



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS
Aligning Domestic Violence and Homeless Services in Los Angeles

Survivor
Focus
Group
Findings

SUMMARY

The Domestic Violence Homeless Services Coalition (DV-HS) formed to create a client centered system of shared values and responsibilities that increases access to safe housing and supportive services for survivors of domestic violence and their families.

To ensure the voices of survivors inform our work ahead, in September and October of 2017, 11 focus groups in seven of the eight service areas of Los Angeles were conducted with 73 participants. Focus groups were facilitated by members of the DV-HS Coalition's *Client Centered Workgroup* and were hosted in an even mix of residential and non-residential domestic violence and homeless services for women throughout Los Angeles County. (Two more focus groups are scheduled – one in the eighth service area and one within the LGBTQ community. The full report will be available in December 2017.)

The findings from these focus groups were stark. Participants in all groups consistently described challenging services experiences which not only interfered with their ability to obtain support and housing, but very often reinforced their lack of power/choice, and re-traumatized them in the process. Participants recounted feeling judged and dismissed when interacting with providers. Many felt as though they had no recourse and a few expressed a conscious decision not to engage with supportive services systems any further.

It is clear when listening to survivors of domestic violence that service delivery in both the Homeless Services and Domestic Violence sectors is, at best, inadequate, and in many cases harmful. As providers and leaders in both sectors, we are in a position to change how we do business by listening to the experiences of survivors and acting on their recommendations with intention.

Following is a list of the prominent themes raised in the focus groups and recommendations for moving forward, as well as demographic survey data.

PROMINENT THEMES:

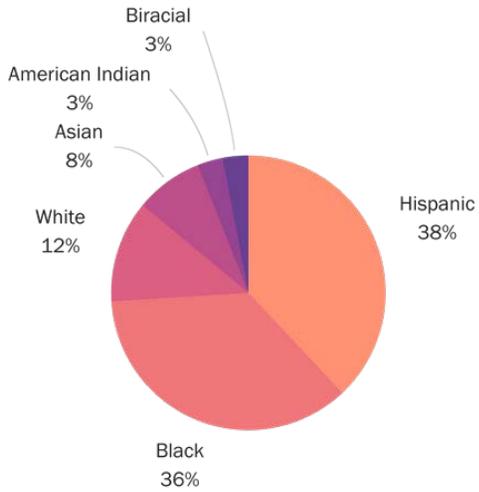
1. Perceive feeling judged and that their experiences are questioned by police and service providers when they are seeking services, often resulting in the women altering their personal narrative for the purpose of receiving services.
2. Challenging to access services when needed. Women feel hopeless when services are not available. Intake processes, waitlists, and program guidelines are frequently re-traumatizing.
3. Expressed need to live in a community of choice, even if still near former partner. Desire to maintain support network as much as possible, even when fleeing an abusive partner.
4. Resounding need for more assistance to locate safe and affordable housing in a timely manner that coincides with shelter stay.
5. Extensive trauma histories and complex experiences when surviving violence and housing instability.
6. Living with multiple health complications attributed to domestic violence.
7. Lengthy process to regain trust with others, including themselves, friends/family, and service providers.
8. Feeling that safety increased when helpful services were obtained; feeling safe and that their voice was regained once they were free from the abuse, received adequate legal assistance, and were provided with other needed services.
9. Desire for more awareness, access, and easier navigation of impactful services, especially for women whose needs are culturally specific.
10. Desire to give back to others in similar situations and participate in advocacy efforts to effect systems change. Increased knowledge about DV dynamics and resources made them feel more empowered to make informed choices for themselves and their children.
11. Need additional support to ensure landlords do not take advantage of them or discriminate, especially for women without documentation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

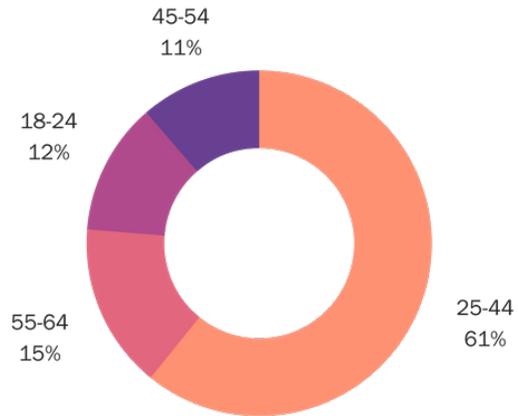
1. Increase access to affordable and safe housing.
2. Provide trauma-informed services, including improvements to intake process and streamlining services for more immediate access.
3. Increase the care coordination amongst service providers to provide access and comprehensive resources such as, mental health treatment, childcare, transportation, and employment opportunities.
4. Limit restrictions to qualify for services, not just when fleeing an abusive environment, but throughout the various stages of a survivor's recovery.
5. Foster opportunities for peer support, including advocacy efforts and support groups.
6. Acknowledge linguistic limitations by providing translation services, especially for complex matters regarding legal and medical matters.
7. Provide field-based accompaniment services for restraining orders, obtaining public benefits, and searching for safe and affordable housing, among other services.
8. Contribute de-stigmatizing efforts around domestic violence and homelessness to increase awareness of services and inroads to receiving help.
9. Through outreach and education, develop rental assistance programs that foster effective relationships between landlords and survivors.
10. Increase access to information regarding legal rights of survivors, including information about housing, protecting custody of children, and obtaining restraining orders.
11. Begin a larger initiative to provide Trauma-Informed Care trainings to domestic violence and homeless service providers to mitigate the re-traumatization of survivors.
12. Increase services to those without documentation, including legal assistance, language classes, support groups, and vocational opportunities.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

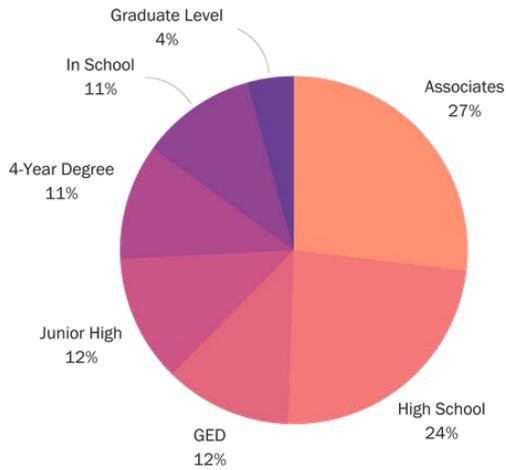
Race and Ethnicity



Age

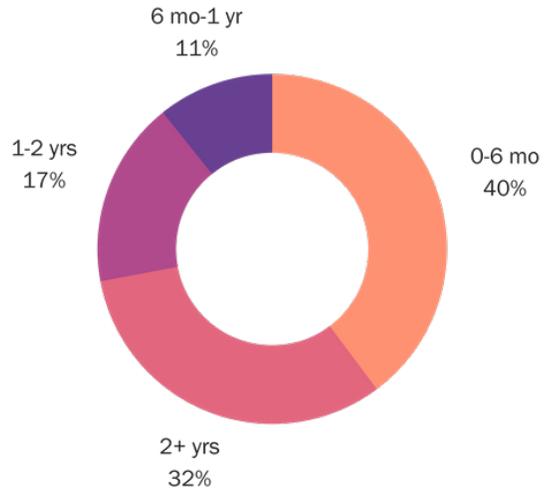


Education



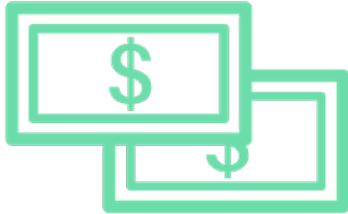
Last Experience of DV

Physical, emotional, financial, and/or sexual

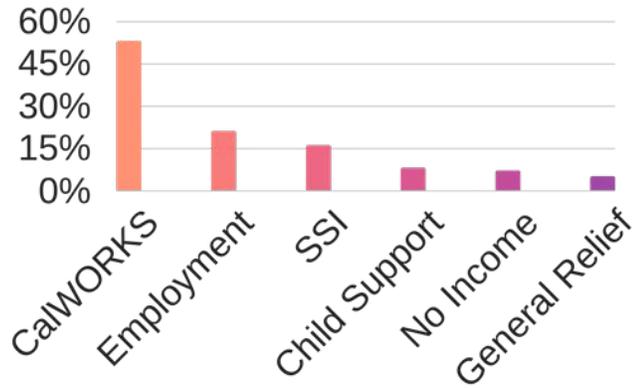


Average Monthly Income

\$607.12



Types of Income



Homelessness

90%

have experienced homelessness

62%

are currently homeless

Current Situation

