

Calling All Landlords: Every Room Counts DV victims in need of housing for fresh start

By David Schlinkert
Policy Analyst

Domestic Violence in Phoenix

Two years ago in Phoenix a mother of four was beaten by her husband several weeks before she was expecting another child. Following her miscarriage, she left her husband to stay with her sister. The abuser continued making threats and the woman called the social work office at the International Rescue Committee (IRC). She asked for help in finding a safe place to take her children. The IRC called every hotline and domestic violence (DV) shelter in the Valley, but it was the summer in Phoenix, and all of the DV shelters were full, so she was put on a waiting list.

Violent threats again were made so the agency called DV Stop's Emergency hotline and she was placed in an emergency hotel on the other side of the Valley while she awaited a shelter bed. She lost her job because of an impossible commute, which led to a loss of financial independence, childcare, transportation to doctors' appointments and her ability to support her family.

She could not survive without a timely intervention and when the system could not support her with the services she needed, she had little choice but to go back to her abuser and the DV cycle continued.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident but a reoccurring theme.

The encouraging news is that solutions do exist, and housing is the key to stabilizing and empowering individuals and families, which, in turn, creates healthier communities and benefits all Arizonans.

Domestic Violence in Arizona

In Arizona, housing continues to be the most urgent need facing DV victims, with 154 unmet requests for emergency or transitional housing services on a single day in 2014.¹ Further complicating the situation, Arizona ranks in the bottom five states in the nation for affordable housing units.² Arizona's cash assistance program provides only \$164 a month per individual paying their own rent. Using the Department of Economic Security's (DES) Income Eligibility Guidelines, a single mother would have to have 10 children in order to be able to afford a one-bedroom apartment at Phoenix's Fair Market Rent (FMR).^{3 4 5 6}

Domestic violence is known for being an underreported crime but it did manifest itself through innumerable traumatic brain injuries and 109 deaths in Arizona last year. DV also creates less-visible ripples: intergenerational violence, a lack of self-worth and a crippling reliance on the abuser.

Arizona ranks eighth nationally for the number of calls to the National Domestic Violence Hotline and 41 percent of those calls are from Phoenix.⁷ Approximately 15 percent, or 4,953 individuals, who entered into homeless shelters in Arizona in 2014 did so because of DV, and 7,428 parents and children were served by DV shelter and transitional housing services in 2015.^{8 9}

Scattered-Site Housing Tools

Scattered-site housing can be a cost-effective alternative to expensive emergency shelters when assisting homeless families secure housing.¹⁰ There are three types of housing tools that utilize scattered-site apartments: Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, Rapid Re-housing and Permanent Supportive Housing.

- Section 8 vouchers are housing subsidies that help very low-income individuals enter into housing.
- Rapid Re-Housing is distributed by housing providers that receive federal grants and they connect homeless individuals, including DV victims, to housing units through tailored packages that may include limited financial assistance and targeted supportive services.¹¹
- Permanent Supportive Housing provides continued rental support to homeless individuals, and it can be offered in site-based developments or in scattered-site units.¹²

These housing programs enable individuals and families to regain control over their lives, helping them forgo government welfare systems faster because they have stability and can find gainful employment.

Even with these housing tools, it can be difficult for housing providers in Arizona to move families into housing because there are not enough housing units available for low-income individuals and families in transition. A major indicator of the lack of affordable housing in Arizona is the fact that there has been a significant decline in the rental vacancy rate.

Vacancy rates have trended downward since the Great Recession, from 18 percent in 2009 to 5 percent in 2016.¹³ Furthermore, Class C units, the type of unit most commonly used for rapid rehousing, have a present vacancy rate of only 2.5 percent, which makes it difficult for housing providers to procure apartments for individuals and families in need.¹⁴

Housing Options in Arizona: Present Issues

Arizona's domestic violence providers have made great strides in reducing the amount of days that DV victims spend in emergency shelters. This is important because there is a strong relationship between the amount of time that a domestic violence victim and their family remain in emergency shelters and their long-term financial and emotional recovery.

This relationship also is important to the taxpayer and individuals and organizations that donate to nonprofits that support DV survivors. It costs approximately \$2,000 a month to house a DV victim in an emergency shelter, whereas it costs Maricopa County's Fair Market Rate of \$757 a month to move them into their own apartment. Additionally, all families are required to pay 30 percent of their income towards their housing when they use a Section 8 voucher, further reducing costs. Moving families out of emergency shelter beds saves taxpayers dollars, especially when considering the fact that 283,170 emergency shelter bed nights were used in the state of Arizona in 2016.¹⁵

Many federally funded housing programs have developed an evidence-based approach to their programs, and rapid rehousing has shown to be the most cost-effective and successful long-term housing model. If we know that rapid rehousing is one the most effective methods in assisting DV survivors stabilize their housing, the question could be asked: Why are DV victims spending an average of six to eight weeks in an emergency shelter?

Arizona was one of the hardest-hit states during the Great Recession, and now that the economy has rebounded there is less incentive for landlords to rent to low-income individuals with less than stellar credit history. Basic economic principles and a strong businesses sense logically lead landlords to rent their apartments to those with the best credit history because they appear to be the least likely to default on their rental payments. Many DV victims, however, suffer from financial abuse from their offenders, which leads to a bad credit history.

All of these housing complexities leave DV victim advocates asking: What can be done to increase the available housing stock for DV families escaping violence?

Alternative Solutions

Despite the adage that real estate is all about “location, location, location,” when it comes to renting to DV tenants earning minimum wage or less it’s about location, understanding and targeted support.

1. Location
 - a. Housing units need to be available in parts of town where jobs, childcare and reliable and manageable commutes exist for tenants.
2. Understanding
 - a. Landlords can benefit from understanding their tenants’ situations and concerns, and landlords do not need to fear renting to DV survivors.
 - i. The nonprofit *Emerge! Center Against Domestic Abuse* in Tucson follows-up with DV victims who go through their DV program. They have found that 94 percent of DV victims are in stable housing 12-18 months after they leave their abuser.
 - ii. The Arizona Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) helps victims of DV from being located through by their perpetrator through public records.
 - b. Tenants in distress need housing that offers them choice and flexibility.
 - c. Tenants with a Section 8 voucher are screened for leasing eligibility and, depending on their circumstances, some or all of their rent is guaranteed.
 - d. DV survivors and DV housing providers do not want handouts and they don’t expect landlords to run a housing charity.
3. Targeted Support
 - a. Landlords can donate a unit to a DV victim and their family, and then write that unit off on their taxes. (Landlords should speak with a tax professional about this advantage.)
 - b. Landlords can make tax-deductible donations to DV housing providers.
 - c. Section 8, Rapid Rehousing, and Permanent Supportive Housing providers can subsidize rents for DV victims for up to a year.
 - d. If landlords offer subsidized rents, they can post their properties for free on [Socialserve.com](https://socialserve.com).
 - e. Wrap-around services such as case management, mental and physical health services and benefits programs are available to DV victims even after they move into an apartment.

DV victims are not alone in their search for affordable housing, there are several other populations in need, such as: veterans, seniors, chronically homeless, Severely Mentally Ill (SMI), individuals with disabilities, substance abuse, and individuals timing out of foster care, institutional and criminal justice systems.

At a time when less public money is going to be available for scattered-site DV housing efforts, every room counts.

Landlords interested in working with providing or setting aside housing units for DV victims or other individuals in need of housing, please contact:

Organization	Contact Person	Phone	Email and Website
A New Leaf – (HOM Inc.)	Leah Bond, Lead Housing Program Specialist	(602) 507-6741	leahbond@hominc.com Or submit your unit directly to HOM Inc.'s Landlord Courtesy Listing: http://www.hominc.com/courtesy.aspx
AZCEND	Martha Myers	(480) 963-1423 ext. 111	http://azcend.org/contact-us/
Central Arizona Shelter Services (CASS) – (Arizona Housing, Inc.)	Administration Office	(602) 256-6945	http://www.cassaz.org/contact.html
Chicanos Por La Causa	Janica Camacho Marquez – Housing Navigator	602-695-0576	jmarquez@tiempoinc.com
Community Bridges Inc. - (HOM Inc.)	Angelique Munoz, Lead Housing Program Specialist	(602) 507-6743	angelique@hominc.com
Mercy Maricopa Integrated Care (MMIC) – La Frontera/ Empact or Marc Community Resources	Angela Sheesley, Program Manager Or, Stephanie Oen	(480) 784-1514 (480) 330-5071	Angela.Sheesley@lafrontera-empact.org stephanie.oen@marccr.com
Save the Family	Nicky Stevens, Chief Programs Officer	(480) 898-0228	Nicky.Stevens@savethefamily.org

UMOM New Day Centers – (HOM Inc.)	Janet Flores, Lead Housing Program Specialist	(602) 507-6976	janetflores@hominc.com
US Veterans	Jeff Willgale	(602) 248-6040	https://www.phoenix.va.gov/services/homeless/index.asp

The City of Phoenix Housing Department offers [Section 8 housing classes](#).

¹ Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization 2013 – Housing Provisions. <http://www.azcadv.org/azcadv2014wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/ACESDV-Fact-sheet-on-VAWA-2013-Housing.pdf> & <http://www.azcadv.org/azcadv2014wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2014-fatality-report-revised-FINAL-draft.pdf>

² Affordable Housing Finance. Report: Affordable Rental Units Lacking for Extremely Low-Income Households. 2016. http://www.housingfinance.com/policy-legislation/report-only-31-affordable-rental-units-available-for-every-100-extremely-low-income-households_o

³ Arizona Department of Economic Security. Cash Assistance (CA) Income Eligibility Guidelines. 2017. <https://des.az.gov/content/cash-assistance-ca-income-eligibility-guidelines>

⁴ Housing and Urban Development. FY 2017 FAIR MARKET RENT DOCUMENTATION SYSTEM. https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2017_code/select_Geography.odn

⁵ Arizona Department of Economic Security. 2017. Cash Assistance – Overview. <https://des.az.gov/content/cash-assistance-overview>

⁶ Despite the preconception that people on welfare have large families, Arizona’s average family on welfare has only 1.71 children.

⁷ Sojourner Center. Domestic Violence Facts. 2014. <https://www.sojournercenter.org/about-us/facts-domestic-violence/>

⁸ Department of Economic Security. 2016. Domestic Violence Information. <https://des.az.gov/services/basic-needs/domestic-violence/domestic-violence-data>

⁹ Department of Economic Security. Homelessness in Arizona 2015 Annual Report.

https://des.az.gov/sites/default/files/dl/des_annual_homeless_report_2015.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/Costs_Homeless.pdf

¹¹ HUD Exchange. Rapid Re-Housing Brief. 2014. <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3891/rapid-re-housing-brief/>

¹² Permanent Supportive Housing. 2017. Arizona Housing Coalition. <http://azceh.org/permanent-supportive-housing>

¹³ Historical Rental Vacancy Trends. <https://public.tableau.com/profile/durhamopeningdoors#!/vizhome/shared/FJGQMWD2W>

¹⁴ Rental Housing Journal Arizona. September 2017

¹⁵ Arizona Department of Economic Security. 2017. Domestic Violence Information. <https://des.az.gov/services/basic-needs/domestic-violence/domestic-violence-data>