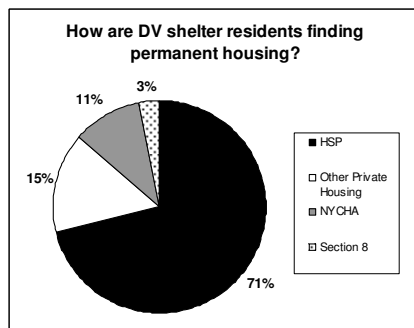


Policy Goal: Address structural issues of Housing Stability Plus and/or develop new housing subsidies to address ineligibility gaps and unrealistic subsidy burdens.

"If I am strong and I leave, the abuse will stop and the pain of that will go away. But not having a place to live won't seem to go away, no matter how strong I am and how hard I try."

Between April and December of 2005, only 20% of emergency shelter residents left shelter for permanent housing. 329 residents found housing through HSP, NYCHA, Section 8 or on their own. Many victims of domestic violence face additional housing barriers as they suddenly find themselves in unstable financial situations as the head of a one-parent household. Many domestic violence shelter residents also feel a lack of agency in the competitive New York City rental market as they search for housing with checkered or non-existent credit and rental histories.

Because of the challenges domestic violence survivors face in finding permanent housing, 52% of shelter residents (844 households) left shelter for unknown destinations, to live with friends and family, or with little more than a referral to the EAU. For domestic violence survivors, these situations can be more dangerous than for those in the general homeless system, putting them at risk of being found by or returning to their batterer.



Among those lucky enough to find permanent housing while in emergency shelter, Housing Stability Plus (HSP) is the overwhelming program helping people move into permanent housing. 71% of permanent housing placements made during emergency shelter stay come through the HSP program.

"There's really no other place to turn, no other program. If you can't get eligible for HSP or you can't find an HSP apartment, you have no other choices."

Because of the dependence on HSP for placing people in permanent housing, we are specifically concerned about those domestic violence populations that are not well-served by the current structure of the Housing Stability Plus program.

1. Short-term concern: Working and employable domestic violence survivors

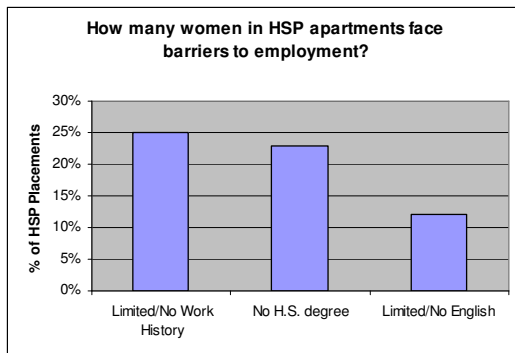
Because HSP is tied to public assistance eligibility, it punishes domestic violence survivors who are earning income and provides an incentive to work less.

"I had a great job working with kids, and I took a leave of absence because they understood he could find me there. They say I can go back when I'm ready and safe. I don't know how I can though, because the job pays very little to be on my own with my kids, and HSP won't help me if I have the job."

- 154 residents, accounting for 10% of shelter discharges, were ineligible to receive HSP throughout their shelter stay.
- Employment is the most frequent reason individuals are ineligible – accounting for 40% of ineligibilities.
- These employment numbers actually under-represent the number of shelter residents who come into shelters with jobs and not receiving cash benefits from public assistance.
- Many residents are forced to make a choice between working more hours and falling short of earning enough for market-rate rents OR cutting down on hours to receive the help from HSP that they need to move into permanent housing.

2. Long-term concern: Domestic violence survivors with obstacles to employment

Some HSP tenants will have a hard time earning enough income to maintain their housing as the subsidy steps down annually.



- 36% of residents moving into HSP face more than one of the following characteristics: have no high school degree, a limited work history, or limited English skills. Many of these HSP tenants will be expected to earn well-above minimum wage in order to meet their increasing rent responsibility.
- Other families receiving SSI and are required to contribute 30% of their income towards their HSP apartments in the first year. In year two, SSI recipients must pay the first step down out of the remaining 70% of their fixed income.

“He said, if I gave him some play on a regular basis, he would accept my voucher.”

Other concerns about the HSP program are related to the lack of landlord accountability and government enforcement. In addition to structural issues with the program, there has been little action encouraging landlords to participate fairly in the program. Domestic violence shelter residents have continually been solicited by landlords to make side deals - asked to provide additional payments or even sexual favors in order to secure an apartment. While the administering agencies recognize this as a problem, the onus has been placed on these individuals to reject the prospect of a stable home (even if at an extra cost), and to continue the search for an apartment as their days in shelter dwindle.

“I decided to take an apartment, but then the landlord told me I had to pay an extra \$150. Not only that but I had to give him a security deposit on it too. My discharge is coming up so I have no other choice. I have to come up with \$300 by the end of this week, and keep paying it too.”

Notes about the data:

The Coalition of Domestic Violence Providers has been collecting survey data from the city’s domestic violence emergency shelters since May 2003. This survey has helped the coalition to continually identify how many households are leaving the shelter system and why. With the development of Housing Stability Plus (HSP), the need to collect more information about individual shelter residents became apparent and the survey was restructured to help the coalition better track not only why residents leave shelter, but also provide more detailed information about where they go. The coalition began implementing the new survey format in April 2005, shortly after the HSP program began in February. For this reason, the figures above reflect the data collected between April and December 2005. The coalition’s research also included data from 11 separate focus groups composed of over 100 women in emergency shelter and conducted by a New Destiny intern. The quotes presented above are from these focus groups.