

## **Platform of the New York City Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential Providers**

The New York City Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential Service Providers, representing all 18 of the nonprofit City-funded shelters in New York City, was formed in 1995 to advocate for more emergency beds for victims of abuse. Since that time, it has expanded its mission to advocate for residential and non-residential services to meet the needs of all people affected by domestic violence. The Coalition advocates with a unified voice for a continuum of care that provides quality housing and services for all domestic violence survivors.

This platform makes recommendations intended to (1) increase the housing resources available to low-income domestic violence survivors and (2) improve the access of survivors to existing resources.

### **Priority #1**

**Revise NYCHA's documentation requirements for domestic violence survivors to access NYCHA housing and Section 8 through the domestic violence priority.**

NYCHA's current policy requires a domestic violence victim to provide a current order of protection and two recent police reports verifying current and ongoing abuse in order to qualify for the domestic violence priority.

NYCHA's reliance, almost exclusively, on the criminal justice system to provide evidence of domestic violence ignores the experience of many women who are most at risk of abuse. Just last year (2004) in New York City, 84% of family-related homicide victims had no current order of protection and, in two thirds of these deaths the victims had no prior police contact at all.

NYCHA needs to adopt expanded, flexible standards—standards similar to “best practices” recently proposed by HUD. Instead of one required document a choice of different types of verification should be acceptable. Assessments by domestic violence or legal advocates and documentation by a range of institutions - including religious, medical, social service and public agencies - should be given equal weight with criminal justice documents.

### **Priority #2:**

**Include domestic violence survivors from the HRA emergency and transitional shelter system in the “homeless” category for the purposes of HPD-subsidized and administered programs.**

Low-income domestic violence survivors are among the most at-risk of the City's homeless population. Yet, residents of the specialized domestic violence system are not recognized as “homeless” under the HPD supportive housing program. HPD's practice is in conflict with the City's own policies on “homelessness.” For example, residents of the domestic violence emergency and transitional systems were able in the recent past to access EARP/Section 8 under the “N-0” or homeless priority—and

currently, they are considered part of the homeless population eligible for Housing Stability Plus.

HPD administers a number of programs that provide capital development subsidies, low income housing tax credits, and Section 8 vouchers to for-profit and not-for-profit developers who agree to provide housing for the homeless. For HPD's purposes, the "homeless" include families and singles residing in the DHS shelter system, people living with AIDS, and ACS reuniting families. Residents of HRA's domestic violence shelter system are not included in the homeless category.

The net effect is that domestic violence survivors in the HRA-administered shelter system have fewer affordable permanent housing options since they are denied access to low-income housing financed with public resources. Domestic violence survivors, largely women and children, are faced with more limited housing options although they are among the most vulnerable homeless populations. HPD guidelines need to be revised in order to make homeless victims of domestic violence residing in HRA's shelter system eligible for its subsidies and other programs.

**Priority #3:**

**Ensure Housing Stability Plus becomes a viable subsidy and therefore a real housing option for DV survivors by addressing its inherent structural problems.**

Housing Stability Plus (HSP), the city's rental subsidy program since February 2005, is the main housing assistance option for homeless and domestic violence survivors. However, the benefits of HSP are not equal to the Section 8 program. Unlike the Section 8 program: 1) HSP is a time limited subsidy with an annual 20% reduction in the supplement portion, 2) the rental subsidies are set below the fair market rent in NYC, 3) accessing the subsidy is tied to public assistance.

Economic abuse is often a major component of domestic violence. Batterers consistently isolate their victims and prevent them from obtaining education or job skills that would allow them to become independent. Not only are domestic violence survivors struggling with the trauma caused by abuse but they face many of the same barriers to employment as the general homeless population, such as educational and language barriers, affordable child-care and access to living-wage employment.

Approximately 15% of DV shelter residents are not eligible for HSP and have very few or no options to obtain safe affordable permanent housing because they are working but can not afford market housing and are not able to access other subsidy options

We join with citywide homeless Coalitions in calling for structural improvements to the HSP program. The city and state should agree to maintain the HSP supplement as a "work support subsidy" after an HSP tenant obtains employment so they can still afford their housing and work towards higher employment income while stably housed. In addition, a non-declining rent subsidy would give the homeless including domestic violence survivors a genuine opportunity to develop real self-sufficiency.

**Priority #4:**

**Increase housing subsidies, including Section 8 vouchers, available to domestic violence survivors who are not eligible for HSP or are unlikely to succeed with an HSP subsidy.**

Section 8 is the most secure and appropriate subsidy for DV survivors. Yet HPD does not provide Section 8 vouchers to DV shelter residents who are ineligible for HSP. They do provide vouchers for HSP ineligible DHS shelter residents.

HPD should include HRA shelter residents within its homeless allocation to the DHS system. Section 8 needs to be available for DV shelter residents and DV survivors outside of shelter.

**Priority #5:**

**Ensure streamlined services that enable women in specialized DV shelters who are still homeless and at risk at the end of their shelter stays to enter the DHS system without being re-certified at the DHS intake facility (ie. PATH, EAU, WAC).**

DV shelter residents, who reach the end of their time limited stay (135 days) in the DV shelter system, without obtaining permanent housing, must reapply to DHS for shelter and prove they are homeless. To qualify for streamlined services and bypass a homeless intake facility, DHS requires HRA to provide: 1) early identification of families not likely to get housing and 2) stringent documentation proving the seriousness of the domestic violence.

Less than 20% of domestic violence shelter residents transition directly from shelter with permanent housing. Those without housing will have no other option but to go to the general homeless system where they will be required to re-qualify as homeless.

The City needs to permit women who are still homeless and at risk at the end of their stays in emergency domestic violence shelter to enter the DHS system without reevaluation.