Intersection of Domestic Violence and Homelessness: An Interdisciplinary Lens

- NISHA TOWNSEND
Housing and Aftercare Advocate, Women's Advocates

- ANN MCFARLAND
Housing Attorney, Standpoint

- RAELENE CASWELL
Housing Advocate, Standpoint

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Women's Advocates
Breaking the cycle of domestic violence

Our Organizations

Women's Advocates

- Mission: Women's Advocates' walks with victim/survivors and our community to break the cycle of domestic violence
- Founded in 1974, St. Paul MN
- First domestic violence shelter in the nation
- Services: prevention/education, shelter, 24-hour crisis line, aftercare/housing support
- www.wadvocates.org

Standpoint

- Mission: Standpoint promotes justice for domestic and sexual violence victims.
- Unique team of attorneys and advocates
- Services: Action Line, training, technical assistance for victim/survivors, advocates, attorneys, and systems professionals
- www.standpointmn.org

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Objectives and Overview

Overview

- Domestic Violence
- Homelessness
- Intersection of Domestic Violence and Housing
- Legal Protections
- Community Response
- Women's Advocates: Aftercare
- Resources

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Domestic Violence

"NEVER FORGET THAT WALKING AWAY FROM SOMETHING UNHEALTHY IS BRAVE EVEN IF YOU STUMBLE A LITTLE ON YOUR WAY OUT THE DOOR." - UNKNOWN

Source

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We could fill Target Field 17 times with MN women who have experienced domestic and/or sexual violence.

Statistic from *2018 Status of Women & Girls in MN* - U of M Humphrey School and Women's Foundation of MN

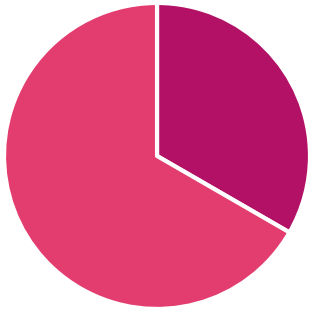
Looking at the Facts

In Minnesota

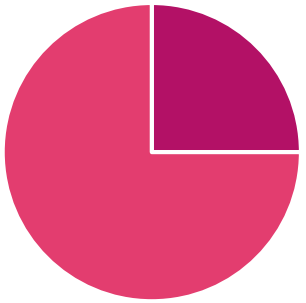
- More than **65,000** adults in Minnesota receive domestic violence services from programs each year.
- 47% of girls from homes where others have been physically abused, hurt themselves on purpose and 56% contemplated suicide
- **Less than 50%** of people who experience domestic violence ever reach out for services

In the United States

1 in 3 Women



1 in 4 Men



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Defining Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is an intentional and systematic **pattern** of physical and psychological abuse, threats, intimidation, isolation or economic coercion used by one person to exert **power and control** over another person in the context of a **dating, family or household** relationship.

Domestic violence is maintained by societal and cultural attitudes, institutions and laws which are **not** consistent in naming this violence as wrong.

Source

Who experiences domestic violence?

- About 85% of victim/survivors identify as female

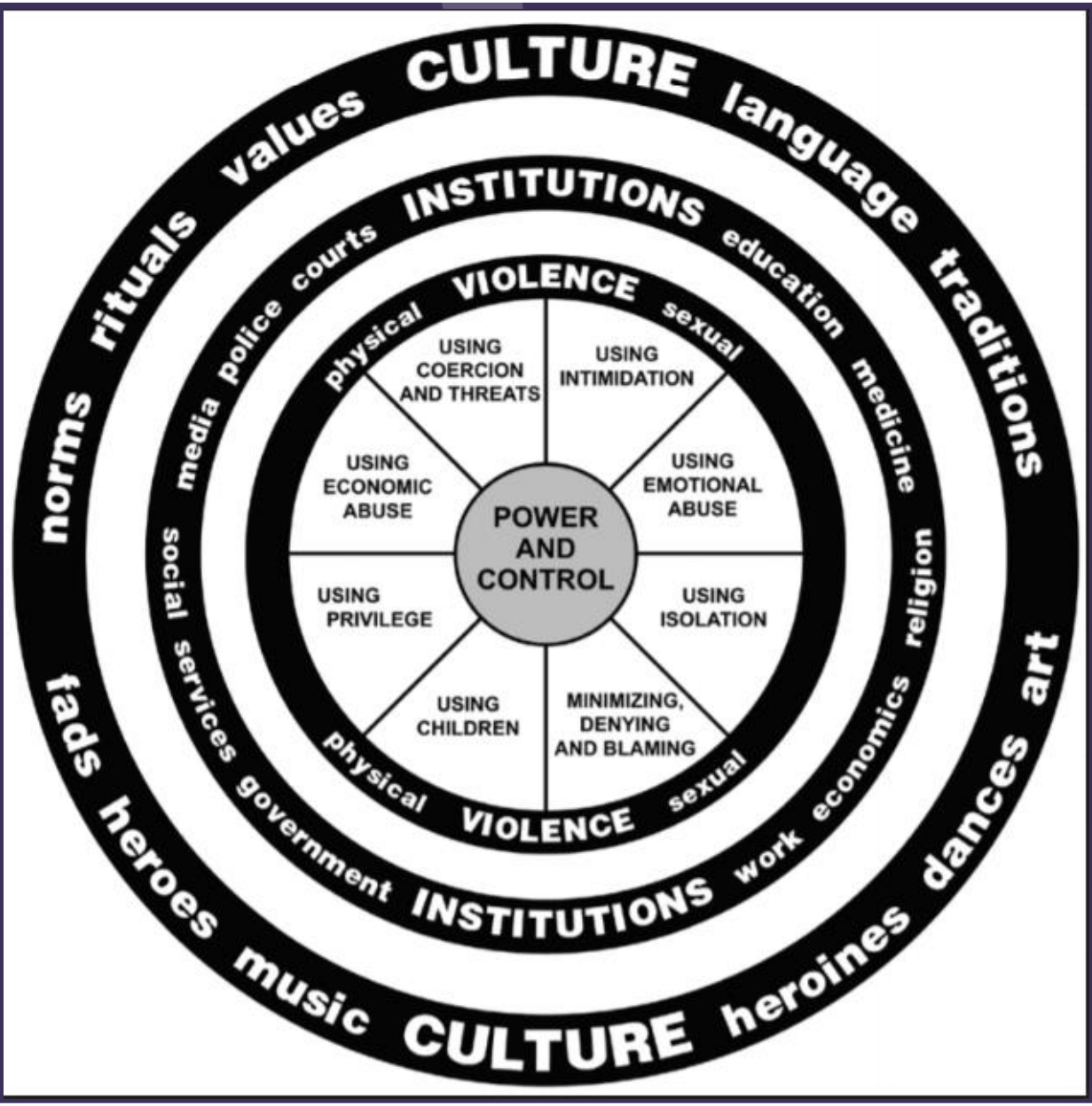
– HOWEVER –

- Domestic violence does not discriminate

Source

Power & Control Wheel

- Different populations and communities – LGBTQ+, immigrants, elders, disabled, etc.



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Red Flags

- Embarrassing or putting you down
- Looking at you or acting in ways that scare you
- Controlling who you see, where you go, or what you do
- Keeping you or discouraging you from seeing your friends or families
- Preventing you from making your own decisions
- Preventing you from working or attending school
- Intimidating you with guns, knives or other weapons
- Threatening to hurt you, themselves, or others
- Pressuring you to use drugs or alcohol
- Every relationship is different

Why do they stay?

- Threats or **fear** of increased violence if one leaves (children)
- Insufficient institutional responses
- Feel it's best for the children
- Shame and embarrassment
- Lack of resources (housing, money)
- Love and sympathy for one's abuser, hope for change, feelings of responsibility
- Threats of suicide or homicide
- Believing abuse is normal
- Lack of outside support
- Cultural/religious reasons
- Language barriers/immigration status/disability
- **Leaving is the most dangerous time for a victim**

Source

Effects of Trauma

A trauma response is a **normal response** to **abnormal situations**

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echo
www.echotraining.org

Impacts of TRAUMA

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Re-enactment

Recreating the childhood dynamic expecting the same result but hoping for a different one. This strategy is doomed to failure because the need is in the past and cannot be resolved. Also you will interpret anything as confirmation that you have been betrayed once more.

Loss of self-worth

Trauma survivors can swing between feeling special, with grandiose beliefs about themselves, and feeling dirty and 'bad.' This self-aggrandizement is an elaborate defense against the unbearable feeling of being an outcast and unworthy of love.

Loss of sense of self

One of the roles of the primary caregiver is to help us discover our identity by reflecting who we are back at us. If the abuser was a parent or caregiver, then that sense of self is not well developed and can leave us feeling phony or fake.

Loss of physical connection to body

Survivors of sexual and physical abuse often have a hard time being in their body. This disconnection from the body makes some therapies know to aid trauma recovery, such as yoga, harder for these survivors.

Dissociation

Often, to cope with what is happening to the body during the abuse, the child will dissociate (disconnect the consciousness from what is happening). Later, this becomes a coping strategy that is used whenever the survivor feels overwhelmed.

Loss of intimacy

For survivors of sexual abuse, sexual relationships can either become something to avoid or are entered into for approval (since the child learns that sex is a way to get the attention they crave) and the person may be labeled 'promiscuous.'

Shame

Huge, overwhelming, debilitating shame. As a child, even getting an exercise wrong at school can trigger the shame. The child may grow into an adult who cannot bear to be in the wrong because it is such a trigger.

Loss of trust

This is especially true if the abuser is a family member or a close family friend.

Loss of danger cues

How do you know what is dangerous when someone you trust hurts you and this is then your 'normal?'

Loss of safety

The world becomes a place where anything can happen

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Lasting Impacts of Domestic Violence

Physical: bruises, broken bones, stab wounds, gunshot wounds, headaches, traumatic brain injuries, stress on the heart, immune system, gastrointestinal system

Psychological: anxiety, depression, PTSD, flashbacks, suicidality, hyperarousal/avoidance

Social: strained relationships with family members or friends, isolation from social networks, **homelessness,** embarrassment, and trauma

Economic: health care costs, **unemployment**, public assistance, costs of evading a stalking ex-partner, coerced debt, evictions

Homelessness

HOUSING IS ESSENTIAL TO THE HEALTH OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES. – WILDER FOUNDATION

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Defining homelessness

- Minnesota Definition of Homelessness
- Long Term Homeless (DHS programs)
- HUD Homeless
- Chronic Homeless
- High Priority Homeless
- Personally Identifies
- Unsheltered

Source Source

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Homelessness in Minnesota

Wilder Study 2018

Key findings

- 10% increase in homelessness since 2015
- Increase in folks doubled up or staying outside
- 25% increase in older adults (55+)

Barriers

- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of shelter beds
- Low income – barriers to education and employment

Populations

- Begins at young age – trauma
- Chronic health condition – cause for concern
- African American and American Indian overrepresented

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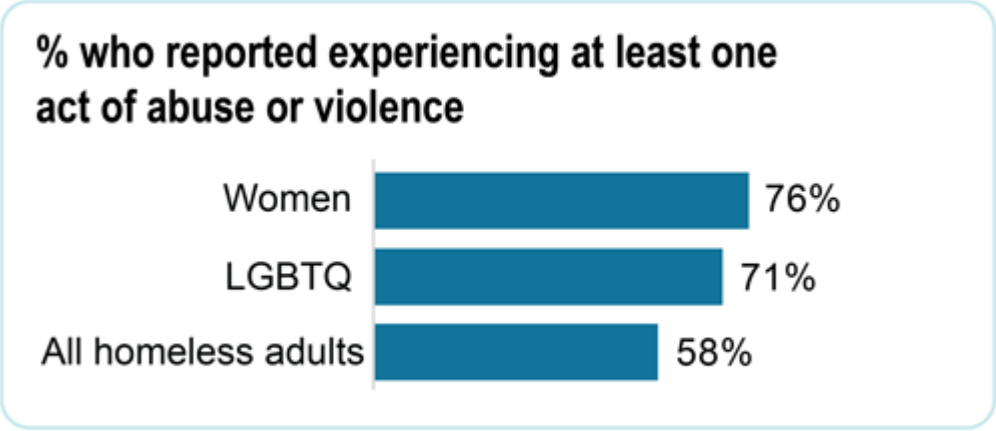
Adding in domestic violence
Wilder Study 2018

- Over half of women experiencing homelessness had at least one experience with violence or exploitation (adults: 67%, youth: 57%)
- Number of homeless women who are also fleeing domestic violence has steadily increased since 2009 (37% in 2018, up from 29% in 2009)



2018 Minnesota Homeless Study | mnhomeless.org

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Supplemental PIT Count 2018

1092 people attempting to flee a violent situation		
40 stayed in a vehicle	608 stayed with their abuser	444 stayed with family or friends

VIOLENCE FREE MINNESOTA

THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

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Challenges Faced

- **Emergency Services**
  - Safety and Security
  - Internal Mental Health
- **Basic Needs**
  - Physiological Needs
  - Cleanliness and Hygiene
- **Economic Security**
  - Barriers to Employment
  - Navigating the System
- **Social and Life Skills**
  - Not Part of Society
  - Social Isolation

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Context of COVID-19 and Housing/DV

Risk of DV has increased due to…

- Loss of power and control
- Safe places/periods of reprieve are inaccessible (work, school)
- In-person support groups and advocacy are unavailable
- Job loss/lack of financial security
- Isolation compounds violence
- Travel restrictions, compromised immune systems- all contribute to inaccessibility of services

Systemic Responses to COVID-19

- Evictions are prohibited (with exceptions)
- 2/3 of police calls involved domestic violence within the first weekend of Stay at Home

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Intersection of Domestic Violence and Housing

The two most pressing concerns for survivors of abuse are the need for safe housing and the need for economic resources to maintain safety.

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Barriers to Housing for Victim/Survivors

"Discriminatory housing practices by landlords, local laws, and public housing agencies can contribute greatly to housing barriers and can often force a survivor to choose between homelessness and staying with an abusive partner." NHLP

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Barriers to Housing for Victim/Survivors:

Lack of Steady Employment

Causes:

- Being forced to miss work because of physical violence
- Concern for children safety, being controlled by abusive partner
- Stalking and harassment

Results:

- Falling behind on rent
- Eviction
- Homelessness, often long term

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Barriers to Housing for Victim/Survivors:

Loss of Subsidized Housing and/or Eviction

Causes:

- Lease violations or damage resulting from criminal acts of the abuser
- Too many police calls
- Lack of steady income
- Financial abuse and lack of control over finances

Results:

- Difficulty obtaining and maintaining steady employment
- Homelessness, often long term

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Barriers to Housing for Victim/Survivors:

Negative Credit and Rental History

Causes:

- Eviction record
- Lack of steady employment
- Lack of control over finances
- Coerced debt: abusers running up credit and lying about paying bills

Results:

- Cannot pass background check for housing
- Limits ability to get car for transportation (can't get to work)
- Homelessness, often long term

Legal Protections and Housing

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Safe at Home

Minnesota's Address Confidentiality Program

- Address confidentiality program
- Landlords cannot:
  - Disclose name and address of participants without consent
  - Display name of participant anywhere on the premises even if such a display is required by local ordinance
  - Release the name of a participant to local government unless in response to specific request to active investigation
- Certificate of Rent Paid – uses Safe at Home PO Box
- Absentee voting

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Protective Orders and Housing

Domestic Abuse No Contact Order (DANCO)

- Family or household relationship
- Issued by courts to prohibit all contact during a criminal trial
- No contact

Order for Protection (OFP)

- Family or household relationship only – includes roommates
- Prohibits contact and acts or threats of violence
- Who leaves and who stays?
- Belongings
- Pets
- Financial Relief – sometimes
- Court order re: Section 8 voucher

Harassment Restraining Order (HRO)

- Does not require relationship, but often used in domestic and sexual violence cases
- Cease/avoid harassment
- No contact

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Tenant's Right to Call for Help

- MN Statute 504B.205: Residential tenant's right to seek police and emergency assistance
- Tenant has the right to call the police or emergency personnel
- Landlord cannot evict/terminate for police calls for safety or emergency made by the tenant
- Does not matter if city has a Crime Free Ordinance – state law trumps city ordinance and victims can call the police/emergency personal to assist them

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Break lease due to domestic violence

- Minnesota Statute 504B.206
- Victim/survivor of domestic violence, criminal sexual conduct, stalking, and fears violence
- No notice period applies
- Security deposit is forfeited
- Lease is terminated for all parties

STEPS → Get Documentation → Inform landlord in writing → Pay rent → Move

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VAWA – Subsidized Housing Protections

Federal Protection: Clients cannot be denied admission, be evicted, or have their housing subsidy/assistance terminated on the basis of, or as a direct result of, their status of a victim/survivor.

- Domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking
- Men, women, any/all gender identities
- Federally subsidized housing, including section 8 programs, public housing, tax credit housing, and more

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VAWA – Housing cannot be denied due to domestic violence

- Clients **applying to live in** subsidized housing have protections that **prohibit** them from being denied due to domestic violence or sexual assault.

https://www.lawhelpmn.org/self-help-library/fact-sheet/subsidized-housing-rights-victims-domestic-violence-and-sexual-assault

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VAWA – Housing must be retained

- Clients **who already live in** subsidized housing have protections that **allow** them to:
  - Move to a different subsidized unit for their safety
  - Remove the abuser or attacker from the lease but let the victim and their family remain on the lease
  - Have their rent recalculated if their income has decreased due to sexual or domestic violence

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VAWA – Housing cannot be taken away due to domestic violence

- Clients **who already live in** subsidized housing have protections that **prohibit** them from:
  - Lease violations due to domestic or sexual violence
  - Getting evicted or terminated due to domestic or sexual violence
  - Being billed for damage caused by the person who harmed them

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Fair Housing Act

Federal Protection: Protects victim/survivors of domestic violence from discrimination in housing, and applies to *both* federally funded and privately owned rental properties.

- Free from discrimination when seeking housing to buy or rent
- Eviction protection or having housing assistance terminated
- No double standards: tenants must be treated the same as other tenants or occupants by landlord or housing provider
- Reasonable accommodation: people with disabilities, including PTSD, has equal opportunity to use and enjoy their housing

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Community Response

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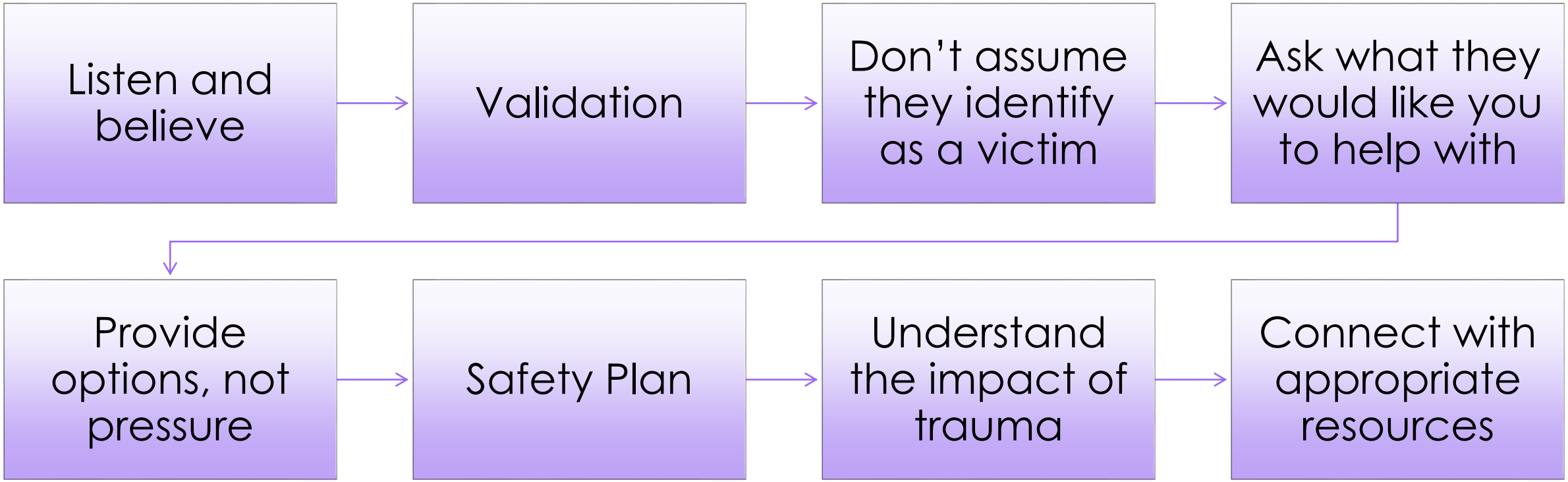
As Individuals



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As Advocates

- Problem solve
- Identify options and resources
- Systems navigation
- Safe at Home
- Assist breaking a lease
- OFP/HRO assistance
- Goal planning/setting
- Provide crisis support
- Assist in assessing safety threats and/or lethality
- Capacity-building self advocacy skills
- Emotional support

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As Housing Advocates

- Domestic violence and confidentiality
- Support with landlord communication
- Help explain background to landlords
- Understand how to break a lease
- Copies of laws to landlords
- Community resources
- Help safety plan
- Maintain connections to DV agencies
- Expungement info/petitions
- Address criminal background and credit score
- Understand domestic/sexual violence

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As Housing Agencies

Safety Resources	• Move in information • Post safety flyers in community spaces • Know available community resources
Stay Informed	• VAWA • Landlord/Tenant Rights • MN Statute 504B – specifically how to break a lease
Be Curious – and Cautious	• Property damage, noise complaints, late rent • Talk to people 1:1 • Recognize warning signs
Property Support	• Lock changes • Trespass unsafe people, save copies of OFP/HRO • Motion sensor lights, locks on windows, non-first floor housing options

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Women's Advocates Aftercare: Shelter is not enough

"These women are not seeking shelter – they are seeking housing. They need a place to live independently from their abusers and a way to maintain their independence through employment, access to childcare, reasonable transportation, and affordable housing." – Liz Richards, Violence Free Minnesota

- Domestic violence is the leading cause of housing instability. For survivors with unmet housing needs:
  - 58% returned to their abuser
  - 16% became homeless
  - 6% stayed in their vehicle

Women's Advocates Aftercare: Survivor Needs

Aftercare was strategically designed to address the specific and long-term and needs of victim/survivors of violence

- Safe, affordable, and stable housing
- Landlords who know how to appropriately address domestic violence, Safe at Home, and other community resources
- Positive community with neighbors to reduce impacts of isolation
- Community resources to address legal advocacy, credit help, and financial counseling to overcome impacts of financial abuse

Why Aftercare?

- Survivors benefit from a continuum of care as they maintain a life free from violence that is stable and predictable in their transition back into the community
- Helps families heal, pursue education goals, become financially stable, and live free from violence
- Sets women up for success, reduce isolation, and ease anxiety after the trauma of domestic violence
- Build a model to increase community capacity to support DV survivors as they build post-shelter lives

Women's Advocates Aftercare: Structure

- Adults and any accompanying children come to Women's Advocates' shelter seeking immediate safety from imminent violence in the home.
- During their stay at the shelter, 40 victim/survivors work with their Housing and Aftercare Coordinator to begin their participation in the Aftercare Program.
- The adults and their children work with the Aftercare Program after leaving shelter, which includes:
  - 2 FTE Housing and Aftercare Coordinators
  - Supervision from the Programs Director
  - Office supplies and equipment, mileage, ClientTrack,
- Direct financial assistance

Women's Advocates Aftercare: Advocacy and Support

- Safety Planning
- Action planning/goal setting
- Build positive community connections and support
- Individualized case planning
- Living and social skills
- Allstate Purple Purse Financial Literacy curriculum
- Domestic violence curriculum
- Wrap around services
- Support educational and employment needs
- Long term housing planning
- Counseling and support group referrals
- Transportation

Women's Advocates Aftercare: Outcomes

- A formal Aftercare Program orientation process has been developed for use during residents' stay at our shelter, and shelter residents create a 90 day housing case plan executed at the shelter in preparation for participation in Aftercare.
- Housing referrals made for participants, and housing advocacy connections established for participants
- Bi-weekly meetings with Aftercare Participants after leaving shelter, continuing for up to one year
- Participants have access to counseling, legal medical, economic, housing, emergency assistance, transportation family support, and educational resources
- Created positive and trusting relationships with landlords and program participants.
- Participants receive holiday gifts on their wish lists
- 128 Women and children participated in the most recent fiscal year in the Aftercare Program.
- Participated on a Domestic Violence work group that created policy for the Coordinated Entry system through Hennepin County.

Impact of the Aftercare Program

- Domestic violence survivors and their children remain free from domestic violence during the year after leaving our emergency shelter.
- Domestic violence survivors stay stably housed and away from homelessness for a year after leaving our shelter
- Formerly homeless families build good rental history and credit during their year of participation

Over the last year, we have measured that:

- 92% of Aftercare participants remained safe from domestic violence and dangerous relationships during the year after leaving shelter.
- Only 8% of Aftercare participants needed to return to a domestic violence shelter.
- 91% of Aftercare participants remained stably housed during the year they participated in our program.

Resources

- MN Domestic Violence Crisis Line: 1.866.223.1111
- www.lawhelpmn.org
- HOME Line – tenant's advocacy
- Safe at Home
- Family Means
- Coordinated Entry
- Violence Free Minnesota
- County-based Emergency Assistance
- Neighborhood House
- Catholic Charities
- Women's Advocates Resource Hub

Nisha Townsend

- Housing and Aftercare Advocate
- rtownsend@wadvocates.org

Ann McFarland

- Housing Attorney
- annm@standpointmn.org

Raelene Caswell

- Housing Advocate
- raelene@standpointmn.org