

ADDRESSING HOUSING FOR VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Access to safe and affordable housing can be a challenge for victims of human trafficking. Many victims face unique barriers to accessing and maintaining housing as a direct result of their victimization. Moreover, few emergency shelters or transitional housing programs are uniquely prepared to serve victims of human trafficking. This has led many service providers to consider developing housing programs to more fully meet the needs of human trafficking victims.

Housing programs can be complicated and costly. Prior to starting such an undertaking, an organization should assess its capacity to financially and administratively support a housing program, identify the broad range of housing options and service needs of victims, understand the community support and concerns, determine costs, and secure funding. Below are steps to assist organizations with how to determine the need and get started building a housing program.

Determine if there is a need for trafficking victim housing in the community

Identifying and understanding the current state of safe housing for victims of trafficking can help determine if there is a community need. Seek out research and local data on human trafficking and ask for insights concerning housing needs for victims of human trafficking through your organization and in your area. Talk to community groups mobilized around or vocal on the issue, such as community programs, homeless shelters, municipal entities, and survivors. Consult with law enforcement to hear their perspective on current housing needs. Start by asking questions such as—

- What is the current state of safe housing in the community?
- What are the range of housing options needed for trafficking victims?
- What are the types of housing-related service needs of trafficking victims?
- What happens to a victim who cannot find safe housing?
- What is the rate of poverty and homelessness in the community?
- Is there a demonstrated housing need for victims of trafficking from homeless shelters?
- What is the process for connecting victims with safe housing?

Identify what victims of trafficking want from a housing program

Seek input from survivors when developing an anti-trafficking housing program. Learn from existing resources such as literature reviews, focus groups, model housing programs, toolkits, checklists, and guides.¹ If your organization is already serving human trafficking survivors, speak with them to find out exactly what *they* want in a housing program. If there are other housing programs in your area (e.g. domestic violence shelter, transitional housing programs, homelessness programs), request a meeting to get ideas and input anonymously.

Obtain a diverse representation of experiences by using different strategies to engage a range of individuals. Seek out male survivors, labor and sex trafficking survivors, American Indian and Alaska Native survivors, and survivors representing a variety of cultural groups. Ask questions such as—

- What challenges do you experience with accessing housing?
- What would you like from a housing program?
- In addition to housing, what else do you need?
- What would increase your feeling of safety and stability in a housing program?

Use the feedback to identify themes and build an outline of critical components.

Establish community support

Establishing community support begins once the need is identified. A housing program must be a collective effort, partnering with local resources to increase supportive services. Therefore, it is important the community understands the need for a housing program and how it will address the identified need. Assess the outreach needed to build a successful foundation for a new housing program through community, civic, and political support. Contact other service provider organizations, advocacy coalitions and task forces, law enforcement, healthcare providers, and community members. Seek advice from those who have started similar projects in local or neighboring communities to learn about obstacles and suggestions for success. Request input on any community or political opposition, funding constraints, or restrictive laws, regulations, or other codes. Establishing community support and ensuring the community understands the housing model and programming will help to make a program sustainable and successful.

¹ Please refer to the Resources for Starting a Residential Program document available from the Center.

Understand housing models and model programming

Understanding the range of housing models and programming available is critical for determining what aligns with the victim and community need. Consider the physical and programmatic accessibility. Determine program components, such as—

- Type of housing program, such as emergency shelter, short-term or transitional housing, Housing First Model, or permanent-supportive housing;
- Population to be served (adult, youth, gender, culture);
- Security - what are the access controls;
- Confidentiality - is housing in an undisclosed location;
- Advocacy, case management, and other supportive services; and
- Comprehensive services² offered in-house or through partnerships.

Identify the type of housing program

Ensure a range of housing options are available to meet victim needs. Whatever the model, it should be safe and healing for victims. housing programs can include—

- Partnering with a housing provider such as private landlords and property managers to allocate some housing units for victims of trafficking.
- Establishing landlord or property management agreements to confidentially house victims.
- Utilizing grant or discretionary funds to provide flexible funding for rental subsidies or pay security deposits and utility bills.
- Obtaining a house or apartment building through a donation or capital campaign.

Assessing organizational capacity

Operating an anti-trafficking housing program can be challenging and is different from operating other kinds of victim services. After an organization chooses a housing model, staff and the board need to develop the various program components and determine the staffing and resources needed to create and support the program. Identify program needs by doing an inventory of current staff and resources. The organization should also assess what types of consultants are needed for the project and what kind of partnerships can be secured through volunteers or other community organizations.

² A [comprehensive response](#) includes victim-centered services intended to meet the safety, security, and healing needs of victims of human trafficking and may include legal services, healthcare, economic empowerment, children's services, counseling, and community outreach and prevention.

Consider costs

Providing housing can be an expensive proposition. Consider the costs of facility rent or subleasing, insurance, utilities, staffing, food, furniture, housing supplies, taxes, financial management, licensing and permits, maintenance, equipment, business supplies, etc. While some items can be gathered through donations, have a plan for upkeep and ongoing maintenance. Determine if the organization has the financial capacity to attend to all of the associated costs with a housing program. Develop a budget showing expected costs and mechanisms to address the costs. Think ahead and develop a long-term plan to maintain the program and sustain the costs in future years.

Prepare, then outreach to possible funders

Once a budget is developed, draft a proposal describing the community's needs, victim's needs, partnerships, type of housing, proposed services, goal, and cost. In addition, highlight organizational capacity and expertise. Use the budget and the proposal to approach possible funders to request financial support. Funders may include local, state, and federal government, private foundations, corporate philanthropies, and individuals. Each funder has different requirements; do the homework to ensure a funding request meets the requirements and includes all necessary content.

Additional Resources

- The Freedom Network Training Institute [Housing Project](#)
- [Housing Options for Survivors of Human Trafficking](#)
- [The Domestic Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium](#)
- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [Technical Assistance](#)
- [The National Alliance for Safe Housing Training and Technical Assistance](#)

Contact the Center at contact@ovc-htcbc.org or [1-844-682-0411](tel:1-844-682-0411) to learn more.