



Domestic Violence and Affordable Housing

The 2005 Hunger and Homelessness Survey conducted by the United States Conference of Mayors concluded that half of the surveyed cities reported that domestic violence is a primary cause of homelessness. In addition Congress found that 92% of homeless women had experienced severe physical or sexual abuse in their lifetimes.

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Locating decent, safe and affordable housing in Florida is a daunting task for any low income household, but for victims of domestic violence it can be a much more serious matter.

This summer, at the invitation of The Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, technical advisors from the Florida Housing Coalition provided an intensive two day affordable housing workshop designed for executives and staff of certified Domestic Violence (DV) centers. While shelter and transitional housing continue to be the traditional models for DV survivors, the shortage of permanent affordable rentals is an ongoing concern.

The workshop participants got a crash course in rental development, funding sources and property management. The information helped some participants to determine that taking on the role of “developer” was not a business line they chose to pursue. Those agencies were encouraged to



explore partnerships with other non profits and housing groups in their area. Other attendees embraced the idea of producing rental units specifically for their clientele and welcomed the opportunity to add housing to the array of services they already provide.

The group also learned the importance of advocating for their clients during the public comment processes at the local government level so that SHIP, HOME and other housing funds could be targeted specifically to victims of domestic violence.

Rosa Ramos Morgan, Director of Economic Justice and Special Initiative at the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, provided valuable information on Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). In January 2006, Federal legislation amended VAWA to include important protections for victims of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking. Here are some highlights:



- Local housing plans must include housing needs of these victims in the Public Housing Agency’s five year plan, PHA annual plan and the local HUD consolidated plan.
- HUD issued guidance in 2006 for VAWA implementation through PIH 2006-23, however, no HUD regulations have been issued at this time.
- VAWA protections apply only to tenants receiving federally funded housing vouchers or living in federally funded public housing.
- The law prohibits PHAs and private landlords accepting housing choice vouchers (Section 8) from evicting victims due to criminal activity “directly related” to incidents of domestic violence, dating violence and/or stalking (ie, police called for loud disturbance).
- Provisions in the law allow for “lease bifurcation”. This means that the lease can be divided to evict only the perpetrator of the violence, allowing the victim to remain.
- Allows for “voucher portability” for households who are moving to protect the health and safety of a DV victim as long as they are in compliance with all other obligations of the housing program.
- VAWA makes it illegal to reject an applicant for public housing or a housing choice voucher because the applicant is a DV or stalking victim.

Domestic Violence affects women (and to lesser extent, men) of all income categories, ages and social classes. If someone you know is affected by intimate partner violence, reach out and let them know that help is available and that all services are strictly confidential. HOTLINE 1-800-500-1119

FLORIDA COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

www.fcadv.org

It is important to note that, although this legislation became effective over two years ago, many DV victims encounter resistance from landlords and in some cases, even from Housing Authorities, regarding proper enforcement. The Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence can provide training, technical assistance and legal referrals for advocates and their clients. Contact them at www.fcadv.org or 850-425-2749. 

ROSENE’S SUCCESS HOUSE

For the past several years, the Florida Housing Finance Corporation (FHFC) has made a special allocation of SAIL (State Apartment Incentive Loan) funding available to nonprofit agencies for the development or renovation of rental housing for targeted groups, including low income victims of domestic violence. Watch for information and announcements regarding this special needs funding at www.floridahousing.org - click the Special Needs tab. In August, over \$12 million was awarded to seven projects from the 2008 round.

Two years ago, the Desoto County Homeless Coalition. Inc. was awarded \$1.5 million of SAIL funds from the Florida Housing Finance Corporation’s “Special Housing and Assistance Development Program” to develop Rosene’s Success House. The facility is named in honor of 92 year old Rosene McQueen who provided struggling individuals and families with free rooms at her boarding home in Arcadia. Guests stayed

until they were able to return to their normal home environment or until they were financially stable. Many lives were transformed through her generosity.

Continuing Rosene’s vision, the new 17 unit Success House and adjacent Activities Building will assist victims of domestic violence and other targeted households for up to 24 months. During their residency clients will receive the supportive services they need along with a safe and affordable place to live.

According to Mirna Marcia, a Rural Victim Advocate at the Safe Place and Rape Crisis Center (SPARCC) of Sarasota, approximately 15-20 homeless and potentially homeless women each year are transported from DeSoto County to be housed elsewhere. SPARCC is working in partnership with DeSoto County Homeless Coalition, Inc. to meet the needs of this population. Rosene’s Success House will allow these victims of domestic violence and their families to stay

in their neighborhood so their children can remain in the local school system, adding some normalcy to a stressful situation

The two million dollar project got underway in January 2007 when the Desoto County Housing Authority entered into an agreement to sell a tract of land in Arcadia to the Homeless Coalition for just \$1. The \$1.5 million in SAIL was leveraged with \$175,000 from the FHFC Pre-development Loan Program and \$500,000 from The Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta. The project is expected to break ground in early 2009 for completion later the same year.

“Our core values are to provide C.P.R.” said Valerie Gilchrist, Homeless Coalition President, “Compassion toward every person we serve, Provide resources to increase their quality of life, and Respect without judgment. Our goal is to transform lives by equipping minds with the keys to life that will open the doors of opportunity.”