; Sullivan, 2015; Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2017).

Research staff transcribed the recorded interviews. The transcripts were analyzed using qualitative analysis software QSR NVivo 9. Two research analysts individually coded an initial sample of transcribed interviews and then collaborated to create a coding scheme for the entire sample employing a negotiated agreement process that improves inter-coder reliability for in-depth semi-structured interviews (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013). Researchers used the codes to analyze the entire sample of interviews and added new codes as necessary.

Table 1  
*Demographics of Transitional Housing Clients in Sample (N=13)*

		% (n)
Gender	Female	100.0 (13)
Age	25 - 35	30.8 (4)
	36 - 50	38.5 (5)
	50+	30.8 (4)
Race/Ethnicity	Black	61.5 (8)
	Hispanic	15.4 (2)
	White	30.8 (4)
Marital Status	Single	46.2 (6)
	Married	15.4 (2)
	Divorced/Legally Separated	38.5 (5)
Number of Children	Two	46.2 (6)
	Three	23.1 (3)
	Four or more	30.8 (4)
Education	High School Graduate	23.1 (3)
	Some College	53.8 (7)
	College Graduate or beyond	23.1 (3)
Employment	Full-time	61.5 (8)
	Part-time	30.8 (4)
	Not Employed	7.7 (1)

**Interviews with program staff.** Staff from three program sites were interviewed in person and via telephone.<sup>13</sup> A total of 11 staff members were interviewed, including five individuals from Site A and three from each of Sites B and C (*Table 2*). Each program identified individuals who worked closely with the transitional housing programs to take part in the interviews. Their job titles included transitional housing specialist, case manager, and CEO, among others. Interviewees had a great deal of experience, reporting an average of over eight years of work at their respective organizations. The interviews ranged from 44 to 83 minutes in length. All interviews were conducted by the primary investigator and each participant provided written or verbal consent prior to the interview. Program staff interviews were audio-recorded.<sup>14</sup>

Interview questions for program staff were developed by researchers to elicit their views on the program's successes and challenges (21), the needs of the target population in addition to housing (6), their experiences with the administration of the grant (9), and demographics (11). Staff also provided a more comprehensive overview of program operations in the interviews.

<sup>13</sup> Researchers aimed to interview all staff in-person (10 interviews); one interview had to be rescheduled and was thus conducted over the phone.

<sup>14</sup> Due to an audio-recording malfunction, two staff interviews at Program Site A were not included in the analyses.



Nine questions were adapted from prior transitional housing program evaluations (Mbilyini & Kreiter, 2013). Researchers used the same coding process for staff interviews as the process described above for client interviews.

Table 2  
*Demographics of Transitional Housing Staff Members in Sample (n=9)*

		% (n)
Age	Under 35	55.6 (5)
	Over 35	44.4 (4)
Race/Ethnicity	Black	11.1 (1)
	Hispanic	11.1 (1)
	White	77.8 (7)
Education	College Graduate	33.3 (3)
	Some Post-College	33.3 (3)
	Master's Degree	33.3 (3)

**Administrative program data.** Researchers collected administrative data from InfoNet, a web-based, centralized statewide case management system used by state-funded domestic and sexual violence service providers in Illinois (Houston Kolnik & Hiselman, 2018). Over 100 participating service provider organizations employ InfoNet to collect and report information about clients and services, 67 of which specifically serve domestic violence victims. The three transitional housing programs in this evaluation utilized InfoNet and permitted researchers to extract record-level, de-identified data on transitional housing clients' demographics, needs, and services received during a portion of the grant period. Data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS.

Additionally, program sites were required to provide quarterly data reports to ICJIA as part of their federal grant agreements. Metrics were proposed by each program in their grant applications. Programs tailor their goals and targets to their unique populations and employ them to track program processes throughout the funding period. These data were used to inform interview question development and supplement the perspectives given in the program descriptions.

### **Study Limitations**

The study was limited by the inability to examine all transitional housing programs receiving VOCA funds. Researchers included only three programs in the study due to resource limitations at the evaluating agency; thus, the present findings may not be indicative of all transitional housing programs.

InfoNet has some limitations as a data collection system, such as closed-ended questions that limit response choices; data were extracted from this system at a single point in time for this evaluation, so the information is only a snapshot of client characteristics.

Relying largely on qualitative interview data was a limitation due to the potential for misinterpretation, bias, an imbalance of power between the interviewer and subject, limited subject recall, among other challenges (Alsaawi, 2014; Atieno, 2009; Boyce & Neale, 2006). Further, researchers were not able to speak to all transitional housing clients; clients that were willing to participate may be different from those who chose not to participate or could not be contacted (i.e. self-selection bias).

Finally, feedback from some stakeholder groups (e.g. landlords, clients' children) was not collected as part of this process evaluation. These issues limit the generalizability of the findings of this process evaluation.

## Section 4: Transitional Housing Programs Studied

### Program Funding

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) of 1984 established the Crime Victims Fund (42 U.S.C. 10601(c)) which is administered by the Office for Victims of Crime within the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice (Office for Victims of Crime (a), n.d.). Grants made through VOCA must be allocated to support the provision of direct services to individuals who have been the victim of a crime. All funds come from fines and penalties collected from individuals convicted of federal crimes; no tax dollars are contributed to the fund (Office for Victims of Crime (b), n.d.). ICJIA administers VOCA funds in Illinois.<sup>15</sup>

In 2017, ICJIA granted VOCA funds to transitional housing programs for victims of domestic violence and/or human trafficking in Illinois. That year, over \$2 million was awarded to 10 programs across Illinois to create or expand transitional housing programs. The funded programs employ diverse housing assistance models serving between four and 120 clients in urban and rural communities, with varying rent structures. The programs are tailored to allow them to address the individualized needs of the clients and communities they serve. Researchers selected three ICJIA-funded transitional housing programs for this process evaluation.

### Program Selection Process

Researchers chose three sites offering a range of programs with varying characteristics of transitional housing programs in Illinois. Researchers considered the following in program selection:

- Geographical location (Cook County, suburban counties, other regions in the state).
- Population(s) served (DV and/or human trafficking victims).
- Program model (scattered site, clustered site, mix of both).
- Community type (urban, suburban, or rural).

Programs serving victims who were immigrants, members of underserved communities, and/or non-English speakers also were of interest. Finally, larger programs were given some preference to provide a larger pool of clients and staff to increase sample size in the evaluation. Program participation in the evaluation was voluntary. The research team identified programs based on the above criteria and approached the selected sites to secure agreement for their participation. Each of the three selected sites are described in detail in *Appendix A*.

### Selected Program Site Descriptions

Sites A and C served a client population of mainly suburban residents in the Chicago metropolitan area, while Site B worked with clients from a largely rural area in the central region of Illinois (*Table 3*). Sites B and C provide services specific to domestic violence victims; Site A also includes services for individuals who are victims of human trafficking. Site A is the largest of the three programs, with a total of 30 available units that are “scattered” throughout the community. Sites B and C are closer in size, with 10 and 15 respective units; Site B employs the scattered site model whereas Site C utilizes both scattered and clustered site housing. The total

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<sup>15</sup> The Notice for Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the Victims of Crime Act Transitional Housing Program issued on July 31, 2016, as referenced in this report, is available upon request by email to ICJIA at [cja.irc@illinois.gov](mailto:cja.irc@illinois.gov).

grant program budgets ranged between \$110,000 and \$450,000 per site. *Appendix A* provides more detailed descriptions of each program site.

Table 3  
*Selected Characteristics of Program Sites (n =3)*

	Site A	Site B	Site C
Location	Suburban county in Chicago area	Central Illinois	Cook County
Community Type	Suburban	Rural	Suburban/Urban
Population Served	Domestic Violence and/or Human Trafficking	Domestic Violence	Domestic Violence
Model(s)	Scattered	Scattered	Scattered and Clustered
Number of Units	30	10	15

Source: Administrative data and program staff interviews

### **Program Client Demographics**

*Table 4* provides demographics of clients who received transitional housing services from the program sites between January 1, 2017, and June 30, 2018.<sup>16</sup> Site A served the most transitional housing clients. All three programs served approximately half adult clients and half children; about three-quarters of all clients at the three sites were female. Over half of clients served by Sites A and C identified as Black/African American, while most clients at Site B identified as White. Site B saw the youngest average adult client age (29.65) while Sites A and C served clients that were slightly older (34.38 and 38.52, respectively). Clients at all three sites had between zero and five children, with an average of 1.8 children per family. Across programs, 44 percent of clients were not employed at intake, although most adult clients had completed high school or some college. At program Site A, clients reported the highest average monthly income (\$855); client income at Sites B and C was somewhat lower at \$689 and \$648, respectively. At all three sites, most clients reported primarily experiencing physical or emotional domestic violence.

<sup>16</sup> These dates reflect the beginning of the grant period until the end of state fiscal year 2018.



Table 4

*Transitional Housing Client Demographics at Intake at Program Sites (N = 194)*

		Site A (N = 114)	Site B (N = 37)	Site C (N = 43)	All 3 Sites (N = 194)
		% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Age	Adult (18+)	52.6 (60)	45.9 (17)	53.5 (23)	51.5 (100)
	Child	47.4 (54)	54.1 (20)	46.5 (20)	48.5 (94)
Gender	Female	76.3 (87)	70.3 (26)	72.1 (31)	74.2 (144)
	Male <sup>a</sup>	23.7 (27)	29.7 (11)	27.9 (12)	25.8 (50)
Race	American Indian or Alaska Native	1.9 (2)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	1.1 (2)
	Asian	0.9 (1)	0.0 (0)	2.3 (1)	1.1 (2)
	Black	53.3 (56)	29.7 (11)	69.8 (30)	52.2 (97)
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2.9 (3)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	1.6 (3)
	White	41.0 (43)	70.3 (26)	30.2 (13)	44.1 (82)
	Unknown				
Hispanic/Latinx	Yes	38.1 (40)	5.6 (2)	11.6 (5)	25.5 (47)
	No	61.9 (65)	94.4 (34)	88.4 (38)	74.5 (137)
Number of Children <sup>b</sup>	0	15.0 (9)	17.6 (3)	26.1 (6)	18.0 (18)
	1	26.7 (16)	11.8 (2)	43.5 (10)	28.0 (28)
	2	21.7 (13)	52.9 (9)	17.4 (4)	26.0 (26)
	3	20.0 (12)	5.9 (1)	8.7 (2)	15.0 (15)
	4+	16.7 (10)	11.8 (2)	4.3 (1)	13.0 (13)
Employment Status <sup>b</sup>	Full-Time	35.6 (21)	29.4 (5)	17.4 (4)	30.3 (30)
	Part-Time	20.3 (12)	17.6 (3)	34.8 (8)	23.3 (23)
	Not Employed	44.1 (26)	52.9 (9)	47.8 (11)	46.4 (46)
Education <sup>b</sup>	College Graduate or More	21.1 (12)	18.8 (3)	8.7 (2)	17.7 (17)
	Some College	24.6 (14)	56.3 (9)	65.2 (15)	39.6 (38)
	High School Graduate	31.6 (18)	18.8 (3)	17.4 (4)	26.0 (25)
	Some High School	19.3 (11)	6.3 (1)	8.7 (2)	14.6 (14)
	No High School	3.5 (2)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	2.1 (2)
Marital Status <sup>b</sup>	Single	58.3 (35)	76.5 (13)	52.2 (12)	60.0 (60)
	Married <sup>c</sup>	31.7 (19)	0.0 (0)	30.4 (7)	26.0 (26)
	Divorced <sup>d</sup>	10.0 (6)	23.5 (4)	17.4 (4)	14.0 (14)
Type of Abuse <sup>b</sup>	Emotional DV	50.8 (30)	29.4 (5)	39.1 (9)	44.4 (44)
	Physical DV	40.7 (24)	64.7 (11)	52.2 (12)	47.4 (47)
	Sexual DV	8.5 (5)	5.9 (1)	8.7 (2)	8.1 (8)

<sup>a</sup> 49 of the 50 male clients were children (i.e. under age 18).

<sup>b</sup> Adult clients only.

<sup>c</sup> "Married" included common law marriages.

<sup>d</sup> "Divorced" included those who are legally separated.

Source: ICJIA analysis of InfoNet data

## Section 5: Study Findings

The following are collective findings from data collected in interviews with clients (n=13) and staff (n=9) of the three transitional housing programs.

### Program Goals

The primary goal of transitional housing is to provide victims with a safe, stable residence away from their abusers. Eight program clients expressed in the interviews that not worrying about paying rent each month increased feelings of security and stability for themselves and any family members. By providing safe and stable housing, transitional housing gave clients the opportunity to focus on healing, define personal goals, and address other challenges in their lives. In the interviews, clients detailed unique goals and discussed how staff supported them in identifying and pursuing said goals. One staff member modeled this support when they stated: “Why should [staff] determine their successes? They need to determine their [own] success.” Programs demonstrated a commitment to providing participants with the tools and resources they needed to be independent and empowered when they left transitional housing.

**Safety.** During the research interviews, nearly all program clients reported an increased sense of safety after beginning the transitional housing program. During intake, program clients worked with their case managers to create a safety plan detailing steps to take in the event of danger, important phone numbers, and other precautions. One program required clients to submit photos of their abusers so that staff and security would be able to recognize them. Safety planning was individualized to each client and updated periodically to reflect any changes in their circumstances. At all three programs, safety planning was voluntary and client-directed; it followed a harm-reduction approach, in that no actions were proscribed and the process aimed to mitigate risk and keep clients as safe as possible (Sullivan & Olsen, 2016). Additionally, staff reported that having case management meetings in clients’ homes offered a sense of safety to clients and allowed program staff to gain more understanding of the transitional residence. Many participants reported the resources and overall support received from the program helped them to feel safer and gave them a point of contact (other than law enforcement) in case they felt unsafe. Legal advocacy was available for clients at all three programs who wished to pursue an order of protection<sup>17</sup> or other legal action as another way to keep themselves safe.

One staff member described some of their program’s apartments as located in a “more secluded” area, which allowed clients to stay in a familiar community while also feeling safer in their new residence. One participant described the location of their residence as, “in a pretty good place where if you don’t want to be found, you’re not going to be found.” In contrast, another client noted that she felt safer because her residence was in an area with many nearby businesses. The confidentiality requirements of the address of the residence also provided a sense of safety to participants. However, some participants noted the transition from the communal, supportive environment of the shelter to living on their own in the community took some adjustment. “It’s

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<sup>17</sup> An order of protection (OP) is issued by a judge to protect those who have been victims of domestic violence. Protections afforded by an OP can include prohibiting the respondent (the abuser) from: coming near the victim; entering the home, even if it is shared; damaging personal property of the victim; possessing any firearms [750 ILCS 60/214]. There are three types of OPs. An emergency order of protection lasts for two to three weeks and the accused is not required to be notified. An interim order of protection can be granted after a respondent has been served and can last up to 30 days. A plenary order of protection lasts up to 2 years and can be renewed indefinitely; it is issued after a hearing in which the petitioner must be present and the respondent must have been notified.

hard for me ‘cause I’ve never lived by myself before,” said one client. “I don’t like living by myself. . . . I was coming into an area that I didn’t know.” The configuration of the units also played a role in the security available, whether it was a standalone residence, part of a small building, or part of a large complex; client preferences and the reported impact of the type of unit on their sense of safety varied.

**Client-driven goals.** During the research interviews, clients shared numerous goals they had chosen to pursue during the program and how they collaborated with program staff to achieve those goals. Case managers reported helping clients take large goals, break them down into smaller, manageable goals, and determine specific steps to achieve them. In the interviews, four clients emphasized securing employment as a goal to increase their financial stability after leaving the program. Many clients also stated specific goals around transportation, including saving for a vehicle, saving for repairs, and reinstating their driver’s licenses. Reducing and paying off debts was another goal for many clients. Three clients expressed a desired to continue their education or obtain professional certifications or licenses. Some aimed to take steps to regain custody of their children, repair other relationships, and build their support networks. Participants also said the program allowed them to pursue goals related to physical and emotional health and healing.

Many clients discussed goals related to obtaining permanent housing following the transitional housing program. Four clients shared goals of saving for a down payment on a house. Others reported they had goals to put down a security deposit on a residence and have savings that will cover rent for several months. A staff member noted that an ancillary program goal was giving clients the experience needed to secure housing in the private market after the program, including building a recent rental history, obtaining a reference from a current landlord, and improving credit scores. Staff also highlighted the importance of transitioning into *safe* housing; one staff member said:

[A] successful transition would look like the client being able to move out safely, into safe and affordable housing, and I mean safe in terms of the domestic violence but I also mean safe in terms of – there’s running water and electricity.

Overall, clients emphasized housing stability as their highest priority after the end of the program.

**Empowerment and self-confidence.** Interviews with staff and clients revealed a program focus on helping clients regain independence and build confidence during the program period. The program period was a time when participants had the opportunity to learn and accumulate the support and skills they need step-by-step, in preparation for the end of the transitional period when they would be on their own in many ways. Participants demonstrated how the program allowed them to become self-reliant, with one noting “Therefore when transitional does end, I’ll be able to go out and do all of these things on my own. No problem.” For some participants, this self-confidence allowed them to take steps to pursue their goals; one client reported the program helped her to feel confident enough to reenter the workforce. Transitional housing programs share a number of goals with models that are recovery-oriented, with the aim of allowing clients to successfully reintegrate and fully participate in their communities (Tsemberis, 2010).



During interviews, several clients noted the program’s strategy of empowerment was important as they navigate future relationships. One client said, “I know if I ever get into an unsafe situation, I know what I am going to do. I am confident in me. I’m in power now.” Further, some clients and staff discussed the program’s positive impact on informing clients about healthy relationships and knowing their worth as a partner. Multiple clients shared that the program helped to empower their children and allowed them to feel more confident in their family’s situation. Other clients described the program’s impact as “helping me move forward,” “creat[ing] a new normal,” and “gain[ing] a voice.”

### Program Model Considerations

Transitional housing programs are adapted to various needs and resources of the community. *Table 5* summarizes the benefits of the different arrangements in transitional housing programs as discussed by program staff in the research interviews. Programs may employ both scattered and clustered site models concurrently, with a group of units in one location and others spread throughout the community. In the present programs, clustered site models often took the form of apartment complexes, ranging in size from small four-unit buildings to large multi-building complexes with over 100 units. Staff reported clients in areas with a greater housing stock had more options to find a landlord willing to work with them/the program, whereas in areas with limited rental choices, clients may require more advocacy from the program. All three programs made rental assistance payments directly to the landlord or property management.

Table 5  
*Transitional Housing Program Model Variations*

		Benefits
Housing Model	Scattered Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clients choose their community/location               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Same community to minimize disruption (e.g. stay close to work, school)</li> <li>○ New community to gain safety</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Units are not known to be associated with a transitional housing program</li> <li>• More flexibility with the ability to house clients and families of various sizes</li> </ul>
	Clustered Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program sustains a relationship with the landlord/property management and have access to additional units as they become available</li> <li>• Program chooses a location that is a good fit for the population (e.g. close to transit, grocery stores)</li> <li>• More efficiency for case managers when conducting in-home services</li> </ul>
Leaseholder	Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Client gains a recent rental history</li> <li>• Client builds confidence as a renter and knows more of what to expect in the private market after program assistance ends</li> </ul>
	Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program is able to work with landlords who might not otherwise rent to clients in this population</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs lease specific apartments and cycle tenants through the same unit(s)</li> <li>• Greater confidentiality protections available</li> </ul>
Rental Assistance	Client pays a portion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clients become accustomed to budgeting for rent</li> <li>• Available funds are shared with more clients or for a longer duration</li> </ul>
	Program covers entirety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clients without an income are eligible</li> <li>• Eliminates potential issues with clients paying rent late or being unable to pay their portion</li> <li>• Allows clients to save more money</li> </ul>

### Supportive Services

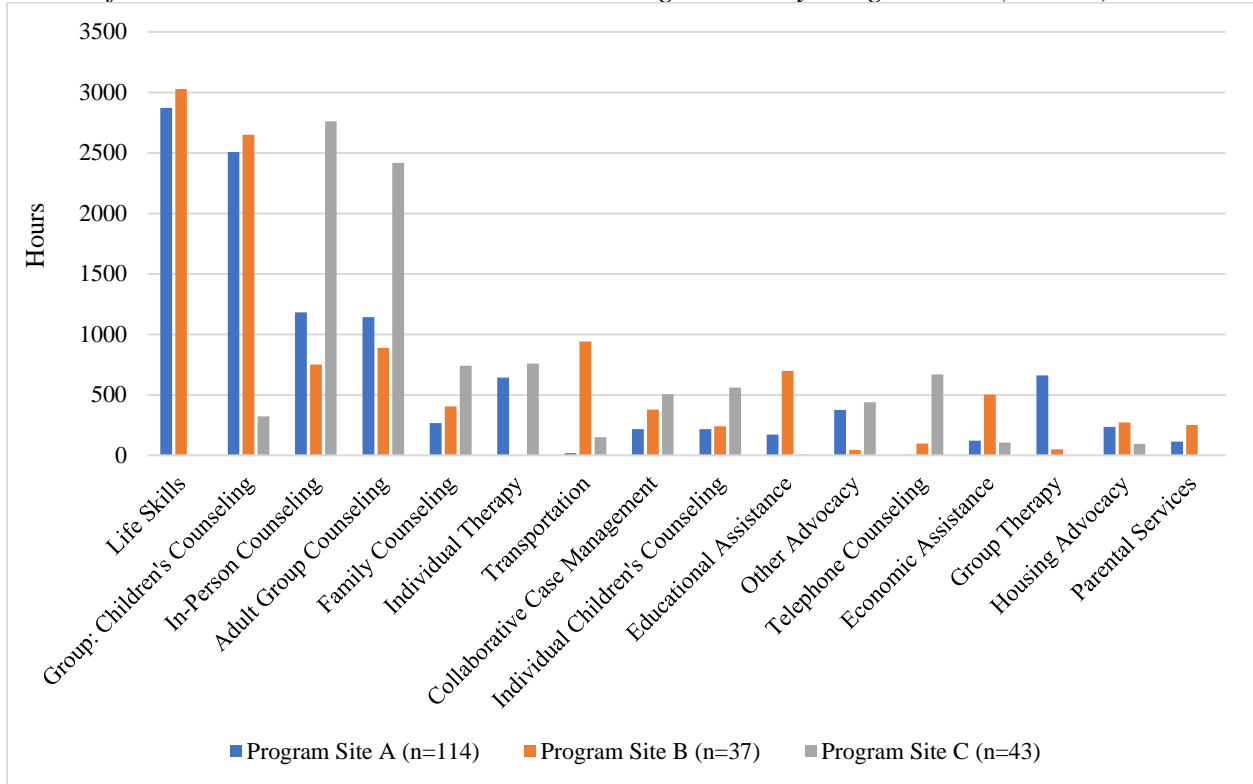
In addition to financial assistance for housing, the programs provided an array of supportive services to their clients. Staff of all three programs reported the goal of wrap-around services was to help clients address additional needs and barriers during their time in the program. All services were voluntary and clients guided the creation of their service plan to address their individual needs and goals. As domestic violence service providers, these three programs also served clients who were not part of the transitional housing program (e.g. emergency shelter clients, walk-in clients); many supportive services were open to all clients of the provider organization, such as counseling services and legal advocacy.

According to analyses of administrative data, transitional housing clients at the three sites received an average of 169 hours of program services over an 18-month period. *Figure 1* shows the number of service hours provided to transitional housing clients in the most common service categories.<sup>18</sup> Program sites differed in the areas in which they provided the most service hours; Sites A and B provided the greatest number of service hours in life skills programming and children’s group counseling, whereas Site C provided more in-person and adult group counseling. These four categories accounted for 62 percent of all service hours provided to transitional housing clients during the period studied.

<sup>18</sup> All clients did not receive services in all categories, so totals are reported per program and not average per client.

Figure 1

*Hours of Services Provided to Transitional Housing Clients by Program Site (N=194)*



*Note: Figure depicts results for all clients receiving transitional housing services between January 1, 2017, and June 30, 2018.*

Source: ICJIA analysis of InfoNet data

**Mental health services.** All programs provided mental health services specific to domestic violence victims, including crisis intervention, therapy, individual and group counseling, and support groups. These services were either limited to transitional housing clients or were open to all clients receiving services from the organization (e.g. emergency shelter clients). Some transitional housing clients felt they benefited more from individual counseling, but others found group counseling to be helpful. One client discussed that in group counseling they were able to share their situations and felt supported. Therapy also was available to clients' children and the three programs made external referrals for clients needing psychiatric care.

In the interviews, clients said support received through therapy was a crucial aspect of rebuilding their senses of self, which some felt they lost during the abuse. Clients provided examples of specific skills cultivated in therapy, including avoiding self-blame, coping with and moving on from prior abuse, and engaging in self-care. Some clients relied more on their relationships with their case managers to provide emotional support that improved their well-being. The three programs made efforts to acknowledge the impact of trauma on victims, operating in a trauma-informed manner and allowing clients the time and space to heal.

**Children's services.** During the interviews, transitional housing staff emphasized the goal of serving entire families, which included providing services for their clients' children.

Whether participants had full or partial custody of their children, clients reported that the residence they were matched with was sized to accommodate their children who reside with them. Two programs reported creating service plans specifically tailored to the needs of each child and one program employed two children's advocates to focus on serving this subgroup of program clients. All programs made individual or group counseling, or other types of therapeutic services, such as art therapy, available to clients' children. Two programs provided childcare during some adult programming, such as group therapy or program meetings. Staff at two programs also noted that their programs provided or facilitated access to after-school and summer programs for children.

In addition to direct service programming provided to children, five clients reported the programs offered supplies for their children (e.g. baby wipes, school uniforms). Clients expressed gratitude for program support in partnering to obtain gifts for children around the holiday season or birthdays. If children needed to be enrolled in a new school district, staff reported their organizations provided advocacy and assisted in gathering documents required for proof of residency. Programs aided parents with skills and techniques to improve communication and coping during challenging situations. Interviewed clients noted the positive effects on their children's behavior related to stable housing; one parent said, "In the shelter, their grades [were] bad, they [weren't] getting enough sleep...Now I'm able to set ground rules as far as like tv time, bed time, dinner time."

Clients identified locating affordable childcare as a significant barrier. Case managers reported making referrals to childcare providers and assisting in the application process for financial assistance. However, the waiting period for application approval was often still a barrier to clients who needed childcare to be able to pursue or sustain employment. One staff member suggested the need for temporary childcare assistance until childcare resources were approved and obtained to eliminate the gap created by the waiting period. Staff and client interviews revealed programs would benefit from the flexibility to provide financial assistance for childcare for a short period of time, removing a barrier for clients looking for jobs, attending various appointments, or accessing other services.

**Financial services.** During the interviews, staff noted many clients were victims of financial abuse and struggled with issues such as outstanding debts, poor credit, and limited financial knowledge. Programs encouraged participants to open and regularly contribute to a savings account. One program required clients to contribute a portion of their monthly net incomes to savings accounts.<sup>19</sup> Clients and staff at this program described the requirement as flexible and adjustments were made if a client's income fluctuated or unexpected expenses were incurred. Most participants were agreeable to the savings account policies. One said, "When the program ends, it's like a safety net." Clients in the programs that did not require a savings account mentioned the benefits of assistance from case managers in creating a budget and ongoing support in pursuing savings goals.

Client and staff reported that opportunities to increase financial education and build financial security through savings were important in achieving the post-program goal of financial empowerment. Two of the programs partnered with external organizations such as banks to offer clients a more in-depth financial education curriculum or workshop sessions on specific topics,

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<sup>19</sup> This program required clients to have an income. Clients were free to use their accrued savings and the account after the conclusion of their participation in the program.

such as credit repair. Working toward resolutions of financial issues (e.g. building credit, addressing bankruptcies/evictions) also was reported to be critical for clients to overcome barriers to securing permanent housing on the private market after transitional housing ended.

**Employment and education.** Staff from all three programs emphasized a primary goal of helping clients obtain secure and sufficient employment. Staff reported utilizing job search curricula and assisting participants with resume writing, sample applications, and mock interviews. At the program that required an income, some participants said they worked with a case manager during their shelter stay to obtain employment in order to be eligible for acceptance into the transitional housing program. Staff at one program discussed their collaboration with an external organization to offer employment preparation classes, which emphasized soft skills and behavior in the workplace. The programs created innovative opportunities to address barriers to client employment, including one program offering volunteer opportunities at the provider organization where participants can bolster their skills and allow the program to serve as a reference for future employment.

Employment goals and readiness to work varied widely between clients, and required individualized consideration of appropriate services by program staff, as reported during the interviews. Clients discussed experiencing a variety of barriers to employment, such as a lack of recent work history and scheduling limitations due to lack of available childcare. Some individuals wished to pursue part-time work or work on an ad hoc basis that allowed them flexibility (e.g. rideshare driving). Case managers provided specific job opportunities to which participants could apply. One client said she received assistance to launch her own business. In some cases, program services and support regarding employment were important in improving clients' self-confidence and allowing them to successfully return to the workforce. One participant said, "They have done a lot getting me back into the workforce, getting me confident enough to get into the workforce again." Clients commonly reported viewing steady employment as one of the crucial aspects of post-program success.

One program employed an MOU with local educational institutions to facilitate access for participants interested in obtaining educational services, such as associate's degrees and certificate programs. Established partnerships with educators allowed for warm hand-offs where clients were directly connected to the appropriate educational program staff. Transitional housing staff members reported assisting clients with scholarship applications and pursuing funding sources to cover academic costs, such as tuition and books. Multiple clients reported utilizing the program period as a time to further their education in fields such as nursing and cosmetology. One client, who had received financial assistance to take a class at a community college and was considering enrolling in more classes, said "It really helped me and encouraged my hope...knowing that...I can do it."

**Legal advocacy.** In the interviews, staff and clients shared that many clients in this population were involved in ongoing legal proceedings around orders of protection, divorce, child custody arrangements, and/or child support payments. Programs provided in-house legal advocates or made referrals to external legal assistance organizations. Clients discussed how their legal advocates accompanied them to court (if desired) and offered information on available legal remedies. One client discussed how the process of pursuing expungement of prior convictions, if available, can be beneficial since some landlords require background checks. For individuals who need ongoing legal representation, some programs had partnerships with

organizations that offer reduced attorney fees or programs were able to put funding toward the retainer for a lawyer in some cases. During the interviews, two clients discussed obtaining a lawyer through working with program staff.

**Transportation.** Clients who did not have personal transportation experienced challenges across many domains, including limitations in where they could pursue employment and difficulty getting to appointments. Clients who owned a vehicle reported financial barriers to purchasing gas and paying for costly maintenance. Programs assisted participants by providing gift cards for gas or prepaid rideshare cards on an as-needed basis. However, for the program serving rural areas, the rideshare market was not saturated to the point of providing a consistent and affordable option. Staff at two programs reported that traditional taxi services were typically too expensive to be used on a regular basis. Multiple clients expressed some discomfort in having to request assistance in this area “as needed” because it is an ongoing need; some program clients felt that offering transportation assistance on a regular basis (i.e. weekly or monthly) would better meet their needs.

The programs considered accessibility to public transit and/or proximity to other resources (e.g. grocery stores) when identifying suitably located residences for their clients. In areas where public transit was lacking, staff members utilized their personal vehicles for client transportation, likely an unsustainable long-term strategy. Developing community among participants helped to alleviate this issue to an extent—staff and clients discussed coordinating carpools to program events when possible. Staff members at all three programs provided flexibility with the locations of their meetings and often conducted case management at the client residences for convenience.

**In-house programming.** Once a client is housed, some furnishings and household supplies were provided by the programs for the new residence.<sup>20</sup> If basic utilities were not included in rent, the programs paid for them directly or reimbursed the client for the billed amount. Covered utilities included water, gas, electric, and trash removal; cable and internet costs were not included. Program clients in need received donated items such as coats. The programs also provided supplies to clients and families around the holidays, assisting with meals or gifts; many clients noted the positive emotional impact this had on their lives. During the interviews, staff at two programs also discussed providing smaller goods, such as personal items, toiletries, and cleaning supplies.

The three sites offered programming in workshop format for clients. The workshops offered opportunities to gain new skills or information on a topic of interest, such as self-defense, wellness, or nutrition. Program staff provided transportation and/or childcare during some of these events. Volunteers from the community facilitated some of these workshops, or at one site, if a client had a particular interest or passion, they were encouraged to take the initiative to host a session. These events were often open to clients across an organization’s programs, not just those in the transitional housing program. Program staff also reported planning events such as picnics or shopping trips to build community and offer clients the chance to socialize.

**External referrals.** For services not provided by the organization, referrals were often made to other community-based service providers. Staff reported the most common external referrals were for psychiatric services or psychotherapy. Healthcare services and substance use

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<sup>20</sup> This may be funded through a budget line item in the grant, through items donated to the organization, or by other means.

disorder treatment were also often referred to outside organizations. Some clients received referrals to food pantries for assistance with groceries or to charitable organizations that provided household furnishings. Staff said specialists helped qualifying clients apply for various public benefits, such as Medicaid, SSI/SSDI, TANF, or childcare assistance funds. Staff at two programs reported referring clients to other housing assistance programs rather than place them on their waiting lists for transitional housing.

External referrals were necessary to address the wide variety of client needs; however, staff noted some service locations were not easily accessible by public transit, presenting challenges to clients with transportation barriers. Staff of one program reported some community providers did not have the capacity to meet the demand for services and clients would often be placed on a waiting lists. Two clients expressed frustration about being referred to services or an external organization that was not able to meet their needs.

### **Program Guidelines**

The programs adopted guidelines for participants based mainly on safety and confidentiality. Some participants came from abusive relationships that were extremely controlling, and program staff discussed the aim to avoid subjecting clients to an experience that denies them agency. One staff member described their approach as “more of the empowerment model than the disciplinary model,” and participants were encouraged to take ownership of their residences and choices. All programs required their clients to maintain the confidentiality of other clients, as well as staff members.

None of the programs required a participant to report abuse or involve law enforcement in any way, nor did programs prohibit clients from continuing to be in contact with their abusers. However, guidelines at all three programs prohibited abusers from knowing the location of the residence and/or coming to the residence. In some cases, due to legal proceedings, it was not possible to keep client addresses completely concealed. Additionally, individuals with any history of violent behavior were prohibited from visiting the residences. One program reported asking clients to inform their case manager of visitors or overnight guests in advance. There were no curfew requirements for clients of these transitional housing programs. Client obligations regarding property rules were outlined in the lease or program agreement. Most clients agreed that the expectations were clear and reasonable.

The programs followed a voluntary services approach, allowing clients to determine what services they wished to pursue. Staff encouraged client participation in available services and asked that clients continue to engage in services that the client identified as beneficial; however, there was no penalty if they chose not to participate.

Meeting with a case manager on a regular basis was a requirement for clients at all programs; additionally, two programs requested that clients attend program meetings when available. When imposing requirements, program staff discussed aiming to make them “low-barrier” to remain flexible and not disqualify participants. During the research interviews, staff at all programs expressed a great deal of buy-in to the idea of voluntary services; though a small number reported some frustration stemming from the inability to ask that clients meet a minimum level of engagement. Staff reported the voluntary services model was empowering for this client population, allowing participants to regain a sense of agency.

Standard regulations around property damage and maintenance also applied to transitional housing participants in the programs. One program also required the clients to have a source of income to pay a portion of the rent and contribute to a savings account.<sup>21</sup> Clients were not allowed to have anyone not listed on the lease reside in the unit. One program asked the clients not to disclose to anyone that the apartment is part of a transitional housing program. Multiple clients who had previously stayed in an emergency shelter noted the transitional housing program had fewer regulations and requirements, which they considered a positive aspect of transitional housing.

When a violation of program guidelines occurred, staff typically reported working collaboratively with the client to rectify the issue. One program documented incidents with a written notice of corrective action given to the client to provide a record of the issue and outlined steps going forward to rectify the problem. A client of one program discussed how an issue led her to be placed on a probationary status, at the end of which the program would decide to continue or terminate her lease agreement. For more serious issues, staff reported they have the option of terminating the lease agreement and giving the client between 48 hours to 30 days to leave the residence, depending on the issue. In those cases, staff said they may assist in the search for alternative housing, if desired by the client. One program required a client to immediately vacate their residence upon a breach of confidentiality that resulted in a threat to safety. A staff member noted that landlords ultimately controlled the decisions as to whether a client was allowed to stay in cases of broken property rules or infractions involving upkeep.

### **Program Completion and Follow-Up**

The programs took a proactive approach throughout the program period in preparing clients for the end of rental assistance. If a client wished to remain in their current residence without financial assistance, the programs provided support and advocacy to allow the client to take over the lease. One client that was interviewed had completed the program and chosen this option and another four clients stated they were interested in pursuing the option, while several others shared intentions to relocate. Some participants discussed wanting to move to a more affordable area or a different type of community (e.g. more rural area) and others planned to move to areas where they had family ties. In the interviews, program staff detailed offering assistance in helping clients search for their next residence and providing advocacy in negotiations with potential future landlords. One program made referrals to an organization that provided funds for a security deposit and first month's rent provided the residence was located in a certain geographic area. Clients who had been participating in a savings account program reported feeling encouraged that they were going to have those funds available to help support them.

During the interviews, three clients reported feeling anxious or concerned about the program period coming to an end, but five clients stated they felt they were receiving adequate support from their case management team to address potential post-program challenges. Most clients and staff affirmed that they considered two years of assistance reasonable. However, some staff members and clients felt making the program longer would be beneficial to better accommodate clients with more complex needs. One suggested 36 months would be valuable, while two staff members at different programs expressed interest in a program with assistance that was not time-limited. Staff at two different programs noted most clients participated in the program for the

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<sup>21</sup> Clients were free to use the savings account and all contents after program participation.



maximum allotted time period (12 months) but some clients chose to complete the program in less than two years.

Clients still had access to the majority of services at the three programs after they were no longer receiving housing assistance. They were free to continue attending individual or group counseling and any of the skills workshops provided by their program. Monetary assistance for both housing and utilities was discontinued at the end of the program period. One program offered clients household products and supplies for six months post-program completion; the other two programs did not specify an end date for receipt of tangible items. A staff member explained clients of one program were allowed to take the provided furnishings with them to their next residence. Case managers of all programs reported maintaining periodic contact with their clients after they have left the program. One program limited aftercare with a case manager to a one-year period following program end, with supportive services remaining available indefinitely. There was no requirement by any of the three programs for clients to maintain contact or participate in services once they left the program.

### **Program Successes**

According to the research interviews, success looked different for each client considering their unique goals. Both staff and clients spoke highly of the work being done by the transitional housing programs and provided many examples of successes that resulted from program participation.

**Stable housing.** As a direct result of the program, clients had safe and stable housing during the program period. The positive impacts from this primary program goal affected many facets of clients' lives. Participants reported improvements in their mental health, children's sense of security, and employment status.

One staff member summarized, "The fact that they were safely housed [for] the time that they were in transition, I think that is a huge benefit to all of us."

When the transitional period came to an end, staff reported many clients successfully secured permanent housing. Staff members said participation in the program helped clients improve credit scores, make debt payments, build a recent rental history, and obtain landlord references to expand housing options once program participation ended. In the interviews, staff and clients from multiple programs reported many clients were able to save money toward making a down payment on a house.

**Advocacy with landlords.** During the interviews, program staff said developing relationships with landlords was critical to the success of transitional housing. Staff from all three organizations recounted instances where landlords were hesitant to work with a third-party or with a domestic violence service provider due to fears of problematic tenants or additional bureaucracy. However, according to staff, once the landlords agreed to participate, program staff reported the landlords they worked with were highly satisfied. Program staff noted landlords appreciated the guaranteed rent payments, as well as having a party to reach out to in the case of issues with the unit or tenant. Additionally, staff said the landlords benefitted from a continuous flow of renters to their units. One staff member said, "I recently had [a] landlord ask me if I needed apartments because he had one coming open and he wanted to rent to us." Further, this also benefitted the programs to have a unit available for a new client when another individual

had completed their time in transitional housing and moved on. Two programs requested confidentiality agreements from the landlords they worked with; one of the programs did not reveal client names to the landlord or property management.

According to the interviews, the levels of program intervention between landlord and tenant varied during the program period. Staff at one program said they served as a liaison between the parties on all matters to maintain total client confidentiality. Another program strictly limited their involvement to paying the rent subsidy to the landlord; in the interviews, a staff member explained that this was so that participants build confidence and gain experience working with landlords as preparation for after the program. In one case where the organization owned the property, the building's property management functions were handled by entirely different personnel than those who worked in the supportive services part of the program. A staff member at another organization discussed how they utilized their status as a landlord to rent to clients who had completed the program but were not yet be qualified to rent in the private market. During the interviews, three clients expressed the importance of learning their rights as a tenant and how to advocate for themselves with property management and landlords.

**Relationships.** Clients reported developing strong bonds with their case managers, their main points of contact within the program. Two clients reported communicating with their case manager every day, while seven others said they interacted with their case managers between two and five times each month. Staff and clients explained that clients' needs dictated the level of contact with their case manager, but all programs imposed a requirement of at least one in-person meeting per month.

Participants noted that case managers were great resources for help with daily tasks and issues, as well as providing unwavering emotional support. Staff members echoed these positive results, explaining that improved strong client relationships allow the programs to better understand and address the needs of the population they serve. One client said of her relationship with program staff: "They genuinely care to the point where you're like OK, what can I do to say thank you...They had my back, and I forgot what it was like to have somebody have my back." A staff member noted that the relationship between client and case manager often continues after program completion. "Working with these clients for such a long period of time, they want to keep on talking to you and I want to keep on hearing," she said. Five clients discussed how it was important that staff's racial/ethnic makeup was similar to that of the client population and that staff acknowledge program participants' various cultural backgrounds.

In the interviews, four program clients and eight staff members reported that the transitional housing programs fostered community and support among participants. A staff member at a clustered site program cited examples of participants helping each other with transportation and childcare. For scattered site models, staff said in-house programming (e.g. support groups, skills workshops, and social events) offered an opportunity for developing community and support among peers. One client said she and another participant planned to rent an apartment as roommates after they completed the program. A staff member at a scattered site program said, "We notice that a lot of clients in transitional become very close and part of the way the can become very close are through the tenant meetings and group. You know they form that support system for each other." Another client expressed that support from individuals going through similar challenges was beneficial and contributed to her decision not to return to an abusive relationship.

## Program Challenges

Transitional housing programs face many challenges. Some are inherent to the model, while others vary between communities. The following section details program challenges commonly reported by staff and/or clients during the research interviews.

**High demand.** Both clients and staff grappled with the issue of demand for the program far surpassing the current capacity of all three programs. One client expressed that “a good amount” of women in her community have gone through the same things she has been through but did not receive services. Four clients reported that they were not aware of the transitional housing programs until they had spent time in an emergency domestic violence shelter. Interviews with program staff illuminated a struggle with whether to publicize the program to reach out and promote awareness among those in need when the program is already operating at full capacity with a waiting list.

Staff interviews revealed that all three organizations operated their transitional housing programs with waiting lists. One program put a cap on their waiting list at 50 people. The others maintained separate lists based on bedroom/family size. Staff and clients both said waiting lists are particularly problematic for this population as many applicants were facing homelessness or living in unstable environments, i.e., illicit drug use, crowded, noisy. Two programs operated their waiting lists based on application date, while the other program incorporated level of need into the decision-making process by considering factors such as individual resources available to the victim. With a two-year program period, one staff person noted participants could potentially be on waiting lists for years. Program staff at two organizations said they sometimes provided external referrals to other housing assistance programs for clients who were on the waitlist for transitional housing; however, those resources often had sporadic availability. One staff member expressed that despite their program having a consistently full waiting list, community members don’t acknowledge that domestic violence is an issue in their community.

**Access to services.** Some clients reported challenges accessing services through the program or through external referrals. Four clients noted in the interviews they were unaware of existing services that could meet their needs. One client said, “Some people get the information, some people don’t. It depends on who their case managers are...my case manager is awesome but the next person, they may have a different story. So just making sure it’s out there for everyone.” Three clients also mentioned discrepancies between what they felt like was available to others in the program versus what was available for them, suggesting challenges in communication regarding available services.

A challenge that came up several times during the client interviews was asking for services on an as-needed basis; three clients reported feeling discouraged or burdensome when asking for the same service repeatedly. One example provided by a client was about addressing the barrier of transportation. If the client demonstrated this need to their case manager, the program provided a \$50 Uber card; however, her need still existed after that was spent. The client reported struggling to continually ask her case manager for this assistance. In the interviews, two clients acknowledged that when they asked, they received the necessary assistance, but they also expressed they were hesitant to ask because they felt like they were asking too often or for too much. Multiple clients reported a preference for a solution that would allow them to receive assistance on a predetermined basis or to build these costs into their monthly budgets, alleviating the need to make repeated requests.

Staff and client interviews revealed that affordable childcare was a significant barrier. Childcare was necessary to look for, or work at, a job; attend appointments; and participate in other services like counseling. Temporary childcare assistance was needed until permanent childcare arrangements were made. In addition, food assistance and transportation were barriers that were to some extent, unable to be addressed.

**Property maintenance.** During interviews, six clients cited challenges with the maintenance and/or the property management staff. Many other clients reported that they were very satisfied with the quality of the apartments and shared examples of maintenance issues that had been successfully resolved. However, some clients expressed concerns about the condition of the units at move-in, quality of unit-specific furnishings (e.g. appliances, carpet), and processes required to address maintenance issues. In some cases, especially in the smaller transitional housing programs, some maintenance and cleaning duties fell to program staff, such as case managers. Staff at one smaller organization said taking responsibility for cleaning the apartments between transitional housing residents made landlords more amenable to a partnership with the program.

Some challenges were handled differently depending on if it is a program-owned property or a privately-owned unit. The organizations that owned property typically contracted with a company to provide maintenance services. This streamlined the process for requests from clients and served to separate the duties of the maintenance staff and staff providing program services. For participants living in privately-owned units, the level of involvement by the program in the landlord-tenant relationship impacted the processes for requesting repairs. In programs where client identities were kept confidential, the program acts as an intermediary; maintenance requests were relayed by the case manager who advocated on the client's behalf. In programs where staff were less involved, clients worked directly with property management to remediate issues and case managers provided support and guidance during the process.

**Grant administration and funding.** In addition to the funds awarded through VOCA, at the time of the staff interviews, all three programs were receiving, or had previously received, funding for transitional housing from other grant sources. Staff from all programs discussed varying grant guidelines and restrictions for each funding source, as compared to the requirements associated with VOCA funds.

Food assistance was allowable in "emergency" situations but two staff members felt that definition was somewhat ambiguous and hindered them from providing this assistance to clients in need. Staff reported clients often need food assistance for longer than what might be considered appropriate under the "emergency" category. Individuals fleeing domestic violence may need to apply for or update their information for public benefits for food (e.g. SNAP); the approval process can take weeks, during which individuals need ongoing food assistance.

Many participants who were fleeing from abuse have very few possessions, making furnishing an entire apartment a large undertaking, according to staff members. Two programs included furnishings in their VOCA budgets, and staff noted that the programs were also able to obtain donations to supplement client needs. There were some variations reported regarding what happens to the furniture after rental assistance ends; when programs cycle participants through the same units, clients reported that sometimes the prior occupant's furniture remained or others shared they were permitted to take items with them to their next residence.

Two programs had budget line items for apartment security deposits. Program staff noted that landlords often allowed security deposits to be applied as the rent payment for the final month of the lease. When that was not an option, it was unclear where the funds were allowed to be spent when they were returned to the programs. The application fees required for some apartments were not specifically budgeted for by any of these programs from their VOCA funds.

To provide the maximum amount of funding for rental assistance, one staff member reported aiming to minimize staffing costs in their proposed budget; this resulted in a high burden on case management staff during the program period. The program chose to revise their budget to add a part-time staff member to allow them to create more manageable caseloads and better meet client needs. This need was not lost on the client population at the various programs. When asked in interviews how to improve the program, one client responded, “There are very few [program staff members] and they are working hard for us every single day and a lot of time they are taking on five different jobs, so they deserve more staff there.” Personnel expenditures were second only to rental subsidies among the most expensive budget categories for all three programs. Funding match requirements become cost prohibitive to programs that might otherwise request more funding for personnel.

**Sustainability.** Staff members from all three programs reported that the transitional housing programs would not be sustainable without grant funds. Because rental assistance required such high proportions of capital investment, few options were identified by staff for their organizations to raise or otherwise acquire the funds necessary to cover a meaningful portion of participants’ rental expenses. “There’s absolutely no way we could pay for it in any other way, said one staff member. “It’s not like if we lost funding for counseling. We could find a way around that. We could set up volunteer systems, there are things we could do. But with housing, you have to pay for it.” One staff member said without grant funding to offset the costs of mortgage payments, maintenance, and taxes, the program would need to charge clients the market rate for the units owned by their program.

This dependence on grant funding created some challenges with respect to expectations for program continuation during the grant renewal process. In the interviews, staff of one program reported they held off on accepting new clients when funding was uncertain so participants would not move into units for only one to two months and then lose their subsidy if the grant was not renewed. Balancing the timing of clients moving in and out with the projected funding cycles posed a challenge for some programs.

## **Section 6: Implications for Policy and Practice**

The following are implications based on the study findings. These are suggestions to enhance programming and may require additional resources to implement.

### **Educate on Tenant Rights and Responsibilities**

Many clients said learning about their rights and responsibilities as a tenant was a valuable aspect of the program. Programs could consider formalizing this information and creating a curriculum or workshop for participants. Clients in this population may face discrimination from landlords, therefore education about what to expect during the leasing process and what to expect from their relationships with landlords/property management could be beneficial (Barata & Stewart, 2010).

Some of the challenges identified by program participants and staff stemmed from poor communication or other issues with the property management staff; allowing clients to be more informed about the expectations of all parties may help to resolve or mitigate some of these challenges.

Information on rights and responsibilities is important for clients as they prepare to exit the program and either look for permanent housing or assume the lease of their transitional housing residence. Additionally, many clients discussed their goal to eventually buy a home. One study in the Netherlands found that of residents who formerly lived in publicly subsidized housing, those who became homeowners scored higher on measures of housing-related empowerment (Kleinhans & Elsinga, 2010). Including information about home ownership and the mortgage process could help program participants to pursue this goal and make informed choices between renting and owning property.

### **Expand and Engage Other Victim Types**

This evaluation was limited as no clients were identified as victims of human trafficking. Research suggests that human trafficking victims have many of the same needs as domestic violence victims (Shigekane, 2007). It would be beneficial for programs to examine their outreach efforts and determine whether there is an unmet need for services for human trafficking victims in the population they serve. Research suggests few providers have the resources to perform direct outreach services, but for those that can engage in outreach activities—consistency, trust, commitment, and involvement of survivors are noted as key principles of success (Clawson & Dutch, 2008).

Victims who experience immigration status-related barriers (e.g. limited opportunities for employment) are also likely to benefit from transitional housing programs (Clark et al., 2018). One of the sites examined here reserved three residences specifically for victims with an undocumented immigration status, yet a staff member acknowledged more units were needed to serve this population. Transitional housing programs for victims of all types should consider the needs of this subpopulation in their communities and explore removing barriers that exclude individuals with an undocumented immigration status (e.g. employment requirements). Victims of all types of crime often belong to communities that can benefit from programs that expand access to safe and affordable housing (Vasquez & Houston Kolnik, 2017).

## **Address Funding Restrictions**

In the research interviews, staff commonly reported uncertainty or limitations around what was allowable under federal VOCA funding guidelines. Most transitional housing programs across the country are funded with multiple sources, which was also true of the three programs that participated in this evaluation (Baker et al., 2009). While multiple funding sources offer some flexibility due to varying requirements, this can also pose difficulties for program administrators to reconcile allowable costs, such as food assistance, transportation, and childcare. Extant research has highlighted the importance of access to flexible funding that can assist clients in overcoming barriers that are not directly related to housing but are still important for restoring stability (e.g. car repairs, childcare costs) (Sullivan & Olsen, 2016). Grant administrators and program staff should engage in a dialogue to examine needs that are unmet due to funding restrictions and explore potential opportunities to implement a portion of funding with greater flexibility. Further, public-private partnerships could be explored to allow programs to more comprehensively meet the needs of victims.

## **Enhance Stakeholder and Public Awareness and Education**

Staff and clients noted in the interviews that some communities displayed a limited awareness of the issue of domestic violence, as well as a lack of information about victim needs. A lack of awareness around the problem can limit access to victim services, hinder investigations and prosecutions, and impede a community's ability to secure funding to combat the issue (Wilson & Dalton, 2008). Efforts by organizations to increase awareness and educate law enforcement, healthcare professionals, and others on issues such as how to identify domestic violence victims and appropriate responses to victimization can benefit all victims, even those who never seek direct services from service providers (Chanley, Chanley, Jr., & Campbell, 2001).

Evaluators noted a dearth of research and data on housing needs specific to human trafficking victims. While some programs intended to serve human trafficking victims, limited administrative and program data were available at the time of the evaluation on if and how their needs and/or outcomes differed from those who were victims of domestic violence. Continued training for program staff and other stakeholders (e.g. law enforcement) conducted by multi-disciplinary teams can help to bolster collaboration and improve service delivery to this client population (Clawson & Dutch, 2008). Additional research is needed to compare the housing trajectories and program experiences of those who experienced different types of victimization.

## **Section 7: Conclusion**

Overall, the findings of this evaluation demonstrated that these transitional housing programs provided a vital service to individuals who were victims of domestic violence. Nearly all program clients expressed satisfaction with the programs and staff reiterated a high level of perceived program success. Transitional housing programs are not intended to replace emergency shelters, but to expand the housing options available to victims. Extant research, supported by these evaluation findings, suggests that transitional housing is most successful when clients are given the agency to make choices in their own best interest (e.g. what services to pursue, whether to remain in their residences, how much (if any) contact to have with the abuser) (Baker et al., 2009; Baker et al., 2010; Clark et al., 2018; Clough et al., 2014; Melbin et al., 2003; Messing et al., 2015; Netto et al., 2009). Further, the findings of this evaluation were in accord with the conclusions of prior research that hold program clients should be treated as experts of their own situations and programs should avoid exerting unnecessary control (Clough et al., 2014; Melbin et al., 2003).



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## Appendix A: Program Site Descriptions

This appendix offers detailed descriptions of the programming and operations of the three sites that were the focus of this evaluation.

### Site A

Program Site A was a domestic violence service provider that operated a transitional housing program in a suburban county in the Chicago metropolitan area. The program offered services to victims of domestic violence and human trafficking. This program employed a scattered site model with capacity to provide assistance for 30 housing units; 22 units were in use at the time of the staff interviews (June 2018). Rental assistance was provided by the program for up to two years. Participants were required to have an income to be eligible for this program.<sup>22</sup> Prospective applicants often learned of the program while in the site's emergency shelter, were referred by an outside organization (e.g. hospital, law enforcement), or had called a hotline seeking services. Applicants were required to write a letter describing their abusive situations and how the program would benefit them and submit it with either an order of protection<sup>23</sup> or two witness letters from individuals who corroborated the occurrence of domestic violence. The program accepted clients who had experienced a domestic violence or human trafficking incident within the past year. Some exceptions to these requirements were made in the event it was not feasible for a victim to provide the necessary documentation.

During the intake process for transitional housing, the client met with a case manager in person to learn more about the program and ask any questions about the program. Clients worked with a case manager to complete a housing assessment, a human trafficking assessment (if warranted), and a budget worksheet. Although optional, safety plans and service plans for all clients were created as soon as possible during their work with the agency.

When an applicant was approved, the amount of their rental assistance was determined based on household size, income, and market rate of housing units in their chosen area. With this information, clients worked with their case managers to search for housing units and submit applications to landlords. With client permission, case managers reached out to the potential landlords to explain the program and advocate on behalf of the client during the application process. Clients held leases in their own names; the program provided a rider to the lease that outlined the relationship between the program, client, and landlord, including the program's rent contributions and any other responsibilities.

Clients were required to engage in case management on a regular basis, continue participation in any ongoing voluntary services (e.g. counseling), maintain an income, and make monthly contributions to a savings account.<sup>24</sup> At the conclusion of the program, all funds in the savings

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<sup>22</sup> Income included employment earnings or non-cash benefits such as child support, WIC, and social security.

<sup>23</sup> An order of protection (OP) is issued by a judge to protect those who have been victims of domestic violence. Protections afforded by an OP can include prohibiting the respondent (the abuser) from: coming near the victim; entering the home, even if it is shared; damaging personal property of the victim; possessing any firearms [750 ILCS 60/214]. There are three types of OPs. An emergency order of protection lasts for two to three weeks and the accused is not required to be notified. An interim order of protection can be granted after a respondent has been served and can last up to 30 days. A plenary order of protection lasts up to 2 years and can be renewed indefinitely; it is issued after a hearing in which the petitioner must be present and the respondent must have been notified.

<sup>24</sup> The program required participants to contribute 80 percent of their net revenue, after expenses were deducted, based on a budget created during the intake process.

account were available to the client. Other guidelines included a prohibition of the abuser on the property. Individuals not named on the lease were not allowed to reside in the unit.

Site A additionally operated an emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence and human trafficking. Site A has provided transitional housing for over 10 years. This provider also concurrently operated permanent supportive clustered housing that accepted subsidies from the federal government's housing choice voucher program (Section 8) administered through the county housing authority. Three units were reserved to provide transitional housing to individuals in this population with an undocumented immigration status.

## **Site B**

Site B was a domestic violence service provider that had been providing transitional housing services to this population for more than 18 years. The provider operated a transitional housing program for victims in a mostly rural area serving seven counties in central Illinois. The program employed a scattered site housing model, providing 10 units of transitional housing, with eight being occupied at the time of the staff interviews (July 2018). Five of the units were part of one apartment complex and the other five were spread across the community.

The intake process for transitional housing clients involved an in-person meeting with a case manager to gather information on client demographics, service needs, safety concerns, and potential barriers. To be eligible, an individual must have been homeless as a result of domestic violence. The program paid the full amount of clients' rent for up to two years.

Program guidelines mainly included safety measures, such as not allowing the abuser or any violent individuals on the property. The program also asked that participants not disclose to anyone that their unit is a transitional housing residence. Clients were required only to attend a monthly tenant meeting and participate in in-home case management sessions.<sup>25</sup>

The housing units were rented under the program's name and clients were rotated through the same residences over the grant period. To protect confidentiality, clients signed an occupancy agreement with the program in lieu of signing a lease. The occupancy agreement outlined the terms of the lease as well as the program requirements. Landlords who worked with this program also signed a confidentiality agreement and were not given the name of the client living in the residence. If clients were interested in remaining in the unit upon program completion, program staff worked with the landlord to allow clients to take over the leases in their own names.

In addition to providing transitional housing, Program Site B also operated an emergency shelter with a 45-day maximum stay. The program received additional funding for transitional housing from the U.S. Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) and applied Illinois Department of Human Services funding to the matching requirement.

## **Site C**

Program Site C was a domestic violence service provider that had been providing transitional housing services in Cook County for more than 15 years. The program operated 15 units of transitional housing at the time of the staff interviews (September 2018). The organization owned a building with four units that was used in part for transitional housing clients. Other units

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<sup>25</sup> Clients who were working during meeting times were exempt from this requirement.

followed the clustered site model and were in a large apartment complex in an affordable area of the community. Clients could participate in the program for up to two years, with the possibility of a six-month extension. Clients had the option of assuming their leases and continuing to reside in the units upon program completion. Clients that relocated to a certain part of Cook County after the program were eligible to apply for assistance with a security deposit and first month's rent.

After an individual filled out an application for transitional housing, they underwent an intake process involving a self-reported assessment of their current situation and discussion of their goals and objectives. To be eligible, participants had to be over 18 years old and a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. Accepted participants were required to sign a confidentiality agreement; visitors to the program-owned property also were required to sign confidentiality agreements. Additional program rules included prohibiting abusers on the property and smoking was not allowed in the residences. Participants were required to engage in case management services at least once per month.

Clients who lived in the privately-owned apartment complex were required to submit to a criminal background check conducted by the property management company. Individuals with past criminal convictions were still eligible to be housed in the agency-owned building. For clients residing in privately-owned units, the program acted as the leaseholder and the clients were listed as occupants. This allowed the program to simply update the names of the occupants on the lease as clients moved in and out. Clients residing in the agency-owned building signed a program occupancy agreement in lieu of a lease. Clients in the agency-owned building paid 30 percent of their monthly income to the organization as a program fee.

The program operated a 45-day emergency shelter, as well as an interim shelter program for individuals who exceeded a 45-day stay but were still in need of shelter services due to housing barriers. Individuals on the waiting list for transitional housing were eligible for the interim shelter program. The organization also received funding from OVW for transitional housing. The organization was interested in pursuing opportunities to acquire additional agency-owned properties to potentially be used for permanent supportive housing for this population.





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