

Flexible Funding Toolkit

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Standing Together is a domestic abuse charity based in London and implemented the first Flexible Funding scheme in 2019 as part of the Whole Housing Approach pilot in the London site.

Purpose of the toolkit

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide guidance and materials to help organisations set up flexible funding in their area. It is intended for commissioners and service providers, including domestic abuse services, housing providers, and local authorities.

Flexible funding was piloted as part of the initial WHA project in the Cambridgeshire and London sites. This toolkit incorporates learning from this initial pilot.

Definition

Flexible funding is a designated funding pot that domestic abuse support workers can access quickly and easily for victim/survivors.

Flexible funding supports victim/survivors to achieve or maintain safe and secure housing. It is low-barrier and does not require victim/survivors to provide evidence of abuse. Unlike most other funding sources, there is no set list of what will be funded and victim/survivors are encouraged to ask for whatever will make the most difference to their housing situation and their lives.

Flexible funding mainly includes payments to suppliers and third parties or payments to the referring organisation. It can also include small payments made directly to a victim/survivor. Due to tax and benefit implications, the preference is to not give cash to victim/survivors but to pay suppliers directly.

Background

The economic abuse toolkit provides context on economic abuse, which is often at the root of requests for flexible funding.

Even if victim/survivors have not experienced economic abuse, they can still find themselves in financial difficulties, particularly when leaving their perpetrator. Victim/survivors who leave relationships at a moment of crisis often have to find large amounts of money - frequently thousands of pounds - to cover transport, rental deposits and associated costs, and other emergency expenditure at short notice.

Limited financial support is available for victim/survivors, if it is available at all. This may include:

- Specialist domestic abuse services, in the form of food vouchers or travel passes,
- Charitable organisations that can supply furniture or other essentials,
- Local authorities.

The financial support available varies from authority to authority, meaning there is a lack of consistency and clarity to the offers and qualifying conditions. Funding is often accessed through highly localised services, with conditions or limitations that prevent all victim/survivors from accessing financial support. Scoping carried out prior to the launch of flexible funding identified rent arrears, utility or council tax arrears, rent deposits, moving costs, and transport costs as needs that are often not able to be met through current funding provision in London and Cambridgeshire.

Flexible funding aims to provide a more equitable and accessible solution to financial crises that may otherwise spiral into homelessness. Early and rapid intervention can improve housing stability – a longitudinal evaluation of flexible funding in Washington DC found that 94% of victim/survivors who accessed this fund were housed six months after receiving funding.ⁱ To read more about this scheme and the origins of flexible funding, please see appendix A.

Flexible funding is easy to access and requires no evidence of abuse, which reduces the stress that victim/survivors experience and helps ensure that support is available when it is needed. Additionally, unlike loans from family, friends or companies, flexible funding enables victim/survivors to be in a more financially stable position than prior to accessing funding.

Principles of flexible funding

The principles of flexible funding are that:

It is easy and quick to access

Referral pathways for flexible funding are **clear and straightforward**.

Victim/survivors should **receive funds as quickly as possible** after the application has been submitted

Victim/survivors **do not have to provide evidence** of abuse or their financial situation

It is accessed via local specialist domestic abuse services but should not always be dependent on engagement with other parts of the service

Victim/survivors who have **no recourse to public funds** can access flexible funding

It helps victim/survivors access safety and stable accommodation

It **meets the self-defined housing-related needs** of victim/survivors across all tenure types (social housing, privately rented, and private ownership)

It **covers indirect, as well as direct, costs related to housing stability**, such as car repair or replacing lost documents

Referrers and the staff involved in administering the scheme **think creatively** about what costs flexible funding can cover

It is flexible and variable

Requests for all types of goods and services, and amounts of funding that help to access or maintain stable accommodation, will be considered

The **quickest route to safety and stable housing is considered** when making decisions on requests

Funds can be issued to help victim/survivors **achieve economic independence** as this will ideally help them secure housing independently in the future

It is cost effective

The person authorising funds **considers the long-term costs saved** by providing victim/survivors with flexible funding

The fund should **cover costs that are not covered by other sources of funding or where applications to other sources have been turned down**. Flexible funding is ideally accompanied by domestic abuse advocacy support to mobilise other services to cover costs and clear debts due to domestic abuse (i.e. rent arrears caused as a result of economic abuse)

Over time, the Coordinator / domestic abuse service will **establish relationships with local businesses and providers of goods and services**, which can better help meet the needs of victim/survivors

The Coordinator **balances the needs of individual applicants with the need to ensure that the fund reaches as many victim/survivors as possible**. This should include consideration of what will help the victim/survivor achieve the quickest and most sustainable route to safe and stable housing

Key components

Flexible funding should include:

- **An organisation that has the capacity to hold the funding and administer the fund.** The fund takes a substantial amount of work to administrate and must be held by an organisation that also has the capacity to process referrals, make payments in a timely manner, and monitor overall activity and expenditure.
- **A dedicated Coordinator who has specialist domestic abuse knowledge.** It is recommended that the Coordinator holds responsibility for the activities listed in the point above and authorises requests. They will need to have specialist domestic abuse and housing knowledge, and ideally be based within a specialist domestic abuse service, as the nature of flexible funding means that applications may be for funding that doesn't appear to be directly related to housing need. See Jasmine's story in the case studies section of this toolkit for an example that illustrates the value of thinking creatively about what constitutes housing-related need.
- **Links to other, smaller domestic abuse services led by and for BME, LGBT+, disabled communities so that they can also apply to the fund on behalf of survivors.** Local domestic abuse services need to be able to apply to the fund on behalf of survivors. Additionally, local domestic abuse organisations are likely to have knowledge of other funding that is available in the area, which must be accessed prior to flexible funding.

- **Access to specialist domestic abuse support.** Specialist domestic abuse support is a necessary complement to flexible funding to ensure housing stability. It is the main reason why it is recommended that this pot sits with these services. The support that is offered will vary between victim/survivors but should include safety planning at a minimum and be responsive to victim/survivors' changing circumstances, needs, and level of risk. The support available should be victim/survivor-focused: victim/survivors know what they need to feel safe and maintain or access secure and stable housing, even if the link between the cost and housing may not be obvious to the referrer. The support should also be trauma-informed and should be able to link victim/survivors to a range of advocacy and other services. Depending on the local context, the specialist domestic abuse support may take the form of mobile advocacy, and any funding applications for flexible funding should ideally include a mobile advocacy component. Please see the mobile advocacy toolkit for more information about implementing mobile advocacy.

Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence illustrated the importance of victim/survivor-led advocacy with the example of a victim/survivor who asked her advocate for a washing machine. The washing machine allowed the victim/survivor to maintain her employment and, as a result, her housing.

The implementation of flexible funding in the pilot sites has demonstrated the need for this fund to be accompanied by high quality specialist domestic abuse support. In London in particular, victim/survivors often present with complex housing situations that are complicated by them having no recourse to public funds (NRPF) or experiencing multiple disadvantage. Referrals in these cases were not intended to resolve a developing crisis and ensure housing stability thereafter, but rather offered temporary solutions to enable further advocacy work – for example, by enabling victim/survivors to access suitable emergency accommodation to prevent street homelessness while a Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) application was completed and other NRPF service providers contacted.

Planning and Preparation

Scoping

The planning process for a new flexible funding scheme should start with a mapping exercise of existing funds in the area that the scheme will be operating in. This will allow the identification of any gaps in provision and enable the scheme to be tailored to the local funding context.

The mapping exercise can also provide a useful resource to share with domestic abuse workers who are referring into the scheme, to ensure that they are aware of all available funding opportunities and that they take advantage of these prior to making a referral to flexible funding.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders will vary from area to area, but may include:

- Local authorities, who may be best placed to hold and/or administer the fund,
- Local domestic abuse partnerships,
- Local domestic abuse services, including mobile advocates and IDVAs,
- Organisations that deal with domestic abuse, but do not have access to their own funding – for instance, community organisations.

The agencies that can make referrals for funding should be decided during the planning process. It is important to ensure that victim/survivors from all backgrounds have access to flexible funding as the most marginalised victim/survivors are likely to be the most in need of financial assistance, so local domestic abuse services that cater for specific communities or groups of survivors should be able to refer into the scheme.

Funding / fundraising

Flexible funding can operate with a relatively small pot of funding, but other costs – including the cost of a Coordinator – must be factored into any bids for funding. Additionally, it is recommended that flexible funding is commissioned alongside a specialist domestic abuse advocacy service that has adequately skilled and experienced workers to support women with housing and other related needs.

Scoping should be carried out prior to the submission of any applications for funding to determine the required amount, which should be proportionate to local need. When determining local need, consideration should be given to the fact that although flexible funding payments can range from a few pounds for a train ticket to thousands of pounds for rental arrears or a deposit, the average payment in both pilot areas was between £500 and £600. The fund should be large enough to ensure that referrals for very large amounts do not place significant pressure on the remaining funds, and to also ensure that victim/survivors who have significant financial needs can be supported by the fund.

Promotion and publicity

Flexible funding should be promoted and publicised to organisations that will make referrals to the fund. Ways to do this include presenting at team meetings and creating and circulating information sheets for frontline staff so that staff clearly understand the purpose of the fund and can offer this option to victim/survivors.

When the fund is launched, local domestic abuse services need to be informed of the referral criteria and the procedure for making referrals. Please see the referral guidance in Resources for an example of the referral criteria and procedure used for the London fund.

Recruiting staff to deliver the scheme (Quality Management)

It is unlikely that delivering flexible funding will require a full-time Coordinator, given the limited scope of even the largest funds. However, the Coordinator should have the time to ensure that flexible funding referrals are promptly acknowledged and processed. As such, it may be necessary to have a shared inbox for flexible funding referrals to ensure that referrals can be processed even when the primary Coordinator is out of the office or not working.

In order to be able to process referrals that may not appear to be related to housing need, those administering the scheme should have specialist domestic abuse and housing training. While referrals should contain an explanation of what the funding is for and how that reduces housing need, it is important for the Coordinator to be able to have a holistic understanding of domestic abuse so they can respond appropriately. Additionally, the Coordinator needs to be able to identify any safety concerns that may arise during the administration of the funding and discuss these with the domestic abuse workers – for example, an item may only be able to be collected from within the victim/survivor's danger zone so delivery may be the safer option.

The Coordinator may also be responsible for coordinating other domestic abuse initiatives such as the local Sanctuary Scheme or Reciprocal Scheme in order to make this a full-time role (see other sections of this toolkit), or they may also deliver direct support to victim/survivors.

If the role does not involve offering direct support to victim/survivors, Coordinators may find it difficult to be contacted by victim/survivors who are seeking extra funding or who are experiencing complex circumstances, so must be comfortable explaining the limits of the fund and redirecting victim/survivors to their support workers. Coordinators must also be able to liaise with frontline workers to develop solutions to victim/survivors' complex situations while still operating within the scope of the fund.

The responsibilities of the Coordinator are to:

- Oversee the referral process and assess referrals using a trauma-informed and victim/survivor-centred approach,
- Liaise with referrers to determine how victim/survivors can be best supported by the fund in conjunction with other interventions and support available,
- Process referrals quickly and communicate decisions about funding clearly,
- Check that no other sources of funding are available to pay for goods and services within the requested timeframe,
- Ensure that payment is made quickly and using the most suitable method,
- Monitor expenditure and effectiveness of the scheme (including carrying out surveys with victim/survivors),
- Promote the scheme and ensure that victim/survivors from marginalised communities have access to the fund,
- Deal with any issues relating to the purchase of goods and services.

Engaging people with lived experience

Flexible funding needs to be monitored to ensure that it is being implemented in a way that aligns with the aims of the model and ensures positive outcomes for victim/survivors. Getting feedback from victim/survivors who've accessed the scheme is a crucial way to do this, as it provides data on whether the funding is truly easy to access, available when required, and helps victim/survivors achieve and/or maintain stable housing.

Consent should be sought to contact victim/survivors for a follow-up survey or interview when the application is made for flexible funding. If a victim/survivor does not consent to be contacted, then this should not be used as a reason to refuse an application for funding. Please see Resources at the end of this toolkit for a template consent form.

Follow-up surveys or interviews should be conducted by the administering agency within the time period specified on the consent form, usually 3 or 6 months. This ensures that there is time for victim/survivors to be able to assess whether flexible funding has affected their housing situation. See the Resources section of this toolkit for a sample feedback survey and script.

However, the passage of time may mean that it is no longer safe to contact victim/survivors due to their situation changing. The Coordinator of the fund may choose to mitigate this risk by asking referring agencies to distribute the survey or conduct the feedback interview. Alternatively, the Coordinator can put strategies in place to reduce the risks associated with

contacting victim/survivors – for example, the Coordinator may call from a withheld number and/or have a cover story ready in case the abuser answers the telephone.

The Coordinator may wish to gather outcome data from the referring agencies, in order for the impact of flexible funding on individuals to be gathered from the perspective of the support worker. This can be a good way of ensuring that outcomes and feedback are captured for victim/survivors who may be unable to engage with people who they don't have an established relationship with, or whose housing situations may still be unstable.

Storing personal and sensitive data

Processing flexible funding referrals requires the collection of personal and sensitive data, including full names and addresses. Data collection should be proportionate to the funding request: for example, it is not necessary to collect victim/survivors' addresses if home delivery of items is not being arranged.

Data should be stored securely, and the number of people who have access to the data should be restricted by password protecting documents and limiting folder access to the staff involved in administering flexible funding.

Discussion and considerations

Should payments be made directly to a victim/survivor?

Making payments directly to victim/survivors is controversial and not all flexible funding schemes will be able to support this. There may be issues with obtaining receipts and incorporating direct payments into accounts. Additionally, there will be tax and/or benefit implications when payments are made directly into victim/survivors' accounts. Care must be taken to ensure that victim/survivors are not put in a position where their access to benefits is compromised.

However, making payments directly to victim/survivors can actively support their recovery and self-esteem. Entrusting victim/survivors with funding shows belief in their experiences and their understanding of what will help them to maintain or achieve stable housing. Making payments directly to victim/survivors also means that they get to choose whether or not to reveal their experiences of domestic abuse to the person or organisation they are paying. Indeed, if a domestic abuse organisation makes the payment on their behalf, then their status as a victim/survivor is automatically revealed.

A good compromise, where available, can be to provide victim/survivors with gift cards to enable them to purchase items, while avoiding any negative effects on benefits entitlement.

When is it appropriate to use flexible funding to pay off rental arrears or debts?

Clearing rental arrears or debts – particularly debts arising from utility bills or council tax – is a common cause of flexible funding referrals. Rental arrears or debts can stem from a range of sources, but economic abuse is often involved in cases that are referred to flexible funding.

Being in rental arrears can be highly problematic for victim/survivors, as it can restrict their access to management transfers if in socially rented housing and can lead to eviction and homelessness. If rental arrears have been caused by the perpetrator, the presence of rental arrears can enable the perpetrator to exert control over the victim/survivor, even if the perpetrator and victim/survivor no longer have contact. Resolving rental arrears therefore often improves the stability of housing for victim/survivors, as well as helping to prevent ongoing abuse.

Before arrears or debts are cleared by flexible funding, however, it is important to ensure that other avenues have been explored and that advocacy with relevant agencies has been undertaken by the victim/survivor's domestic abuse support worker. Flexible funding should not be used to relieve other agencies of their duties towards victim/survivors. Steps should have been taken by the support worker and the housing provider to support the victim/survivor to pay off the arrears in line with relevant internal policies. If some of the arrears can be cancelled under these policies then this should be done prior to a flexible funding payment being made.

Where the amount requested is significant, the referrer should ideally find out what minimum payment is required in order to prevent or stop eviction proceedings and how much the victim/survivor can afford to pay off with a repayment plan. This is also helpful for stretching the flexible funding pot so that it reaches as many victim/survivors as possible.

Additionally, it can be helpful to co-create an action plan with the victim/survivor and landlord to help prevent arrears accruing again. The victim/survivor should be offered access to support – such as debt management – to ensure that they are able to continue to pay their rent. It is the responsibility of the referrer to arrange this, but the Coordinator should be aware of these issues and should discuss this with the referrer.

Direct contact with victim/survivors

If flexible funding is not delivered by a frontline service, there may be issues with victim/survivors contacting the Coordinator directly. It should be made clear to potential referrers that only professionals can refer into the scheme and that victim/survivors should not be given the contact details for the Coordinator in order to avoid multiple lines of communication developing. Victim/survivors can be provided with an information sheet that explains the purpose of the fund and what victim/survivors should do if they have any questions or concerns. A template for this document can be found in the Resources section of this toolkit.

In instances where victim/survivors contact the Coordinator, the role of the fund should be explained and any requests for support should be directed towards the referring organisation. Coordinators should be able to employ a trauma-informed perspective to be able to deal with these contacts sensitively. The Coordinator should not take on the role of support worker or advocate, although it may be necessary to liaise with the referring organisations to ensure that the victim/survivor is receiving adequate support.

If disputes arise regarding the support the victim/survivor is receiving, victim/survivors should be directed to raise these issues directly with the service they are being supported by.

Complaints about goods and services

It is inevitable that not all purchases will go smoothly. Issues can arise with the quality of a service and as the purchaser of goods and services, the Coordinator may need to respond to these issues, acting as a liaison between the victim/survivor, domestic abuse service and supplier.

A complaints policy and procedure should be developed as part of the planning process.

Additionally, the way in which funds are delivered should be considered to ensure that services are delivered as smoothly as possible. Where possible, the victim/survivor or the referrer should identify relevant services and the role of the Coordinator should be limited to dispensing payment. For example, if a referral is made for carpet to be fitted in a victim/survivor's property, the victim/survivor or referrer could obtain a quote and reference number, and the Coordinator could then make payment directly from the fund. Similarly, supplying victim/survivors with gift cards ensures that victim/survivors are able to purchase exactly the goods they need and can settle any disputes directly with the supplier.

Procedures: London Pilot Site

In London, flexible funding is administrated by Standing Together, a second-tier organisation that works to improve organisational responses to domestic abuse. Standing Together holds £30,000 of funding. The fund is open to organisations involved in the Angelou Partnership: a cohort of 10 specialist organisations that support women and girls experiencing domestic or sexual violence in Kensington & Chelsea, Westminster, and Hammersmith & Fulham.

Applications are made by frontline workers from these organisations. The referral form (see the Resources section of this toolkit) is sent to the Coordinator at Standing Together, along with a consent form if the victim/survivor would like to be contacted as part of the project evaluation. The Coordinator reviews the application and responds to the referrer within a day, often within the hour. This is either to approve the referral or to ask for more information.

The approval criteria are as follows:

- The request meets a housing related need, and increases the stability of the victim/survivor's housing situation;
- The victim/survivor either lives in or has fled Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea, or Hammersmith & Fulham;
- All other appropriate funds have been approached or deemed unsuitable;
- The victim/survivor has recently experienced, or is currently experiencing, domestic abuse.

More information may be requested for a variety of reasons. For instance:

- To find out more about a victim/survivor's situation and how the flexible funding request will support them;
- To discuss how a request can be delivered;
- To clarify how the request meets housing need.

Once the Coordinator has all the necessary information, then a decision can be made. If an application is rejected this is usually because the referral is not judged to be for goods or services that will increase the victim/survivor's housing stability, or because it falls within the scope of another fund.

When a request is approved the Coordinator sends the details of the request to the Office Manager at Standing Together, who is authorised to make purchases. The Office Manager is only provided with the information that is essential to making the purchase. Once the purchase has been made, any confirmations are sent to the Coordinator by the Office Manager. The Coordinator will then send confirmation and any details of the goods or service to the referrer.

If there are any issues with the delivery of the goods or service, these are communicated by the referrer to the Coordinator, who liaises with the Office Manager to ensure the timely resolution of any issues.

Case studies

Jasmine's story.

As there is no set list of what can be purchased through flexible funding, the Coordinator bases their decision about the suitability of the referral on the link that the referrer makes between the referral request and the victim/survivor's housing situation. In Jasmine's case, her support worker made it clear that providing Jasmine with funding would help her consider her housing options and that there were significant risks associated with not providing her with funding. This case study illustrates the value of Coordinators believing that what victim/survivors say will help them improve their housing situation will do so.

A return train ticket was purchased for Jasmine so that she could go and stay with a friend outside London. Jasmine has PTSD, depression and anxiety and was feeling overwhelmed by appointments and services. Additionally, the perpetrator had just been released from prison and Jasmine was very upset and concerned for her safety.

Jasmine's support worker had tried to explore safety and housing options with Jasmine but, due to her fear of the perpetrator, she was unable to think about her options. The support worker was concerned that without respite, engagement with the service was unlikely to be maintained and Jasmine was likely to become homeless as she did not have adequate protection to feel safe at home and often could not stay there.

When Jasmine returned to London, she was able to engage with her support worker, her Housing Officer, and attend her housing appointments. Jasmine had previously turned down both a Sanctuary Scheme referral and a fire brigade referral but now accepted these, enabling her to feel safe in her home and engage with local services.

Jane's story.

Jane came to the UK from a Commonwealth country with her husband, who exercised his EU treaty rights under the Surinder Singh judgement. Jane could live and work in England for six months before needing to obtain her residence card, but Jane and her young son fled from her abusive husband five months into the six-month period.

Jane went to stay with a family friend. She had no money to support herself as she did not have access to her savings or recourse to public funds due to her immigration status. Jane had several ongoing legal cases to enable her to leave the UK with her son and return to her country of origin, and was advised by her solicitors that making an application to the Home Office for a residence card on the grounds of relationship breakdown due to domestic abuse would jeopardise her court case and her application for leave and removal. As such, Jane could not work and her only source of income was less than £40 a week which she received from her husband to go towards her son's cost of living. Jane had to travel a significant distance to get this money and to allow her son to have supervised contact with her husband, at a cost of £60 per trip.

Jane's domestic abuse support worker applied for £500 to meet Jane and her son's basic needs, which was awarded. The funding was used to repay debt she had with the friends who'd supported her and her son, to purchase clothing and toiletries, and pay for travel. Jane and her son moved into emergency accommodation and Jane bought essential items for the accommodation, including bedding, a kettle, cutlery, crockery, and baking tins. These items were "desperately needed" and Jane stated that "had the money not been granted I'm not sure I would have been able to afford such".

Beyond the practical impact of the funding, in an email to the domestic abuse service that supported her Jane expressed the value of "grant[ing] the money in the first place, when so many others had turned us down for not meeting the criteria. It has made an invaluable difference to our lives, and I am grateful to those who provided it as well as those who assisted me in applying and obtaining it."

Supporting victim/survivors with no NRPF: Emergency accommodation

Victim/survivors with NRPF should have access to flexible funding, but care should be taken to ensure that other agencies are not relieved of their duties towards victim/survivors.

In Jane's case, she was deemed in priority need and provided with emergency accommodation by the local authority, so using flexible funding for accommodation would have been inappropriate. In other cases that arose during the pilot, flexible funding was offered to victim/survivors with NRPF who were not deemed in priority need to secure hotel accommodation to prevent them becoming street homeless that night. Accommodation was only provided as a last resort, on a short-term basis (not longer than a week), and where other agencies were unable to provide emergency accommodation.

When providing emergency accommodation through flexible funding, whether to victim/survivors with NRPF or victim/survivors who had access only to emergency accommodation that was unsuitable (as in the case of a woman who was offered mixed-sex hostel accommodation for a week while applying to refuge services and instead provided with a secure private hotel room through flexible funding), care should be taken to ensure that the accommodation allows adequate privacy, does not require ID if the victim/survivor has no ID, is in an area where the victim/survivor feels safe and can continue to access support services, and that the referring agency has a clear plan to attain more suitable accommodation within the period of time the hotel is funded for.

Impact on referrers

Flexible funding is a vital resource for referrers, who may find it difficult to source appropriate funding for victim/survivors. Scoping for the flexible funding pilot identified gaps in the funding that was available in Cambridgeshire and London, particularly for paying off rent, utility or council tax arrears.

Additionally, the complexity of many victim/survivors' circumstances may mean that support workers struggle to improve their housing situation and may face difficulties when engaging with other services and systems. This quote illustrates the difference flexible funding can make to support workers:

Flexible funding has kept me motivated. If you know you have this to fall back on, you can handle hard decisions better. IDVAs burn out when you get knocked back and feel like you get told no too much. It's been really motivating.

IDVA, London

Recommendations

- Flexible funding should be funded in conjunction with mobile advocacy. Specialist domestic abuse support is necessary to ensure that victim/survivors can stabilise their housing situations.

Resources

[WSCADV flexible funding toolkit](#)

Flexible funding information sheet for victim/survivors

Referral documents:

Form

Guidance

Available funds

Payment procedures

Monitoring tools:

Flexible Funding Tracker

Feedback survey

Feedback script

Appendix A: Background to Flexible Funding

Flexible funding was developed in the USA by the Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Domestic Violence's Economic Stability Working Group in 2001. The state established the Expanded Transition to Independent Living programme, which provided flexible funding to survivors of domestic abuse to support them to live independently.ⁱⁱ

Flexible funding was further developed as part of the American Domestic Violence Housing First model. Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) prioritises securing safe housing for survivors, which is accompanied by in-depth support following rehousing. Flexible funding is one of key components of DVHF, along with mobile advocacy and community engagement.

Evaluation of the flexible funding component of DVHF demonstrated that flexible funding supports housing stability. 51% of victim/survivors were able to stay in their own home as a result of receiving flexible funding, while other victim/survivors moved from homeless to housed (12%), from temporary accommodation to housed (9%), or moved homes (8%). The remaining victim/survivors received funding to prepare them for housing (for example, transportation assistance) (17%) and the remaining 3% received funds that supported overall family well-being.

DVHF has been implemented in several different locations and contexts in the USA, including in Seattle, Washington State, and in Napa Valley, California. In the Napa Valley project, which was run by a domestic violence organisation called NEWS, \$425,000 was dedicated to flexible funding over 21 months. NEWS was able to provide victim/survivors with long-term financial support (for 12 months or longer), as well as one-off payments.ⁱⁱⁱ

This was a very different project to those implemented as part of the Whole Housing pilot, which had a total of £75,000 to disburse across two sites over less than 18 months. These differences are due in part to the differing availability of funding in the USA compared to the UK, as well as the limited nature of the welfare system in the USA.

References

ⁱ Sullivan, C., Bomsta, H. and Hacskaylo, M. (2016) Flexible Funding as a Promising Strategy to Prevent Homelessness for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34(14), 3017-3033. doi: 10.1177/0886260516664318.

ⁱⁱ Sullivan, C., Bomsta, H. and Hacskaylo, M. (2016) Flexible Funding as a Promising Strategy to Prevent Homelessness for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34(14), 3017-3033. doi: 10.1177/0886260516664318.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lopez-Zeron, G., and Sullivan, C (2019) *NEWS: An exemplar of the DV Housing First model*. Retrieved from https://wscadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/DVHF-CA_NEWS_02212019final-.pdf

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