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Medina Foundation's Domestic Violence Stable Housing Initiative

Every nine seconds, a woman in the United States is assaulted or beaten. Every day, more than three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends. Given these grim statistics, it's not surprising that domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women—more than car accidents, muggings and stranger-rapes combined.

One of the most devastating consequences of domestic violence is the loss of housing and the resulting instability for survivors and their families. While emergency shelter is a good option for some, temporary housing can sometimes compound stress and further traumatize families who have already experienced great suffering.

Keeping survivors and their families in their own homes—or other stable housing options—is one way to mitigate the impact of violence and trauma, and flexible funding is proving to be an effective way to achieve that goal.

With this in mind, in the fall of 2011, Medina Foundation launched a Domestic Violence Stable Housing Initiative which was implemented by organizations serving survivors of domestic violence. This initiative was inspired by work already underway by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Housing First model which focuses on rapidly moving people who are homeless into permanent housing. The theory is that any issues that may have contributed to an individual or family becoming homeless can best be addressed after they are stably housed.

Now closed, Medina's three-year Initiative was comprised of 22 grants totaling \$416,000 to 8 different agencies working with survivors of domestic violence. Thanks to this flexible support, 607 survivors—the vast majority of whom had children in their care—were able to acquire or maintain housing and avoid shelter stays entirely.

The flexible funding allowed service providers and survivors to chart a path to stability by addressing discrete and individualized needs. Rather than automatically allocating resources to rent or mortgage assistance, advocates were able to direct funds to more targeted solutions for individual survivors. Some examples include: repairing windows on a car—that were shattered by the abuser—so a survivor could continue to get to work; or paying for job-related licenses so that a survivor who had been out of the workforce could return; or even fixing broken teeth to help make a survivor more employable.

Highlights:

- **607 survivors—and their families were supported through this three-year Initiative.** While eviction prevention and move-in costs topped the list for most frequent interventions, agencies reported that having the flexibility to offer survivors tailored support allowed them to truly support each survivor in the most personalized and effective way. For some, that might have meant changing the locks, and for another it could have meant rent support and the purchase of a dental hygienist kit to continue education.
- **Housing stability is the overwhelming mark of success for this Initiative.** With small specific interventions, the vast majority of survivors in this Initiative (69%) were able to stay in their own homes. As a result, families were better able to focus on their long-term goals such as education, work and emotional well-being instead of coping with the trauma that shelter and moving causes. This also prevented children from being uprooted from their school and friends. For those who weren't able to stay in their own home, moving in with family was the most frequent occurrence.
- **The average size of intervention was under \$500.** This is a cost-effective response to addressing one of the largest contributors to family homelessness. While the size of intervention varied greatly depending on the needs of the client, the average cost of intervention remained under \$500. This is an especially impressive number considering both the financial and psychological cost of the alternative—a survivor going into shelter, transitional housing and then back into permanent housing. Examples of interventions include paying union fees so a survivor could continue to work, repairing cars used for transportation to and from work/school, driving lessons and debt relief.

The Domestic Violence Stable Housing Initiative demonstrates that flexible funding and a focus on survivor-driven solutions can immediately and positively impact the stability of survivors and their families. The impact is often greater and more cost-effective than would be possible with traditional, restrictive funding.

Unfortunately, the primary challenge to this approach is the restrictive nature of most funding, which is typically provided by government sources and carries with it strict guidelines for how the funds can be used. Outside of rent, moving costs and utilities, there are very few instances where agencies can use public dollars to offer solutions to survivors and their families. Making resources more flexible will have the best short and long-term benefits for survivors.