



# HOMES FOR 100 WOMEN **DISCOVERY INSIGHTS**

INSIGHTS PAPER FOUR:  
SOLUTIONS

*A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE HOUSING PROJECT  
BY THE WOMEN'S HOUSING ALLIANCE*

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## Introduction

The Victorian Women's Housing Alliance (WHA) formed in 2019 to address the systemic barriers and housing crisis being faced by women and children fleeing family violence. The WHA's members are leading organisations across the family violence, homelessness, and housing sectors with expertise in delivering safe, sustainable housing (both transitional and social), and providing family violence support, homelessness support, and a range of allied services. The WHA is committed to driving systemic change to deliver effective solutions to homelessness for women (transgender and cisgender), non-binary people and their families.

The WHA recognises the critical need for stable, secure and affordable housing, along with necessary support for women, non-binary people and their families experiencing family violence in Victoria. Through our combined knowledge and experience, the WHA is keenly aware of the systemic barriers within Victoria's current service system. These barriers are leading to a growing housing crisis with dire impacts for women, non-binary people and their families.

To address this urgent need, the WHA have secured philanthropic funding to develop a gender-informed pilot project that responds to the unique needs of women and non-binary people who have experienced homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. With a target of supporting 100 families, *Homes for 100 Women* will partner with women and non-binary people who have experienced homelessness (including victim-survivors of family and domestic violence) and sector stakeholders. Together, we will co-design an integrated housing-led response that not only ensures a sustainable pathway out of homelessness but also supports participants to recover from crisis and build economically secure and thriving futures.

The project addresses:

- The increasing numbers of women entering into the homelessness service system,
- The deficit in appropriate, safe and sustainable housing for women and non-binary people,
- The system delays between housing support requests and securing permanent accommodation,
- The lack of integrated support available once housing is secured,
- The need for a coordinated program of gender specific supports to assist people to not only maintain their tenancy but thrive once housed, including health, legal, financial, income, education and employment,
- Incorporating insights from the emerging international evidence base on effective gender-informed approaches to housing and homelessness response.

This project is a major initiative of the WHA and is auspiced by Juno. Once co-designed, the project will build government and philanthropic support to fund

the model, thereby delivering an integrated, evidence-informed model that can be piloted with women (transgender and cisgender) and non-binary led households.

A note on language: Whilst the WHA uses the term “women” inclusively to encompass both transgender and cisgender women, it is crucial to note some significant limitations in much of the research informing this document. For example:

- Adoption of a binary approach to gender without acknowledging gender identities beyond the binary of men/ women;
- Conflation of gender and sex, for example using “male/female” language to denote gender;
- Failure to specify how “women” are defined within studies and whether research is inclusive of both transgender and cisgender women.

These limitations must be taken into consideration when examining the insights explored throughout these papers.

#### Key Finding 4:

### **There is an emerging local and international evidence base about what works in responding to homelessness for women.**

This paper presents the fourth key finding from the Discovery Phase for the *Homes for 100 Women* project, exploring emerging evidence-based and tested solutions to address homelessness for women. Both locally and internationally there are various models being trialled and developed that provide holistic, trauma-informed and person-centred approaches to homelessness for women. In the following sections, we discuss these models and relevant principles and learnings for the *Homes for 100 Women* project.

## Finding 4a. Recovery from homelessness requires more than just accommodation.

Research with women who have experienced homelessness shows that an exit from homelessness is about more than just securing housing.<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup> Just as homelessness is a broader and more complex social issue extending beyond a lack of shelter ('rooflessness'), recovery from homelessness requires more than a woman or non-binary person simply securing a roof over their head. The concept of 'home' encompasses more than mere shelter, and since homelessness itself is often traumatic and preceded by traumatic and difficult experiences, achieving a sustained exit from homelessness involves a personal, individualised recovery journey.<sup>6,7</sup>

An international framework aimed at ending homelessness for women and girls emphasises fourteen key attributes of 'home', including the recognition of home as a fundamental human right, the importance of safety, quality, affordability and sustainability, the need for accessibility and support if required, sufficient space for self-defined family, privacy and autonomy, and connection to land.<sup>8</sup> Qualitative research with women who have experienced homelessness shows that although finding a house is crucial, it is equally important that it is the right house for them and that it meets their individual needs.<sup>9</sup> After securing housing, there is a process of transforming a 'house' into a 'home', a subjective process which includes adapting the physical environment of the home, building a felt sense of safety and security and establishing community connection and belonging.<sup>10</sup> This also often needs to be accompanied by personalised, one-on-one support from a case manager to build the necessary life skills associated with maintaining a home.<sup>11</sup>

Once appropriate and stable housing is secured, women and non-binary people can then begin addressing trauma, disconnection and loss, while rebuilding

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<sup>1</sup> Phipps, M, Dalton, L, Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2021) More than a house: Women's recovery from homelessness in Australia. *Health and Social Care in the Community*. 2021; 00:1–11.

<sup>2</sup> Milaney, K., Williams, N., Lockerbie, S.L. et al. (2020) Recognizing and responding to women experiencing homelessness with gendered and trauma-informed care. *BMC Public Health* 20, 397.

<sup>3</sup> Warburton W, Whittaker E, Papic M. Homelessness Pathways for Australian Single Mothers and Their Children: An Exploratory Study. *Societies*. 2018; 8(1):16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8010016>

<sup>4</sup> Bullen, J. (2019). Didn't feel heard, didn't think I had a voice, didn't feel safe: Gender responsive strategies for assisting women experiencing long-term and recurrent homelessness. Crows Nest, NSW: The Mercy Foundation.

<sup>5</sup> O'Campo P, Nisenbaum R, Crocker AG, Nicholls T, Eiboff F, Adair CE. (2023) Women experiencing homelessness and mental illness in a Housing First multi-site trial: Looking beyond housing to social outcomes and well-being. *PLoS One*. 2023 Feb 10; 18(2) :e0277074. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9916643/>

<sup>6</sup> Phipps, M, Dalton, L, Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2021) More than a house: Women's recovery from homelessness in Australia. *Health and Social Care in the Community*. 2021; 00:1–11.

<sup>7</sup> O'Campo P, Nisenbaum R, Crocker AG, Nicholls T, Eiboff F, Adair CE. (2023) Women experiencing homelessness and mental illness in a Housing First multi-site trial: Looking beyond housing to social outcomes and well-being. *PLoS One*. 2023 Feb 10; 18(2) :e0277074. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9916643/>

<sup>8</sup> Yeo, S. et al. (2015) A Framework for Ending Women's and Girls' Homelessness. Canada.

<sup>9</sup> Phipps, M, Dalton, L, Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2021) More than a house: Women's recovery from homelessness in Australia. *Health and Social Care in the Community*. 2021; 00:1–11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Warburton W, Whittaker E, Papic M. Homelessness Pathways for Australian Single Mothers and Their Children: An Exploratory Study. *Societies*. 2018; 8(1):16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8010016>

confidence, autonomy and agency.<sup>12</sup> Sustained exits from homelessness are interconnected with the pathways into homelessness and it is through addressing the experiences that preceded, or occurred during, homelessness that women and non-binary people can rebuild and reduce the likelihood of homelessness recurring.<sup>13,14</sup> Housing support plays a vital role in promoting safety and wellbeing for victim-survivors of family violence, including children, but it is essential to also provide other types of support, especially in education, training and employment.<sup>15</sup> Research is clear that simply securing housing is not the only support needed for women and non-binary people exiting homelessness; withdrawing support at this point can leave them feeling vulnerable and isolated.<sup>16,17</sup>

Experiences of trauma and homelessness are closely interconnected, and with homelessness having serious, ongoing consequences for women.<sup>18,19</sup> There are five key domains highlighted in the research of the sustained consequences of homelessness for women: poorer physical and mental health (including psychological distress), greater physical and sexual abuse, more drug and alcohol use, hunger and food insecurity, and lower and less stable employment.<sup>20</sup> The evidence is particularly strong for the association between homelessness and greater mental and physical illness, including sexual, health concerns, underscoring the need for this to be factored into tailored service responses for homeless women.<sup>21, 22</sup>

Not only are the consequences of homelessness serious and severe, but they frequently extend across generations.<sup>23,24</sup> With many homeless women the

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<sup>12</sup> Phipps, M, Dalton, L, Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2021) More than a house: Women's recovery from homelessness in Australia. *Health and Social Care in the Community*. 2021; 00:1–11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> O'Campo P, Nisenbaum R, Crocker AG, Nicholls T, Eiboff F, Adair CE. (2023) Women experiencing homelessness and mental illness in a Housing First multi-site trial: Looking beyond housing to social outcomes and well-being. *PLoS One*. 2023 Feb 10; 18(2) :e0277074. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9916643/>

<sup>15</sup> Flanagan, K., Blunden, H., valentine, k., and Henriette, J. (2019) Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence, AHURI Final Report No. 311, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/311>

<sup>16</sup> Phipps, M, Dalton, L, Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2021) More than a house: Women's recovery from homelessness in Australia. *Health and Social Care in the Community*. 2021; 00:1–11.

<sup>17</sup> Warburton W, Whittaker E, Papic M. (2018) Homelessness Pathways for Australian Single Mothers and Their Children: An Exploratory Study. *Societies*. 2018; 8(1):16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8010016>

<sup>18</sup> Milaney, K., Williams, N., Lockerbie, S.L. et al. (2020) Recognizing and responding to women experiencing homelessness with gendered and trauma-informed care. *BMC Public Health* 20, 397.

<sup>19</sup> Phipps, M, Dalton, L, Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2021) More than a house: Women's recovery from homelessness in Australia. *Health and Social Care in the Community*. 2021; 00:1–11.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, G., Ribar, D. and Zhu, A. (2017) Women's Homelessness: International Evidence on Causes, Consequences, Coping and Policies. Life Course Centre Working Paper Series. Life Course Centre, Melbourne. No. 2017-06.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Grammatikopoulou, M., et. Al. (2021) Health status of women affected by homelessness: A cluster of *in concreto* human rights violations and a time for action, *Maturitas*, Volume 154, pp. 31-45.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, G., Ribar, D. and Zhu, A. (2017) Women's Homelessness: International Evidence on Causes, Consequences, Coping and Policies. Life Course Centre Working Paper Series. Life Course Centre, Melbourne. No. 2017-06.

<sup>24</sup> Warburton W, Whittaker E, Papic M. Homelessness Pathways for Australian Single Mothers and Their Children: An Exploratory Study. *Societies*. 2018; 8(1):16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8010016>

primary carers of children, their homelessness also inevitably affects their children. The impact of homelessness on children can be severe, including higher rates of mental illness, poorer physical health outcomes, hunger, reduced academic achievement, disrupted community connection and higher levels of stress.<sup>25, 26, 27</sup> Studies also indicate that experiences of homelessness in childhood can negatively impact employment outcomes as an adult and heighten the risk of homelessness in adulthood.<sup>28, 29, 30</sup> In Australia, the main reason children receive homelessness services is as a result of family violence and family breakdown.<sup>31</sup> Despite the Australian government identifying families experiencing homelessness as a priority group in 2008, and the potentially severe consequences stemming from the experience of homelessness in childhood, there is limited Australian research examining the experiences and support needs of homeless mothers and their children to ensure a long-term exit from homelessness.<sup>32</sup>

The strong link between trauma and homelessness for women and non-binary people underscores the importance of trauma-informed homelessness and housing services. Support provided after securing housing should be holistic, gender-specific and focused on supporting healing and recovery from trauma.<sup>33, 34</sup> Qualitative research with women who have experienced homelessness shows that they view themselves as survivors, and that recovery involves a shift in self-perception and restored feelings of agency, autonomy, and competence.<sup>35, 36</sup> This process of recovery occurs through the opportunity to process and repair the social and personal impacts of homelessness and its antecedents.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Johnson, G., Ribar, D. and Zhu, A. (2017) Women's Homelessness: International Evidence on Causes, Consequences, Coping and Policies. Life Course Centre Working Paper Series. Life Course Centre, Melbourne. No. 2017-06.

<sup>26</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) *Australia's children*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 15 March 2024.

<sup>27</sup> Warburton W, Whittaker E, Papic M. Homelessness Pathways for Australian Single Mothers and Their Children: An Exploratory Study. *Societies*. 2018; 8(1):16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8010016>

<sup>28</sup> Cobb-Clark, D. and Zhu, A. (2015) Childhood Homelessness and Adult Employment: The Role of Education, Incarceration, and Welfare Receipt. Melbourne Institute Working Paper No. 18/15.

<sup>29</sup> Chamberlain, C., & Johnson, G. (2013). Pathways into adult homelessness. *Journal of Sociology*, 49(1), 60-77.

<sup>30</sup> Warburton W, Whittaker E, Papic M. Homelessness Pathways for Australian Single Mothers and Their Children: An Exploratory Study. *Societies*. 2018; 8(1):16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8010016>

<sup>31</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) *Australia's children*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 15 March 2024.

<sup>32</sup> Warburton W, Whittaker E, Papic M. Homelessness Pathways for Australian Single Mothers and Their Children: An Exploratory Study. *Societies*. 2018; 8(1):16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8010016>

<sup>33</sup> Milaney, K., Williams, N., Lockerbie, S.L. et al. (2020) Recognizing and responding to women experiencing homelessness with gendered and trauma-informed care. *BMC Public Health* 20, 397.

<sup>34</sup> O'Campo P, Nisenbaum R, Crocker AG, Nicholls T, Eiboff F, Adair CE. (2023) Women experiencing homelessness and mental illness in a Housing First multi-site trial: Looking beyond housing to social outcomes and well-being. *PLoS One*. 2023 Feb 10; 18(2) :e0277074. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9916643/>

<sup>35</sup> Phipps, M, Dalton, L, Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2021) A qualitative exploration of women's resilience in the face of homelessness, *Journal of Community Psychology*. 2021;1-16.

<sup>36</sup> Phipps, M, Dalton, L, Maxwell, H and Cleary, M. (2021) More than a house: Women's recovery from homelessness in Australia. *Health and Social Care in the Community*. 2021; 00:1-11.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

In an international randomised controlled trial, which included the largest longitudinal sample of women experiencing homelessness to date, it was found that while a gender-neutral approach to Housing First resulted in an increase in length of housing stability, there was no improvement in social and mental health outcomes when compared to treatment as usual.<sup>38</sup> Recommendations from this study included ensuring that Housing First initiatives are tailored to women, that support provided addresses trauma and social connection, that time-limited support may not be sufficient to ensure recovery from homelessness, and the need for definitions of housing stability that consider safety, security and feelings of home.<sup>39</sup>

The National Plan to End Violence against Women and their Children reinforces that trauma-informed and person-centred approaches are needed to address barriers to recovery and healing. These approaches minimise the risk that victim-survivors will be re-traumatised and harmed when accessing services and systems.<sup>40</sup>

### **Emerging Practices: Holistic Support Models from Across the Alliance**

This paper has highlighted the range of diverse support needs associated with homelessness and family violence and the critical importance of holistic, person-centred support models. Among members of the WHA, there are examples of such models in practice, two of which are highlighted below.

**McAuley Community Services for Women** offer an integrated service model that aims to ensure women and their children experiencing family violence and/or homelessness are connected to the right services at the right time. During this project's Discovery Phase, this model of operation emerged as one of the closest to providing an integrated family violence and homelessness response. However, it must be noted that the resources of affordable housing and government funding are required to make it sustainable and scalable across the state.

McAuley provides multiple accommodation options from crisis to longer-term supported housing. The integrated model aims to give women access to critical support services without the burden of self-navigating through multiple service systems. For instance, McAuley House provides women who have experienced family violence with longer-term supported accommodation for up to two years, assisting with skill building, achieving stability and recovery. The support provided is through using an integrated partnership model whereby McAuley provides central case management and family violence, housing, life skills and social inclusion programs, while partner agencies provide mental health, general health, finance and legal support at McAuley House. Women work with a housing worker

<sup>38</sup> O'Campo P, Nisenbaum R, Crocker AG, Nicholls T, Eiboff F, Adair CE. (2023) Women experiencing homelessness and mental illness in a Housing First multi-site trial: Looking beyond housing to social outcomes and well-being. PLoS One. 2023 Feb 10; 18(2):e0277074.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Department of Social Services (2022) National Plan to End Violence against Women and their Children 2022-2032. Commonwealth of Australia.

throughout their stay at McAuley house and with support are often able to transition into independent housing within nine months. starting support.

Over the past four years, **Juno** have trialled a holistic, trauma-informed coaching program that is designed to support women (trans and cis) and non-binary people build economic mobility. The program was adapted from, and maintains fidelity to, the evidence-based Economic Mobility Pathways program from the US. Juno has employed the model with participants after homelessness, family violence and/or homelessness case management are complete.

The program supports participants as they make changes across the domains of family stability (housing and family), wellbeing (health and social wellbeing), financial management (savings/debt and financial wellbeing), career (career and education) and income (income and employment). The model recognises the impact trauma has had on agency and self-belief and supports recovery from these impacts. Coaches work intensively with participants over 18-24 months to set goals across these domains.

Evaluation results show this capacity building model has resulted in significant improvements, such as:

- all participants attaining safe and affordable housing
- participants saw an overall income increase by a median 46% (from \$1,000 to \$1,463)
- 76% of program participants were engaged in employment and education by program end, and
- personal wellbeing scores for program participants rose from the compromised range at the start of the program to above the Victorian average by program end (an average 25.2 point shift) (Juno evaluation).

In addition to coaching, EMPOWER also includes a peer support program, which connects participants and provides opportunities for shared learning. Coaches recognised this social connection dimension as critical to the program's success.

While these two models differ in approach, they both demonstrate the importance of extended support, a recovery focus, and a central case manager or coach who can facilitate linkages to support services to enable healing from trauma and family violence.

## **Finding 4b – Both local and international models for effective gender-informed homelessness responses for women exist.**

The WHA commends the Victorian State government for investing in Housing First programs in Victoria. As an Alliance, we believe this model needs to be adapted with clear gender informed considerations to be suitable for women and non-binary people, particularly survivors of family violence. Internationally, there is an emerging evidence base, stemming from evaluations of trials and projects in Europe, USA and Canada, on how to successfully adapt Housing First programs to

meet the needs of women.<sup>41, 42, 43, 44, 45</sup> There have been some highly successful international pilot programs specifically focused on adapting the Housing First model specifically for survivors of family violence.<sup>46, 47, 48, 49</sup>

### **Emerging Practice: Exit Pathways out of Refuge and Viv's Place**

In recent years, there has also been important investment to increase housing options for survivors of gender-based violence. This has included capital investment to build **Viv's Place**, a social housing program that provides purpose-built accommodation for victim-survivors of family violence. Another initiative, the **Exit Pathways from Refuge project**, connects victim-survivors with private rental properties at a subsidised rate for 18 months. Both projects can provide a more direct pathway from refuge into safe, secure accommodation.

Launched as a pilot in 2023 with joint funding from state and federal governments, the Exit Pathways Out of Refuge project seeks to enhance victim-survivors' access to private rental housing following family violence crises. The WHA interviewed Haven Home Safe, who are currently leading the regional project for the Barwon and Northern Eastern Metropolitan Melbourne regions. Haven is also the tenancy manager for the project.

The project enables victim-survivors, most commonly women, to secure an affordable rental property of their choice, with Haven acting as the head-lease holder on their behalf. The tenant then subleases from the agent on a sliding, subsidised scale of rent, gradually increasing to 100% by the end of the project. The project offers potential benefits such as increased housing choice and the opportunity for tenants to build rental history. This project is mid-way through delivery at the time of writing this report.

<sup>41</sup> FEANTSA and Housing First Europe Hub (2022) Housing First & Women: Case studies from across Europe. <https://www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2022/03/10/publication-housing-first-women-case-studies-from-across-europe>

<sup>42</sup> Mbilinyi, L. (2015) The Washing State Domestic Violence Housing First Program Final Evaluation Report. Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/dvvhf-demonstration-evaluation>

<sup>43</sup> Oudshoorn, Abe & Forchuk, Cheryl & Hall, Jodi & Smith-Carrier, Tracy & Berkum, Amy. (2018) An evaluation of a Housing First program for chronically homeless women. *Journal of Social Inclusion*. 9. 34.

<sup>44</sup> O'Campo P, Nisenbaum R, Crocker AG, Nicholls T, Eiboff F, Adair CE. (2023) Women experiencing homelessness and mental illness in a Housing First multi-site trial: Looking beyond housing to social outcomes and well-being. *PLoS One*. 2023 Feb 10; 18(2):e0277074.

<sup>45</sup> Scott, F. (2013) Housing First Case Studies, Vancouver, British Columbia: The Vivian. Canadian Homelessness Research Network. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/33-vancouver-british-columbia-vivian>

<sup>46</sup> Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (2020) Whole Housing Approach Toolkit <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/innovations-in-practice/whole-housing-approach/guidance-resources/> and Standing Together (2021) A Whole Housing Approach to Domestic Abuse. London, UK.

<sup>47</sup> The Centre for Social Justice (2023) Home for Good: Housing First for domestic abuse survivors. The Centre for Social Justice, Westminster, UK. <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/home-for-good-housing-first-for-domestic-abuse-survivors>

<sup>48</sup> Cris M. Sullivan & Linda Olsen (2016) Common ground, complementary approaches: adapting the Housing First model for domestic violence survivors, *Housing and Society*, 43:3, 182-194.

<sup>49</sup> Ward-Lasher, A, Messing, J and Stein-Seroussi, J. (2017) Implementation of Trauma-Informed Care in a Housing First Program for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence: A Case Study. *Advances in Social Work* Vol. 18 No. 1 (Spring 2017), 202-216.

Viv's Place operates under a social housing lease model, where victim-survivors and their children can move directly into self-contained accommodation within a secure, purpose-designed apartment building managed by Launch Housing. Expert interviews indicate that the model has been working well for a lot of tenants, particularly those with high security needs.

Viv's Place not only provides safe, secure accommodation to victim-survivors, it facilitates access to wrap-around support for parents and children to assist the recovery from family violence. The project requires strong connection to family violence case management support post-housing as some tenants may have been referred without staying first in refuge.

Our interview with Launch Housing revealed that operational support for the project, meaning their foyer/concierge supports and coordination, did not have ongoing funding from the government past the FY2025. To facilitate the number of support partnerships needed by their tenants, this funding is critical.

A key challenge in supporting victim-survivors to engage in both of these fantastic programs is also ensuring adequate funding for longer-term family violence case management and recovery supports.

A pilot project in the US aimed at developing a tailored approach to Housing First for victim-survivors of family violence led to the establishment of a model known as DVHF (Domestic Violence Housing First), operated by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence from 2011-2014. During this period, the program supported 681 survivors and 937 children under the age of 17.<sup>50</sup> The evaluation found that 96% of survivors retained their housing 18 months after entering the DVHF program, and at the final evaluation, 88% of those able to be contacted had secured permanent housing.<sup>51, 52</sup>

The program had a focus on survivor-led housing choices which resulted in 45% of survivors being able to remain in their own homes, with financial assistance from the program.<sup>53</sup> Review of DVHF led to the identification of four key service pillars:

1. Survivor-driven, mobile advocacy;
2. Flexible engagement, including flexible funding;
3. Trauma-informed practice; and

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<sup>50</sup> Note: Per program criteria, the DVHF model worked with survivors of domestic violence with the following gender breakdown amongst participants: men (2%) and women (98%). Mbilinyi, L. (2015) The Washing State Domestic Violence Housing First Program Final Evaluation Report. Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/dvvhf-demonstration-evaluation>

<sup>51</sup> Cris M. Sullivan & Linda Olsen (2016) Common ground, complementary approaches: adapting the Housing First model for domestic violence survivors, *Housing and Society*, 43:3, 182-194.

<sup>52</sup> Mbilinyi, L. (2015) The Washing State Domestic Violence Housing First Program Cohort 2 Final Evaluation Report. Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/dvvhf-demonstration-evaluation>

<sup>53</sup> Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2020) What We've Learned: Domestic Violence Housing First. <https://wscadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Medium-Report-2020.pdf>

4. Community engagement (see Figure below).<sup>54</sup>

**Figure 3: Key service pillars of the DVHF model**



In reviewing the pilot results, DVHF was found to be an effective model for stabilising housing for victim-survivors of family violence. Participants also reported additional benefits such as increased safety and well-being, and restored dignity.<sup>55</sup> The evaluation emphasised the need for both survivors and their children to receive support for the impacts of trauma. It also highlighted that the model can only be effective if there is availability of affordable housing.<sup>56</sup>

In the UK, a review of several pilots of gender-informed Housing First approaches tailored to diverse groups — including family violence victim-survivors, criminalised women and women with multiple and complex needs — found that they are highly effective in delivering a sustained exit from homelessness and significant cost savings. This includes tenancy sustainment rates of between 85-90% and, in one pilot, a cost benefit ratio of £1:2.51.<sup>57</sup> Evaluation findings have also shown improvements in mental and physical health, reduced substance use, reduced offending, and participants feeling being able to address histories of trauma and violence.<sup>58</sup> These models have a high degree of fidelity to the principles of Housing First, with housing and support provided by different agencies through partnership agreements.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Cris M. Sullivan & Linda Olsen (2016) Common ground, complementary approaches: adapting the Housing First model for domestic violence survivors, *Housing and Society*, 43:3, 182-194.

<sup>57</sup> The Centre for Social Justice (2023) Home for Good: Housing First for domestic abuse survivors. The Centre for Social Justice, Westminster, UK. <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/home-for-good-housing-first-for-domestic-abuse-survivors>

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Principles identified as contributing to the success of the gender-informed Housing First pilots in the UK include:

- reliable and rapid access to suitable accommodation,
- information campaigns to address misinformation and stigma associated with family violence,
- community outreach to connect with survivors who avoid services or do not identify as at risk,
- small caseloads,
- an emphasis on addressing trauma,
- partnership and multi-agency approaches,
- data sharing,
- working with perpetrators and people choosing to use violence to meet their needs and thereby increase safety for survivors, and
- inclusive approaches that engage specialist services who are 'by and for' the communities they work with.<sup>60</sup>

In reviewing the success of these pilots, an expanded model is being proposed. This model would adopt an early intervention approach, working with women at risk of homelessness and accepting self-referrals with a focus on community engagement to meet the needs of women at risk of homelessness from family violence before a crisis hits.<sup>61</sup>

In summary, several recurring themes emerged from across these successful pilots which are useful to draw out and consider as learnings for potential implementation in a local context. These include:

- **Trauma-informed support is critical and involves several key components: the provision of physical and emotional safety, prioritising choice and control across all areas including allocation of housing, specialised training for staff, and recognising that if trauma is not sensitively addressed it can hinder engagement and successful outcomes. Trauma is understood and addressed expansively and can include trauma from experiences of homelessness, experiences of violence and abuse, and/or as a result of separation from children.**
- **Ongoing safety planning across the life of the program is built into program design, recognising that family violence risk can reappear at any stage of engagement and must be planned for. This can include support to move into alternative long-term housing during the program.**
- **Holistic support that is not limited to the provision of housing but is tailored to the individual and their identified needs. This looks different across different programs, however, often includes**

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

**intensive, flexible and long-term outreach case management, family violence support, mental health support, alcohol and other drug support, legal support and flexible funding.**

- Ongoing access to support for between two to three years is common across these pilots, with many finding a tapering of support intensity as participants progress.**
- Supporting parenting is crucial for supporting recovery, enabling positive outcomes and reducing barriers to participation. It is noted in several of the pilots that the grief and loss associated with separation from children is poorly attended to, and that these pilots provided a unique opportunity to acknowledge this distress and support participants both to reunify with children and to address the impacts of separation.<sup>62, 63</sup>**
- Partnership approaches that involve the bringing together of a range of agencies with different specialisations across housing, homelessness and family violence have been critical to developing and delivering these pilots successfully. Partnership agreements and collaborative processes have been identified as key factors contributing to success.**
- Community engagement and advocacy to address stigma, misunderstanding and misinformation in relation to women's homelessness and family violence have equally been identified as important enablers of success in program delivery and outcomes.**

The successes and learnings gleaned from these models, both locally and internationally, provide an emerging evidence base that the Alliance can draw from and build upon in creating effective evidence-based and gender-informed housing and support solutions for women and non-binary people experiencing and at risk of homelessness in Victoria.

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<sup>62</sup> Oudshoorn, Abe & Forchuk, Cheryl & Hall, Jodi & Smith-Carrier, Tracy & Berkum, Amy. (2018) An evaluation of a Housing First program for chronically homeless women. *Journal of Social Inclusion*. 9. 34.

<sup>63</sup> The Centre for Social Justice (2023) Home for Good: Housing First for domestic abuse survivors. The Centre for Social Justice, Westminster, UK. <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/home-for-good-housing-first-for-domestic-abuse-survivors>

## Recommendations

12. Recognition in policy and practice that exit from homelessness involves both assistance to obtain housing and support to address experiences that preceded and occurred during periods of homelessness.
13. Housing and homelessness support must prioritise a trauma-informed approach that centres physical and emotional safety and continues post-housing, with the capacity to address trauma recovery.
14. Children and young people must be included in the design and delivery of homelessness responses and their needs considered both independently and in partnership with the needs of their primary caregiver to ensure they receive the support they need and that outcomes are in their best interests.
15. Dedicated funding for gender-informed Housing First programs is essential to build a local evidence base on what works to end homelessness for women and non-binary people.
16. Learn from the international evidence base on effective Housing First responses for women and victim-survivors of family violence.